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MAY

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## **THE EDITOR TALKS**

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### THE FLEETWAY HOUSE

Since the war we have seen all too many lovely old buildings demolished for one reason and another. And, admittedly, plenty of structures which were not so lovely.

Often, that destruction must have caused certain pangs at the hearts of those who knew the buildings well over many years.

The whole character of many towns has been changed as the bulldozers have taken over. For instance, a huge area of once charming Guildford has been completely flattened, and much of it is now re-built. There is but little left of the charming country town we once knew. As I commented once, Freeman Wills Crofts, the writer, who lived near Guildford and often wrote of it, would not be happy with what the planners

and developers have done to the place he loved so well.

It saddened me that the authorities allowed the British Music Hall to be almost entirely obliterated to be replaced with characterless blocks of offices or all-alike supermarkets. Scores of those halls, originally built in the first dozen years of this century, were completely wiped out. Surely a few could have been saved for posterity.

Much of it has turned out incongruous, too. At Aldershot, for instance, they tore down the lovely Hippodrome and built a massive office block on the site. With crocodile tears, they named the new block Hippodrome Corner, or something of the sort. Now they have a new civic centre - I'm sure it cost the earth - where they have kinds of music hall entertainment in a place with none of the atmosphere of the bygone Hippodrome.

Which brings me in a roundabout way to the Fleetway House. In a fascinating article Mr. W. O. G. Loft told us recently that it has been demolished. Whether Fleetway House had any architectural beauty - or, indeed, anything in its favour - I do not know. But I am sure that the news of its death must have struck a slight note of sadness for those who, as it were, grew up with the Fleetway House as a dropcloth to their childhood. The Fleetway House, plus Gough House, Gough Square. I wonder what the last-named was. It was certainly a place which cropped up now and then in the various editors' addresses.

I went a couple of times or so to the Fleetway House, but am sure I never visited Gough Square.

It was in the autumn of 1912 that the editors of various papers informed their readers that, from now on, their new address would be The Fleetway House, Farringdon St. Up till then, the loved papers had been edited from Bouverie St. I wonder whether the Fleetway House was a new building in 1912, especially constructed to house the editors of the day. (Not Hamilton Edwards, though, for he had left for pastures new by that time in 1912.)

So Fleetway House has gone. It may have proved draughty, it may have been inconvenient for the spoiled journalists of a later age, it may even have been a blot on the landscape of the London scene of the shoddy seventies. But some of us loved it, even from a distance. We are sorry that another link with our childhood has been torn down.

## THE COMING OF PRINCESS SNOWEE

It was inevitable, or so scores of readers have told me. When we lost our dearly-loved Mr. Softee we vowed that we would never have another - the pain is too great when parting time comes. But pet-lovers from all over the world advised us to get another, and now, three months after Mr. Softee died, we have followed their advice. Even so, Mr. Softee may still have been the Last of the Masters - for the newcomer is a lovely little lady.

We came to the conclusion that something is missing in a home - our home, at any rate - without a pet.

We debated whether to go to a breeder and buy one of those magnificent animals such as one sees at the Cat Show at Olympia. Or whether to go to the Animal Rescue Centre at Wokingham, from whence Mr. Softee came seven years ago.

One Sunday afternoon in early April we went to Wokingham. They had dozens of cats of all colours, shapes and sizes, and plenty of kittens. Our eyes lingered on two, fully grown, together in one of the small sheds, looking rather unhappy and forsaken. They were a mother, coming up to four years old, and her son, coming up to two years old. We said that we would have the mother if they could find a good home for the son.

Late on the Tuesday afternoon we had a call from the Welfare Centre. They had found a good home for the son, but the mother was very unhappy indeed, left on her lonesome. Could we take her at once, for she was sad and desolate? You can guess our reply, and that evening a kindly soul brought the new boss along to Excelsior House. And that new boss has started to run the place with a firm but kindly paw.

She is predominantly white, but she has a silver tabby tail and silver tabby curtains over her eyes. I tell you this, for it is right you should know something of our new "Girl Friday" who, even as I am typing now, is spread contentedly snoozing among all the papers on my desk.

She already had a name - "Snowee". We wondered what we would call her. We thought of Pollie Green - for the little lady is the prettiest, wittiest girl in the world. We thought of "Cousin Ethel".

But this little lady is obviously a "missing heiress". For some reason she made me think of Grace Kelwyn, who starred in a Cliff House

series in the School Friend when I was a boy - I fancy Grace was a missing heiress found in the South Seas. I loved that series, and still have it, though I have never read it since those far-off days. Maybe one of our contributors will write it up for us, now that I have brought it to mind at long last.

So we rejected Pollie Green, Cousin Ethel, and Grace Kelwyn. Besides, with her misty colouring, "Snowee" is a very appropriate name. And, as a missing heiress, she must surely be a princess. So Princess Snowee it is.

With true impudence Snowee has taken to curling up and going to sleep in my own very personal rocking-chair. And Mr. Softee looks down from his large picture in the frame over the mantelpiece, and I'm darn sure there is a new expression of approval on that much-loved face of his.

#### THE EDITOR

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WANTED: Buy/Exchange, Bullseye 41, 89; Surprise No. 3; Film Fun 571; Boys' Mag. 602.

41 SWALECLIFF AVENUE, MANCHESTER 23.

\* \* \* \* \*

SALE: HB vol. 5 (Cracksman series) £2.50; Bunter hardbacks 23, 31, 36, £1.50 each, 34, £1; Greyfriars Prospectus, £1.25; Old Boys' Books Catalogue (Lofts-Adley) £1; last Magnet and Gem, 50p each; Gems 1446, 1503, 50p each; Magnet No. 1 (facsimile) offers; CDs - various numbers between 1965-78, 10p a copy. Postage extra on all items.

CLARK, 172 CAMP HILL ROAD, NUNEATON, WARKS.

\* \* \* \* \*

SALE or EXCHANGE for Magnets: Enid Blyton's Famous Five, The Seven Goslings, Little Grey Rabbit. Grey Rabbit Wandering Hedgehog by Alison Littlebel, very early, many others. Complete set 1934 Champion Comics, also the Modern Boy, perfect condition. Early School Books, 70 Magnets, 1938 to 1940. Odd Gems, Skippers, Detectives, Thrillers, Playtime, Adventures, Rovers, Wizards, Boys' Cinemas, Hotspurs, Triumphs, King Albert Book, paintings by E. Dulac and others. Little Nell 1912, Tammina of Angenla 1934, Modern Boy Annual 1933, Strand Vols. with Sherlock Holmes, etc.

OLYMPUS, SANDFORD MILL ROAD

CHELMSFORD, ESSEX.

# DANNY'S DIARY

MAY 1928

A new Musical Comedy called "Show Boat" has opened at Drury Lane Theatre in London. The main stars are Paul Robeson and Edith Day. I think we may be able to go and see it some time.

In the Nelson Lee Library the series has continued about Handforth with no friend left at St. Frank's, all due to his own fault. The opening story of May is "Handforth's New Chum". In a country lane Handy finds and befriends a ragged lad named Bert Hicks, who is really a complete rascal. Handy takes Hicks to the school. Next week, in "Under a Cloud", Hicks and some of his pals ransack the school. Suspicion falls on Handy, and he is forced to leave St. Frank's.

