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VOLUME 35

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MAY 1981

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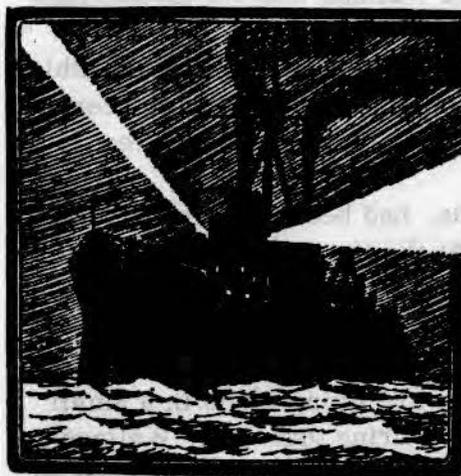
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A Word from the Skipper.

Happiness is a half-way station
between too little and too much.

FIFTY YEAR OLD MYSTERY

Danny, in his Diary, has reminded us that it is just fifty years since the Wallace case. The question was Who murdered Julia Wallace, and Why was she murdered? We have touched on it before in our pages, and it is a problem which has never ceased to intrigue students of real-life crime.

It has been written on, always providing compulsive reading, by a great many authors, including, to name but a few, Edward Lustgarten, Winifred Duke, Dorothy Sayers, John Rowland, Nigel Morland, and

Yseult Bridges, some trying to prove Wallace innocent, some trying to prove him guilty. Many of the accounts contain inaccuracies, for the writers took as gospel Wallace's own "My Life Story" which was serialised in the weekly paper John Bull - and Wallace, not unnaturally, whitewashed himself.

The one by Yseult Bridges is, for me, the most convincing, possibly because she wrote so well and because her research was so thorough. She had no doubt that Wallace was guilty.

John Rhode made it into a case for his famous character, Dr. Priestley, in a book entitled "The Telephone Call".

Two things are certain. The murder was premeditated with cold-blooded precision, being set up the evening before, when the telephone call was made. Secondly, the killer of Julia Wallace was the mysterious Mr. Qualtrough, who made the call from a phone-box near the Wallace home. Was Qualtrough actually Wallace himself, preparing an alibi which was rather too good to be true, or was he some sinister stranger seen mistily through the window of a public telephone-box one mid-winter evening?

The Wallaces were a childless couple, had been married seventeen years, and seemed to have lived happily. At the time of the wedding, Julia seems to have been comfortably off, living in a pleasant stone villa in Harrogate. Soon, others of Wallace's family moved in with the newly-married couple.

Seventeen years later, the Wallaces were living alone in a small terraced house in the suburbs of Liverpool. During that time, Wallace seems to have got through all his wife's money. Now they were living on his modest salary as an agent for the Prudential.

There seemed no motive at all for a senseless crime. It seemed inconceivable that Julia, a refined and reserved housewife, could have an enemy capable of battering her to death.

Wallace dressed well. He had bought an expensive violin, which he had learned to play reasonably well. (Julia accompanied him on the piano which she had owned in the old days.) Wallace also had a costly microscope. Yet Julia was faded and dowdy, and was still wearing the clothes she had owned at the time of her marriage, seventeen years earlier. At the trial, doctors described Julia as weak from malnutrition.

Mrs. Bridges stresses the lack of motive - but there must obviously have been one. Wallace had lost a kidney as a young man. He could not hope for a long life. Mrs. Bridges suggests that Wallace, remorseful at having gone through his wife's money, was fearful of her being left alone, without an income, when his own time to die came. So he killed her frenziedly in that tiny house's front room (nobody living on the other side of the thin walls heard a sound, there was no blood anywhere else in the house, and no weapon was ever found), having prepared an alibi which was a bit too substantial for belief.

In puzzling over the motive, Mrs. Bridges ignored one point. She presents Wallace as a man who spent money on himself, while his wife wore old clothes. At the time of her death, Mrs. Wallace was found to have thirty shillings stitched up in her corsets. Mrs. Bridges points at this to show the poor, down-trodden little woman who tried to keep her tiny hoard from the knowledge of her husband. It was a touching point.

But it emerged at the trial that Julia had a savings-bank book, in credit for £90, of which her husband was unaware. So why stitch a few shillings into her corsets? It makes me wonder whether Julia may have been a rather eccentric woman who drove her husband round the bend. I often meant to discuss that point with Yseult Bridges, but I left it too late. She died not so long ago.

One other interesting point. Wallace wrote his Life Story for John Bull, and contributed articles on the crime to other papers. At the time of the trial he possessed £152. When he himself died, two years later, probate was granted on a sum of £1,196. His writings paid him well.

The book, "Two Studies in Crime" by Yseult Bridges (Hutchinson) is fascinating reading for all who like mysteries, and would probably be available at your local library.

THOSE FREE GIFTS

Last month we published a fine article from our contributor, J.E.M., on Free Gifts, and it has roused considerable interest among readers.

Personally, so far as the Hamilton papers went, I never had much time for the so-called Gifts. No doubt they were pleasing to the under-

twelves. But the Magnet and the Gem, the Popular and the Boys' Friend, were aimed at older youngsters. There may have been a bit of mild snobbery in it, but it seemed to me that many of the gifts lowered the tone of my papers, whole others were a distinct nuisance. The only ones I recall liking were the pictures of famous engines presented with the Popular and the stand-up cricketers. Sticky pictures often stuck to the stories with which they were included, so that one spoiled the pictures and the stories as well. Bars of toffee almost invariably marked the pages which enclosed them. All these years later, one finds toffee marks on the old papers, due to those gifts. I recall having difficulty, years ago, in getting a certain Magnet series, minus toffee marks, for my collection.

Most senior boys who bought the Magnet must have felt themselves far too mature to be presented with Secret Codes, Masks, and Sheriff's Kits, while the introduction into the stories of those very codes and invisible pencils seemed the height of absurdity. It was difficult to imagine the Bounder or Bob Cherry buying the Magnet which chronicled their adventures, and using the childish free gifts to further their plots. One wonders whether anything so ridiculous was an editorial idea or whether Frank Richards himself saw something clever in it. The latter seems unlikely.

THE PRINCESS SNOWEE'S CORNER

All through the winter, the Princess has slept, at night, on a bed made up for her in my room. Being fastidious, she insists on having a clean blanket at least once a week.

On the small table beside my bed, I always have a mug of water, to refresh myself during the small hours. One morning, as it was getting light, I opened my eyes. There was the Princess, up on my table, her head in my mug, drinking away at my water.

I said nothing. I just watched as she drank on. I didn't know whether to be pleased or distressed. I was glad to see her drinking - but - from my precious mug --!

So now, I have another mug for myself, on the small shelf beneath the table. The original mug - now the Princess's - remains on the top, and she drinks from it regularly. It means that two mugs have

to be filled with fresh water at bed-time. The other night, I woke up in the dark, and, half-asleep, I took a long drink. As I settled down again, a worry shot into my mind. Had I taken my drink from my own mug or from Snowee's? I'm not sure. Snowee says: "What's it matter? If I don't mind, I don't for the life of me see why you should."

The Princess has had two new interests in the past fortnight. A mild interest in the blackbirds which have raised a family in one of her Mum's hanging-baskets under the patio, and in the robins which have a family in their nest in the ivy. But we get hundreds of birds visiting our little garden, so the interest remains mild.

