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A WORD FROM THE SKIPPER



THE QUEEN OF MYSTERY

So Agatha Christie, the world's greatest and most popular writer of mystery and crime stories, is 80 years of age somewhere about now, and her latest book "Passenger to Frankfurt" is just published, enabling her publishers to keep their old promise of giving us every year "a Christie for Christmas." And this latest Christie novel, though away from the usual run of her books, is entrancing reading.

Agatha, who has dealt for so long in mysteries, is not without her own mysteries. It is a great puzzle to me why, while there is an incessant clamour for Christie tales in this country, there are quite a number of her short stories (fairly early ones for the most part) which are only obtainable in America. The American book "Three Blind

Mice" and other stories (now published as "The Mousetrap" and other stories) contains 9 stories, only one of which features in a book published in England.

It is, of course, understandable why "The Mousetrap" is kept out of our shops. The famous play (based on the short story "Three Blind Mice"), is still running at the St. Martin's Theatre in London, and is now in its 18th year. The presenters of the play do not want the ingenious story to be familiar to the public who might not be so keen to fill the stalls each night if they knew the solution to the mystery. I don't know whether the play was ever presented on the New York stage.

So it is understandable why Americans can buy and read "The Mousetrap," while we cannot. What is less understandable is why the other stories which go to make up the collection in the book have not been published over here, despite the insatiable demand. In "The Mousetrap" collection there are several Miss Marple shorts, which give the impression of having not found space in the English collection "The Thirteen Problems" which first introduced the old lady long ago. There are one or two Poirot shorts, only one of which is found in England, and, most odd of all, there is a story of Mr. Harley Quin which seems to have strayed away at the time that the quite charming "The Mysterious Mr. Quin" was first published.

I find two of these "lost" little stories quite intriguing. One of them seems to have been a potted version of what was later to be the famous Christie novel "The Murder in the Vicarage," and another seems to have been the basis of one of Agatha's fairly recent books, "Endless Night." So Agatha has, on occasion, taken her short stories of long ago, and extended them into full-length novels. And why not? Some of the Christie "shorts" are such brilliant little pieces that it seemed a shame to waste their plots on such short stories.

So lift your glasses to Agatha Christie, who once wrote for the Thriller. We salute her on her eightieth birthday, and wish her a great many more happy anniversaries in the years to come.

While on the topic of Agatha Christie, here is a final anecdote. Recently, I took down from my shelves the Christie novel "Murder Is Easy." I found a bookmark in it - a relic of some long-passed reading

spell. It was a picture of H.M.S. "Eagle," and printed in the corner were the words "Presented with the Magnet, January 1937." In the story, a young lady puts a penny in a slot machine and gets a bar of chocolate on a railway station. The book was published in 1939. Yesterday I bought a bar of chocolate. I paid two shillings for it. The weight was printed on it - $3\frac{1}{2}$ ounces. It makes you think.

POLLIE GREEN

Fictional heroes were becoming the fashion during the first decade of the century. Jack, Sam and Pete had been going strong for some years when Tom Merry and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, and a little later, Harry Wharton, came along to displace them in some hearts. But the girls' papers of the period had their heroines. It could be that some editor believed that Pollie Green and Mary Latimer, Nun, could be to the girls what Tom Merry was to the boys. I have no idea at all who wrote about Mary Latimer, Nun, or who created her. For a number of years she featured continually in Girls' Friend, Girls' Reader, Girls' Home, and, especially, in the Heartsease Library. There were long stories and there were short stories about her, and there was even a serial "Mary Latimer's Schooldays."

Even more the rage was Pollie Green. Pollie was created by Mabel St. John in the Girls' Friend, with illustrations by that perfectionist in the drawing of winsome ladies, George Gatcombe. Pollie started off at school in a serial, and she was later joined by a black girl, Coosha, who introduced an element of slapstick farce into the Pollie Green stories which was never later removed. For years the Girls' Friend was seldom without a Pollie Green story. The original school story was followed by "Pollie Green at Cambridge," "Pollie Green in Society," "Pollie Green - Engaged," and "Pollie Green at Twenty-One." At the end of the last named, Pollie got married, and that ended Pollie's career. However, it did not end Pollie as a star turn for the girls. All the stories were published in book form in the Girls' Friend Library, and then they started the saga again in the Girls' Home in serial form, accompanied by new illustrations from George Gatcombe. There were patterns for Pollie Green blouses. There were Pollie Green hatpins. A new long series of Pollie Green complete

stories took the heroine, with Coosha, back to school again.

Mabel St. John seems to have been the most popular girls' writer of her day, but as she wrote a score or more other serials every year, Mabel, who was really a man who, as Henry St. John, also wrote piles of stories for boys, one feels it likely that Mabel, like Charles Hamilton, had substitute writers performing under the magic name. It might be interesting to read some of Mabel St. John's prolific output, and find out just where Mabel left off and somebody else weighed in, but I, at least, would never have the time or patience for the task.

In 1916, when the Girls' Home closed down and Our Girls started immediately in its place, the opening story was "Daisy Peach" by Mabel St. John. And Daisy Peach was described, in the title, as "Pollie Green's Chum." So Pollie went back to school yet once again, for "Daisy Peach" was a school story. And that, so far as I have record, was the end of Pollie. She had lasted for about nine years. Tom Merry and Harry Wharton have lasted for more than sixty. So women, sweet and charming though they usually are, are less loyal than men.

Probably 99 out of a hundred men over the age of 50 would well know the name of Tom Merry or Harry Wharton. Would one out of a hundred women over the age of 60 recall the name of Pollie Green, "the sweetest, most dainty girl in the world," as the editor often described her? For shame, you ladies - but bless you all the same.

THE HARDY ANNUAL

Work is going on apace on the world's most loved Annual - Collectors' Digest Annual for 1970. All our star writers are in sparkling form, and our own incomparable artist, Henry Webb, is responsible for the really delightful cover. Maybe, next month, I may find space to go into detail concerning some of the contents. Have you ordered your Annual yet?

THE EDITOR

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DANNY'S DIARY

OCTOBER 1920

A lot of the boys at school have pogo sticks. They are all the craze. I asked Dad if he would like to buy me one, and he gave me a fearful look. He said that my holiday at Torquay cost him a fortune, and how dare I ask for anything more? But, one Sunday afternoon, he took Mum and me for a nice charabanc ride into the country, so perhaps he repented of his harshness. The charabancs remind me of the toast-rack trams they have at Southend. You sit in rows, about five to a row, and the charries have solid rubber tyres. They are all open to the sky, which is very pleasant.

It has really been Sexton Blake's month. The Union Jack has come out as a 2d paper, with a coloured cover, and 28 pages. The first story in the new set-up was "The Case of the Bogus Judge." It was about Leon Kestrel, and was really a tip-top tale. The second week of this set-up they gave us "The Dog Detective" which had Pedro in a leading role and was all about the Criminals' Confederation which is led by Mr. Reece with his son, the Shadow. Two really great tec stories.

My brother Doug also had some first-class Sexton Blake Libraries, and he passed them on to me after he had read them. There was a first-class tale of Leon Kestrel, a yarn with a navy setting, named "The Mystery of X04." And a really eerie, thrilling, and original tale was "The Mystery of the Living Shadow" which introduced Granite Grant and Mademoiselle Julie. Yet another good S.B.L., though not quite so good as the other two, was "The House With the Red Blinds."

