

THE STORY PAPER COLLECTOR

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WHAT DOES THE POEM MEAN?

SEVERAL READERS have written commenting upon the poem reprinted from *The Gem* in *The Story Paper Collector* Number 75. The following are excerpts from some of the letters:

There is no English poem, at least of any standing, that begins with "When in the dark . . ." If the effusion that caught your eye is intended as a parody, it must be based on Lord Thurlow's "When in the woods I wander alone." I haven't a copy of this by me—you will find it in such anthologies as *The Oxford Book of Lesser Lyrics*—but it wambles on in similar style, complete with nightingale. It isn't necessarily a parody, though. Thurlow was writing about 1820, but for the next hundred years budding Eliza Cooks were turning out similar woozy, heartfelt, sentimental rissoles, and Martin Clifford's may be

just a skit, or take-off of the trend rather than some specific poem.

I realize that this doesn't answer your question about what it means, but, then, you should know better than ask such questions. Fortunately, S.P.C. does not circulate in Bloomsbury or Greenwich Village, or you would send a chill of horror through the denizens thereof. "My dear! The Philistine is too, too petrifying. Imagine! He actually demands sense in a poem!"

—TOM HOPPERTON

Scarborough, Yorkshire, England.

I would explain that piece of verse on the front of Number 75, but it is too dark in here. Anyhow, I've just sent my straight-jacket out to be dry-cleaned. Kidding aside, I would say the writer was alluding (in a rather vague way) to "the good old days" when he was young. Or—just to look at it from another direction—it may be a plain piece of

: : TWENTIETH ANNIVERSARY NUMBER : :

nonsense verse which isn't supposed to mean a thing. Lewis Carroll's Jabberwocky is an example.

—EDWIN HARLER
Levittown, Penn., U.S.A.

The poem on the front page baffled me, too. It seemed to concern a person in very good circumstance, judging from the court and silver fountain, suffering from insomnia, who loved to gaze from his window and think of happier times (maybe of Magnets, Gems, etc.) until daylight arrived. There may be a deeper meaning, but as I say, it baffles me.

—EDWARD THOMSON
Edinburgh, Scotland.

I wish I could enlighten you on the poem. It is strange yet has for me at least an odd attraction. . . . I am afraid any interpretation would be subject to an inherent fallibility of the person who tries to evaluate it out of context. But that applies to the autopsy of any poem. Sometimes years later the poet isn't sure what he meant at the point of writing the poem.

—A. S. FICK
Fort Johnson, N.Y., U.S.A.

IT MAY, we think, be accepted that the poem was not intended to mean anything. In the Gem story the juniors of St. Jim's were planning a lower-school magazine. The poem was submitted by a member of the editorial board. Another member thought it sounded very

good—but what did it mean? We echoed his question.

Another verse in the same story is equally as meaningless, but it doesn't sound so lovely. We intended to include it in the short article, then left it out. It reads:

A dicky-bird sat on a garden wall,
A spring onion grew below;
And the dicky-bird sighed, as the
onion he eyed,
As he watched it grow and grow.
"Oh, dearest spring onion," the
dicky-bird cried,
"I love you, I love you so!"

Martin Clifford meant it all in fun!

Our short contribution which included the beautiful-sounding poem only earned a place in S. P. C. because nothing else was available to fill the space. It was put together many years ago for just such an emergency. There have been other such emergencies, but always until this time something else has been found.

Anyone who has not tried assembling the material to fill the pages of even a very small magazine probably does not realize what a problem it can be to fill odd pages and parts of pages. If the space is small, a typographical ornament may be used. If it is larger, then something in the way of reading matter must be put together.

—W.H.G.

The Story Paper Collector

No. 76—Vol. 4

Priceless

WE BEG TO DISAGREE!

By W. O. G. LOFTS

THE LETTER by Jim Cook published in *The Story Paper Collector* Number 74, criticising points in an earlier article on St. Frank's by Berenice Thorne, brings to mind how vastly we collectors differ in opinions and topics relating to the hobby of old boys' papers. To produce some concrete evidence in respect to that controversy, I should like to point out that Edwy Searles Brooks himself stated some years ago, when attending a London Old Boys' Book Club meeting, that he was told to model his St. Frank's characters on those in the Charles Hamilton type of school

stories. This should be the last word on the matter.