And she has a boy friend. A huge and lovely sandy and white cat who sits patiently outside her cat-door, waiting for H.R.H. to emerge. He must come from quite a distance away. I'm not sure whether she is a bit scared of him or whether she leads him on a bit. I hope his intentions are honourable.

THE EDITOR

* * * * *

DANNY'S DIARY

MAY 1931

The New Zealanders have arrived in England to play Test Cricket, and all cricketers are wondering how they will get on. It is the first time they have played Test Matches. The captain is T. C. Lowry, and he is the brother-in-law of Chapman, who has captained England for several years. The captain of England this year has not been named yet, but everybody thinks it will be A. P. F. Chapman again.

In the Modern Boy there is a new series of school stories about Milford School, and they are pretty good. George E. Rochester has a series about the Canadian Mounted Police, and Alfred Edgar has a serial about the railway in South America. No sign of a new Ken King series yet, though.

In the Nelson Lee Library, the St. Frank's party is still on its second trip to Northestria. The first tale this month is "St. Frank's in the Lists". Nipper & Co. are captured by Cedric, the Cruel, and

Handforth is sentenced to be beheaded. The boys, pictured in striped blazers and cricket trousers, meet the Gothland knights in the Lists, with their lives hanging on the result of the fight.

In the next tale, "The Valley of Fear", they find themselves face to face with prehistoric monsters, when Cedric the Cruel has the St. Frank's party thrown into the Valley of Fear. Next week, "Lee the Lionheart". Lee penetrates into the dreadful valley, and is discovered by Cedric. Final tale of the series is "Schoolboys in Armour", when, at long last, St. Frank's puts paid to Cedric the Cruel. In the last story of the month, they are all back at St. Frank's in "High Jinks at St. Frank's" - under a new Headmaster, Dr. Inigo Scattlebury. And he is a weird and wonderful Head.

There is a new supplement "Handforth's Weekly" in the Nelson Lee.

A wonderful new Zoo has opened to the public. It is called Whipnade, and I think it is somewhere near Bedford. It covers a huge area, and the animals wander around much more freely than they can in an ordinary zoo. It is mainly in the open air, and, if you don't want a long, long walk in the zoological countryside, there are buses, touring at frequent intervals, from the entrance gates. There is a restaurant there, too, in case you get peckish.

Two splendid stories in the Schoolboys' Own Library this month. "Harry Wharton & Co. in India" is the sequel to last month's tale, which of course was a lovely series once in the Magnet, and "The St. Jim's Showmen" in which Tom Merry & Co. plan a Music Hall, twice nightly, in the woodshed, and then plan a cinema, having taken films with a cinema-camera invented by Glyn. I enjoyed these tales a lot.

The verdict against Wallace, who was found guilty of murdering his wife, has been quashed by the Appeal Court on the grounds of insufficient evidence. He is now writing "My Life Story" which is starting to run every week in the paper John Bull, which my Mum has delivered regularly.

At the cinemas we have seen some lovely films. Buddy Rogers was good in "Young Eagles"; I loved "Whoopee" which had some nice songs, was all in Technicolor, and starred Eddie Cantor; Gary Cooper

and Fay Wray were in what is the first sound western, entitled "The Texan"; Norma Shearer and Marie Dressler in "Let Us Be Gay"; Spencer Tracy and Claire Luce in "Up the River", a light comedy about an escaped convict; Greta Garbo and Lewis Stone in "Romance" (which Doug said was sooperb but which bored me stiff) and masses of Paramount stars in "Paramount on Parade". In this one, the stars are all in alphabetical order (it's a revue). I've forgotten lots of them but they included Maurice Chevalier, Clara Bow, Gary Cooper, Fredric March, Warner Oland, Fay Wray and lots more. The film was partly in Technicolor. I liked it quite a bit.

The new Charlie Chaplin film "City Lights" (a silent film) is having a pre-release run at the Dominion Theatre in London. I expect I shall see it when it comes our way, though Charlie is nothing like so funny as he used to be. He came to England to attend the opening at the Dominion, and landed in England in a torrential rainstorm.

A very theatrical series has been running in the Gem. It started last month when Mr. Linton was sacked for theft. Advised by Tom Merry, speaking hoarsely and fiercely and brokenly, Mr. Linton, with sparkling eyes, refuses to leave St. Jim's. A new master arrives, and Mr. Linton punches him on the nose and the boys cheer. There is a lot of chunky plot in this series. A very wealthy man, who was once Master of the Shell at St. Jim's, has died. In his will, he leaves his entire fortune to whoever is now Master of the Shell at St. Jim's.

But gangsters are after the fortune. They send in Kent as a new Fifth-former, and it is he who gets Linton sacked for theft. Then they kidnap the real Mr. Pilbeam, and send an imposter named Hyde, who pretends to be Mr. Pilbeam, to be the Master of the Shell and claim the fortune. Talbot takes a hand. Shots are fired at Mr. Linton. Mr. Linton leaves on the liner Niagara, which is wrecked. Tom Merry flies an aeroplane to rescue him. Later on, Tom Merry came to his senses in the dormitory. Pity the author didn't, too.

The two tales completing this series this month are "The Fighting Form-Master" and "The St. Jim's Flying-Squad".

Next came "Flats & Sharps at St. Jim's". Mr. Linton, now a rich man, has left. The real Mr. Pilbeam has come to be the Shell Master, but he is music-mad and drives everybody (me included) up the

wall. Fourth of the month is "The Flying Fugitive" in which Grundy is taken in by a confidence trickster. Bully Burkett and the American, Hancock, now in Study No. 10 with the Terrible Three, play big parts in all these tales.

The final tale of the month is "The Midnight Cricketers", in which Mr. Ratcliff forbids cricket, so they play under floodlights. Lots of new crooks in this one, too.

The Rookwood stories, all pretty feeble, in the Gem his month, are "The Brass Lizard Mystery", "Muffin's Midnight Maneuvre", and "Limelight Lovell". These are all about the Brass Lizard which Muffin found, and there is a reward of £10 for it. Then "Tubby Muffin's Treasure", and finally "Lovell's Little Lapse". All pretty flimsy.

In the Linton series, Hancock drove a car, with the boys in it, at a mile a minute. All unbelievable stuff.

On 16th May, the L.U. Trams ceased running in the Kingston-on-Thames area, and were replaced by trolley-buses. But the Metropolitan Tramways have introduced newly-designed trams, the Felthams, which are running at present on route 40 which I think goes from North Finchley to Cricklewood. I believe they are lovely cars.

For a long time now, on Saturdays and Sundays, the L.C.C. cars have run all the way from the Embankment via Balham, Tooting and Wimbledon, and then, over L.U.T. tracks to Raynes Park, New Malden, Kingston, to Hampton Court. A wonderful trip with a very frequent service. Now that the L.U.T. trams have finished, this run will have finished, too. Very sad.