I have noticed that the Greyfriars, St. Jim's, and Rookwood tales seem to be getting shorter. The Rookwood stories are often only 2 pages long, including titles, pictures and adverts., which means only 4 chapters. The Gem has two serials, and the Magnet has a serial, a series of long articles, and a page of comic pictures about "If Charlie Chaplin Were a Form-Master" drawn by J. Macwilson.

The whole of the month in the Boys' Friend has been taken up by a new series of Cedar Creek tales which is still going on. It intro-

duces that villainous rustler who has appeared in several previous series, Handsome Alf Carson. Handsome Alf, with his gang, attacked the Lawless Ranch, and carried off one of the boys as a hostage. Chasing him, Frank Richards and Co. get buried alive in an underground cavern. Fine western tales, and the titles this month have been "The Ranch Raiders," "The Schoolboy Hostage," "Cornered by Cattle Lifters," "The Cavern of Death" and "Escaping the Cattle Thieves." The series hasn't ended yet. Several times this month, Cedar Creek has started on the front cover of the Boys' Friend.

"Putty Grace to the Rescue" was the final story about the Lovells, and the absconding solicitor who ruined Mr. Lovell. Putty brought about the capture of Pilkingham at his hiding-place in the bungalow on the moor.

Then came a story about Carthew trying to "fag" the juniors. It was called "At Grips With the Sixth." This story was separated from its sequel, by a pretty short tale named "Muffin, the Mischief-Maker," in which Tubby pilfered the pantry, Scrivvens the new cook was blamed and sacked for it, and the domestic staff struck in support of Scrivvens. I fancy this one was not written by the normal writer, though it was passable. Then came "The Rookwood Secret Society" in which the juniors dealt with the prefects.

Final of the month was "Sir Tubby of Rookwood" in which Muffin had a letter sent to him by a friend who was an office-boy in a solicitor's office, to make the fellows think he was heir to a title. Probably not by the regular writer. Altogether, not a really great month for Rookwood.

There is a new paper out called "Girls' Cinema." In the first issue they gave away an art plate of Mary Pickford in the wedding dress in which she married Douglas Fairbanks.

Government butter is 3/4 a pound, a terrible price, so everybody eats margarine. In fact, Blueband is nicer than plenty of the government butter. But petrol is down by 3d a gallon, though that only helps the rich, who run cars. Summer time has at last ended on 23rd October. It was kept on longer this year, owing to the possibility of a coal strike. I'm glad it's finished, as it was getting very dark in the mornings.

In the Magnet they have given away a film Annual called "The Who's Who in Filmland." The Gem had a football annual, given in parts in the same way, and a Boxing Annual is announced for the Boys' Friend. The Magnet film annual is given away over 4 weeks.

All this month there has been a series in the Magnet about the Remove, Coker and Co., Temple and Co., Wingate and Co., and the Cliff House girls going to a seaside cinema school where Mr. Hunker is making a cowboy film. I shouldn't think there were many pupils left at Greyfriars and Cliff House. Wingate fell in love with the star, Elsie Mainwaring, and was suspected of stealing £100. He went in for a boxing match at Fritchester to win £10, and Elsie climbed into the ring and rushed to save him. There is a villain named Carson and a detective named Beaky, and it's all a bit like East Lynne. The titles are "The Schoolboy Cinema Stars," "Wingate's Sacrifice," "Her Schoolboy Chum," "The Shadow of Shame," and "His Last Card." At the finish, Wingate fought Carson who died in a pool of blood.

The Popular is still running the old Rookwood tales and a new lot of Greyfriars tales which are not for me. There are several serials including the life of Eddie Polo, and "The Exploits of Ferrers Locke, Detective" by Maurice Everard. So the Popular is feeble and not worth my money. It seems they don't call it the Penny Pop any more. It's 1½d, in any case!

Dad and Mum were very much delayed in getting home one evening. They had taken the train from Charing Cross, but a big fire at the Hop Exchange blocked the line between London Bridge and Waterloo Junction. Eventually the train went back to Charing Cross, and Mum and Dad went by bus to London Bridge where the services were all anyhow.

It has been another excellent month in the Gem. The Dirk Power series ended with the two best stories of them all, entitled "The Tables Turned" and "Hunted Down." Dirk Power was now the hunted instead of the hunter. These two tales were set in Texas.

Then came two really first-class tales starring Arthur Augustus. He annoyed his friends by running away from Pilcher, the chemist's boy of Rylcombe. He didn't want to get his new overcoat messed up. But, later, that fine overcoat was seen going into the Green Man, and the

BLAKIANA

Conducted by JOSEPHINE PACKMAN
 27, Archdale Road, London, S.E. 22

I would like to thank all my friends who have so kindly helped me with their good wishes and messages of sympathy during these last few months and for all their help in sending me material for Blakiana. There is enough in hand for the next two months, but I should be pleased to have some of your contributions for Christmas and the New Year.

I have not forgotten my promise to obtain a reprint of the Sexton Blake Catalogue and a Supplement of all the new information which has been found since the Catalogue was first done. Please watch this column for further information.

JOSEPHINE PACKMAN



THEY MADE A GENTLEMAN OUT OF JACK

That Diary, which was kept regularly long ago by a precocious little lad named Danny, reminds us this month that it is exactly 50 years ago since the Union Jack emerged with a striking cover of many colours, it was enlarged in size, and the price went up to 2d. It was the first of the famous papers to take this step, and others were to follow suit during the next twelve months.

This new phase in the long history of the Union Jack was started off, at least, with a very strong programme of stories. Kestrel, the Criminals' Confederation, Zenith, and Waldo featured in some stunning stories for a while. The quality slipped a little as time passed.

The opening Kestrel story, "The Case of the Bogus Judge," and the one following on the Criminals' Confederation, "The Dog Detective," were among some of the best ever to appear in the paper.

What a glorious omnibus volume would be made of, say, the first six of these new Union Jacks, all bound together for 1970!

SIX OF THE BEST — AND THE BEST OF THE SIX

by J.E.M.

The famous Tram Series (U.J.'s 1485 to 1490) has probably stimulated as much discussion and analysis as anything in the Sexton Blake saga. Yet one scarcely needs to apologise for returning to these stories. It was, after all, a unique occasion when six outstanding U.J. authors were invited to compete in writing mysteries based on the same problem-situation, with the readers themselves delivering the final judgement. And it is still fascinating to ask: What accounted for the popularity of the winner?

Enthusiasts will recall that the incident around which the stories had to be written involved a luckless character called Alfred Mowbray Proud (now surely an immortal in the Blake pantheon!), who is found dead on the upper deck of a London tramcar, together with an unconscious Sexton Blake. Further complications include a number of curious objects found near Proud's body and in his pockets. Not only had these circumstances to be satisfactorily explained by the contestants, but the incident itself had to appear as near to the end of each story as possible. G. H. Teed, Gwyn Evans, Gilbert Chester, Donald Stuart, Anthony Skene and E. S. Brooks - who replaced Robert Murray at short notice, when the latter fell ill - rose to the challenge and six stories of remarkable ingenuity resulted. On the subsequent readers' ballot, Brooks was declared the winner.