"If we all agreed about everything, how dull this world and our hobby would be," Eric Fayne, Editor of *The Collectors' Digest*, once wrote to me. His popular feature in that magazine proves by the replies from readers the tremendous interest shown in controversial subjects. Controversy is, however, not confined to collectors, as this article will show. Indeed, authors, and former sub-editors of *The Magnet*, are inclined to disagree about certain policies themselves!

First, I would like to quote

.....

☆ To avoid any misunderstanding among readers of this article, the word "substitute" is spelled in full and refers to substitute writers or stories. "Sub," "subbed," and "subbing" refer to sub-editors and their work.

G. R. Samways' comments about an article I wrote for *The Story Paper Collector* Number 64, *Inside the Magnet Office*:

This article interested me a great deal. Of course you wrote it in very good faith, and were very kind in exonerating me from the alleged blunders at the time; yet I feel that the whole article gives a false picture. The *Magnet* staff of that day, so far from being a set of nincompoops, were the most brilliant and talented young men I have ever had the pleasure to work with. They were not misfits, but each qualified to be on the staff of the *Companion Papers*.

I do not agree at all that the papers were ill-staffed and ill-served at that period. It was suggested that the present-day *Magnet* and *Gem* experts would have made a much better job of it. With this I profoundly disagree. Under these worthy gentlemen the stories would have achieved a higher literary tone, but I am sure they would have been insufferably dull, and as unreadable as the old B. O. P. stories.

The biggest mistake in the article was the omission of the man who mattered most—the Editor, H. A. Hinton! He was responsible for the administration and policy of the *Companion Papers*, and the selection of the stories; the sub-editors had no say at all in such matters. The full blame for any alleged mismanagement must, therefore, rest upon the

Editor's shoulders, though in my opinion Hinton was a most efficient supervisor. He had been the right-hand man of Hamilton Edwards, who thought very highly of him.

When Hinton was Editor of the *Companion Papers*, a substitute story was subjected to two tests—the post-bag and the circulation. If the readers' letters praised the story and if the circulation was maintained or increased by it, then the substitute writer was encouraged to continue. If, on the other hand, the story was not liked by readers, or if the circulation slumped, the substitute writer had to make a speedy improvement, or he was not persevered with.

Stories were not judged, at that time (like they are today by collectors), by high literary standards, but solely by the measure of their appeal to the schoolboy public, and their effect upon the circulation.

Nobody writing forty years after, with only the scantiest information at his disposal, could be expected to give a true-to-life picture of the *Magnet* office as it was in 1920. But I do feel that less than justice has been done to the staff of those days, and considerably less than justice to the poor unfortunate substitute writers.

MY ARTICLE, written some four years ago, obviously needs a great deal of revision, in view of fresh authentic

information obtained since that date. As Mr. Samways points out, the substitute stories in H. A. Hinton's period in office (1913-1921) were the sole responsibility of the Editor, then Mr. Hinton must take the blame for the poorness of some of them. I have always been led to understand that in Mr. Down's period of editorship (1921-1940) the sub-editors read the proofs of all the substitute stories, as well as the genuine Hamilton tales, and I still stand by my statements made regarding this period in my previous article.

I do, however, feel that I was a little unfair to Mr. C. M. Down in my 1957 article. I had the pleasure of meeting him some time ago, and he obviously knew the characters as well as anyone. Probably, with due modesty, Mr. Down could claim to be the most highly successful of all the substitute writers, as he wrote some of the early Gem stories of such merit that many collectors (including John Shaw in his lists of genuine Hamilton stories) have mistaken them as having been written by the real "Martin Clifford"! *The Schoolboy Jockey* and *The St. Jim's Motorcyclist* are but two of them.

