

MARCH
1966

Collectors' Digest

The RIO KID'S REVENGE

by RALPH REDWAY

VOLUME
20

NUMBER
231

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Collectors' Digest

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No. 231

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WRITE TO ME ABOUT IT.



PUBLICITY AND ALL THAT:

In early February, under the heading "The great Billy Bunter exposé," a national newspaper published what purported to be an inter-

view with Mr. W. O. G. Lofts. He is quoted as giving "unshakeable evidence that Billy Bunter was 'pinched' by Richards from another author. The plain fact cannot be disputed at all."

Comments of this type, made in newspapers, are unfortunate, to put it mildly. Mr. Lofts tells us that he was misquoted for one thing, and for another, he had no idea that the interview was to be written up and published. 'There is a lesson for us all in the matter - to keep a guard on our tongues if we discuss the hobby with newspaper reporters. And the better known we are in the old boys' book world, the greater is our responsibility.

In an excellent article, elsewhere in this issue, Mr. Roger Jenkins makes it convincingly clear that there is no proof at all that Charles Hamilton did not actually invent the name of Billy Bunter. Mr. Hamilton often used names, over and over again, but his early stories are mainly lost in the mists of time.

Mr. Frank Lay gives us an interesting piece of information. He writes: "In the Boys' Journal, 1914, there is a story by Charles Hamilton of Highcliffe School (not the Highcliffe we normally associate with C.H.) and one of the characters is Taffy Llewellyn." Mr. Lay comments: "It does seem that if neither read the other's stories, then they certainly lengthened the arm of coincidence somewhat."

The strange thing about it all is that, when names are so easy to

create, so much duplication should have occurred. It really doesn't make sense.

For ourselves, we sincerely hope that the press will now give Bunter and the hobby a welcome rest for a while.

A QUESTION OF IMPORTS:

My old tutor of English Language used to impress upon me never to invent words of my own. He may have been a bit old-fashioned. Somewhere or other I have read that it takes a genius to invent words. In that case, there must be plenty of geni about, especially in the U.S.A., for I have the impression that most of the new words flying round are imports from America.

One word I have heartily disliked in recent years is "commuter." In my ignorance I assumed it was a post-war import from the States. It comes as quite a shock to find that 50 years ago our young friend Danny saw a film named "The Commuters" about people who live at a distance from their work.

It seems that amateur magazines overseas go under the name of Fanzines - or, if time is short, just Zines. Recently I received one of these zines - The Comic Reader - from the editor, Mr. Derrill Rothermich of Rolla, Missouri. Mr. Rothermich would like to enlist some English readers under his banner.

Comic Reader gives "coverage of comics fandom," and, so far as I can judge, deals with old and new American comics. The magazine is well produced, consisting of 20 pages, the size of our Annual sheets.

There is perhaps not a lot to interest English readers, but in the January issue a column headed "Bidgee," by John Ryan of Australia, spotlights our Australian Club members, takes a look at Australian collecting, and has a few comments to make on Collectors' Digest. There are also two reproductions of Magnet covers, plus a cover from the Union Jack. Mr. Ryan points to the 27th issue of C.D. as evidence of consistency in "fanzine" production. He may have something there. Among other interesting items, he sees sinister possibilities in the publication of Magnet No. 1. In the future, unscrupulous dealers may pass off these latter-day issues as original collectors' items. I doubt whether that side of the matter bothers us very much.

"The Comic Reader" is obtainable from Mr. Derrill Rothermich at Box 801, Rolla, Missouri, 65401, U.S.A. It costs one dollar (just over 7/-) which includes mailing.

We hope that it will never become general in this country for story papers of the class of the Magnet, Gem, and Nelson Lee to be known as "comics." Perish the thought that one day the O.B.B.C. may

THE BILLY BUNTER CONTROVERSY

By Roger M. Jenkins

Possibly a number of collectors were surprised to read in the Daily Mirror on February 2nd that Bill Lofts has been "looking into it for fifteen years and now he's come up with the truth." He goes on to say that as H. Philpott Wright featured a Billy Bunter in the Vanguard a year before the Magnet began, "this gives unshakeable evidence that Billy Bunter was pinched by Richards," and so "the plain fact cannot be disputed at all."