The series about Lancaster, now running in the Magnet, is one of the grandest I have ever read. Lancaster, now at Greyfriars, is a secret cracksman named the Wizard, as well as being a senior schoolboy and a splendid cricketer. Loder had met Lancaster before. Loder was a guest at Danby Croft when that mansion was robbed - and Loder remembered that Lancaster was there as well. Loder becomes convinced that Lancaster is also the Wizard. I reckon that Frank Richards had the famous Raffles in mind when he wrote this gorgeous series. Lucky for us. This month's tales are "Cracksman and Cricketer", "Foes of the Sixth", "The Schoolboy Cracksman", "The Shadow of the Underworld", (the spirit of Greyfriars is beginning to influence Lancaster, but he finds it hard to

break away from his life of crime), and the last of the month is "The Greyfriars Pretender". Magnificent stuff. The series continues next month.

One evening this month, Doug took me to the Holborn Empire, and we saw a lovely variety programme which included Albert Kendal and the London Savannah Band from the Kit Cat Club; The Two Bobs; Tommy Trinder; and Harry Tate in a sketch called "Fishing". A splendid show.

The Ministry of Transport has issued a new booklet called "The Highway Code", and everybody who drives a car should have one in his pocket and know it by heart. You can buy it from any post-office for one penny. I showed Dad an advertisement offering new Hillman Wizards for £100 each, and told him if he would buy one I would buy him "The Highway Code". And Dad said "Don't talk nonsense!"

(EDITORIAL COMMENT: S.O.L. No. 147, "Harry Wharton & Co. in India" comprised three stories from the Magnet's India series of 1926, originally entitled "In the Heart of the Himalayas", "The Terror of the Jungle", and "The Nabob's Rival". As this series covered eleven issues of the Magnet, it is difficult to understand the editorial policy in using only six of the stories in the S.O.L.

S.O.L. No. 148, "Showmen of St. Jim's" comprised two tales from the blue Gem. They were "Tom Merry & Co's Music Hall" from early 1912, and "The St. Jim's Picture Palace" from the summer of the same year. The second tale is reputed to have been written by Down. Neither story was reprinted in the Gem.

The Feltham cars, introduced by the M.E.T. in 1931 were sold, many years later, to Leeds, I believe, but our Northern friends will know more about this.)

* * * * *
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Nelson Lee Column

A LETTER FROM ST. FRANK'S ...

by Jim Cook

The other night I had a strange dream. With painful clarity I saw an entirely different St. Frank's - utterly unlike everything I had known. There were boys with long hair; girls with short hair; music emanated from studies and class rooms. Co-education had apparently come to St. Frank's. A large community television aerial adorned each House like the ones I see in high-rise London flats.

The old Triangle had been transformed somehow. There was an air of general untidiness - even the fountain was contaminated with toffee papers and scraps of refuse that floated on murky water. Worst of all dotted all over the Triangle were blobs of discarded chewing gum that formed tenacious tiny hillocks. Is this St. Frank's I kept on asking myself. And that game that was being played on Big Side ... wasn't it Softball?

I saw strange Third formers in Mrs. Hake's tuck shop with transistor radios in their hands that blared out a cacophony, a dissonance of weird sounds.

I did not recognise anybody. The juniors, the seniors, the masters ... even the domestics were all strange to me. But it was certainly St. Frank's College. It said so on the big iron gates. And big garages had been erected where the gym used to be. There were cars and motor cycles in several places that overflowed from the garages.

To make sure it was only a dream I made a hasty journey to Bellton fearing the worst, but hoping for the best. Some dreams are the precursors of real events and if what I saw in my dream was really happening at St. Frank's then my spiritual world was shattered.

But arriving at Bellton station nothing was changed there at all events. The bright afternoon sunshine and the droning of summer flies still gave this little local station the sleepy, rural spoit it always had been. And as the puffing, groaning local steamed on its way to Caistowe, I set out for St. Frank's.

Arriving at Bellton village there were no signs of changes. The

shops, little children with their hoops and the village folk were all as I had always pictured them. Even old Mudford, the village postman, still trudged along with his mailbag. But although I was beginning to dismiss my dream of the previous night I still had to make certain it was just a dream.

Bellton Lane, with its avenues of trees, and full of memories, still had that effect on me as it always did. I feel it will always produce revenants to remind me of strange characters and mysterious happenings.

And so I entered St. Frank's. There was old Archie Glenthorpe basking in the sun and Handforth & Co. lolling on the Ancient House steps. Nipper and Fullwood and Vivian Travers -- oh they were all there in the flesh as it were and just as they had always been. There were no girls about as I had seen in my dream. The fountain in the Triangle was spouting clear, bright water. Mrs. Hake's tuck shop still sold beef patties and pop. And I did not see any Third formers and juniors holding transistor radios. The bell for morning break clanged out, and the boys returned to their forms in orderly fashion.

So what I had dreamed about was a lost generation perhaps. Before I went elsewhere I went deep into Bellton Wood just opposite St. Frank's and pondered. If what I dreamt was the shape of things to come then something has gone wrong.

The lovely old trees in the wood seemed to tell me they preferred to remain where they were. For trees never change.

THE CROSS OF BLUE

by Ernest Holman

The mention by Bill Thurbon of 'The Blue Crusaders' in April C.D. set me off on an attempt to trace the history of this fictional football team. I had to rely on my memory of stories I had read but received valuable assistance from both "Danny's Diary" and the Lofts/Adley epic "Men Behind Boys' Fiction". (More informed readers will probably have greater details, which it would be interesting to have brought into C.D. columns.) For my part, I have pieced the story briefly together - with the proviso that 'E. & O.E.' must apply to the article.

Arthur Steffens would appear to be the originator of 'Blue Crusaders' under the pen name of Arthur S. Hardy. ("MBBF" reveals that Steffens wrote many sporting stories, under a variety of names -

some of them in his dressing-room, as he was at one time an actor-manager. As Arthur S. Hardy he penned stories of boxing in the "Marvel" and then introduced 'Crusaders' in the "Boys' Realm". He also held the Editorial posts of several sporting papers, being no mean sportsman himself. After many years of writing, he ceased his stories at about the beginning of the Thirties and, in fact, all trace of this author was thereafter lost.)

As Mr. Thurbon mentions, the earliest stories of 'The Blue Crusaders' appeared before the first World War. The main character at the start was Fatty Fowkes, who formed the Club out of a Works' team. The stories of this Club continued after the War and the beginnings were reprinted about the middle Twenties in the "Popular". Some years later many of the previous stories were republished in "Realm" - having undergone some re-writing by an 'Editorial Name' - that of Charles Wentworth.

It would appear that the "Boys' Realm" was feeling the strain as far as circulation was concerned and a prolongation of life was given to it when E. S. Brooks was brought in to take over and write new stories of the 'Crusaders'. As additional assistance, ESB introduced the Club into the Nelson Lee stories of St. Frank's. In the autumn of 1928, Danny tells us, a new boy named Lionel Corcoran came to St. Frank's. His uncle was principal shareholder in 'Blue Crusaders' and the Club moved into the Stronghold, replacing the existing team of Bannington Town.

About this time, a joint "Realm/Lee" series commenced. The St. Frank's side of the story was in "NL", the 'Crusaders' in "BR" - but there were, of course, overlaps. Incidents mentioned briefly in one paper carried a footnote that full details could be read in the other paper. I recall this joint series mainly because after reading each of the two papers, I would note on several pages where the 'missing' incident occurred in the other publication. When it finished, I re-read the entire series in MY ORDER of incidents. The story itself concerned the 'drowning' of Simon Kenmore - Fatty Fowkes, the 'Crusader' Goalie being suspected of the act. Kenmore returned to St. Frank's, disguised as his brother Walter. Details of what eventually happened are now very vague - I remember the series finished in time for the 'Nelson Lee'

Christmas story ('The Return of Ezra Quirke').