A writer, actively connected with *Magnet* and *Gem* affairs in the 1915-1929 period, who for certain reasons wishes to remain

anonymous, has shown great interest in recent articles in *The Story Paper Collector*. His comments on my 1957 article, and later ones, are here quoted:

I wrote my first Gem story at the age of seventeen; different of course from Hamilton, but even more different from John Nix Pentelow! The root of the trouble in finding substitutes was that, despite what C. M. Down has been reported to have said, there were no trained substitutes. Don't ask me why. Charles Hamilton was living in the South of France, and simply got behind with his work; substitutes were needed unless he caught up with schedule. Therefore, the need for them was his fault. If Charles Hamilton had co-operated, as he should have done in his own interests, a good system could have been arranged. It was obviously against his interests to have inferior work published under his pen-names. The Amalgamated Press never had the legal right to publish substitute stories—except with his written consent.

Charles Hamilton, in my opinion, was never paid a fair rate. His stories were never "subbed"; there was no editorial work of selection. Therefore he could have taken his stories to any publishing firm.

Eventually, he did come to battle, and my information is that, to ensure continuance of the papers in

the event of his death or crippling illness, he was paid for the rights of his characters, thus entitling The Amalgamated Press to employ others to write about them.

In my view, a likely writer should have been coached to imitate Mr. Hamilton, with his full approval. Substitute stories should have been sent to him for comment, and perhaps modification, and sanction. But, in plain fact, one man cannot think with another's mind, and as readers seldom remained so for more than five years, there could have been a repetition roster of stories and incidents; and Hamilton should have been allowed to "plagiarise" himself, more or less, with paste and scissors. The truth of the matter is that demands were made on Hamilton and responded to by him far beyond his output capacity; but no one deliberately planned how to fill in the gaps. "Subbing" is not the answer. In fact, "subbing" is a great evil. There is no guarantee that Y, who "subs" X's version, knows more about the characters than X—or that if their positions were reversed, X would not "sub" Y to his own taste. The "sub," in the "subbing" system, has the last word. But, if he is the better judge, he should write the stories. A man may like a story without understanding the subtle technique of story-writing; and therefore the very thing he alters may in fact, without him realising it, have an important bearing on

his liking the total effect of the story.

Summing it up, therefore—in my view, the only person capable of "subbing" an ersatz story was Charles Hamilton himself! He could have been paid a fee; better still, his stories should not have been reprinted mutilated in The Penny Popular, but should have been reprinted as substitutes in The Magnet in case he had been taken ill. Just suppose that Charles Hamilton had died in 1919. How long would the papers have lasted on substitute stories, which as the weeks went by became less and less like Hamilton? If there had been one substitute writer only, or even two, then although unavoidably bringing their own mentality and moral attitude into the stories, the style at least would have been consistent, and if they had acquired a natural readership, this could have been maintained as their own if Charles Hamilton had died.

But a plague on "subbing"! A man who feels that "Gussy would not have said that" may feel so justly without being able to say just what Gussy would have said. It would be rather fun if a small "Imitate Hamilton" competition was held in The Story Paper Collector. Select some incident from a Charles Hamilton story, reasonably short, and challenge readers (a) to say what is wrong with a substitute version; (b) give their version of

how Hamilton would have written it; and then produce the original.

I think you would see the true value of "subbing" then: because (b) will be the "sub's" version of (a). Equally delightful would be for A to "sub" an ersatz and to pass his version to B, who would "sub" and rewrite and then pass to C, who would "sub" and pass to D., etc. Each would send the version he had received to the judge, who would finally have the lot. That, I think, would say the last word on the value of "subbing"!

THIS AUTHOR, later, gave me his comments on the G. R. Samways articles, and the "Circulation of The Magnet and The Gem" items which appeared recently:

I was most interested to read the article about George R. Samways, and am glad to know that he is still alive and lively. He had very great ability, and his versifying for the Companion Papers and his short stories, were quite outstanding, and it was surprising that he gave up writing when he did. Perhaps I was an exception, but I remember reading some of his Greyfriars stories, when a boy, and somehow they seemed a little different to me. But he wrote his Greyfriars stories much better than his Gem yarns—where in my opinion his "Gussy" was totally unlike Hamilton's and quite lost his character of a "gentleman."