To my simple mind, the matter is not clear at all. First of all, I draw a sharp distinction between fact and inference. The fact is that the Vanguard Bunter appeared some months before the Magnet Bunter, but it is only an inference that the character was "pinched." No doubt the Daily Mirror reporter did Bill Lofts an injustice in the way he wrote up the interview, but I still prefer the account that Eric Payne wrote in the last C.D. Annual.

The charge that Charles Hamilton was guilty of plagiarism was made as long ago as 1940 by George Orwell in his famous Horizon article. He said that as there was a Mr. Prout in "Stalky & Co." the Greyfriars Mr. Prout must have been a copy of him. To this charge Charles Hamilton pointed out the difference in the characters of the two Mr. Prouts, and then added significantly, "Characters in a story must, after all, have names. Every name in existence has been used over and over again in fiction."

It is also a curious fact that Charles Hamilton had a preference for some names and used them over and over again, like Mr. Snaith who was often a villain in a Magnet or Gem series, but it was never intended to be the same man as before. When Tom Merry went to school at Clavering College, Mr. Quelch was master of the Shell and Wingate the school captain. Many critics have commented on this trend. John Medcraft in the September 1948 number of the Collector's Miscellany listed several names that were used many times, and then went on to say that Charles Hamilton "in the Marvel of 1908 wrote a few stories of Netherby School and Beechwood Academy with Hurree Singh, Redfern, and Owen Lawrence as central characters. The stories did not last and Hurree Singh was transplanted in Greyfriars, but we heard no more of the other two until, needing fresh characters for the St. Jim's series, they were split into three and reappeared as Redfern, Owen, and Lawrence."

We have, therefore, good grounds for suspecting that perhaps the name Billy Bunter was used by Charles Hamilton before the Magnet

appeared. In No. 41 of the 1st Gem, published at the end of 1907, there appeared a plump and lazy tramp named Bill Bunter. I cannot help suspecting that if anyone had the energy to read through all Charles Hamilton's work that was published between 1899 (when he claimed that he first thought of Bunter) and 1907, it is possible that the name of Bunter might appear therein, perhaps more than once.

But even if such a search yielded nothing, we are still left in indecision, since the use of another author's character name proves nothing more than it did in the Mr. Prout episode. In fact, if one author was so desperate that he wanted to "pinch" from another, I should think that he would be more likely to copy a character and give it a name of his own, than copy a name and give it a new character. To my mind, however, an author who had already established such a memorable assembly of characters as the Gem could then boast was hardly the type of author who would need to steal from another. So my verdict is "Not Proven."

. . . .

(EDITOR'S COMMENT: I find Mr. Jenkins' arguments entirely convincing. In the article in Collectors' Digest Annual we wrote: "Did Charles Hamilton know that, while he wrote of Billy Bunter for the Magnet, another Billy Bunter, and an older one, was going strong in Vanguard? To my mind it is impossible that Charles Hamilton did not know."

I repeat now - to my mind it is impossible that he did not know. Therefore his only reason for using Bunter in the Magnet could have been that he had actually created the name Billy Bunter in a story or stories published before Vanguard. Because the name was his creation, he deliberately used it again in his Magnet series. And Vanguard or Wright could do nothing about it.

Such an action - poetic justice - on the part of Charles Hamilton would be on a par with his writing, years later, the story "Frank Richards' Substitute" in the Cedar Creek series, which was a thinly-veiled protest against the substitute writers. Gerry Allison has previously discussed this Cedar Creek story.)

SALE: Nelson Lees, Chatterbox Annual 1923, 28 Knockouts 1961, 10/- lot.
2 Vols Ladies Realm 1897-8, 5/- each. Post extra.

65, BENTHAM STREET, BELFAST.