It is arguable that he was helped to victory by having his story published last in the series, its impact thus being fresher in readers' minds when they cast their postal votes. There might also have been some "sympathy voting" on the grounds that the author had been handicapped by his last-minute invitation to take part in the contest. But even if such considerations played a part, they are hardly likely to be the whole explanation of his success, so I want to consider what intrinsic factors made Brooks' story, The Mystery of Blind Luke (U.J. 1490), so indisputably popular with Blake fans.

First of all, in my view, is the satisfying explanation of the objects found on the tram. Brooks demonstrates how much a bizarre collection - fireman's helmet, protesters' banner, pawntickets for

mandoline and carpet, mousetrap, etc. - could emerge quite reasonably from an ordinary household and even, by a convincing logic, find their way to that sinister climax on the tramcar. The author does not fall into the trap of giving the objects an exotic significance; nor of lamely dismissing them as red herrings. Similarly, Proud's household itself provides a convincing background, realistically ordinary and more familiar, one suspects, to many U.J. readers than the glittering locations Blake's authors often went in for.

Because each story in the series had to encompass Proud's death in extremely suspicious circumstances, other contestants were inclined (very naturally) to make him a total villain. Brooks turned Proud into a more subtle figure: shifty, weak and cowardly rather than wholly evil. There is even a touch of pathos in his death. As a pleasing contrast, Proud's "daughter" turns out to be the offspring of a noble and wealthy family. This, of course, is one of the oldest - and one ought to say corniest - devices in fiction, yet it never fails to appeal. (The perennial attraction of the "double identity" theme is perhaps due to the occasional longing in all of us to be somebody other than we are!) Another subject of universal fascination, that of "lucky" charms, is cleverly exploited through the introduction of the swastika emblem which provides the clue to the heroine's true identity.

Then there is the strong basic appeal of the story's main theme, the rescue of the weak and innocent from the crooked and ruthless. And who, in such a situation, could be more appropriate to take a hand than the Robin Hood figure of Rupert Waldo? The fact that his part in the happy termination of the affair is almost as great as Sexton Blake's strikes a happy note. All this is backed up with lively characterisation - the sinister Mr. Vernon makes a convincing villain, the attractive Cynthia Bray is everything an innocent heroine and victim ought to be - while the story itself has a clear narrative line.

But characterisation and structure are only the scaffolding of any successful story. In the end, E. S. Brooks' yarn probably won its readers' acclaim through a nicely calculated mixture of those ingredients which have made many a best-seller: realism, popular myth and "human interest."

This month we say "Au Revoir" to

STAUNCH CHUMS AT ST. JIM'S

Eleven strokes had boomed out from the tower. From the dark wall abutting upon Rylcombe Lane a dim figure dropped lightly and turned towards Rylcombe. It was Lucas Sleath. He set out at a rapid stride along the lane, but before he had taken half a dozen steps he halted with a gasp of dismay and terror.

Three figures had suddenly detached themselves from the gloom directly in his path. And, in spite of the darkness he recognised them. Mr. Kidd, the master of the School House, Kildare and Figgins! What did it mean?

"Sleath, where are you going?"

The thought of flight had crossed the wretched youth's mind, but it passed away as he heard the housemaster speak his name, and knew that he was recognised.

"I -- I --" he stammered.

"You were going to the Rylcombe Arms?"

"I -- no -- I -- certainly not!"

"Where were you going?"

"Only for a -- a walk. I have a headache, and ---"

"That will do. If that explanation proves to be correct, you have nothing to fear. Come!"

"Where?"

"To the doctor."

"The doctor!" gasped Sleath. "Why?"

If you think I have broken bounds for a bad purpose, which I deny, you can report me to my own housemaster."

"This is a matter too serious to be dealt with by a housemaster, and concerns one of the School House boys, too. In short, Sleath, I have reason to believe that you were going to see that ruffian Joliffe, to take money to him."

Sleath seemed turned to stone.

"Money not your own," went on Mr. Kidd sternly. "Can you deny it?"

"Yes -- yes; I deny it. It is false!"

"You are willing to be searched?"

"Searched! No. I will never submit to such an insult."

"You will either be searched in my room, Sleath, or in the doctor's."

"I will not submit. I --"

"Why should you not submit if you are innocent?"

"It is an insult, and --"

"If you are unjustly suspected, apologies will not be wanting," said Mr. Kidd drily; "but, as a matter of fact, your manner makes it impossible to doubt your guilt. Come."

Sleath, whose only idea now was to get rid of the incriminating notes in his breast-pocket, turned to fly.

But Kildare was on the look-out for such a move, and so was Figgins, and in a moment he was struggling in their grasp.

His resistance was brief.

With his arms held by the two, he was marched along behind Mr. Kidd, who opened a wicket with his key and entered the walls of St. Jim's.

Right across the quad the culprit was marched, a grip on either arm, so that he could neither attempt to escape nor to destroy the notes.

The last doubt Mr. Kidd or Kildare might have entertained as to the accuracy of Figgy's information had vanished now.

Sleath was trembling violently, and white as death. He cast hunted looks to right and left like a captured wild animal.

As they entered the house he broke down utterly.

"Let me go!" he whispered, in a dry, husky voice. "For mercy's sake don't take me to the doctor! I -- I own up!"

The housemaster looked at his white, anguished face almost compassionately.

"I am sorry for you, Sleath. But the truth must come out publicly. You forget that an innocent boy bears the suspicion of having committed the crime of which you were guilty. You must go to the doctor."

Sleath groaned, and made no further demur. He knew that all was up now, and he ceased to struggle with his fate.

The doctor was in his study, busy with the preparation of examination papers. His deep, quiet voice bade them enter.

The Head of St. Jim's was not given

to expressing surprise easily, but he certainly looked astounded now as he stared at his unexpected visitors.

"Mr. Kidd! Kildare! What can this possibly mean?"

"It means, Dr. Holmes," said the housemaster gravely, "that Blake's innocence is proved, and that the real thief stands before you!"

"Sleath!" The Head laid down his pen, and stared at the white and trembling culprit. "Sleath! Is it possible?"

"Unfortunately, it is only too true. Owing to certain information supplied by Figgins, concerning Sleath's dealings with Joliffe at the Rylcombe Arms, Kildare and I stopped this wretched boy to-night on the way to the inn. I had reason to suspect him of having upon his person two bank-notes stolen from Figgins's study. He admits his guilt."

"You have the banknotes in question, Sleath?" asked the doctor sternly.

Sleath made a sign of assent; he could not speak.

"Give them to me."

With a trembling hand Sleath took a pocket book from his breast, and opened it. He passed two crisp rustling five-pound notes to the Head.

"Are these your notes, Figgins?"

"Yes, sir."

"Where did you obtain such a sum of money?"

"I borrowed it of D'Arcy sir, to lay a trap for that rotter. I knew he was the thief, and I wanted to clear Blake."

"How did you know he was the thief?"

"Because he paid Joliffe ten pounds at the time of the robbery, when he had no money of his own. Joliffe suspected that he had stolen it, and kept the five-pound note so as to hold it over Sleath's head as a threat."

Sleath stared at Figgins in amazement.

He had not the faintest idea of whence the junior derived his information.

"Is that correct, Sleath?"

"Yes," groaned the wretched Sleath.