With all due respect to Mr. Samways, with regard to his statement on the pen-names "Frank Richards" and "Martin Clifford" as used by The Amalgamated Press: An author who shall be nameless once used the scissors and paste method of cutting out extracts and sections from old Charles Hamilton stories, and made a patchwork quilt of them into a "new" story. He had it typed, and thus produced the best imitation of Charles Hamilton ever. He was bowled out by "someone's" good memory, left the firm hurriedly, and no more work was accepted from him. [This author died some 20 years ago.—w.o.g.l.] This author obviously had a good defence—if he had only been bold, open, and not furtive. The good of the paper, and therefore, the benefit of the shareholders, demanded that readers should not be disappointed, and obviously it would have been far wiser to fake a jig-saw Hamilton story from bits of earlier ones, juggling incidents and so on, than to write a non-Hamilton fake.

Thinking about it, surely The Amalgamated Press in accusing someone of plagiarising was in the position of the pot calling the kettle black? It is all very well to be shocked and appalled at, say, an author selling them a story of his own which was in fact a hotch-potched Hamilton. But was their conduct any better, selling readers a story as Hamilton's which was in

fact someone else's? If I buy a book because it is advertised to have been written by P. G. Wodehouse and I can prove it was written by an imitator who did not give me what I reasonably expected in the way of wit and writing, I contend I have a just case for demanding compensation.

If *The Magnet* had advertised that the Greyfriars stories were being written by someone else, then I, not liking the new versions might well have stopped buying them. It is a very odd position. Perhaps this poser can be put to S.P.C. readers: would they rather have a story composed of genuine Hamilton bits, completely genuine except the permutation, or would they rather have a complete "Hamilton" by someone else? It would be much harder for a writer jig-sawing a Hamilton story than writing a new one from scratch! He would be entitled to as much money as for writing the story. Only Charles Hamilton's permission would be needed.

Speaking from memory, *The Magnet's* circulation was always higher than that of *The Gem*. The reason for this may have been that the plots, to my mind, were generally more dramatic and "sobby," oddly enough, but enlivened by the comic Bunter, and greatly helped by Bob Cherry. When Bob was expelled in the famous barring-out series some readers dropped the paper, and at least one wrote that "without Bob

Cherry, the paper had lost its pull" for him. Bob, of course, came back, and those who had dropped the paper may not have known so for some time. It just shows the danger of expelling heroes. If the readers are told in advance he will come back, the series loses pull; if they are not told this, the paper loses circulation!

One reason for the lowish circulation of both papers was the commercially absurd methods in producing the Hamilton material. Apart from *The Magnet*, *The Gem*, Rookwood stories in *The Boys' Friend*, reprints in *The Penny Popular*, Dick Trumper yarns in the comic *Chuckles*, they started to reprint the stories again in *The Schoolboys' Own Library*. Fantastic! Charles Hamilton could not possibly write this lot, and the substitute writers in the long run, except when used very sparsely, lost readers, naturally—or Hamilton wouldn't be worth much as a creator if he could really be imitated. Had Hamilton's "pull" been concentrated wholly in the two papers, and had they and Hamilton and his characters been advertised, the circulation would have been a lot higher.

Also, when comparing circulations then and now one must admit that the salient difference is primarily due to ordered copies. In those days the great mass of the community did not have a standing order at their newagent's, and parents did

not buy their children "comics" as they do today. When papers must be bought from pocket-money which is limited and subject to rival demands, circulations tend to be low. Now, a child may not read his weekly paper for some reason or other for a week or two, but it will still be delivered, and a back-lag of serial-reading can be made up. Then, the loss of two issues would make serials not worth going on with and perhaps the paper's not being worth buying for that reason.

Then there is the factor that parents in those days had not themselves been readers of A. P. papers and were often unfairly critical of them as "bloods"; parents today who read A. P. papers in childhood are on the other hand generally sympathetic to the demand for them as a necessity not to be included in

pocket-money costs.