'Blue Crusader' stories continued for some little time by ESB in "Realm" and the Club received occasional mention in the St. Frank's stories. I believe Lionel Corcoran merely became 'one of the cast' from then on. The 'Crusader' yarns ceased about 1929/30, when "Realm" became a Film publication. Stories by both Hardy and Brooks would crop up at odd times in the "Boys' Friend Monthly Library" after "Realm" ceased.

I wonder who, today, can recall much of 'The Blue Crusader' stories. Some of the characters' names remain with me - apart from Fowkes, there was a rugged Bulldog Drummond type named Ben Gillingham who played Back; Dave Moran was Centre Half and Skipper; another Half was 'Mustard' Keene. There was a Black Sheep called 'Curly' Hankin, a boy Winger ('Tich' Harborough - who dwelt at St. Frank's for a while) and a great-scoring Centre Forward named Rex Carrington. The team was under the managership of an ex-schoolmaster (not unlike Quelch in some illustrations) named Ulysses Piecombe, known to one and all as Piecan. Perhaps it should be mentioned that the Club played in white shirts, with a large Crusader Cross in blue.

* * * * *

BLAKIANA

Conducted by JOSIE PACKMAN

I do hope you all enjoy the articles in Blakiana, please write and let me know so that I can continue the Consulting room Chat, etc., and maybe some of you could send me an article for future use. The months go by so quickly that suddenly I find I do not have enough material, and of course there is the Annual to think about. Eric will want some articles as early as possible. Perhaps you have a favourite character which has not been written about or maybe a different angle on some of our old favourites?

SOME THOUGHTS ON SEXTON BLAKE - OLD AND NEW

by D. Harkness

Perhaps Blake readers can be divided into three groups. Those who prefer the old Blake, those who like the New Look Blake and those who enjoy both Blakes.

Even those who prefer the old Sexton Blake and Tinker maybe do not realise the changes that evolved during the ensuing years. How many readers are aware that back in 1895 Blake's residence was in Shepherds Bush, West London? Did loyal readers feel a jolt when his headquarters were shifted to Baker Street? And what was the reaction when the New Look Blake was located in a Berkeley Square office suite, complete with a personal secretary named Paula Dane, and Marion Lang as a receptionist, while Tinker became Edward Carter, Blake's associate and junior partner. Blake still lived in Baker Street, but in a penthouse, while Tinker had his own flat directly below his guv'nor's.

In the old Blake stories Mrs. Bardell served as housekeeper and receptionist, and Tinker was both secretary and assistant. This was the era and these were the stories most of us were reading while we were growing up and this is why most readers are staunch supporters of the twenties and thirties yarns.

A letter in S.B.L. No. 466, 4th series, from a Mr. J. Story of Worthing, Sussex, had this to say:- "I have been a reader of the Sexton Blake stories in a spasmodic fashion since the Union Jack when they were written and read mainly as juvenile fiction. Since the New Look however, your stories are no longer directed at juveniles." (This was a wrong statement as the Union Jack had printed on it "For readers of all ages". J.P.)

Somehow I cannot quite go along with the first part of this statement as the stories and writing styles of sixty years ago were not juvenile. Also nearly all the letters to the Editor were from adults. I can read the U.J. today and I think I enjoy it more than when I was a schoolboy because I understand it better. Practically every Blake tale dealt with adults and adult themes and were certainly never written down to a young boy's level.

I realize that the S.B.L. policy for the New Look updating was to keep pace with the times and induce new readers to the fold as old readers perhaps dropped off not caring for the new Blake after so many years of the old Blake. Maybe they preferred the grey Rolls Royce to the Bentley and liked the idea of Mrs. Bardell living in as housekeeper instead of only being a daily visitor to the Baker Street Penthouse.

This is not to say that the later Blake stories were not good in

themselves, from the few I have read. "No. 466, Dead Man's Destiny" was quite enjoyable and unique in which the author Martin Thomas, revealed how Tinker acquired his unusual name and how it was discovered his real name was Carter. However, I think it is safe to say that the vast majority of Blake fans will always remain devoted to the old Blake, with Mrs. Bardell puffing her way upstairs to the consulting room, Blake relaxing in a saddle bag chair clad in his old dressing gown, smoking his briar, while Tinker clips items from the newspapers to paste in the famous Baker Street Index. And all this taking place in Baker Street. Long may that thoroughfare reign!

CONSULTING ROOM CHAT (2)

Somerset Maugham on Sexton Blake. Well, not exactly. I omitted a question mark. But it is quite possible for Maugham to have written about Blake, for he confesses in his essay "The Decline and Fall of the Detective Story" that "I have read hundreds of detective stories, good and bad, and they have to be very bad indeed for me to cast them aside unfinished . . ." He suggested that, eventually, detective stories might be regarded as the 20th century's greatest contribution to literature. And predicted that the day would come when detective novels would be studied in colleges, and aspirants for doctors' degrees would "shuttle oceans and haunt the world's great libraries to conduct personal expeditions into the lives and sources of the masters of the art." If scientists at Reading University can get a £13,000 grant to study Pterodactyl, there must be a copper or two to spare for a thesis on the "live" Blakian legend.

Dorothy L. Sayers has, of course, often been quoted for "The really interesting point about them is that they present the nearest modern approach to a national folk-lore, conceived as the centre for a cycle of loosely connected romances in the Arthurian manner. Their significance in popular literature and education would richly repay scientific investigation." From an introduction to a book of short stories, my copy is an eleventh impression and still " . . . and their bulldog Pedro" is uncorrected.

Praise. Schoolmaster Ernald James writes in his Midlands reminiscences "Unforgettable Countryfolk" (Cornish): "I had to do half-

an-hour (on the organ) every night, and although I loathed it, it was not altogether a hardship, as I did most of the half-hour practising each hand separately, whilst the other hand held a Robin Hood or Sexton Blake or Jack, Sam and Pete, which to my mind were the beginning and the end of all good literature."

* * * * *

LET'S BE CONTROVERSIAL

No. 232. WILL LADIES KINDLY REMOVE THEIR HATS!

It would be an exaggeration to regard any Hamilton story as a social document, but there is no doubt that plenty of the old tales provide reflections of the periods in which they were written.

Exactly fifty years ago, our Danny was enjoying a Schoolboys' Own Library entitled "Showmen of St. Jim's". This, of course, was not a new story in 1931. It comprised two tales, separated by several months, which had first appeared in the blue Gem, nearly twenty years before that, early in the year 1912.

To raise money for the cricket funds, Tom Merry had the idea of running a music-hall entertainment, twice nightly, for a week, in a barn. The "turns" were to be supplied by various juniors who might have sufficient talent for that sort of thing.

"You chaps know, I suppose," said Tom Merry, "that there are places in London and Manchester, and other towns, called music-halls. Music-halls aren't what they used to be, and they rake in piles of money. If it can be done in London, it can be done here."