WANTED: Collectors' Digests before September 1965, also C.D. Annuals.

11, DUNLOE AVENUE, TOTTENHAM, LONDON, N.17

DANNY'S DIARY

MARCH 1916:

The Greyfriars Herald has packed up after just 18 weeks. I feel very sorry, for I always liked the Herald and it was fine value for a halfpenny. They say the end has come because of a shortage of paper, and this may be true, because for the past week or two there has been a lot in the editor's chats about the paper shortage, and most of the papers are now smaller. Alas! Still, quite a long time ago the editor was complaining that the circulation of the Herald was "slipping away." So I just wonder.

There has been no cut in size so far of the Boys' Friend, and only a week or two ago they had an enlarged issue. I really only read Rookwood in the Friend, so perhaps it is not such good value for money for me. I don't care much for the boxing and adventure stories. All the Rookwood tales this month have been about snobbery, and two more fresh faces and figures have come on the scene.

I don't really care much about snobbery tales which always seem exajeratated, but these were very good ones all the same. A new boy named Rawson came to Rookwood on a scholarship, and Townsend & Co were horrified because his father worked for his living. The two opening stories of the series were "Scorned by the Slackers" and "Keeping His End Up." In the third tale, "The Scholarship Boy's Secret" it was shown that there is a fat boy at Rookwood. His name is Tubby Muffin, and this is the first tale in which he has appeared. Rawson has a brother who is a prisoner of war in Germany, and as a private in the army he had rescued his officer. Finally there was a kind of Parents' Day at Rookwood in the last tale of the series "Rallying Round Rawson," and Mr. Rawson came visiting, as did Major Townsend. And it turned out that Major Townsend knew Rawson's brother, so the Major and Mr. Rawson got quite chummy. A nice series, I thought, even though I don't like snobbery tales.

I exchanged one of my Boys' Friends with my pal Lindsay for a Boys' Realm. It is not a paper I like very much, and I don't know anybody who has it regularly. It had a serial called "Hidden Beneath the Sea" by Sidney Warwick, and this was a school and weird adventure yarn, and I galloped through the long instalment. There is also a series about a Scot named Chip McGregor, which is not too bad - but Lindsay got the best of the exchange.

All the month I have been to the pictures once a week, and some-

times even twice a week. I didn't care much for Pauline Frederick in "Zaza" - it was too boosum-heaving - but I went because the new Chaplin "Charlie at Work" was in the programme. Another time I saw Mary Pickford in "Esmeralda," and this was nice. There was a funny Fatty Arbuckle comedy "Fatty's Plucky Pup" which was about a dog with a big ring round its eye.

Dad came with us to see Lou Tellegen in "The Explorers" and in this programme was Charlie in "Dough and Dynamite." This was not a new Chaplin, but an older one he made for Keystone.

Alice Delysia in "She" was quite mysterious, and Henry Ainley and Alma Taylor in "Iris" made Mum sniff a bit into her handkerchief. Another time we saw "The Commuters" which was fairish. It seems that commuters are people who live in the subbubs but go into town every day by train or bus or tram to work. There was a screaming 2-part Keystone called "The Cannon-Ball" in this programme.

After a very bad month in February, when I despaired, the Gem has been bang back up to standard all through March. Even though yet another new boy has come on the scene at St. Jim's. He is Reggie Manners. The first two tales of the month were "Manners Minor" and "The Right Stuff," and they were both first class. Manners Minor, a spoiled lad, attacked Mr. Selby with a whip, and Manners Major got blamed for it - but it all turned out all right in the end. That other newish character, Piggott of the Third, featured in these tales, and at the finish we found that Wally D'Arcy, Joe Frayne, and Reggie Manners had formed a kind of a new Co.

With the third story, "By Luck and Pluck," the Gem was reduced from 32 pages to 28. It was a far-fetched tale, I think, but quite exciting, and I liked it. A German spy named Schultz had taken a lonely house where some of the boys tried to shelter from the rain. Two spies tried to get away in a balloon, and the Terrible Three and Talbot were carried away too, but they managed to overcome the Huns and the balloon came down near Abbotsford Camp where Colonel Lyndon was in charge.