Last tale of the series is "Handforth's Great Adventure", in which he sets out to clear his name. We find Handy in two roles - Saxon Drake, the famous detective, and Mr. Hooper of Chicago.

Next tale was "All Aboard the Skylark", a Whitsun holiday yarn.

Two very good stories in the Schoolboys' Own Library this month. "Taming A Bully" is one of the very early Greyfriars tales starring Bulstrode and Wun Lung, and "The Fighting Form-Master" is about the arrival of Mr. Dalton after Mr. Bootles becomes a rich man and leaves Rookwood.

A poor month in the Gem, at any rate for those who remember how good it used to be. "Trimble's Reformation", a title which tells nearly everything, was followed by two tales of the boys going to help a local farmer. These two were "Farmers All" and "The Secret of the Farm". Next a tale about Cardew called "For Friendship's Sake".

The longest non-stop railway service in the world has been started by the L.N.E.R. This is from King's Cross to Edinburgh, a distance of  $392\frac{1}{2}$  miles without a scheduled stop. Our railways are wonderful.

In the Modern Boy there is a new series by G. E. Rochester, all about Rene de Lafayette and his band of Aerial Adventurers. I'm sure it's good if you like that sort of thing.

The "King of the Islands" serial finds Cap'n Samson joining forces with a Dutch skipper, Van Tromp of the Oom Pieter. They are after John Chin, a Chinese trader, who has discovered a rich pearling ground. While Chin is on the Oom Pieter, imprisoned until he tells the secret of the pearling ground, Ken King, with Kit Hudson, is on the way to the rescue.

At the pictures this month we have seen William Boyd and Mary Astor in "Two Arabian Knights"; Bebe Daniels in "Senorita"; Colleen Moore in "Twinkletoes"; Fred Thompson in "Lone Hand Saunders"; Ellaline Terriss and Godfrey Winn in "Blighty"; and Monte Blue in "The Black Diamond Express". We have also seen a lovely exciting sea film entitled "The Emden".

The Popular has been magnificent again this month. Greyfriars has been represented by the series about Mick, the Gipsy. And, at St. Jim's, Gussy has run away from school and has been turning up at Highcliffe, Cliff House, Rookwood and Greyfriars. But the Rio Kid tales are really the top of the bill with a brass band playing. The Kid, having left Salt Lick after dealing with a bully, is trailed into New Mexico by friends of that dead bully. The Kid finds a prospector dying from thirst in the Red Desert - the Jornada de la Muerte. The Kid helps the man, who has a bag of gold nuggets and the map to a gold mine. The Salt Lick man, left from the gang, shoots the prospector in mistake for the Kid, and the Kid inherits the gold mine. The Kid finds the mine, in Arizona, and gets a staunch ally in Rainy Face, an apache he has befriended. The Kid opens his mine, and employs a lot of men, but the Arizona Consolidated Company is determined to take the Kid's gold mine by fair means or foul. The stories in the series so far are "Saved from the Desert", "The Rio Kid's Bonanza", "The Rio Kid's Gold Mine", and "The Hidden Hand". Splendid stuff.

The Labour Party, together with the Trade Unions, has taken over Transport House, Westminster, to be their new headquarters. It was opened by Mr. Ramsay Macdonald.

I had the Union Jack twice this month. The first one contained "Tha Affair of the Staggering Man". The criminal was Peter, the Spider, who wields a dread disease to further his wicked schemes - and Sexton Blake falls a victim. My second story had the fascinating title "Fraud!"

And the fraud was connected with being the first airmen to fly the Atlantic from East to West. With Sexton Blake and Tinker was Splash Page of Fleet St.

On the 28th of the month it was exactly 300 years since John Bunyan was born. They had a tercentenary celebration in the town of Bedford to mark the occasion.

Another curate's egg month in the Magnet, with only two tales by the real Frank Richards. In "Coker's League of Friends" Coker starts a society to promote good-will and the like. Silly affair. But "Billy Bunter's Bike" is delicious. Bunter reckons he has struck a bargain when he buys a £20 Moonbeam bike for £3. Especially when Fishy, scenting a bargain, gives £5 for it. But the bike had been stolen from De Courcy of Highcliffe - by Honest George Jobson. In a very amusing sequel, "For the Honour of Greyfriars", Ponsonby doesn't lose the chance of putting the question "Who stole the bike?" But the Caterpillar chips in, and Pon doesn't have the last laugh.

Finally "The Hero of the Fifth", a tripey tale in which Coker falls in love with Miss Kitty Collinson.

I don't think any reader can be sorry that the Rookwood serial "For the Honour of Rookwood" has ended in the Gem. Luckily it wasn't a very long one. It was being replaced with a cricket serial "The Luck of the Game" by Richard Randolph.

(EDITORIAL COMMENT: S.O.L. No. 75, "Taming a Bully" comprised two tales which, with their illustrations, were famous at one time. The first tale entitled "The Greyfriars Athletes", where Bulstrode got shut in the vaults, and was found by the visiting Gussy, appeared early in 1910. The second story, a sequel, entitled "Wun Lung's loss" was the tale where Bulstrode contrived for Alonzo to cut off Wun Lung's pigtail, appeared some six months later in the summer of 1910. S.O.L. No. 76, "The Fighting Form-Master" was rather a curious collection in a way. It comprised the first four tales and the last four tales of a 12-story series which appeared in the Boys' Friend in the Spring of 1921. Readers of the S.O.L. were never told how Mr. Bootles came to leave Rookwood, which seems an absurd omission. The first four tales of this S.O.L. told of a brute named Cutts who replaced Mr. Bootles. The middle stories of the series were left out. The book was completed with the four tales telling how the ex-boxer, Mr. Dalton, arrived to be the Fourth Form master. It was very much a re-run of the events which heralded the arrival of Mr. Lascelles at Greyfriars. In passing, a black mark to the author for polishing off the pleasant piece of characterisation which Mr. Bootles was, and replacing him with the stock type, Mr. Dalton.

Eight stories seems at first glance, to be a lot to be included in one S.O.L. But the

Rookwood stories of the Boys' Friend of 1921 were very short indeed.)

\* \* \* \* \*

# BLAKIANA

Conducted by JOSIE PACKMAN

Once again I have to say the Sexton Blake Saga is never ending. Our contributor this month - John Bridgwater - has discovered a few items not listed in our Catalogues. These are as follows: A serial in  $\frac{1}{2}$ d Marvel from Jan. 1902 to June 1902 called "The Real Adventures of Sexton Blake". Blake's assistant in this serial is Wallace Lorimer whose name is included in the list of characters in the Catalogue. There is also a Professor Septimus Murgatroyd who seems to be a sort of Professor Moriarty. A short tale called "The Green Emerald" appeared in 3d Nugget Library No. 24. The answer to John's enquiry about the artist "Val" is: he was the famous Union Jack artist Val Reading who illustrated so many Union Jacks especially those containing stories of Yvonne and Dr. Huxton Rymer. His portrait appears in U.J. No. 1000. The two Sexton Blake Libraries mentioned in Mr. Swan's article are available from the O.B.B.C. Sexton Blake Lending Library.