That remark must have read very oddly in 1931, but even in 1912 it was a curious understatement. Music-halls had been very popular with the "working classes" for at least fifty years before 1912. But, as Tom said, they were no longer what they used to be.

For some half a dozen years prior to 1912, Sir Oswald Stoll had been building splendid variety theatres on lavish lines, and the rival firm of Moss Empires had been doing the same. Dozens of beautiful variety theatres went up all over London, the suburbs, and the provinces. Stoll built at Shepherds Bush, Hackney, Wood Green, Chiswick, Chatham, culminating with the magnificent London Coliseum which, even today, is

incomparable. Moss built at Finsbury Park, Brighton, New Cross - all over the place, in fact. Independent people built splendid theatres at Kingston, Lewisham, Penge, Woolwich, and elsewhere. Another firm, Syndicate Halls, took over rather older properties, at places like Clapham, Islington, Croydon, East Ham, Camberwell, Walthamstow, Watford, Chelsea, and the famous Met in Edgware Road.

Music-halls were all the rage in 1912, appealing to all classes. The coming of the cinema had hit what was known as the legitimate theatre, particularly touring companies, in London and the provinces. It left no mark on the Music Hall.

But, by 1931, "Tom Merry's Music Hall" of 1912 was very dated indeed, and readers must have sensed it. The coming of the "talkies", with many giant musical productions, hit the Music Halls hard, and they staggered for a time. But they rallied with a vengeance. The variety theatres remained popular until some years after Hitler's war - until television, and, much more, the gigantic prices offered by developers for plum sites, finished them completely.

It is fascinating to muse for a moment on the names of the stars who would have been drawing in the Music Hall audiences in 1912. Marie Lloyd, Gerte Gitana, Little Tich, Bransby Williams, T. E. Dunville, Billy Merson, Tom Costello, Harry Champion, Fred Karno's Mummung Birds with a certain Mr. Chaplin who would not make his first Keystone comedy till late the following year.

With regard to "Tom Merry's Music Hall" one suspects that Hamilton had in mind that Marmaduke story (our "classic serial") of six years earlier still, when Arthur Augustus sang "Give me Back My Eighteenpence". In 1912, Arthur Augustus sang "Give me Back My Seven and Six".

Inflation, in 1912? Apparently! The 7/6 in 1912 is explained as referring to the cost of a marriage licence. The prospective bridegroom changed his mind at the last minute, rushed to the Registry Office, and asked for the return of his 7/6. (He was going to keep a dog and buy a dog licence instead). The obvious conclusion is that, in 1906, the marriage licence had been eighteenpence, rising to 7/6 some time between then and 1912.

There is another curious song in the 1912 tale. Fatty Wynn sings

"Who is going to lick the stamps?" On first sight, that is meaningless. But it comes clear after cogitation. Somewhere about that time, the National Insurance Bill was passed, and National Insurance stamps - 9d. from the employer and 4d. from the worker - had to be stuck on a card each week. The Act was unpopular for a time, and a mocking comic song was the result.

Probably readers in 1912 knew all about it, but in 1931, when it was reprinted in the S.O.L., readers must have wondered, if they thought about it at all.

The second part of that 1931 S.O.L. comprised another story from 1912, "The St. Jim's Picture Palace". For a good many years that story has been regarded as a substitute effort, and in later times it has been credited to C. M. Down. I am not entirely convinced that this one was a sub story, but it is a long time since I read it thoroughly. Certainly, Down is the only sub writers I would accept for it. He had no literary mannerism of his own, he closely followed in the footsteps of Hamilton, and his imitations in the inconsequential line were reasonable.

At any rate, whoever wrote them, the two tales are linked. Levison derides Tom Merry for losing money in the music hall venture, and Tom declares he will raise the money. The chance comes with Glyn's "patent moving picture camera", and, by contrivance, he has also invented projection equipment. So the chums decide to film items of school interest, and run a picture palace.

To get some hints, they visit Wayland Cinema, and their reactions to the films they were watching may have been passable in 1912, but must have seemed a bit odd to readers in 1931.

There is a gratuitous piece of sensationalism when there is an operating-box fire while the boys are at the Wayland Cinema. Cinematograph film was very inflammable. Operating-box fires did occur now and then, but they were surprisingly rare, even in 1912. By 1931, they were almost unknown. In fact, safety stock did not become general till the late forties, and, when it came in, it was unpopular with most operators.

It is interesting to ponder on who might be starring in the programmes the boys saw at the Wayland Cinema in 1912. Long films were still very few, and the programmes mainly comprised one and two-

reelers. Broncho Billy Anderson, Mr. and Mrs. Sidney Drew, Flora Finch and John Bunny, Ford Sterling, Fatty Arbuckle, Mabel Normand, Asta Neilsen, Florence Turner, Maurice Costello, Helen Holmes in a series about the railways? Mary Pickford and Lilian Gish might be there, but unnamed in 1912 probably. The film companies: Vitagraph, Kalem, Biograph, Lubin, Cines, Essanay, Selig, Keystone, Hepworth?

But, as we see from his Diary, Danny was watching Eddie Cantor in "Whoopee" and Maurice Chevalier in "Paramount on Parade". The cinema had come a long way between 1912 and 1931.

So, readers must have found "The St. Jim's Showmen", with its Music Hall and its Picture Palace a bit odd in that S.O.L. of 1931. School stories date but little - but these two were not really school stories, and they dated a lot. They dated - but how they must have charmed! And still do!

* * * * *

Nearing the End.

THE REFORMATION OF MARMADUKE

Figgins was the first to break that dreadful silence.

"It's a joke!" he murmured. "It can't be true!"

But he knew that it was true, and so did the others. He picked up the envelope from the table, and tore it open. He gave one glance at the programme, and then gave a wild whoop.

"What's the matter?" demanded Kerr.

"The beasts! The bounders!"
The programme was tightly clenched in Figgy's hand. "The howling cads --"

Figgins and Kerr threw themselves on the furious Figgins, and Pratt extracted the crumpled programme from his hand. Then, as they looked at it, the New House Dramatic Society understood the cause of Figgins's excitement.

"Our concert!" howled Kerr.

"All our songs!"

"Our 'King John' scene! The cads!"

It was some minutes before the Dramatic Society calmed down sufficiently to read the programme through. Then the reading was frequently interrupted by bursts of rage and indignation. For this is how it ran:

"Programme of a Grand Concert to be given in the Lecture Hall at St. Jim's by the members of the School House Dramatic Society, on Friday evening at 7 precisely. Under the distinguished patronage of Arthur Kidd, Esq., M.A., Oxon, master of the cock house at St. Jim's.

"Song, 'Down Among the Dead Men', G. Herries; Flute Solo, A. Digby; Cake-Walk 'Giddy Gilbertina', J. Blake; Sketch, 'New House Funniosities', Messrs.

Blake, Herries and Digby; Song 'Give Me Back my Eighteenpence', Arthur Augustus D'Arcy; Act 4, Scene 1 'King John' (Shakespeare) Messrs. Blake, Herries, Digby, D'Arcy; March 'Lohengrin', Mouth-Organ Solo, J. Blake; Duet, 'Sing me a Song-O!' (Sullivan), P. Mellish and K. Walsh.

"God Save the King! Admission free to the young gentlemen of the School House. New House cads may come in if they like, but they will be expected to wipe their boots, and to behave as nearly like civilised beings as possible."