Finally, "Spoofing the Swell" was an amusing tale. Gussy tried to organise a campaign against the neutral countries which make money out of the war while the British Empire fights it. Gussy made up a big party to visit Wayland Cinema, but when they got there, they found they were expected to be pickets to stop people going to see American films. In this tale Bernard Glyn constructed a working model of Gussy, and Clifton Dane played quite a big part. All told a grand month in the Gem.

My brother Douglas bought me the new Boys' Friend 3d Library "Rivals & Chums" by Frank Richards. It is a splendid story about Frank Courtenay, De Courcy, and a gambling den. It is quite one of the best Frank Richards tales ever written. I may be a nut, but if this story is written by the same author who did "School & Sport," then my name's Little Willie and Kaiser Bill's my dad.

I have done an extravagant deed. A bottle of lemonade costs a penny, and there is also a penny on the bottle. I smashed the bottle in order to get the large glass marble out of the top. And then I wished I hadn't done it. A glass marble is nice to have, but a penny would buy a couple of halfpenny comics. When I mentioned it to Mum she said that it was a silly thing to do and I will only learn by aperiens.

Now that the Greyfriars Herald has finished, the Tuck Hamper competition, is continuing in the Boys' Friend, and the serial "Pride of the Ring" is being carried on in the Magnet. As the Magnet is now reduced to 28 pages, we could have done without a second serial.

It has not been a good month in the Magnet. The first story "Skinner the Skipper" was a silly affair in which Harry Wharton resigned as Remove captain, and Skinner took his place. Phyllis Howell and her hockey team came into this one.

The next two stories were a good deal better, though I was not all that keen on them. A new boy, Rupprecht von Rattenstein, the son of a German princeling, naturalised in England, turned up, and he was a horrid character, causing much mischief till Phyllis Howell took matters in hand. These two tales are called "His Highness" and "When Friends Fall Out." Rattenstein is still at Greyfriars, so I reckon he will feature again.

The last tale of the month "The Mailed Fist at Greyfriars" strikes me as a terribly written affair, and so unbelievable. A Color Ranter appoints a Sergeant Burrell as musketry-instructor at Greyfriars. He bullies the boys. At the end, Harry Wharton is to be presented with a shield by General Martyn. Sergeant Burrell says "Of course it was me wot done it. They wouldn't never 'ave done nothin' but for my vallyble tooition."

Then General Martyn recognizes Burrell as a criminal and not an instructor at all. Burrell said "Yus, sir. 'Ave pity on a poor cove wot's down, sir!"

And General Martyn says grimly to the Head: "Let the boys deal with him. The police are too busy to be bothered just now."

I think this tale must have lost its way in the dark. I reckon it was intended for Comic Cuts but somehow got landed in the Magnet.

NELSON LEE COLUMN

CONDUCTED BY JACK WOOD

EDWY SEARLES BROOKS

HAIL AND FAREWELL

A TRIBUTE BY J. R. MURTAGH, NEW ZEALAND

I doubt if any reader of E.S.B.'s. stories was more saddened by the news of his death than myself. I feel that I have lost a good friend and a man who through his writings has had a great influence on my life.

The Nelson Lee Library was the first of the boys papers I ever read and I loved it from the start. The Magnet, Gem, Union Jack and Sexton Blake all came later but could never displace my first love. I chased up every back issue I could get hold of, No. 529 being the first one I read but 36 years were to pass before I finally completed my set of Nelson Lees from the very first one in 1915 to the last issue in 1933.

I first wrote to E.S.B. in 1928 and I still have his breezy reply; this was the start of a correspondence that was to continue on and off for over 35 years. In 1957 E.S.B. paid me the grandest compliment any author can pay a reader - he dedicated a book to me - this book "The Golden Monkey" by Victor Gunn had in the fly leaf - "To John R. Murtagh of Hastings, New Zealand, who a glutton for punishment has read my stories for more years than either of us care to remember. Thanks Jack."