## THE WINGED TERROR

by John Bridgwater

When I first read of the Winged Terror in Turner's book "Boys will be Boys" I was intrigued and curious. Why did Blake think Lee had an "inspiration of genius" when he drove the car in which they were travelling at 40 m.p.h. into a hedge? How were Tower Bridge and London Bridge destroyed?

At last curiosity has been satisfied. The "Winged Terror" is a serial by Maxwell Scott. It appeared in "The Boys' Herald" of 1909/1910 running from 329 to 349 a total of 21 instalments. It received a great flourishing of editorial trumpets, instalments being printed under headings containing such words as "Grand" and "Magnificent". It rated no less than seven very fine black and white cover drawings. The large format of the old "Boys' Herald" (about tabloid newspaper size) gave the ample space necessary for the big scenes. These included an attempted assassination of the Prince of Wales by shooting from a hovering biplane, an aerial attack on the Fleet, another on a football stadium and my particular favourite, a flaming dirigible falling into the Thames near the bombed ruins of London Bridge. (Need I add that Blake and Lee are in the doomed Gondola?) There are also some excellent smaller drawings of the

bombing of Tower Bridge and Sheffield Town Hall. The very talented artist's initials look like Val. I should very much like to know who he is. Can anyone tell me? (See my reply in my preamble. J.P.)

Unfortunately the writing did not impress me so favourably. I FOUND IT FLAT AND RATHER TEDIOUS WITH TOO MUCH EMPHASIS ON TIME. In several places events are pin-pointed by giving the exact time of day and precise lapses of time. This literary device has been employed with great effect in some stories which rely on the time element for the mounting of tension but in this tale it becomes merely repetitious. However, in spite of these defects there are many exciting passages such as aerial dog fights with pistols bombings and chasings. The aeronautical technicalities are rather ingenuous to the jet age reader but this is really captious carping against a story which was forward looking in the best science fiction traditions. It was probably inspired by "War in the Air" by H. G. Wells which had appeared the previous year, but this does not detract from the credit due to Maxwell Scott for adapting modern inventions to provide an adventure story about popular characters. Everything which happens eventually became possible. His array of hardware includes two-seater biplanes capable of 60 m.p.h. able to hover and remain airborne for 24 hours. (Later in the story called The Terror) a small vertical take-off monoplane (invented by Nelson Lee) called "The Gadfly", an aerial bicycle later fitted with a small engine, a flying torpedo and an airborne searchlight.

The story is long and full of incident. Briefly it concerns an army captain wrongly imprisoned as a traitor and later released when the real spy confesses. Emerging from prison, his life ruined, he embarks on a campaign of vengeance which is directed against England in general and Nelson Lee in particular as he worked on the case. He steals the biplane, murdering the inventor, rescues a confederate from prison by air and formally declares war on England. Blake had been instrumental in putting the confederate in gaol so he becomes a co-target with Lee. Bombing attacks are made on the Navy and public buildings. The Government employs Blake and Lee to build a fleet of Gadfly monoplanes for defence and station them at strategic points linking them to a central control in the War Office by telegraph. Tinker and Nipper spend most of the time in captivity at enemy headquarters.

Pedro briefly emerges from convalescent kennels only to quickly return there with a broken jaw after an aerial scuffle. Blake and Lee have several crashes, the most spectacular being in the blazing dirigible destroyed by its own aerial torpedo. Tower Bridge and London Bridge are bombed as are buildings in Sheffield and Leeds. It is to dodge a bomb thrown at their car during an aerial attack on it that Lee drives into the hedge. It is a neat touch to have the enemy headquarters located by means of a carrier pigeon which the captive assistants use to send a message. Unfortunately it was a wet night and the most important part of the message is obliterated but a neat bit of deduction overcomes the deficiency. The enemy is finally liquidated and the aerial terror comes to an end.

It is really the Nelson Lee show with guest star Sexton Blake. Even Nipper constantly outshines Tinker though younger and still a schoolboy. Whilst it is a little irritating to have one's particular heroes reduced in rank to second fiddle (a mere echo sometimes) this is still a very enjoyable tale. The impact it had when the sight of an aeroplane was a cause for great wonder, may be lost, but it has that compelling fascination, that ability to make you want to read the next instalment, a successful serial must have. Perhaps I should not have been so critical had Blake been host instead of guest.

#### AN ORIENTAL INVESTIGATOR

by S. Gordon Swan

At one time -- to be exact, in 1920 -- Sexton Blake worked in collaboration with a Japanese detective, Kyoto Saburo. This character was the creation of an author little known in the Blake Saga, Trevor C. Wignall, though prominent in other circles as a sporting journalist. Under the pen-names of Alan Dene and David Rees he contributed sport stories to *The Boys' Realm* and kindred papers.

He wrote only two yarns for The Sexton Blake Library (First Series): No. 119, *The Case of the Japanese Detective*, and No. 143, *The House with the Red Blinds*, which was a pity, for Saburo was an interesting personality and the Japanese atmosphere introduced into London made a colourful background.

Saburo was described as a secret agent for his Government, a sort of Japanese Admirable Crichton. He painted, wrote, carved,

played the piano like a professional and did a host of other things. He had an extraordinary knowledge of international politics, was directly descended from one of the noble families of the Yedo period, and spent what little spare time he had in studying crime.

The first story dealt with a treaty between England and Japan details of which certain interests in Japan and another foreign Power were anxious to obtain. Sir Richard Barden, a British Minister, decided to deliver the treaty in an unorthodox way by means of his son, Major Donald Barden. He called in Saburo to inscribe the treaty in minute writing on two artificial teeth which Donald wore. (This was before the day of the micro-dot.)

The issue was clouded by the subsequent murder of Sir Richard, a crime of which Donald was suspected, and further complicated by the involvement of another son, Duncan, something of a ne'er-do-well, who closely resembled his brother. Blake and Saburo, working together, after many adventures rounded up the gang in a battle-royal which ended the story.

The second tale, *The House with the Red Blinds*, and, perhaps, the better of the two, began with the murder of a playwright of a failed play. The leading actor, John Moran, who had quarrelled with the victim, was accused of this crime, but his friend Blake set out to clear him of suspicion. There were several suspects in the case, and Saburo came into the story because of an outbreak of opium smuggling, in which traffic the dead playwright had been mixed up. Thus Blake and Saburo found themselves upon the same trail and there were exciting developments before the mystery was solved and John Moran proved innocent.

A possible clue to the origin of Kyoto Saburo is to be found in a minor incident in *The House with the Red Blinds*. We are told that "Saburo hurried through Haymarket and hesitated outside a picture show. He was attracted by a flaring poster depicting a compatriot engaged in violent combat with a red-haired woman."

The "compatriot" was undoubtedly that fine Japanese actor, Sessue Hayakawa, who had by this time established himself as a silent screen star. (Some of his talking films have been shown quite recently on Australian T.V., notably *Three Came Home*, *The Bridge on the River Kwai* and *Hell to Eternity*. I myself can recall that poster which Saburo

saw and the film which it advertised, though the title escapes me.)