"I -- I was driven to it. He won the money from me, he fleeced me, and then he threatened to come to you and get me expelled if I didn't pay him. I -- I used the football money to keep him quiet,

and -- and then --"

"And then," said the Head severely, "you saved yourself by throwing the blame upon a wholly innocent lad; an action infinitely more wicked than the theft."

"The idea came into my head when I found him in my study," muttered Sleath. "If he hadn't been there I shouldn't have thought of it."

"No," exclaimed Figgins indignantly. "Then you'd have fixed it on some kid of our own house, on Fatty Wynn most likely. You could have shoved a half-sovereign into his pocket as easily as into Blake's!"

"Silence, Figgins! Sleath, I do not know how to express my detestation of the enormity of which you have been guilty. Theft itself is one of the basest of all petty crimes, but to blast the character of an innocent lad -- But I will say no more. You will leave the college to-morrow morning. You are expelled from St. Jim's, sir, and I shall take care that your father is acquainted with the full particulars of the matter. You are a disgrace to the school. Go!"

And Sleath walked unsteadily out of the study.

* * * * *

St. Jim's received a shock the next morning. On the notice-board in each house was a paper in the doctor's handwriting, round which eager crowds gathered.

The information it imparted was thrilling.

But for the well-known writing of the Head, there would have been a suspicion that it was a practical joke.

But there was no doubting Dr. Holmes's own hand.

The notice was brief, but very significant. It ran as follows:

"The truth concerning the theft from the New House of St. Jim's has now fortunately been discovered.

"The money was not taken by the junior hitherto unjustly suspected, but by Lucas Sleath, the treasurer of the college clubs, himself.

"Sleath has confessed, and is expelled from the school."

And the signature of the Head followed.

The news buzzed from one end of St. Jim's to the other. Blake, when he came down, observed the crowd in the hall, but did not join it. He was getting into the habit now of keeping to himself.

He was astonished when, as soon as he was perceived, a number of juniors made a rush for him and surrounded him in wild excitement. He clenched his fists, ready for war, but he quickly perceived that the demonstration was not a hostile one.

"It's all right, Blake!" cried Walsh, slapping him on the shoulder.

"What's all right?"

"You're not a thief."

"What!"

"I mean, we know you're not. The truth's out."

Blake's heart gave a bound.

"What are you jabbering about?" he asked.

"Sleath's the thief! He took the money; he's confessed."

"Sleath!"

"Yes. Here it is on the board, in the doctor's fist! Look!"

Blake was dragged to the notice-board. There, sure enough, was the doctor's statement of his innocence in black and white.

His chums had already heard the news, and they were soon in the crowd. They slapped him on the back till he gasped for breath.

"Hurrah!" cried Herries, and the crowd echoed his shout, waking echoes in the School House very unusual on a Sunday morning.

Kildare came out of his room. He came towards Blake with his hand outstretched, and gave him a hearty grip.

"I felt all along that you were innocent, though I admit I was staggered at one time," he said. "I'm glad the truth is out, Blake. The whole house owes you an apology, and I make mine now. I'm sorry I ever doubted your honour for a moment."

"Thank you, Kildare."

"We all apologise," exclaimed Walsh.

"We're sorry, Blake. I suppose we've made asses of ourselves, and may as well own up."

"That's all right," said Blake. "You are asses, you know, and couldn't be

expected to act otherwise. I hope you'll have more sense another time, but I have my doubts. Come on, chaps. Are you all here? We're going to see Figgins & Co. I don't know how they've done it, but they've worked the oracle somehow, I'm certain of that."

And Study No. 6 sallied forth from the School House arm-in-arm, across the quadrangle, to the New House.

Figgins & Co. were expecting the visit.

There was a blush of conscious merit upon the classic features of the great Figgins, and the Co. looked as if they fancied themselves a good deal that morning.

"How did you do it, Figgy?" asked Blake, gripping hard the hand of his old enemy and his best friend. "How on earth did you do it?"

And Figgy modestly related his adventures as an amateur detective.

"My hat!" said Herries. "You ought to have a medal, Figgy!"

"Figgy, old son, you're a giddy marvel," said Blake. "I don't know how to thank you, so I won't try. You'll understand. But after this I'll never go for you again, never."

"Oh, what rot!" exclaimed Figgins, in alarm. "Why, all the fun would be gone if the School House stopped rowing the New House. This needn't make any difference."

"But --"

"Look here, we're going to make the New House cock house at St. Jim's, and make you bouncers sit up," said Figgins. "There's no reason why we shouldn't be jolly good friends, and rivals at the same time. We're going to knock spots off you soon."

"Are you?" said Blake, looking warlike. "You'll find us at home when you start. Still, what you say is a jolly good idea."

"May I make a suggestion?" drawled D'Arcy. "Suppose we make it pax for a couple of days, and to-morrow I will blow one of the fivahs at the tuck-shop, and we'll have a big feast to celebrate the great occasion. We'll invite all the juniors of both houses, and have a high old time, deah boys. And after that we'll go on the war-path again."

"Adolphus," said Figgins, "you are not half the silly ass you look. There's a lot of solid hoss sense in your suggestion,

NELSON LEE COLUMN

EARLY STRUGGLES

CHEER BOYS CHEER

(continued)

by Robert Blythe

The Hut,
South Norwood.

15th November, 1912.

Horace Phillips.

Dear Mr. Phillips,

I enclose the war story herewith, which I have called "The Submarine Invasion." I trust you will find it to your liking. I shall be up in town, I expect, on Wednesday next, so I will give you a call. If you would like another war story in before Wednesday, however, I will write it upon hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,

Fleetway House.

15th November, 1912.

Dear Mr. Brooks,

Many thanks for your story "The Submarine Invasion." I am sorry to say it is all out in many important respects, and you will have to do some revisions at once. Please call and see me Monday morning without fail.

Yours sincerely,

HORACE PHILLIPS

CHEER BOYS CHEER.

The Hut,
South Norwood.

19th November, 1912.

Horace Phillips.

Dear Mr. Phillips,

I enclose the MS. of "The Submarine Invasion" herewith. I have made the suggested alterations, and I trust that the yarn is now satisfactory.

Yours sincerely,

The Hut,
South Norwood.

26th November, 1912.

Horace Phillips.

Dear Mr. Phillips,

I am quite confident that you will like the war story I enclose herewith. It is just over 4,000 words, I think, but I couldn't very well get it into less. I must apologise for not having sent the story yesterday, as I promised, but I sincerely trust that you have not been inconvenienced. In future I can confidently assert that you will have no cause to criticise my promptitude in turning in manuscripts.

Yours sincerely,

He must have finally convinced Mr. Phillips that he had at last grasped the principles of a good war yarn, because he is commissioned to write a series of war yarns concerning a Chinese invasion.

Talbot Lodge,
South Norwood.

26th May, 1913.

Horace Phillips.

Dear Mr. Phillips,

I enclose a synopsis herewith. It is, of course, only brief, and in the story I shall fill in the gaps, and make the yarn absolutely brisk and alive. If by chance you do not care for it, I can easily let you have another synopsis and still turn in the first yarn by Monday morning next. But I am of the opinion that you will approve of the enclosed.

Yours sincerely,
E.S.B.

Fleetway House.

27th May, 1913.