Figgins stamped round the study as though he were seriously bent upon testing the strength of the floor-boards.

"Done!" groaned Kerr. "Foiled, dished, diddled, and done!"

"Hopelessly done!" said Fatty Wynn, staring at the programme. "How on earth did that horrid boulder get hold of our programme?"

"Blake must have boned one from our study somehow. We weren't on our guard against that."

"That's true enough. We can't give our concert."

"We're not going to take it lying down," said Kerr, fiercely. "We've got to smash up their concert, somehow."

Figgins shook his head hopelessly.

"Too late! There goes the clock - a quarter to seven."

The Dramatic Society gritted their teeth. They were "done" at all points.

"Too late!" repeated Figgins.

"It's victory to the School House this time, and no mistake."

"It can't be! It shan't be! Look

here, Figgy, you're leader. Think of something.

Figgins wrinkled his brows in a painful effort of thought.

"I can't think of anything, except to go there in force and kick up a thundering row," he said. "Of course, we might cut the concert, but that would be taking it lying down with a vengeance. They'd say we were jealous, and they'd crow no end. We'd better go, and make such a row that they won't be able to hear themselves."

"If there are any masters present, we can't do that."

"Well, we'll do our best, anyway. You can get out of those things, Kerr; they won't be wanted now. Send the word round among the fellows, and tell them to bring all the rattles and mouth-organs and things they can."

It was evidently the only thing to be done, and the Dramatic Society broke up. Figgins remained in the study, with knitted brows, trying to think of something. He hardly noticed that Marmaduke remained with him. Marmaduke wasn't of much importance at this critical moment. But the heir of millions was doing some thinking, too.

The Co. found the news of the concert all over the house. Blake had stuck a programme up in the hall as he went out, and it had been read by all the house.

So the New House boys, some of them with knotted towels under their jackets - there was nothing like being prepared for anything - trooped across the quad towards the School House. Kerr put his head in at Figgins's door.

"Better come, Figgy. It's five to

seven."

"Right!" said Figgins, rousing himself with a sigh. "I can't think of any way of getting our own back, unless we can manage to wreck the concert. It's the masters being there that will spoil our game. Are you coming, Smythe?"

"Yes," said Marmaduke, "if I may come with you, Figgins."

Figgins looked at him curiously.

"What's the matter with you, kid? Getting patriotic?"

"I wish I could think of something," said Marmaduke, as they left the study.

"I'm a New House boy. I feel the same as you do about it. Don't you believe me?"

"Yes," said Figgins; "you're getting on, kid. I wish you could think of something; but if I can't, it's pretty certain you can't. Come on!"

They had reached the great door of the lecture-hall.

"Ain't you coming in?" said Figgins, as Marmaduke hung back.

The heir of millions shook his head.

"No. I don't think I'll come in, Figgins."

"Have you got some idea in your head?"

"Yes. I don't know if it will work. . . But I'm going to try, and I don't care if it means a flogging," said Marmaduke. "You and the rest will be ready to mess up the concert if anything happens to give you the chance, won't you?"

"Won't we, rather!" said Figgins grimly. "But I don't see --"

But Marmaduke was gone. Figgins went into the hall with a peculiar expression on his face.

The great hall was crowded. The School House boys had crowded in before the New House knew anything of the concert at all, and they filled all the front seats. This served a double purpose - it gave the School House the best seats, and enabled them to mass themselves for a guard to the platform, in case the New House should interrupt the concert. If the New House tried to rush the platform, they would have to walk over the School House first.

All the juniors of both houses were there, and a good many of the seniors. Kildare sat with a group of School House seniors, and Mr. Kidd, the housemaster. Monteith, with a group of New House seniors, had come in. The seniors were allowed politely to take front seats, but all the New House juniors were crammed in the rear of the hall. Many of them had to stand up.

Figgins joined the Co. They were as near the front as they could get, but there was a solid phalanx of School House boys between them and the platform. Kerr turned a hopeless look on his leader.

"No go!" he muttered. "We can't keep up a row, with Kidd there, and nearly every prefect in the hall."

Figgins nodded a gloomy assent.

"They may not stay all the time," said Wynn hopefully. "Anyway, we can hiss and groan all the songs, and make the bounders feel uncomfortable."

"Hallo, they're beginning."

The accompanist, Rushden, a School House senior of musical taste, who had kindly offered his services, struck a chord on the piano. There was a general

cry for silence.

"Booh!" hooted the New House as one man.

"Silence!"

"Yah!"

Mr. Kidd rose to his feet.

"Silence must be preserved for the concert," he said. "Come my boys, fair play! Any boy who wishes to make a noise can leave the hall."

The New House relapsed into silence. The Housemaster resumed his seat, and the pianist gave another touch to the keys. In the midst of a deathly silence, save for the sound of the piano, Herries came forward. The great concert was about to commence.

(This Very Old Story Will be Concluded Next Month)

* * * * *

REVIEWS

HIGH JINKS AT ST. JIM'S

Martin Clifford
(Howard Baker: £5.95)

This superb volume contains seven stories from the Indian Summer of the Gem - the years 1922 and 1923. It was a time when a number of priceless single stories first saw the light of day. They are perfect school stories.

However, the volume opens with a pair "Trimble in Trade" and "Cousin Ethel to the Rescue". There is much originality in this lovely twosome, with Gussy declared guilty of damaging a valuable volume belonging to Mr. Lathom. This was the one where Martin Clifford observed that it was a problem which "might have taxed the ingenuity of Sherlock Holmes, Sexton Blake, or the greatest of them all, Ferrers Locke". Our Martin didn't go in for false modesty.

Then comes "Trimble Tries It On" from some five months later. A time when St. Jim's and Greyfriars were neatly dovetailed together. Levison is away with his minor. He has left behind an entry for a competition, and Trimble uses it as his own entry in the contest.

"Taming a Tartar" is a delightful single in which the heroes of the Third had the bright plan of putting Mr. Selby into a good mood by giving him a birthday present - a plan which misfired. Later on, the plot was used again, in the Magnet. Then another single "Trimble's Auction", an absolute joy. Trimble seldom appealed to me, but this wonderful little yarn stands out as the school story supreme.

"Rushden's Folly" is in more serious vein. It is no record breaker, but it has its moments, and has the added novelty of introducing Lord Conway.

Yet another perfect single, and another great favourite of mine, is "Manners Holds His Own" in which Manners blackmails the bullying Mr. Selby by means of a compromising photograph. A gorgeous yarn with wonderful characterisation.

The Gem tales were very short at this period. But the exceptionally high quality of the stories is more than ample compensation for their brevity. And, it may be added, the supporting programmes are full of interest and well worth reading.

Here we have a quaint, and quite delightful pot-pourri of Gems and Magnets, selected to enrapture you, between the years 1910 and 1937. Call it a Christmas stocking or a Glory Hole - under any name it's a dream of pleasure.

"Bunter's Brain-Storm" (1927) is the one where Bunter orders a massive feast from Chunkley's, using his master's voice. It is probably the most deliriously funny of all Bunter stories. It had the honour (whether by accident or design is uncertain) of being reprinted twice in the S. O. L.