The character of Kyoto Saburo, though a minor one, added to the lustre of the Sexton Blake Saga, which was so rich in vivid portrayals by different authors, to all of which some credit is due.

BLAKIAN ECHO

from J.E.M.

Mr. Loft's interesting article in this month's C.D. states that it "seems to be generally accepted" that Eric Parker stopped contributing to the Sexton Blake Library only with the coming of the 'new look' around 1956. It is hard to imagine in what collectors' circle such a myth could have been "generally accepted". Brian Doyle's Who's Who of Boys' Writers and Illustrators explained nearly 15 years ago that Parker drew all the SBL covers from 1930 until March 1953.

However, even Mr. Doyle erred when he wrote that Parker "did an occasional cover after that, his final one being in September 1954." I have in front of me two SBL volumes from the end of 1959 - "A Cold Night for Murder" and "Guilty Party" - both with ERP covers! These issues from the 'new look' period really were, so far as I can discover, Eric Parker's last SBL efforts.

Mr. Loft also asks "how many different artists illustrated the SBL monthly from its beginning?" The answer to this must surely be simple. Arthur Jones did all the SBL covers from Number 1 in 1915 to Number 184 in 1929. This would suggest that Jones and Parker between them had a monopoly of SBL graphics from the beginning to 1953 - a period of nearly 40 years.

Having made these points, I must say how very much we are indebted to researchers like Mr. Loft and Mr. Doyle for their contribution to our knowledge of pop. lit. and its artists.

\* \* \* \* \*

WANTED: Monsters, Howard Baker Collectors' Special Editions, B.B. & Blue Mauritius, H. Bakers, Vols. 18, 19, 20, 22, 23, 29, 38, 39.

JAMES GALL, 49 ANDERSON AVENUE, ABERDEEN, SCOTLAND.

\* \* \* \* \*

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# Nelson Lee Column

## WHATEVER BECAME OF THE SECRET SOCIETIES?

Who in the days of their youth has never been thrilled by the thought of Secret Societies?

I think my first contact with them was through the two-reel weekly serial at the cinema on Saturday matinees. It was the main feature for many of us young ones and it made sure we turned up every week. I refer to the old silent days of "Dr. Fu-Manchu".

Chinese secret societies were the favourite in those days; who could resist Fu-Manchu and his little wiry Chinese henchmen and their drug-laden blow pipes?

Naturally it led to quite a few harmless Black Hand gangs, after the nature of "Just William" stories most of us meeting in rough built sheds, tents or derelict houses, sporting a rough drawing of a large black hand stuck on a prominent place. These gangs were purely make-believe and I never remember any sick vandalism. Membership was usually restricted to three or four of us. There was probably one in every other street.

Later, of course, knowledge of secret societies was gained by reading, so far as I was concerned, the "Nelson Lee" and the "Union Jack" in which the boys of St. Frank's and Sexton Blake entered into conflict with them. They were mostly Chinese. I was much older when I actually read a Dr. Fu-Manchu story.

Around about 1929 a new type of secret society appeared on the otherwise hallowed ground of St. Frank's. It took Edwy Searles Brooks around about four copies of the Nelson Lee to explain the birth, rise and fall of two of them. I refer to the "Ancient Order of Avengers" and "The New Klu Klux Klan".

It may surprise you to know that it was Edward Oswald Handforth's idea in the first place.

It was not often our Edward Oswald Handforth came up with an idea that caught on - this one did; incidentally keeping Mr. Brooks' pen

---

busy for quite a while, covering a series of four.

"The Feud of St. Frank's", "The Foes of St. Frank's", "The Secret Societies of St. Frank's" and "Drummed Out of St. Frank's", written in the year 1927 and covering new series from No's 68 to 71.

Whatever became of the Secret Societies? It was while reading a mention of the "Camorra" and the "Mafia" that Handforth's idea was born.

Today we have the remnants of the Klu Klux Klan and we have the K.G.B. to say nothing of the "Mafia" and our own Secret Services, and the American F.B.I. The difference being that the St. Frank's Secret Societies got up to things while we were looking, while the above mentioned get up to things while we are not looking.

Now, you must hand it to St. Frank's. They never have a dull moment. Our story opened as the boys arrive back to school four days after start of term. They had been on an adventurous holiday party with Lord Dorrimore in the Congo and arrived home right into the Secret Society episode. Brooks tells us that "they had so many excitements in Central Africa, that they were looking forward to the peace and quiet of St. Frank's."

Some hopes! When did Edwy Searles Brooks let St. Frank's settle to any peace and quiet? He kept the pot boiling (and I mean boiling) every week until the last "Nelson Lee".

A feud between the Fourth and the Remove became rather nasty, leading to both sides having their own secret societies, and that in full gear. By full gear I mean the long cloak and hood made popular secret society fashion by the Klu Klux Klan, with slight modifications so you could distinguish one society from another.

A third mysterious background figure fans the flame of hatred between the two forms, and it all adds up to ... I'll leave you to contact Edwy Searles Brooks in the Nelson Lee series as mentioned and let him tell you what it adds up to.

By the way, I must mention this, at the close of the series the editor says of a new series starting the following week, "Brooks at his best".

But then Brooks was always at his best!

sticks out like a sore thumb. Unlike the well printed and smooth appearance of the rest of the cover drawings of the Singleton series, this issue has the look of a rushed job made to keep the continuity of the Nelson Lee Library.

Whatever the reason for this unusual cover, it is the centre page drawing repeated in red with a blue background. It is possible that a lightning strike of the block-makers caused this hurried cover to be produced.

To add further to the mystery, the Editor's Chat to his Readers in o.s. 242, "The Waster's Progress" clearly states that the story next week would be called "The Schoolboy Gambler!"

Incidentally, Nos. 243 and 244 were not reprinted in the Monster Library as the Singleton series consisted of ten issues against the usual eight.

It is now extremely doubtful if the 'story behind the story' will ever be known, and one can only guess as to what really happened.

\* \* \* \* \*

### EASTER AT ROSE LAWN

by Roger M. Jenkins

A request from Miss Hood is tantamount to a command, and when she wrote to say she would like to see me again it was not long before I was driving to Thanet where I found the weather in its typical springtime mood - sunny and windy, with white fluffy clouds racing across a blue sky.

For fourteen years after Charles Hamilton died, Miss Hood had had a pleasant elderly lady as tenant of the upstairs part of the house. She was not so fortunate, however, with the next tenant, who proved to be quite impossible to live with. According to modern philosophy, tenants are the victims of rapacious landlords and so they are given rights to make them virtually irremovable. In Miss Hood's case it resulted in two spells in hospital with angina and a specialist giving evidence on her behalf that the heart condition was brought on by emotional stress. She won her case, but her health had been impaired and the bill for legal expenses was formidable. A council of war was necessary to discuss tactics to meet the situation.