The personally autographed copy E.S.B. sent me is one of my most treasured possessions. My one regret is that I was never able to meet him in person.

My old mother who lived to 85 used to say she had had her three score and ten and was living on a bonus after that. E.S.B. who was born in 1889 would be 76 when he died; it's a pity he didn't get a bigger bonus than six years but let us be thankful he was with us so long and remember he will always be with us through his many characters who will live with us for the rest of our lives.

As I said in my tribute to Frank Richards and the same applies to E.S.B. The boys of St. Frank's and all the others will live on much longer than any of us or our children, but we are the fortunate ones - we have lived in a period of time when these stories were published

week by week and when the writer lived and this period has been a very pleasant part of our lives, so let us be grateful for that and remember that E.S.B. will live on through the many lovable characters he created.

Thank you Edwy for the many delightful hours you have given us, I feel that you too will have a very special place behind the veil as a reward for all the happiness and joy you have brought to millions of youngsters and many not so young for over half a century - hail and farewell.

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A TRIBUTE TO EDWY SEARLES BROOKS

By Jim Sutcliffe

Like other Nelson Lee enthusiasts I was shocked to read in the January C.D. of the death of Edwy Searles Brooks.

I did not have the pleasure of meeting Mr. Brooks at any time and have regretted ever since that I could not manage to get to the London Club meeting that he attended just over a year ago.

I am, however, the proud possessor of sixteen letters, being correspondence between Edwy Searles Brooks and myself during the years 1931-2 when he resided at Halstead in Essex.

This began with a letter I wrote to him through the medium of "Between Ourselves" and I can still recall my delight on receiving a personal reply and to find that my idol actually lived in the same county as myself and only a mere thirty miles away.

With the demise of the Nelson Lee Library in 1933, I, and no doubt other readers, wondered if Brooks was still alive but with the re-appearance of his chat column at the back of the "Gem" this fear was unfounded and I wrote to him again in 1934 and had a reply.

From then, until I came to know of our club in 1952, I still imagined that Brooks must be living in Essex. I again wrote to him in 1954 and had a cordial reply thanking me for my past interest and my present interest in his Victor Gunn and Berkeley Gray novels which I have been collecting ever since I became aware that he was the author of these.

In Collins Spring Catalogue just published there are shown what must be the last two novels he wrote - "The Petticoat Lane Murders" by Victor Gunn and "Curtains For Conquest?" by Berkeley Gray, (MAY). It seems a sad coincidence that although a query is shown after the title it really is "curtains" for Conquest.

Edwy Searles Brooks is no longer with us in the flesh but his spirit will live on and whenever we can escape from the rigours of

the hectic life of today and regale ourselves by reading of the adventures of the St. Frank's juniors, whether it be a Christmas series at some ancestral home, a summer holiday series on some Pacific island or a mystery series at the school we shall remember him and the pleasure he brought us with his writing.

HUMOROUS GLEANINGS

By "Leeite"

Few were the times when Timothy Tucker could obtain an audience for his speech-making. Such an occasion was on a wet half-holiday when the fellows listened, mainly because they were unable to indulge in outdoor activities. The following extract is from "The Diamond of Fate" No. 260 old series.

"There are, of course, many types of humanity," went on Tucker, warming to his work. "The lowest type, as everybody knows, exists in Australia. The aborigines are the most animal-like creatures honoured by the name of human beings. We have in the Remove a certain boy who somewhat resembles an Australian aborigine!"

"Who's that?" inquired Pitt.

"I am referring to Handforth ----"

"Poor old Handy!"

"It's a good thing he's not here. He'd slaughter this ass on the spot!"

"Exactly, my friends - exactly!" shouted Tucker. "You have grasped my point."

"Eh?"