Dear Mr. Brooks,

Your synopsis is quite all right, and I shall be glad to have the story on these lines by Monday morning next, without fail.

Yours sincerely,
HORACE PHILLIPS
CHEER BOYS CHEER.

Talbot Lodge,
South Norwood.

29th May, 1913.

Horace Phillips.

Dear Mr. Phillips,

As I was full up with the subject, I got straight ahead with the enclosed yarn as soon as I got the synopsis back from you. I have finished it off at the point you requested, and even as it is I am afraid the yarn has run to about 5,500 words, or perhaps a little more. But, as this is the first of the series, perhaps it will not matter. I sincerely trust that you will like it, and shall be glad to hear from you. I can run up on Monday, if you like, to discuss the second story.

With kind regards.

Yours sincerely,
E.S.B.

Fleetway House.

3rd June, 1913.

Dear Mr. Brooks,

I expected you to call to-day about the first "Chinese" story. There are one or two important points to deal with, so please do not fail to call to-morrow.

Yours sincerely,
HORACE PHILLIPS
CHEER BOYS CHEER.

The Fleetway House.
26th June, 1913.

Dear Mr. Brooks,

The enclosed synopsis strikes me as being quite all right. Please do not fail to send the story in by Monday. Perhaps you will call in on Tuesday to see Mr. Phillips about the next yarn?

Yours sincerely,
R. T. EVES
CHEER BOYS CHEER.

Talbot Lodge,
South Norwood.

29th June, 1913.

Horace Phillips.

Dear Mr. Phillips,

As promised, I enclose the next Yellow Terror yarn herewith. I tried to finish it up at the beginning of page 12, but I found that it ran to the bottom. In spite of this, however, I think it is a trifle shorter than the last story.

I shall be in town on Wednesday or Thursday, when I will pay you a visit to discuss the next yarn.

With kind regards.

Yours sincerely,
E.S.B.

The Fleetway House.
2nd July, 1913.

Dear Mr. Brooks,

With regard to the "Invasion" story you are working upon. Will you please get the finishing incident to take place over St. Paul's Cathedral? This incident is, of course, the one where the airship, after the brush with the aeroplane, has dropped and caught on to a part of the cathedral dome.

Yours sincerely,
HORACE PHILLIPS
CHEER BOYS CHEER.

Talbot Lodge,
South Norwood.

4th July, 1913.

Horace Phillips.

Dear Mr. Phillips,

I should have preferred to enclose the whole of the 5th "Yellow Terror" story herewith, but I could not get it done in time, so I enclose only half. You told me Monday morning would be satisfactory, but I thought you might like to see the opening to-day. The remainder of the yarn will be in your hands first post Monday.

Yours sincerely,
E.S.B.

Talbot Lodge, South Norwood.
21st July, 1913.

Horace Phillips.

Dear Mr. Phillips,

I enclose half of THE SIEGE OF IPSWICK herewith, and will post off the remainder

to-night.

I shall probably be up in town on Tuesday or Wednesday, and I will call upon you in order to discuss the next yarn.

Yours sincerely,

Talbot Lodge,
South Norwood.

17th August, 1913.

Horace Phillips.

Dear Mr. Phillips,

I am coming up to the office to-morrow - Monday - and I will bring the YELLOW TERROR yarn with me. Meanwhile, I shall be glad if you will glance at the synopsis herewith; we can then talk over it.

With kind regards.

Yours sincerely,

It would now seem that Edwy is all set for a profitable association with "Cheer Boys' Cheer" but unfortunately the paper is not doing so well and in fact has to finish in September. And once again E.S.B. has to look for other papers to earn his living. With what results we shall see in the next instalment of his early struggles.

* * * * *

MOOR VIEW SCHOOL

by R. J. Godsave

When E. S. Brooks introduced the Moor View School to the readers of the Nelson Lee it must have been somewhat in the nature of a gamble. In common with other contemporary boys' papers mention of female characters had been, more or less, in passing.

The one exception in the pre St. Frank's Lees was that of Eileen Dare who had worked with Nelson Lee and Nipper on some of their detective cases.

Whether this innovation was popular with the readers at that time it is difficult to say, although the Lee must have had quite a few girl readers to judge by subsequent letters written to the author.

The close proximity of Moor View School to St. Frank's would have made it extremely difficult for Brooks to gradually fade out and eventually drop the girls' school, had this venture proved unpopular.

How the author succeeded integrating the Moor View girls without affecting the smooth flow of the Lee is well-known.

The friendships which developed between the boys and girls was treated quite naturally without becoming 'mushy' and were the basis

of many fine series.

It is refreshing to find that Brooks did not fall into the error of assuming that persons with undesirable characteristics are all shifty eyed, thin mouthed, etc. The popular Irene Manners was fair, with a pretty face. The far from saintly Joan Tarrant was dark, and also had a pretty face.

There is no doubt that the Moor View Schoolgirls contributed greatly to the Nelson Lee, especially in the holiday and Christmas series which presented more balanced stories than in the past.

THE MEN BEHIND BOYS' FICTION by W. O. G. Lofts and D. J. Adley

reviewed by F. Vernon Lay

At last an advance copy of the so-long awaited epic is in my hands and it has been well worth waiting for. Every page of its 361 pages is full of interest. The dust jacket designed by Basil Reynolds, nephew of the famous Gem illustrator, Warwick Reynolds, with its thumbnail sketches of famous characters, is a 'gem' of nostalgia. The chapter entitled 'A Tribute to the D. C. Thomson Papers and the Red Circle School' throws much new light on a very neglected topic and will delight the many thousands of aficionados of this section of our hobby. The chapters on 'The Charles Hamilton Schools' and 'The Sexton Blake Roll of Honour' alone are worth the price of the book and are monuments to the unflagging zeal of the two authors over a period of fifteen years.

The price of Four Guineas may seem a lot but when one considers thousands of hours that have gone into the preparation of the text, no amount of money could possibly repay the two authors for their time and devotion, so obviously a labour of love.

The book is well produced and the publishers Messrs. Howard Baker (Publishers) Ltd., are to be congratulated on the care they have taken to produce a book that will be treasured and used for many years to come. It is, without doubt, the finest book that has yet been produced about the men and a few women to whom we all owe eternal thanks for the many hours of enjoyment they have given and continue to give to millions of readers the world over.

Copies may be obtained from the writer at 52 Oakleigh Gardens, Whetstone, London, N.20 9AB, or from Howard Baker Publishers Ltd., 47 Museum Street, London, W.C.1.

No. 85 - Magnets 1325/6 - Bunter's Boater Hat Series

Authors are notoriously bad judges of their own work, and Charles Hamilton was aware of this failing when he wrote in a letter "Among the stories which seemed to me rather amusing were 'Bunter's £100 Hat' and 'The Boy Who Wouldn't be Caned.'" And I thought the stories of Wibley in the guise of a new boy rather entertaining. But on such points as these I think the reader is a better judge than the author."