We lunched at a nearby hotel and found it soothing to watch the North Sea through the windows: it was a brownish-grey in colour, and

in the distance the wind was whipping up frothy white horses that glittered in the sunlight. A decision was made to sell some of Charles Hamilton's books, and I sorted out old leather-bound editions published at various dates between 1699 and 1898. There were classics in Latin and Greek as well as modern European languages like French, German, Italian, and Spanish. (It is ironic to reflect that many of these were originally purchased for reading during his retirement, but failing eyesight rendered them indecipherable to him.) With the boot of the car loaded up, we drove to an antiquarian bookseller in Faversham, the first outing that Miss Hood had taken since coming out of hospital. I entered into negotiations on her behalf, and after some bargaining I returned to the car with a cheque and an arrangement for the bookseller to visit Rose Lawn the next week to see if there were any further items of interest. I could not help wondering whether future purchasers of these books would realise the significance of the inscription 'Charles St. John Hamilton'. As I was leaving the shop, the bookseller said to me, "Are there any autographed copies of the Magnet?" I smiled and said that all those had been dealt with.

Indeed, most of them had, but there were still some A.P. publications left, and Miss Hood was now intending to sell these. In view of her long and happy association with the London Club, she offered first choice to the Hamiltonian Library, and I was glad to have the opportunity of purchasing a number of Boys' Friend reprints of Ken King and Rio Kid stories as well as some other items. The remainder were to be sold to London Club members, and I said I felt sure that, in the circumstances, they would be pleased to pay a good price for the privilege of owning items from Charles Hamilton's own collection.

At the end of that eventful day I was relieved to note that Miss Hood seemed brighter and more cheerful, no doubt on the principle that a trouble shared is a trouble halved, and she did admit that she felt she was recovering a little. I drove back past the Nayland Rock Hotel, the scene of many of the London Club's luncheon parties in years gone by, and what with one thing and another I found considerable food for thought on my long journey home.

\* \* \* \* \*

MORE LETTERS FROM THE ARCHIVES

(courtesy of Les Rowley)

From Henry Samuel Quelch, Esq., to Colonel James Wharton, Wharton Lodge, Wimford.

My Dear Colonel,

In an earlier letter I mentioned that your nephew's behaviour this term had been far from satisfactory and that improvement in his conduct was essential if his future at Greyfriars was to continue.

It is as an unwelcome and unpleasant duty that I have to inform you that the hoped for improvement has not materialised and that Wharton will not be allowed to return next term. Indeed, it has been a matter of serious discussion between Dr. Locke and myself as to whether the boy should be sent home without waiting for the present term to end. It is only out of consideration for the feelings of Miss Wharton and yourself that he has been allowed to stay for the few remaining days.

The Headmaster and I had previously held high hopes for your nephew. He had shewn great promise both in form and at games and his conduct had hitherto proved exemplary. This term, however, he has shown an increasing tendency to hold the School regulations in contempt culminating with visits to licensed premises of ill repute and attendance at a race meeting at Wapshot. He has broken bounds at night and detention by day and appears to have forfeited the regard of his closest friends.

Impositions and canings, having proved of little avail, the Headmaster duly administered a flogging only to have the boy laugh contemptuously in his face. At the time of writing Wharton is incarcerated in the School punishment room and there he will remain until he gives some assurance that he will behave.

In due course the Headmaster will send you formal notification that Wharton will not be able to return next term but I thought that I should send you warning in advance. Perhaps, at some other school - or in some other sphere, your nephew may again find himself and redeem the good opinion you once had of him.

Please convey my sympathy and my regards to Miss Wharton.

Yours &c.,

H. S. QUELCH

Colonel James Wharton, Wharton Lodge, Wimford, to Mr. H. S. Quelch.

My Dear Quelch,

Thank you for your letter. I need hardly say how disappointing the contents were to my sister and myself. Both of us had shared your high hopes for my brother's son, and we certainly share your disappointment that these hopes have not been fulfilled.

Harry has had a chance that many less fortunate lads would have envied, an education at the finest of schools and under the direction of the finest of masters. If he has chosen to cast this opportunity to the winds he cannot complain of what must follow.

It still falls to me to make provision for him when he leaves School and I shall make arrangements accordingly, but he will not be returning to my house.

I shall be writing to Dr. Locke in due course but, in the meantime, I shall be grateful if you will let him know of my appreciation of that consideration which both of you have shown to me on every occasion.

Yours &c.,

JAMES WHARTON

Miss Amy Wharton, Wharton Lodge, Wimford, to Dr. H. Locke.

Dear Doctor Locke,

I am writing to you about my nephew, Harry, who appears to have been in trouble at School this term. I use the word 'appears' advisedly for appearances too often have proved to be deceptive.

Appearances were deceptive not so long ago when another relation named Stacey was at the School with Harry. The reason given then was that both boys bore a resemblance to each other and that Ralph - that is Stacey had been responsible for all the terrible things laid at Harry's door. Now I realise that Harry may not resemble another boy at present at the School, but - on the occasion I have mentioned - Mr. Quelch's judgement was at fault. Is it not just possible that history has repeated itself. There have been other occasions when Mr. Quelch has been deluded into thinking Harry the wicked person he is now considered, but then he is only a man, and men are so easily deluded!

I believe in my nephew, Dr. Locke. Whatever the outcome of the present troubles he will need that belief in him. Once that belief was shared by my brother and, indeed, by yourself and Mr. Quelch. I am sure that there is hope that you will all share in that belief once again. I do, for that reason, entreat you to examine once again the reasons you have for sending Harry away from the School.

Perhaps I should have asked my brother to have written this letter but he is just a little angry at present and, since anger blinds the judgement, I am writing it myself.

My warmest wishes to Mrs. Locke and my thanks to you for the further consideration I am sure you will give to my nephew's present trouble.

I am &c.,

AMY WHARTON

Dr. H. Locke to Miss Amy Wharton, Wharton Lodge, Wimford.

My Dear Miss Wharton,

Your brother will have told you by now how fully vindicated your belief in your nephew has been proved. I am sure that you are overjoyed to learn that Wharton will be taking his old place in the Remove here next term.

Much of the unfortunate chain of events that involved your nephew is the responsibility of a senior boy and former prefect who was motivated, I fear, by reasons of malice rather than those of justice. Nevertheless, a proportion of blame must be attached to Wharton himself and

I would ask you to use your undoubted influence in persuading him to curb a sometimes ungovernable temper when he returns to Greyfriars. That there has been much to excuse his behaviour this term as Mr. Quelch and I readily acknowledge but the boy must exercise self-control in the future.

With your wise counsel and advice I am sure that Wharton will resolve to do his utmost in the new term to regain the good opinion of him that was formerly held by his form master and myself. More important, however, is the opportunity he has of redeeming himself with his uncle and of justifying your own implicit faith in him.

I am &c.,

H. H. LOCKE (Headmaster)

\* \* \* \* \*

### CONTROVERSIAL ECHO

LES ROWLEY writes:

I have been re-reading the article 'The Recurring Decimal', the Da Costa, Smedley, Caffyn and Carter series, all being favourites of mine. I agree with you that the best (of a very good bunch) is the Da Costa series and the points you make about the others are very valid. The series I liked least amongst those mentioned was the Caffyn series - the reforming effect of Greyfriars was overplayed to improbability (as it has been on other occasions). Far more probable was the story of Carter and the cover illustration depicting his discovery and his dishonesty must rank amongst one of the most dramatic in the 'Magnet's' long life.