We have ample evidence that there was no paper shortage in the early years of the First World War. There was a Double Number of the Gem at Easter 1915 and another Double Number in the summer of that year. 48 pages for 2d. - with coloured covers. Both double numbers appear in this Howard Baker volume.

"Winning His Spurs" is the first of the doubles, both of which star Talbot. It was a time when Talbot was being heavily overplayed in the Gem, but this tale will be given a rousing welcome now. Neither of these doubles was reprinted in the Gem, possibly because each has a war flavour.

The second double, from a few months later, contains the famous St. Jim's story "The Housemaster's Homecoming". This is a beautifully written yarn, in which the secret of Talbot's birth comes to the surface, and we find he is the nephew of Colonel Lyndon, and the cousin of Crooke of the Shell. It winds up the Talbot saga, though, as we all know, it resolutely refused to be wound up. Its omission, in the later years of the Gem, left the Talbot story unfinished and unexplained, for the young readers of the thirties.

This yarn has, of course, been reprinted in recent years, but it is nice to see it in its original setting of a Double Number.

A Greyfriars single from 1927, "The Footprint in the Sand" is a potted drama in which a cracksman kidnaps a new master for the Second Form, and takes his place. A bit hackneyed in theme these days, but it holds the interest throughout.

Another Greyfriars tale "Only Alonzo" is a Red Magnet from 1910 - that was the year when Alonzo turned up as a new boy, and he was featured a lot for a time - and it is full of period charm which will delight everybody. Arthur Clarke's pictures warm the heart. Finally, a 1937 Gem, "The Swot", originally entitled "Rallying Round Figgins" in early 1914. A restrained little item after all the excitement of the previous pages.

Another lovely, varied book for the collection.

JIM LEE'S SECRET

Frank Richards
(Howard Baker Special)

Beautifully bound and produced, as always, this is one of the Special Editions for the connoisseur. The main attraction is the five-issue series concerning Jim Lee, the ward of Ulick Driver. Lee is sent to Greyfriars to make friends with wealthy boys, get himself invited to their homes, and spy out the land for Ulick Driver to burgle them later. So Lee refuses to

make friends with anyone, and becomes unpopular. The plot does not really give much scope to the author, but the series contains some interesting sequences. An added attraction is that the series is not much known or discussed. It will come with a special freshness to readers.

This is followed by "Bunter's Latest" in which the Owl feigns dumbness. Very amusing is a story from the previous year, in the white cover era, "The Persecution of Mr. Prout". The Fifth-Form Master is much offended when somebody refers to him as "Old Prout".

To conclude the attractive programme there are two more consecutive stories from the closing weeks of the white cover era. The yarns are connected and concern the Highcliffe match. In "Fishy, the Footballer", Fish tries to get into the team by a spot of blackmail. He is unsuccessful. In the sequel, "The Footballers' Foe", Ponsonby tries to ruin the match, and he, too, is unsuccessful.

It all makes happy reading. One must not overlook the fact, also, that the Greyfriars Herald supplements, at this time, were at their most attractive. Another novelty is that the 1923 yarns fall in the period when a different artist, rather mysteriously it seems, was drawing the covers.

A volume to look lovely on your shelves, to fill you with pride, and to charm the hours.

* * * * *

News of The Old Boys' Book Clubs

MIDLAND

There was an attendance of eleven at Dr. Johnson's House when we met for our March meeting. It was quite a good turn out as a number of regulars were absent.

The meeting began with greetings to your correspondent on his birthday and were duly appreciated by him as a gracious gesture, but he has now got to an age when birthdays remind him that he was born too soon.

Our two features, Anniversary Number and Collectors' Item, were on display. A.N. was Magnet 477, dated 31st March, 1917, 64 years old to the day. Tom Porter said it was sub-written by Pentelow. The C.I. was No. 1 of The Golden Hours Magazine published by O.B.B.C. enthusiasts in Australia. A point of interest was that your correspondent had written articles for it.

A photograph of people at our highly successful Christmas meeting had been sent to Tom Porter by Maurice Hall. Some of us were lucky to get on it. I was unlucky. It showed the back of my head.

After refreshments a discussion took place of how Charles Hamilton repeated his themes for series over the years.

There were two readings. One was by Ivan Webster from Magnet 971, entitled "Coker the Rebel". It was very amusing. This was followed by another reading from your correspondent from the facsimile edition by Howard Baker from Greyfriars Holiday Annual for 1927. The story was entitled "What happened to Bunter!"

There was no time for a game and the meeting closed at 9.30.

Our next meeting is on the 28th of April, and we hope for another good attendance.

JACK BELLFIELD - Correspondent.

CAMBRIDGE

The Club met at the home of Secretary Keith Hodgkinson on Sunday, 5th April, 1981.

Further reports were received on arrangements for the Club's tenth birthday celebrations in May. The Club learned with pleasure of the return of Jack Doupe from Tenerife.

The Club continued its interest in crime! Following up the recent study of Sweeny Todd they turned to Jack the Ripper. Vic Hearn gave an intensely interesting, and closely reasoned account of the latest theories and of the people involved. He produced a book containing photographs of the people who could have been involved. He drew attention to the points made in the book "The Final Solution"; the connection between the various victims; the implication of the mutilation of the victims which suggested that the Ripper had medical knowledge. Of possible connections with masonic ritual; of mysterious happenings in the Cleveland street area. The theory he examined suggested that in one case the wrong victim was killed in mistake for an intended victim. The whole argument was in the best Sherlock Holmes or Sexton Blake vein. Much interest was aroused by Vic's talk, the discussion continuing while enjoying Keith and Mrs. Hodgkinson's lavish tea. After a brief interlude while members tried to enlighten the Club President into the mysteries of Cambridge University, Bill Thurbon gave a talk on books about the "Monks of War", the military religious orders of the Middle Ages, dealing mainly with the Knight Templars, the Knights of St. John and the Teutonic Knights.

The meeting closed with a warm vote of thanks to Keith and Mrs. Hodkinson for their hospitality.

LONDON

Although the attractive souvenir menu cards that graced the tables at The Rembrandt Hotel on Sunday, 12th April, conveyed the facts that the London Club was celebrating the Coral Anniversary of the Collectors' Digest and the Sixtieth Anniversary of the Schoolgirls' Own and Morcove School, there was also another anniversary that could be celebrated. This was the twenty years that the President of the club, John Wernham, had held office, succeeding Frank Richards in 1961. As is now customary, John had supplied suitable menu cards for, so to write, the three anniversaries.

With Morcove very much to the fore, both Mary Cadogan and Tommy Keen were busy autographing copies of the Morcove Companion. The latest publication by the Museum Press is a worthy companion to the one that was published some time ago, the Schoolgirls' Album which dealt with the other famous girls' school, Cliff House. The luncheon party was an unqualified success and the speeches by John Wernham, Mary Cadogan, Eric Fayne and Roger Jenkins were much enjoyed. Much to Madam's delight, the hotel cat came on the scene. The get-togethers were very enjoyable and it was good to see Les Rowley up from Cornwall. Even St. Frank's and Edwy Searles Brooks was not forgotten as twelve more of the souvenir plaques were bought.

Next meeting at the Twickenham home of Sam and Babs Thurbon, who unfortunately were unable to attend the luncheon owing to a bout of 'flu, the date of the meeting being Sunday, 10th May. A full tea will be provided.