The story began with a £100 banknote that Mr. Vernon-Smith allowed to blow away on the breeze across Courtfield Common. In these days of tax evasion a note of such a high denomination is not issued; in 1933 it represented a small fortune, but to Mr. Vernon-Smith it was annoying though not important. It fell into the hands of Mr. Hinks, and when he was about to be captured he hid it in the lining of Billy Bunter's boater, Bunter fortunately being asleep at the time, lying in the grass on the common. The boater happened to belong to Lord Mauleverer and Bunter never wore it again, which was very frustrating for Mr. Hinks who kept lurking in the vicinity of Greyfriars and springing out to snatch Bunter's hat whenever he passed by. The comedy of mistake was well-contrived, and the series reads agreeably enough, but it hardly ranks as one of the funniest Magnet stories.

There are interesting period touches to be found in the pages of the Magnet. In No. 1255, for instance, Colonel Wharton was feeling the pinch and got off the train at Courtfield instead of Friardale to save money. He explained that his fortune was locked up in investments that could not be sold in those days of depression except at rubbish prices. A year later, in No. 1325, we learn that the Big Slump was over, and Mr. Vernon-Smith, who had bought a lot of shares at low prices, was now reaping the benefits. It is odd that Mr. Bunter's financial dealings, usually unsuccessful, were regarded as a joke, but Mr. Vernon-Smith who always came out best was taken very seriously indeed. Today we should not consider there was much difference between a stockbroker and a financier.

The Boater Hat series also relates the continuing story of

Vernon-Smith's troubles. It comes mid-way between two little series about the Bounder, and his feud with Mr. Quelch is taken a stage further in this series, being linked to the missing £100 note. In 1932 and 1933 there were times in the Magnet when the clear-cut division between one series and another was difficult to define, and a theme would sometimes run through more than one series and even be forgotten for a time. This was more like real life but not so artistically satisfying as a self-contained series. Nevertheless, the Boater Hat series can stand on its own merits, an attractive and interesting pair of tales with pleasing touches but not among the classic stories of Greyfriars.

THE GOLDEN ARROW by A. Hasenson

reviewed by F. Vernon Lay

This lavishly-illustrated and superbly documented book is a 'must' for every railway enthusiast. As the blurb on the beautifully produced dust jacket says "For more than forty years with an interruption for the war, the Golden Arrow has been a magic name. Speeding between London-Victoria and Dover, with its cross-Channel boat to connect it with the Flèche d'Or from Calais to Paris, it became the colourful symbol of a romantic age of travel."

With its numerous maps, photographs and time-tables this is a book to take us back into the past and at its price of 65/- the publishers, Messrs. Howard Baker Books are to be congratulated on producing yet another book to their ever-expanding list of books that will be cherished for years to come.

Copies may be obtained from the writer at 52 Oakleigh Gardens, Whetstone, London, N.20 9AB, or from Howard Baker Publishers Ltd., 47 Museum Street, London, W.C.1.

COMING YOUR WAY IN C.D. ANNUAL FOR 1970

Cliff House School - 1909 to 1940	—	Mary Cadogan
Early Days at Morcove	—	Ray Hopkins
"Loder, Carne and Walker"	—	Les Rowley
Grand and Final Appearance at Greyfriars	—	Gerry Allison

LET'S BE CONTROVERSIAL

No. 151. A CROWN BUT NO PEDESTAL

For well over 20 years Roger Jenkins and I have been writing on the life and work of Charles Hamilton. We have enjoyed doing it. We have done it with no thought of personal gain, but only in the hope that it would give pleasure to those with like interests to our own.

Down the years there have been times when we have seen chunks of our work lifted, without so much as a "by your leave," by professional writers. In fact, it is hard to see what any new work on Charles Hamilton could possibly contain which Roger Jenkins and I have not written already.

Up to date this "Let's Be Controversial" series has comprised over 160,000 words, and last month reached its 150th edition. It has surely covered every possible phase of the celebrated author's career. It has not been all that repetitive, either. We have returned to old themes, often to give a new slant on them.

Such a series would only be possible, obviously, when written about the work of a brilliant author of simply enormous output. I would go further and suggest that it would not be possible in connection with any other author who has ever lived.

The series has praised Charles Hamilton. It has lauded him as the world's greatest writer of school stories, and this is something from which I do not budge an inch. But the series has never been afraid to be critical. It has never stuck Charles Hamilton on a pedestal which must never be used as a cock-shy. Despite the eulogies, of which there have been plenty, it has also carried probably more adverse criticism of the author than any articles from any other Hamiltonian. At times it has been a little daring, and run against the stream of popular opinion. For instance, though I have always disliked substitute stories, "Let's Be Controversial" has never condemned the sub writers simply because they wrote substitute stories. To some extent, this series may have been responsible for a more generous approach to the subject of substitute writers than once existed. I hope so.

Just occasionally we have deliberately slid out on thin ice, dealing with subjects which might cause offence to the thin-skinned. We once looked at religion, and how it was handled in the Magnet. We asked whether a political bias might not be behind the barbed utterances which have come against the Gem and Magnet from certain public figures. In two of last year's subjects, "Unfinished Symphony" and "The Great Hiatus," we dared to suggest that our hero was only human after all and not perfection itself - for when one has praised a lot one can dare to be critical a little. And only last month we slid out on to the thin ice which in 1970 is named South Africa.

Being a bit lazy this week, I am picking out a few short extracts from long-gone Controversials, so that we can chew on them again for the passing moment. I thought of calling them Pearls of Controversy, but that would sound fearfully immodest. So here are just a few memory-ticklers from the past:

"I am prepared to believe that an Author's Page, like 'Between Ourselves,' may have benefited the Lee - that readers revelled in that contact between themselves and the author. I do not believe that a similar plan would have benefited the Magnet or the Gem. I think that the Hamilton papers lost nothing by the aura of mystery which always surrounded their author. My enjoyment of a film is not increased by having the trick photography explained to me. I cannot imagine Charles Hamilton ever having the time or the inclination for a readers' column conducted by himself - and I am thankful that he never attempted it."

"Broadly speaking, the Famous Five was an unlikely combination. In fiction it worked out well: in real life, a thread linking five into close friendships 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."

"Those who decry Bunter are ploughing the sands. For Bunter is Greyfriars. Charles Hamilton made him so. The author believed

that he was giving the majority of his readers what they wanted. I daresay he was right. Let us make no mistake. Plenty of those who decry Bunter do so simply because they are anti-Hamiltonian. They find Bunter's ample behind an adequate target for a boot - but they would decry any Hamilton character who won such phenomenal success."

"In Britain today, charm and genuine worth have been superseded by a slick, hard brightness; vulgarity is both offhand and outspoken; a moral tone seems ridiculous. All this is admitted. But the dregs of youth get the spotlight. There is still a hard core of fine youngsters who would buy and read good papers if they had the chance. That they do not get the chance is not the fault of the publishers. It is the result of the money-grab and enormous overhead costs which makes the normal circulations of yesteryear quite uneconomic now."

Well, four chunks from the past are more than enough - a few hundred words from 160,000. Next month we will get down to real business again, maybe running with the stream or maybe on a collision course with the experts. Who can tell?

In passing, two articles from this Controversial series, entitled respectively "And Summer Is A-Coming In -- and Cricket" and "King Cricket in a Golden Summer" are to appear in the "Cricketers' Journal" next summer. But, in this case, the editor of the Journal has courteously asked permission to reprint the articles. In the "King Cricket" article I wrote: "And my beloved Kent have not been county champions since 1913." Well, well!