I cannot speak of 'Gem' examples but I would think that recurrent though the decimal might have been all the series were well worth the while.

\* \* \* \* \*

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\* \* \* \* \*

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BIOGRAPHY OF A SMALL CINEMANo. 50. ROBERT DONAT IS BACK - AND RED SKELTON

We opened the new term with a big film from Warner Bros: Humphrey Bogart in "Across the Pacific". In the supporting programme was what was apparently our first of the Fitzpatrick Travel talks, released by M.G.M., of which we were to show a great many as time passed. These Travel talks, roughly of one thousand feet, were beautifully photographed in Technicolor though the commentary was often on the exaggerated side in plummy tones. This first title was "Haiti, Land of Dark Majesty", - pleasantly impressive and typical of the series.

Next, from M.G.M., came Mickey Rooney and Judy Garland in "Girl Crazy", the theme of which escapes me though I am sure it was immensely popular. In the same bill was a colour cartoon "Blitz Wolf" and a Secrets of Life subject "Singing While They Work".

Next, a double feature programme from Warner's. Alexis Smith (I recall her as a stately lady of considerable beauty) in "Steel Against the Sky", plus the Mauch Twins in "Penrod and His Twin Brother". The Penrod films were always entertaining. I have seen it suggested somewhere that Richmal Crompton may have had the Penrod stories in mind when she created her William and his family, but whether there is any truth in it I do not know.

Next, from M.G.M., came Red Skelton and Eleanor Powell in "By Hook or by Crook". In the States this one had the title "I Dood It", which seems awful, but apparently Skelton was popular on American radio, and "I Dood It" was one of his catch-

phrases. I think it was a pleasant picture. In the same bill was a colour cartoon, "The Hungry Wolf" and a Secrets of Life episode, "Getting His Wings".

This was followed by a big one in Technicolor from M.G.M.: Wallace Beery in "Salute to the Marines". In the supporting programme was a Fitzpatrick Traveltalk in colour "Glimpses of Florida", and a Tom & Jerry colour cartoon, "Puss 'N Toots". Another item in that programme catches my eye. It was "New Towns for Old", a British documentary. I wonder whether, possibly, it was made by some planners to show what they had in mind for some towns when the war was over. A kind of advance horror trailer.

Next week, from M.G.M. brought Robert Donat in "The Adventures of Tartu". This was Donat's first film since the magnificent "Good-bye Mr. Chips" which he had made four years earlier. Donat was under contract to M.G.M., and they were anxious to get another picture out with him starring, to cash on the success of "Chips". But there was a clause in Donat's contract which gave him the privilege of turning down any role which did not appeal to him. It seems he turned down plenty, including a number of parts which were taken with immense success by other big stars. At any rate, he agreed to play Tartu, which was fairly good, without being anything outstanding. I fancy it was a Skeik kind of romantic story, but my memory may be playing tricks.

In the supporting bill to Tartu was a Tom & Jerry coloured cartoon "Fraidy

Cat" and a Secrets of Life item, "U-Boat in the Pond".

After that, from M.G.M. came a spectacular Technicolor production: Red Skelton in "Du Barry Was A Lady". His leading lady was Lucille Ball, and I fancy it was a fine film. For so long a main feature we had an astonishingly big supporting programme, which must have run for well over an hour on its own. There was a coloured cartoon "Bats in the Belfry"; a Person-Oddity "The Barefoot Judge"; an Our Gang 2-reel comedy "Surprised Parties" (Hal Roach comedy from M.G.M.); a Secrets of Life item (Gaumont) "Three Wicked Sisters"; and "Wedding Yells". The latter was the first of a number of Mack Sennett 2-reel comedies which Warner's released. They had been re-photographed at correct speed and had an amusing commentary added. We showed them all in due course as they were released, and they were immensely popular.

Next week, from M. G. M., came Charles Laughton, with Donna Reed, in "The Man From Down Under". I fancy Laughton was miscast in this, and it was a bit of a disappointment. In the same bill was a Secrets of Life item "There's Nothing New", and a Tom & Jerry coloured cartoon "Dog Trouble". We were lapping up so many shorts now from both M. G. M. and Warner's that they were coming to us in the first week of release.

After that, from M. G. M., Frank Craven in "Harrigan's Kid" which may have been a modest production. I can't recall Frank Craven, anyhow. In the same bill was a Fitzpatrick Travel Talk in colour: "Inside Passage", a Barney Bear colour cartoon "The Flying Bear", and a Tweety Pie coloured cartoon "The Cagey Canary". The Tweety Pie cartoons came from Warner's, and I think this was the first of many. They were great fun; so much so that they had a theme song "I Taut I Taw a Putty-Tat", which was made into a record and became a best-seller. We used to play part of the record over the non-sync just before a Tweety Pie cartoon came on the screen. I believe I still have that record.

Next, from M.G.M., Pierre Renaud and Susan Peters in "Assignment in Brittany" which I think was a tip-top spy and romantic drama. In the rest of the bill there was a Secrets of Life item "Once We Were Four" and a colour cartoon "Little Gravel Voice".

The last programme of the term was a British film from Warner's: Anne Crawford in "The Night Invader". In the supporting bill was a colour Fitzpatrick: "Alluring Alaska"; a Bugs Bunny colour cartoon: "Hiawatha's Rabbit Hunt"; and a Musical Parade in colour "Forty Boys and a Song".

(ANOTHER ARTICLE IN THIS SERIES  
NEXT MONTH.)

D. WESTCOTT, 30 EDITH ROAD

BARONS COURT, LONDON W.14.

# News of the Clubs

## MIDLAND

April 1978

Christine Brettell informed the meeting that her exhibition of Charles Hamilton's work had now moved on to Langley. It is proving to be a great success in our own district. Evidence of this appeared in our local weekly paper where a letter written with charming grace and style by Fred Tranter, an 80 year old Rowley Regis man, appeared. He called it "The Silent Corridors of Greyfriars" and recalled the fact that he was eleven when Magnet No. 1 was published, and how his precious halfpenny was spent being borrowed from his mother. "The silent corridors of Greyfriars", he says, are filled again in imagination for theirs is the melody of youth, ever young and imperishable.

This month the Anniversary number and collectors' items were of unusual interest. Tom Porter brought along Magnet No. 6, "Aliens at Greyfriars" published on 21st March, 1908. And there were also five S.O.L's, St. Frank's stories about Martin the tyrannical headmaster.

A lively discussion took place as to the respective merits of the two Harry Wharton's Rebellion Series. The second one had more polish because by then Charles Hamilton was a mature writer, but the first had a freshness, which while difficult to define, is part of its fascination.

Ron Gardner had brought along three books which he had captured on his browsing expeditions to second-hand bookshops. He does this not to add to his own collection but to pass on to members who are interested at a nominal charge. This is a grand spirit and one that has always prevailed in our club. Tom Porter received "My Friend Smith", by Talbot Baines Reed and Geoff Lardner, "Captain of the Fourth" by Peter Martin and "Captains of the Dukes" by Hylton Cleaver.

The last item was a reading from the 1920 Holiday Annual by your correspondent. "Billy Bunter's Bike" was the title and shows Bunter entering a picture puzzle competition.