"You realise what I have been attempting to describe," said T.T. "Handforth, you declare, would - er - slaughter me! There you have the matter in a nutshell. Handforth is a savage by nature! His actions prove this to be so. Admitted. The position, therefore, is this. Handforth being a savage, cannot help his savage actions. It is a great delight with him to punch noses, and to draw blood. It is the wild, brutal instinct with him, which compels this behaviour. One glance at his face is sufficient to tell any observant person that Handforth is of a low type of humanity. I am not blaming the fellow. He cannot help it in the least. I am, indeed, inclined to sympathise with him!"

"You'll need some sympathy of your own soon" grinned De Valerie.

Other fellows were grinning too, and not without reason. For Edward Oswald Handforth himself was descending the staircase behind Timothy Tucker. The lunatic of St. Frank's was quite unaware of his

impending fate.

"Yes, I am certainly inclined to sympathise with Handforth," went on Tucker complacently, "in some ways he is a very good fellow. But, at the same time, it is a matter of common knowledge that Handforth is utterly depraved in his habits and customs.

"Go it, T.T. !" said Pitt encouragingly, with half an eye on Handforth. "Let's hear some more about poor old Handforth."

"I have hardly entered my subject yet!" declared Tucker. "You have all observed the low forehead - a sure mark of savage nature! His eyes, set closely together, after the manner of a pig - what - what - Dear me! I must insist upon your releasing me --"

"You insulting little worm!" bellowed Handforth into Tucker's ear. "Eyes like a pig! Low forehead! An Australian aborigine! If you get out of this alive, it'll be a wonder."

Tucker had been taken from the rear, otherwise Handforth would not have gained such an advantage. With a firm grip on Tucker's collar and the seat of his trousers, Handforth rushed him out of the lobby, down the Ancient House steps, and dropped him into one of the big muddy puddles in the Triangle.

SALE: PICTUREGOER (Bound), 1942, 1936, 1937. Hobbies Volume One Bound 6/- . Frank Richards' Autobiography 1st edition 7s. 6d.

WANTED: Volume Magnet (Bound).

McWILLIAMS, 35 TESTLANDS AVENUE, NURSLING, HANTS.

WANTED: New or nearly new copy of "Billy Bunter's Barring-Out;" also Magnets and Gems.

256, TOWNSEND AVENUE, LIVERPOOL 11.

WANTED: Good loose copies or volumes containing any one or more of the following: MAGNETS: 32; 39; 40; 41; 42; 44; 45; 131 to 149 inclusive, 205; 238; 239; 309; 328; 337; 351 to 359 inclusive; 435; 752; 753; 762; 763; 773; 850; 858; 862; 863; 864; 865; 868; 921; 940; 942; 951; 985; 988. GEMS: 493; some issues between 801 and 832; 953; 954; 956; 975; 980; 984; 985; 989; 990; 992; 993; 998.
POPULARS: 452; 455; 466; 472.

ERIC FAYNE, EXCELSIOR HOUSE, GROVE RD., SURBITON, SURREY.

HAMILTONIANA

THOSE RARE HAMILTONIA

BOYS FRIEND LIBRARIES

By W. O. G. Lofts

It speaks volumes for the writings of Charles Hamilton; when easily the most valuable of the Boys Friend Libraries are those which contain the school stories of his creation. I know for a fact that No. 288 The Boy Without a Name and its sequel No. 328 Rivals and Chums, both dealing with Highcliffe, and according to Charles Hamilton his finest writing under the Frank Richards pen-name, recently changed hands for £20 the pair.

Our editor, in a recent "Controversial," mentions another early St. Jim's story in No. 153, The Silent Three, which has always correctly been assumed to be a substitute story. It still has a great value to collectors however - whatever its merit. But who did actually write this story? To my knowledge no collector has ever ventured a guess.

Although I have had quite a few surprises in gleaning the authorship of certain stories from official sources during the last few years, I must confess that the authorship of this story astonished me. It was actually written by S. Clarke Hook, creator of those former world-famous characters Jack, Sam, and Pete!