 SALE: Magnets, several 1931-40, offers; S.O. Libs. offers; GEMS (2 bound vols.) 1938-9, 52 Nos., offers; NELSON LEES, many Nos. (1927-33) 5/- ea. & post; S. BLAKE LIBS. 3rd Series, several; MECCANO MAGAZINES 1947-64 bound and unbound around 300 Nos.; Picture Show Annuals 1926-35; SCHOOLFRIEND ANNUALS pre-war 25/- ea. & post; Schoolgirl Own Annuals 15/- eac. & post; Radio Pictorial 1935-6 70 Nos. 3/6 ea. & post; CHUMS, mint pre-war vols. 30/- ea. plus 4/6 ea. post; BOYS OWN PAPER pre-war vols. 25/- post paid; Scout, many hundreds of loose Nos. 1908-39 price 1/6 ea. plus postage. Comic Annuals, Aero, Film, Cricket, Football, Railway, Motor, M/cycle, Nautical, Stage, Crime, Victorian, Bunter Books, Ally Slopers, all types of mags. in stock. 20 Bunter and Tom Merry post-war books 6/- each plus postage. Old Victorian Bloods wanted such as Calendar of Horrors, Black Monk, Calcraft the Hangman, Melina the Murderess, Catherine Hayes, Ruth the Murdered Child, Dance of Death, Moonlight Jack and Fierce Boys Journals such as Bad Boys Paper, Boys of Albion, etc. Good prices paid. S.a.e. for all enquiries.

RONALD ROUSE, COLLECTOR & DEALER, 3 ST. LEONARD'S TERRACE, GAS HILL, NORWICH, NORFOLK.

NEWS OF THE CLUBS

SYDNEY, AUSTRALIA

After their meeting on Tuesday, 25th August, at 6.30 p.m., the members all agreed that though their numbers are small and the meetings are only held every second month, the enthusiasm and enjoyment are certainly not lacking. The rendezvous as usual was Cahill's Restaurant and here again members found the atmosphere and service very much to their liking, so that the meeting began under most favourable conditions.

Members paid a sincere tribute to the late Len Packman and his unflinching devotion and invaluable contribution right from the initial founding of the book clubs to the end of his life. And remembered with deepest gratitude his very personal involvement with the Blake saga and the wonderful way he had helped quite a few of the collectors in our part of the world. And they have asked me to extend to you, Josie, their understanding sympathy at this very sad time... Len will always be remembered by his many friends throughout the world.

The programme for the evening got away to a controversial start when discussion was started on the vicissitudes of authors early days as per the letters of Edwy Searles Brooks.

Topics under discussion were many and varied, ranging from Johann Strauss through the theatre of yesteryear to old gramophones and music boxes.

The hobby regained its supremacy when the discussion turned to "spoofs" in the literary world such as those in the Sherlock Holmes saga. The question arose as to whether the collectors of the story papers really take their favourite authors and stories too seriously. Several "spoofs" have been taken really seriously - a famous one was that which appeared in our own "Daily Telegraph" a few years ago. Charles Hamilton reacted to it strongly and it was taken very seriously indeed as he wrote a prompt and indignant reply.

B. PATE

Secretary.

MIDLAND

Meeting held on 25th August, 1970.

The attendance was eleven. Ian Bennett took the chair and said that the club finances were improving but care had still to be exercised. Suggestions came from Jack, the two Teds, Norman and Bill and will, no doubt, be acted upon in the near future.

Ian then thanked Norman and Ivan for help in producing the newsletter during the illness of Freda Guest.

Then followed the Anniversary Number - N.L.L. (O.S.) 116, Fullwood's Victory, dated 25.8.17., and thus 53 years old today; and the Collectors' Item - B.F.L. (2nd S.) 277, Rivals of the Blue Crusaders, a reprint of a serial in N.L.L. (1st N.S.) 146 to 159. Both items aroused much interest and comment, for example "Was Fullwood's reformation a mistake?" and the merits of Brooks and Hardy when writing of the Blue Crusaders.

Although it was an informal meeting there was a set item. George had taped some dance records of the 30's and linked them together with a carefully worded commentary, and for twenty minutes had everyone entranced.

A game followed - Finding the Title - and the two rounds were won respectively by Jack Bellfield and Ivan Webster.

Bob Wareing then showed a number of supplements from the Popular, Boys Magazine, etc. They were in splendid condition despite their age and like the other items in the programme, aroused great interest. Bill Morgan was particularly attracted by a photograph of Aston Villa F.C. of the early 20's.

The final item was the raffle won by Win Partridge, Jack Bellfield, Ted Dodd and Bob Wareing. The next meeting will be on 27th October, from 7 p.m. onwards.

TOM PORTER

Correspondent.

NORTHERN

Saturday, 12th September.

Chairman, Geoffrey Wilde, was back in his usual place after his

Rhineland holiday and welcomed Harold Truscott, a new member, on his first visit to our club meeting. Geoffrey was accompanied by wife, Marion, and son, Simon, and recalled that on finishing his holiday in Vienna, he had discovered a Hamilton Street, but not the original home of Dr. Huxton Rymer before he clashed with Sexton Blake. Hobby allusions crop up in curious places. Jack Wood produced a cutting relating to Harry Wharton's new racing stables and to Harry's brother, Walter, who was also looking for a new stable. Jack also spotted that some of the children in the recently hi-jacked B.O.A.C. plane came from Rookwood School, Andover, Hants. Right county, at least. After the usual library business, and general discussion in which reference was made to the receipt of badly damaged books owing to bad packing, we settled down to Leslie Rowley's Greyfriars entrance examination paper. Not quite so easy as it looked at first, and we await our results with qualms. Geoffrey Wilde brought our efforts at completing the unfinished Magnet series to an end. It was a first-class piece of Hamiltonia, with, as always, everything ending all serene in an imperfect world.

Next meeting Saturday, 10th October.



LONDON

The sequence of the Leytonstone October meetings was broken this year as we met a month earlier, a fine sunny September afternoon with most of the gathering taking their tea in the garden.

"If the Greyfriars Boys Grew up," a questionnaire quiz by Mary Cadogan, opened up the entertainment side of the meeting. Roger Jenkins was the first contestant with Hurree Singh as his grown-up boy. After Roger had expounded, many amusing replies from others were forthcoming. This was followed by Bill Lofts with Peter Hazeldene, and Winifred Morss with Vernon-Smith. Daughter Teresa must have liked her mother's effort to entertain. Reuben and Phyllis Godsave then dispensed tea, which most of the gathering had in the spacious garden.

Frank Vernon-Lay read some interesting letters from Edwy

Searles Brooks, in answer to his correspondents who wrote to him in the early days of his writings. Bob Blythe obliged with a postscript re the letters.

Jack Allison's Crossword was then enjoyed. Roy Parsons was the winner. Charlie Wright was the second and Bill Norris the third as regards correct answers. The company's thanks to Jack Allison was recorded.

"Can we consider Coker?" was the subject of a very fine discourse by Leslie Rowley and a truly amusing talk it turned out to be.

Josie Packman agreed to take over the Sexton Blake section of the club library. The new impression of the S.B. Catalogue will be published next January, together with a supplement to go with the catalogue already in the hands of collectors.

The luncheon party at the Rembrandt Hotel, Kensington, will take place on Sunday, 18th October, 1 p.m. Tea will be at 4 p.m.