BEN WHITER

NORTHERN

Twelve members were present for our A.G.M. on Saturday evening, 11th April. Harry Barlow was in the Chair. Being a business meeting, we found that most of the evening was taken up in discussing the future of our Club and what our programmes would be for the forthcoming months.

The following people have been appointed Officers of the Club for the coming year: Chairman, Harry Barlow; Vice-Chairman, Darrell Swift; Treasurer/Librarian, Mollie Allison; Minute Secretary, The Revd. Geoffrey Good. An ongoing appointment was made - Harry Barlow is also "refreshment secretary" - i.e., biscuit buyer! A vote of thanks was given to the Officers for their past year's work and once again, we all recalled with thanks and praise, the work of the late Geoffrey Wilde, who had been such an inspiration to us all.

Even though we did not have a programme as such that evening, we conducted some very important business and took some steps to really further the activities of the Club and efforts are to be made to attract new Members.

All readers of Collectors' Digest (especially those in Northern England, Scotland and Northern Ireland) are welcome to join our club, as postal members. An extensive library of old boys' books is available, on loan at modest fees. Our Librarian, Mollie, will be very pleased to hear from you.

JOHNNY BULL MINOR

* * * * *

SALE: Oor Wullie, Broons Annuals, £2 each. Magnets, 1940/41, £1 each. C.D. Annuals, 1970, 1971, 1973, 1975, 1977, £4 each.

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The Postman Called

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

J. P. FITZGERALD (Manchester): Bonnie Bluebell and her Magic
Gloves rings a bell, but I don't remember where!

(Somewhere, over the Rainbow. - Ed.)

L. HOLLAND (Oldham): I am rather surprised that so far there appears
to have been no comment by readers of the "Digest" about the recent
televising of R. F. Delderfield's great novel, "To Serve them All My
Days". I watched every episode with great interest, and found John
Duttine's portrayal of the principal character to be almost as I imagined
David Powlett Jones to be. Of course, there was ever so much more in
the book, but one accepts that there had to be considerable licence in the
dramatisation; otherwise it could have gone on for ever!

Any devotees of the old papers who have not read R.F.D's original
book should certainly do so without delay. They have a treat in store.

(EDITORIAL COMMENT: A few readers have commented on the serial. It was first-class
entertainment, as all would agree - just slightly marred by explicit bedroom scenes which were
quite unnecessary, but without which producers of TV plays seem unable to bring work to the
small screen.)

L. WORMULL (Romford): It was nice to see The Firefly making the
cover of C.D. The offspring of Fun & Fiction, which did so much for the
later Bullseye. I first made their acquaintance about twenty years ago,
and came to like them. The Woman With A Black Heart, from F & F, is
a lady I would most like to meet again. A nameless beauty, it was said,
and one very much in the tradition of Pearl White, of serial fame. An
illustration from one of the tales, with minute changes, adorned the first
cover of Bullseye.

E. CONNOLLEY (Gloucester): What happened to "Princess Snowee's
Corner" this month? I look forward to it. Hope it will be back again in
the May issue.

Fr. F. HERTZBERG (Bebington): With regard to J.E.M's interesting
notes on Free Gifts - it was not only the Bullseye which gave toffee, the

Magnet also did so for four successive weeks in 1934 (the week before the toffee actually began to be given the whole cover was devoted to a rather misleading Billy Bunter wireless broadcast which a less-than-careful reader might well have thought meant the toffee was in that week's issue). Such gifts - as often a means of boosting a flagging circulation as of launching a new comic paper - of course have continued to the present. Whereas the I.P.C. publications have had various jokes and tricks, D. C. Thomson have hardly varied their gifts, with the exception of a set of plastic aeroplane models some years ago: they still issue wallets of facsimile medals, a commando ring into which may be fitted various pictorial devices, etc. They have also developed the 'club' side, sending wallets of documents, badges, etc., to those who join their Warlord or Dennis the Menace or Desperate Dan clubs.

HAROLD TRUSCOTT (Deal): In your most recent editorial you ask, among other things, if we have encountered the invisible glass windows or doors. I have! With, on one occasion, painful results, and broken spectacles. And if you have seen Jacques Tati's marvellous film "Play-time" you will know that in it he parodies this very thing, so that he and the man he is trying to speak to, chase each other round a building, always able to see each other but never able to meet. The other man ends with a damaged nose from dashing at Tati's reflection.

F. S. KNIGHT (Cheltenham): I don't know how you do it, but you do.

Each month as the C.D. drops through the letterbox and is eagerly perused, it is noticeable that the very high standard you set yourself is maintained.

While the emphasis is naturally on Hamiltonia, it is nice to have articles as well on other well-loved periodicals of boyhood and young manhood days.

I have enjoyed the serialisation of the early Gem story and hope there will be more to come sometime in the future.

RAY BENNETT (Codsall): April C.D. much enjoyed, particularly Editorial (as always!) and the "Free Gifts" article by J.E.M.

May I heartily endorse the sentiments of your correspondent, Mr. R. H. Cushing on page 32.

ERN DARCY (Maidstone, Australia): Yesterday, 6th April, the April C.D. monthly arrived, and I smiled when I read Danny's Diary regarding the new Air Mail service of twenty days, as against the old, slow thirty-four days by sea. Well, that "slow" old way would suit me fine, as against our modern sea mail service, fifty years later. Yes, my friend, today I received my long-awaited C.D. Annual, postmarked 3rd December. The Annual was well-worth waiting for, but the postal authorities must feel really proud, taking exactly four months to deliver. Four months, I suppose, is 'par for the course' these days.

(That's Progress! - Ed.)

WANTED: Thriller Picture Library, Greyfriars Holiday Annuals, 1920, 1941; Richmal Crompton's "William" books, 1st editions, with dw's; "William The Lawless" (any condition).

JAMES GALL, 49 ANDERSON AVENUE, ABERDEEN. 'PHONE 491716

WANTED: Bessie Bunter of Cliff House School; Billy Bunter of Greyfriars School (hardbacks) and Journal Cricket Society 6/3 and 6/4.

48 SHALMARSH, BEBINGTON, WIRRAL

WANTED: Howard Baker facsimile Greyfriars Press No. 18, "The Greyfriars Double", published June 1973. Also Gem (new series) Nos. 13, 28, 40, 41, 82, 88, 95, 96, 100. Monster Library Nos. 1, 3, 5, 6, 8, 15, 16, 18, 19. Schoolboys' Owns. Also wanted: Richmal Crompton - "William the Lawless", "William the Superman". I will pay your price for any of these.

E. CONNOLLEY, 25 PAYNES PITCH, CHURCHDOWN, GLOUCESTER, GL3 2NT

WANTED: O/S Lees: most before 130; in particular 16, 19, 57, 78, 113, 115, 294 - 407. 3d. Nuggets. S.O.L.: 27 - 120. O/S B.F.L. 514, 200, 504, 518, 530, 623, 649, 704, 727, 746. N/S 27. Also Dick Turpins. For Exchange: O/S Lees, Magnets, S.O.L., B.F.L.

MCPHERSON, UPPER MILTON, WELLS, SOM.

1981 is the CORAL JUBILEE YEAR of Story-Paper Collectors' Digest.

If we are spared, our 35th Birthday comes in November.