The keen reader may at once think there has been some mistake and that the initial should be that of his son H. Clarke Hook, who did pen quite a few early substitute Gem stories. But I have checked most carefully about this, and there is no error.

In 1909 when this story was published, Jack, Sam and Pete were the main popular characters in Amalgamated Press boys fiction, and S. Clarke Hook was considered the star author. Charles Hamilton had only just started his way to fame, and the big puzzle is why on earth an established writer, who also wrote school yarns of his own creation, and had a total of seven pen-names, would want to write a St. Jim's story.

Perhaps the explanation to this mystery can be elucidated when I say that whilst in correspondence with Mr. Hamilton a few years ago, in answer to a query if he knew other authors during his early days, Mr. Hamilton replied "that he was once very friendly, with a charming cultured writer of the name of S. Clarke Hook, who wrote about some

characters called Jack, Sam, and Pete." It should also be mentioned that the genuine Martin Clifford, in his early Blue Gem cover days, once had Tom Merry meet these famous characters in London!

Maybe S. Clarke Hook showed a great interest in Mr. Hamilton's characters, and for a challenge attempted to write a St. Jim's story. Certainly this is not the first time it has been done, as the war time editor John Nix Pentelow, once challenged none other than R. S. Warren-Bell to write a Greyfriars story, but I have never succeeded in finding a record of it, unless it was published under Pentelow's "Frank Richards" name.

School and Sport No. 319 another substitute story and written by G. R. Samways, has been written about a great deal in recent years, and it is true that a story of a succession of sporting events leaves a lot to be desired by readers who like a good genuine Hamilton yarn. Yet, the fact must be accepted that it was tremendously popular with readers at the time, who liked this sort of thing.

Probably the most mysterious B.F.L. of them all, and which has puzzled readers right from the start of collecting, is No. 276 Through Thick and Thin, a St. Jim's Story by Martin Clifford. Arguments have raged through the years whether it was a genuine story or not, and collectors have written to me many times about it. Mainly whether they should pay the high price demanded and above all asking who did write the story.

Readers can now be told that it was definitely a genuine yarn. Originally intended for a forthcoming double number of the Gem, Mr. Hamilton's original title was Tom Merry's Chums. Plans were changed however, by the colourful, first Companion Papers' editor Percy Griffith, and he decided to use it in a Boys Friend Library instead. He rewrote it in many places, lengthened it a great deal, and re-titled it Through Thick and Thin.

I feel I ought here to pay tribute to the deductions of our own Hamiltonia expert Roger Jenkins; when writing without the aid of official knowledge he wrote the following in a C.D. nearly 18 years ago...

"Another habit of substitute writers, was to take an original story by Charles Hamilton, and alter many passages of it, as was done with No. 276 Through Thick and Thin by Martin Clifford, which was probably adapted from an unpublished story by Mr. Hamilton. Discerning readers will note that some parts must have been wholly retained, whilst others were altered and incidents related in a manner very different than the style used by the master himself"....

Roger was correct in every detail, so for the record it must be regarded I suppose as a genuine story, with a big but editorially rewritten far more than usual!

Another rare Greyfriars B.F.L. and rarely mentioned before concerns No. 489 Football Champions by Frank Richards. Of course as always assumed, a substitute story, written by our old friend G. R. Samways.

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A STUDY OF SUBSTITUTION

By Laurie Sutton

It requires a painful effort to read through many of Pentelow's substitute stories - just words, words, words, with plots either non-existent or so tangled up that I, at least, give up trying to work out what it's all about. Actually, JNP was quite out of his depth in writing for a weekly paper; he should have concentrated on a few long, long hard-backs. Even so his style was about fifty years out-of-date even at the time when he was writing. I have remarked before on his obsession with the word "notion," and how every one of his stories contains its quota of from half-a-dozen to a score. These things are spotlighted by studying the stories and taking out thousands of phrases as I have done in recent years. But it is laborious work - particularly in Pentelow's case when it is literally an effort to get through some of the stories. Samways is much easier reading, and one gets some good laughs from the sheer absurdity of many of his situations, such as the classic one where Prout walks across the sight screen when Wingate is batting in a practice-match:

"You dolt!" roared Wingate (to Prout!) "You insane imbecile! I was ninety-eight! A couple more and I would have completed my century! And then you go and expose your fat carcass in front of the bowling screen and put me off! Oh, you frabjous dummy!"