Votes of thanks to the hosts terminated the meeting.

UNCLE BENJAMIN

RIPPINGHAM SCHOOL TALES

by O. W. Wadham

In 1946 with the war well over the thoughts of publishers in England turned to school stories once again. Nothing had appeared to take the place of the MAGNET and the GEM so, in 1947, a school story paper called SCHOOL YARN MAGAZINE was commenced by School Yarn Publications Ltd., of Throgmorton Avenue, London. I have number six of that slim twelve page weekly. It is entitled "Dick Doran Does It Again," and is by Kenneth E. Newman. The story has the old well-worn plot, schoolboys betting on sporting fixtures, and there are no illustrations in the paper, barring a red and green cover picture of a short-panted youth tied up to a tree. What interested me most in the publication was an announcement that a companion paper was about to be started called the SCHOOLGIRL STORY MAGAZINE. The first number was to be called "The Schoolgirl Film Star." Now I wonder - did that paper for girls ever see the light of day? I fancy that School Yarns Mag. for the boys did not last many more moons. Does any reader of COLLECTORS' DIGEST have any more data on these publications?

The Postman Called

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

S. GORDON SWAN (Western Australia): I have been rather puzzled recently at a certain name appearing as writer of several television scripts. A year or two ago Patrick McGoohan ran a series called *The Prisoner*, and three of the episodes were credited to Anthony Skene. Last night I was watching an American show called *The Name of the Game* - an hour-and-a-half show - and the episode entitled *Island of Gold and Precious Stones* was stated to be written by Anthony Skene. Can this be the creator of *Zenith the Albino*?

I remember that the first *Zenith* tale appeared in the *Union Jack* about 1920, which is fifty years ago. It seems unlikely that the same writer could be scripting for modern television, and American television at that, yet the name is unusual. And after all, Agatha Christie has been writing for over half a century.

I wondered if any readers of the C.D. would have some knowledge of this matter. I seem to recall there was a query some years ago about an Anthony Juan Skene, and it was found that a play, or a television play, had been written by George Norman Philips, which is Anthony Skene's real name.

F. V. LAY (Whetstone): The article on Fingo was well-timed and interesting, altho' I cannot agree with the disapproval of Herman putting the word 'nigger' into Doris Levison's mouth. It is only in recent years that 'nigger-brown' has been changed to 'African-brown' and I feel that the 'demure' Doris Levison would quite well have used the term 'nigger.' I am not so sure that Hamilton could have handled this theme. His ideas on 'foreigners' were always very English and 'stiff upper lip' and this problem goes much deeper than that - I think 'Inky' was often called a 'nigger' and the *Magnet* was the last place I feel where controversial matters should have been introduced. I know George Orwell thought otherwise but I am sure a left-wing boys' paper would have shared the same fate as the *Daily Herald* only much quicker. Politics and sex have no place whatsoever in boys' literature and in spite of prevailing conditions I am sure it is as true to-day as when we were youngsters.

K. HUMPHREYS (Nottingham): I always enjoy C.D. In these days of sex, "kinkiness," violence, pot, demos and mayhem, how refreshing it is to meet Wharton & Co. in the shady lanes of Kent. It's like a mental bath. Long may you continue to provide the soap and water!

L. S. ELLIOTT (London): In Let's Be Controversial last month, mention was made of Julius Herman of South Africa, and his Gem story of 50 years ago. The name struck a chord in my memory, and I looked up my Nelson Lees of 1929. In the January 5th issue, E.S.B. (in Between Ourselves) wrote: "I think you have been trying to pull my leg. J. Herman of S. Africa, when you tell me that you feel fresh after a 40-mile walk, By the way, Julius, may I publish your photograph which I was pleased to receive?" And, in the April 27th issue, the photo appeared with Brooks' comments: "As I am of the opinion, J. Herman, S. Africa, that 'a middle-aged pedagogue's physiognomy will interest our readers,' your photograph appears above this week." Brooks then went on to say that some Headmasters, etc., had shown keen interest in the Lee and St. Frank's.

JACK MURTAGH (New Zealand): In the September C.D., Len Wormull asks "What would you do chums?" in regard to the collection of books his workmate has - my answer is "Lend him a couple of C.D's and see if you can rope him into our circle!"

THE FANTASTIC WILLIAM WILSON

by W. O. G. Lofts

Over the last few years, I have been approached several times by the B.B.C. T.V. and several organisations connected with best selling magazines, for information about William Wilson - a character that first appeared in the Wizard in the second world war period. These inside facts, they wanted to use in programmes, about this amazing sports character, who inspired many youths to become famous athletes and world record-holders in later life.

When the first Wilson series started in 1943, I was engaged in jungle fighting in Burma, was 18 years of age, and had put boys' papers behind me. My own estimation of the most popular series ever to appear in D. C. Thomson papers (up to 1943) being the Red Circle School Stories, the Wolf of Kabul, the Black Sapper, and Lionhearted Logan.

William Wilson was a fantastic athlete who could run a 100 yards in 9 seconds, jump 7 feet in a high jump (carrying a 16 pound shot) and trot a mile in 33 minutes! Fantastic times when one must remember that this was in 1943. Incredibly more so when he was reputed to be about 150 years old! Clad in a black Victorian bathing costume, bank hair flopping across his pale forehead, and speaking in a harsh (old English)

accent - after these great efforts he usually went into a coma, when his heart stopped beating. The explanation of his great age was that simply he had discovered the elixir of life. Born at Stayling in Yorkshire in 1795; he was as a youth a seven stone weakling. Tired of watching every week funerals and people dying in early and middle age, he discovered an old hermit living on the Yorkshire Moors who was 200 years old and who prattled about the Courts of Queen Elizabeth. The hermit died eventually not through old age, but through the roof of his cave falling on him. Wilson had learned all his secrets, which included picking various wild roots on the Yorkshire Moors, and isometric exercises. Wilson of course broke almost every world record in existence - and with him quoting old sports records of events in the 18th and 19th centuries, long before our own started. Writing in old English using the 'f' instead of the 's.' Paying sums of money in golden sovereigns (when they were worth several times their original value) Wilson strode through several series in the Wizard through the years of many generations of schoolboys. So popular were they that they were reprinted several times. Extremely well written, they undoubtedly gripped the imagination of many enthusiastic young athletes. The first series was republished in the short lived RED LION LIBRARY in 1962. As in the case of nearly all D. C. Thomson stories - apart from them being mainly editorial creative suggestions, and discussions with authors concerned, more than one author was engaged in writing the series - though the name of 'W. S. K. Webb' is almost certainly a nom-de-plume as given on the Red Lion Library reprint.

Wilson later joined the R.A.F., was shot down over the channel, reported missing, but of course turned up again. In later series he called himself Greene for some unknown reason, and dedicated himself to train a cripple to become a world mile record-holder. He even later went to Africa to squash a black up-rising led by an athlete-king called Chaka.

I can well remember, at the "after" party at a B.B.C. T.V. show, hearing Chris Brasher (a former world record-holder) talking enthusiastically about the character of Wilson - and of the efforts of Tom McNab, the A.A.A. National Coach to write a full-length article about probably the most fantastic fictional character ever to appear in sport. The ageless, great William Wilson.

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