Our next meeting will be held on 25th April.

JACK BELLFIELD, Correspondent.

CAMBRIDGE

We met at 20 Wingate Way, on 2nd April. There was a good gathering of members, and a particularly warm welcome was given to Dr. Jack Doupe, our Teneriffe member, who was visiting us during a "safari" which had covered both South Africa and England; Jack mentioned the lack of second hand book shops in Johannesburg, and also that he had written a letter on the subject of old boys' books collecting to the Johannesburg "Farmers' Weekly". Bill Loftus remarked that he had just written an article for the English "Farmers' Weekly". The Secretary reported that an article by Jack Overhill had appeared in the current "East Anglian Magazine". Host Vic. Hearn then gave a re-showing of films of the Club's visit to the Rose and Crown, Hempstead, birthplace of Dick Turpin, in August 1972, and of the visit of the London Club to Cambridge in September 1973 reviving happy memories among the older members of the Club.

Bill Loftus talked on "our heroes on the silver screen". He pointed out that few of our favourite characters measure up to expectations when we later see them on film or television, instancing "Bulldog Drummond" and "Dick Barton". Audiences had rioted and demanded their money back. He instanced many other characters in the same category. Among other points made in this extremely interesting talk was the number of Sexton Blake films made (some 26); a "Greyfriars" film had been projected in 1930; fortunately this project fell through; since Claude Dampier had been cast as Mr. Quelch and Nellie Wallace as the House Dame (a mind boggling thought!). "Jack, Sam and Pete" had been made into a film in 1919; Bill expressed surprise that these characters, in their early days the A.P.'s most popular characters, had not been filmed until just before Clark Hook's long series ceased. Bill had been puzzled at the lack of any Nelson Lee film, but had been assured by an old sub-editor of A.P. that "Paul Sleuth" had been far more popular than either Sexton Blake or Lee. Bill mentioned the lack of films on Thomson Paper characters, probably due to the close control by Thomson's of their material. An interesting discussion followed.

Mike Holliday showed a condensed version for home projection of the 1925 silent version of Conan Doyle's "Lost World", dubbed with a musical accompaniment.

Jack Doupe said that while in South Africa he had visited the Kruger National Park and seen a number of plaques and Stones referring to "Jock of the Bushveldt", famous story of the early part of the century. He had managed to purchase a copy in Colchester recently.

The Secretary reviewed arrangements for the visit to Neville Woods' home planned for 4 June. Mike Rouse reported arrangements for the Club open meeting on 7 May, when Dennis Gifford would be the speaker. The meeting closed with warm thanks to Vic and Mrs. Hearn for their hospitality.

#### LONDON

Thirty years after we first made the acquaintance of Maurice Hall, the club met at his Walton on Thames residence. There was a good attendance and what must be the highlight of the meeting was Maurice's treatise entitled Opinion. This was a comparison of Tom Merry and Harry Wharton. A good paper, and there followed a general discussion on these two Hamilton creations and which led to them being compared with Vernon Smith, Cardew and the Caterpillar. Then the rival merits of the Gem and Magnet were discussed which brought up the fact that Eric Fayne was instrumental in getting the genuine Hamilton St. Jim's stories reprinted and the pastiches discontinued. A very enjoyable session of the entertainment side of the meeting.

Bob Blythe read out the accounts of both Bill Loftus and Ray Hopkins re the visit of Edwy Searles Brooks to Hume House in 1963. Roger Jenkins spoke of his visit to Miss Edith Hood recently.

In answer to many requests, Bob Blythe gave a talk dealing with how the London Club came into being.

The newsletter reading dealt with the only time that a meeting was held on a Saturday, this being at the Goodrich Road School.

Next meeting on Sunday, 14th May, at Sam and Babs Thurbon's residence, 29 Strawberry Hill Road, Twickenham, Middlesex TW1 4PZ, Tel. 892-5314.

BENJAMIN WHITER

#### NORTHERN

Saturday, 8 April, 1978

Chairman Geoffrey Wilde presided over a very lively gathering at

the Annual Meeting (and the 336th Meeting) of the Northern Club.

The retiring team of officers were thanked for their work throughout the year and were re-elected en bloc for another term of office. They were Geoffrey Wilde (Chairman), Harry Barlow (Vice-Chairman), Mollie Allison (Librarian/Treasurer) and Geoffrey Good (Minutes Secretary).

We discussed our membership and borrowing fees and felt that some increase was called for. Borrowing charges, we decided, are now to be rounded up to the next penny (our first increase for twenty years - Mr. Healey please note!) and Club membership fees are to be £1.00 per year (or 10p per month).

Geoffrey Wilde had brought along 'The Schoolboy Tourists' (the Easter Cruise Series). He introduced the series and read to us the hilarious chapter 8 of the first number (Magnet 1312) in which Coker, 'a senior man', has to consider his position! Coker feels there may be a certain loss of personal dignity in his going on a cruise with a mob of fags. As it turned out, there was!

Next month Nigel Shepley, one of our youngest members, gives us a talk on Hamilton, his work and his influence. Nigel has just come down from Cambridge with a BA in history and an admiration for the great master of school stories. We eagerly await his paper.

### DEATH OF ROBERT MORTIMER

We regret to record the death of Robert Mortimer which occurred recently. Mr. Mortimer was a keen Magnet and Gem reader from 1912 onwards, and never lost his love for them. He is probably best remembered for his delightful cut-out figures of Greyfriars characters. For a considerable time he was a sign-writer and window-dresser for the firm of Bentall's at Kingston-on-Thames, and it was there that he arranged his first window display of his Greyfriars characters, possibly as a boost for the Skilton or Cassell Bunter books.

Accompanied by his charming daughter, he attended many Surbiton meetings, and at one of these the display of his cut-out figures, from Bentall's, was a feature. At that time he was living at East Molesey, close to the Surbiton venue of the London Club.

Once, in the early sixties, when the Bunter shows were running in London theatres for the Christmas season, there was a display of Mr. Mortimer's Greyfriars character cut-outs at Foyle's, as publicity for the show.

After he moved away from the Kingston area - he was employed in Croydon for a time - he lost contact with the club and the Digest, but his pleasant and kindly personality plus his keen enthusiasm are well-remembered by those who knew him. Mr. Mortimer was

aged about 76 at the time of his death.

\* \* \* \* \*

# The Postman Called

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

D. WESTCOTT (London): Could you please give me the origins of the "Atta Boy" stories in the Boys' Cinema, as shown on the cover of C.D. for January 1978? Were the stories taken from films or were they specially written for Boys' Cinema?

EDITORIAL COMMENT: The "Atta Boy" stories were nothing to do with films, so far as one can judge. Our photograph depicted a Boys' Cinema cover for the last week of the year 1926. At that time, Boys' Cinema and the latter-day Boys' Friend were under the same editorship, and neither paper, then, was impressive. The Boys' Friend was soon to fade out.

Up till the end of 1926, the "Atta Boy" stories were quoted as being of 25,000 words in length. From that time onward, they were increased to 35,000 words, owing to their "great success". They were published anonymously, in spite of the popularity which they were supposed to enjoy. How long they ran I cannot say. At that time, despite its title, Boys' Cinema had only the very slightest link, if any, with the cinema or films. We published another Atta Boy cover some years back, but I forget exactly when it appeared. Does anybody know who wrote them and for how long they appeared?)