If the A. P. had publicised and popularised their own writers, and made those writers' names household possessions, they would not now have to pay top price for Enid Blyton. They are paying for her publisher's build-up; the value is solely in the name's being well-known. It is only in recent years that Charles Hamilton's name has been widely advertised—but not by Fleetway House, which never seemed to attach any importance to him, largely because it was always believed that high circulations were entirely due to representatives, circulation manager, advertisement men, and almost anyone but the authors and editors, who were considered to have little part in circulation build-up.

The Dreadnought, No. 8 of Vol. 1

WITH *Fun and Fiction* well established in public favour, in March of 1912 the time was considered opportune to launch a companion paper with a similar type of stories. That might have been a reasonable decision, but the further decision to make the new paper,

The Dreadnought, a large size one, is open to question. At that time it must have been apparent that the large size for story papers was slipping a little in popularity: *The Empire* had failed in that size the previous year, and *The Boys' Herald* was approaching its end, which came the following May.

That the size was wrong was brought home to the publishers, The Amalgamated Press, very quickly, for *The Dreadnought* ran

for only twelve weeks before a change was made. Thereafter it was issued in the smaller *Magnet* size, the numbering being started at Volume 2, Number 1. This was a new idea: the usual practice on the occasion of a change in page size was to start a new series at Number 1, Volume 1.

The front page illustration of *The Dreadnought*, Volume 1, Number 8, which is shown in the reproduction on page 7, is worthy of a little scrutiny. The artist was required to depict a box, with a lid that was opened by mechanism inside upon the

application of a turning motion at the front. But it would seem that what he had in mind when he planned the picture was an enormous Thorens cigarette lighter.

Editorial features consisted of seven stories, completes and serials, two articles on football, and a full page feature entitled *Our Cinematograph Page*. The latter was a story told in pictures, with two brief descriptive paragraphs at the foot of the page. It surely must have been a fore-runner of today's picture-story magazines.



ON BEGINNING VOLUME 4

WITH THE THIRD volume of *The Story Paper Collector* completed, we are doing something that we did not do following the completion of Volumes 1 and 2: we are starting on the next volume before printing the title/contents/index pages for the previous volume. This means a delay for those who wish to have their copies of Numbers 51 to 75 bound. We regret this delay, but under the circumstances it could not be avoided.

After this issue is printed, S. P. C. will be "placed on the

shelf" for an indefinite period. Twenty years of publishing have been accomplished, plus this 20th Anniversary Number. Just how soon the magazine will be taken off the shelf it is impossible to state. But we hope it will be before too many months have passed.

* * *

SINCE THE MAILING of copies of Number 75, many letters of appreciation have been received. We quote from a few of them:

Number 75 is the end of Volume 3! A wonderful achievement, I

think, and I am sure that S.P.C. will be treasured long after we are all gone. I was looking through some of the earlier copies, and I was struck by the beautiful illustrations of some of the old boys' books, which in themselves are enough to cause S.P.C. to be treasured. — C. WRIGHT

Greenwich, London, England.

Many thanks for Number 75 of S.P.C. Congratulations on so splendid and so well-sustained an effort. As Dr. Watson once remarked to you-know-whom: "You are a benefactor of the race!" The race of old boys' books collectors who owe you so deep a debt of gratitude!

— J. C. IRALDI

Long Island City, N.Y., U.S.A.

May I offer you my warm congratulations on the completion of Volume 3 of S.P.C. This is a wonderful effort, and must be a great source of satisfaction to you. I greatly value receiving S.P.C., and I am

sure you must be gratified at the thought of the pleasure you give so many of your fellow collectors.

— W. T. THURBON

Cambridge, England.

Congratulations on three volumes! Quite tremendous going!

— C. F. F. RICKARD

North Vancouver, B.C., Canada.

My thanks and hearty congratulations on the 75th number of S.P.C. Your achievement is indeed one of which to be proud. Besides the high standard of the articles, there is the beautiful appearance of the magazine itself.

— G. ALLISON

Merston, Ilkley, Yorks, England.



I Wish to Obtain . . .

— Numbers 2 to 11, 13 to 16, 32, 34 to 38, 40 to 43 of S.P.C. — Tom Langley, 340 Baldwins Lane, Hall Green, Birmingham 28, England.



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