L. S. ELLIOTT (East Ham). "The Dauntless Three", later "The Big Three", mentioned by Mr. B. R. Leese, commenced in the Jester of April 1919. The interesting point is that the author, Richard Starr ("Richard Essex", "Frank Godwin", etc.) who had just been discharged from the Air Force, was responsible for so many of the stories in a new paper "Young Britain". "Spartacus", "Bold Robin Hood", "Marcus Buller, Detective", and many others in "Young Britain", "The Jester", etc., with "Slade of the Yard" (later in hardbacks) meant that he, with "Vera Lovell", his sister, wrote practically all the yarns in both papers for a long time.

J. TOMLINSON (Burton-on-Trent): I experienced a little nostalgia when seeing mention in the Sexton Blake section of the Philo Vance books by S. S. Van Dine, and the fact that William Powell took the role of the detective. He actually only took the part in three adaptations ("The Canary Murder Case", "The Greene Murder Case", and "The Benson Murder Case"). Then came Warren William in "The Dragon Murder

"Case", after which Paul Lukas took the part, followed by others whom I cannot remember at present.

Some think the tales a little too prolix, but they were good literature and much superior to today's American sleuth-literature, or to most of it at any rate. Even the "Greene Murder Case", with about half-a-dozen murders, does not give the impression of violence the modern novels do, much less sex (none at all as I recollect).

A pity these books do not get reprinted.

L. M. ALLEN (Bournemouth): In all the years I have subscribed to the C.D. I have never seen any reference to what, in my opinion, is one of the greatest series of school stories ever written - The Human Boy by the famous author and playwrite Eden Phillpotts. Written for the Idler Magazine at the end of the last century they were based on the author's own experiences at boarding school. I was pleased to find, however, that Bill Lofts and Brian Doyle did include references in their respective biographies of authors of school and adventures stories. Should any fellow collectors come across copies of the books I sincerely recommend them to purchase especially the Human Boy Omnibus which comprises the five volumes of stories. I do not expect they will be as fortunate as myself as regards the cost; I found my copy at Herne Bay many years ago, price one shilling!

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### READING FOR PLEASURE

by W. O. G. Lofts

Recently, and at a literary luncheon, a book critic of a highbrow Sunday newspaper, gave me details of his own boyhood reading. He first read The Children's Newspaper, then The Boys' Own Paper, as well as the classical hard back school stories. In reply, I stated that my own tastes were The Hotspur, and the Greyfriars tales in The Magnet. "Oh" he said, rather condescendingly, having heard the last named. "The Billy Bunter chap, a pity his work did not have any real literary value".

This led to quite a friendly discussion as to what was exactly considered good literature, finally ending in stalemate. Long before I could ever have been influenced by the C.D., I thought that Charles Hamilton was an excellent writer, penning extremely good English. Probably he was superior to most other writers in this field, though this was his natural style being his sole output. Some other writers who wrote in adult fields deliberately wrote down to the readers.

According to editors, Charles Hamilton's manuscripts were so well written and typed that hardly any subbing was needed except for the odd typing error, or when a story had to be shortened for space reasons. So excellent were they, that adults can re-read them with exactly the same pleasure as when they were young. The same certainly cannot be said about many other boys stories, and one can see that they now were only intended for the juvenile mind.

This brings one to the interesting question as to why we read certain stories? For the literary content, or for the sheer joy of reading a good tale. In most cases probably both. The essence of a good story teller is to make the characters, locations and situations come alive to the reader, and surely Charles Hamilton did exactly just that. Whether his stories were written in correct English as laid down

by the text books, I would leave a Professor of the English language to judge.

As far as I know, there is no yardstick laid down on how a critic should review a book or story. It depends entirely on his views and tastes. Some Libraries are stocked out with the Victorian minor classics written by Balantyne, Fenn, as well as other well-known writers of semi historical boys' fiction, which they think children should read. Yet, they are loth to have the Bunter Books and reprints. Some years ago Bunter (too greedy) William (too scruffy) Biggles (having fascist overtones) as well as Noddy were banned from some libraries for their bad influence on children, because they might copy. These same high-brow librarians should have likewise been banned from holding office for their low mentality.

John Creasey who wrote more crime books than any other author, whose work sold in millions, once stated that his novels never got a good review in his life. Another well-known reviewer and writer some time ago attacked the work of Edgar Wallace and Leslie Charteris as being of poor literary value. As their books have sold many thousands of times over as this same highbrow critics works the results speak for themselves. In my own humble opinion, it is not the literary content that really matters but the sheer pleasure of reading a good story that is the real criterion.

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### "FOR DRAKE AND MERRY ENGLAND"

by Norman Wright

To capture the feel of an age there is nothing better than to read a well researched, excitingly written historical novel.

I will not pretend that every writer of historical boys' fiction was a master historian, far from it. The anachronisms were often profusely obvious to those with even only a passing knowledge of English history. They did, however, provide a reasonably authentic background and usually an exciting tale.

Recently I read two tales dealing with the Spanish Armada, "For Drake and Merry England" ("Chums", volume 23, Cassell and Co., 1921) by S. Walkey and "The Fighting Lads of Devon" (Partridge & Co., reprinted in N.L.L. old series, nos. 519 to 532 as "In the days of the

"Armada") by W. Murray Graydon. The former story was a great disappointment. Walkey was writing down to his readers in a way that I had not come across in other of his books. The characters were either thoroughly bad or wholly good. I was irritated by the continual reference to Elizabeth as "Englands Gloriana". I could have stood "Good Queen Bess", but three or four "Glorianas" per chapter became rather monotonous. Bearing in mind the serialization date of the story (1914/15) the intense patriotism was obviously to encourage the war effort, it probably succeeded. As a book to read sixty years later it seemed very out of date. The book was reprinted in the 1950's and must have seemed very dated even then.

"Fighting Lads of Devon" on the other hand painted a more authentic picture of Elizabethan England. The struggle for victory against overwhelming odds was well told. The reader felt sympathy for Elizabeth in her efforts to keep England at peace, but impatience at her stubborn attitude when implored for more provisions and powder at the height of the battle. Even the inevitable "missing heir" was acceptable in such a well-written story.

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JIM COOK writes: JEWISH CHARACTERS

Esmond Kadish would like to know more about Solomon Levi, the St. Frank's Jewish character and whether Edwy Searles Brooks had any acquaintance with Jewish people.

As Mr. Brooks was born in Hackney, East London, it would be surprising if Edwy's knowledge of Jewish folk was scarce.

If Mr. Kadish can obtain a copy of Nelson Lee, old series, No. 389, THE WANDERING JEW, he will read all about gefiltered fish and other Jewish foods. He will also read how the "Kol Nidre" was played in Solly's study.

This single story is a very moving account of an itinerant young Jewish boy who visits St. Frank's. An unemployed musician, he roams the country with his fiddle hoping to send his mother money.

I love this particular story. It shows old Edwy Brooks in yet another light of versatility.

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