The next instant there was a startled gasp from all the cricketers. Wingate had hurled down his bat, and actually squared up to Mr. Prout. Such a scene was almost without parallel in the varied and extensive history of Greyfriars. (ONLY ALMOST!)

This story (Magnet 436) is, incidentally, one of the considerable number of stories erroneously attributed to J. N. Pentelow in the 1962 C.D. Annual lists. Pentelow actually wrote less than half of the stories which appear against his name in this list. Another interesting point about Pentelow is that his first St. Jim's story ("Finding His Level," Gem 386) is still officially attributed to

Charles Hamilton (by implication, at least, as it does not appear in any sub lists, and has apparently not even been spotted by Roger Jenkins, as it appears in the Hamiltonian Library catalogue).

I recently formed the conclusion that Stanley Austin was the best craftsman among the sub-writers (I think he was certainly the best at plot construction and probably the most painstaking and closest to Hamilton's style). However, I was rather shaken in recently reading Magnets 938-940 (Mark Linley's return to the factory) in which I found some glaring faults in sentence-construction; for example: "Most of the fellows had come in from skating by this time for tea, ..." But the first prize for this sort of thing must surely go to the unknown author of Magnet 934: "Coker did not eat himself; he was far too excited for that." In the same story we have: "But Coker, at all events, unheeded it." Well, I suppose we should uncare about these things!

The easiest to recognise among Samways' stories are the repeated yarns of sporting events in which the Head (or a School Governor) decides to give a trophy and a week's holiday to the school (often involving rival schools also). However, there are other good clues to Samways' authorship; besides introducing his own characters (Archie Howell at Greyfriars, Phyllis Howell at Cliff House, and Dick Mason at St. Jim's) he "adopted" some of the lesser lights at the Hamilton schools and featured them quite frequently in prominent parts. He liked to star, in particular, Dick Russell at Greyfriars, and the New House Scholarship trio at St. Jim's ("The Pluck of Edgar Lawrence" being only one of many). Samways was also responsible for other creations which featured frequently in his tales, such as the town of Burchester, and the Elysian Cafe at Courtfield.

I would just like to give another typical example of Samways' farce. In Magnet 550 Mr. Vernon-Smith is testing the Bounder's loyalty by pretending that he has lost his fortune. In his letter to Smithy Mr. V. Smith tells him: "...I am moving this week to No. 10, Plummers Court, Bermondsey... It is a terrible come-down for me, of course." I think the dramatic Samways is funnier than the humorous one! That story, by the way, is yet another listed as Pentelow in the 1962 C.D. Annual, but there is not the faintest trace of Pentelow's style or inevitable vocabulary in the whole story, even if that one extract wasn't enough to give the authorship away!

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LET'S BE CONTROVERSIAL

No. 97. INQUEST:

It is probable that when Charles Hamilton's "Popolaki Patrol" stories in the Popular commenced in the Spring of 1930 the star of the famous old paper was already beginning to fade.

As I have commented before, the collapse of the Popular seemed, at the time, to come about very suddenly. Way back in the early twenties, the Popular had been increased in size and price a good many months before the same improvements reached the Magnet and the Gem. For a good many years, the Popular had shown a method and orderliness plus the presentation of a long run of excellent stories which had put it on top of the world. But one can trace the decline from early 1930.

It is always interesting, if rather sad, to try to decide the reasons behind the collapse of papers which had obviously been in high favour for many years. It is impossible to avoid the conclusion that the foundering of periodicals like the Boys' Friend, the Popular, and the Nelson Lee Library must have been due to some specific shortcoming within themselves. It would be easy to suggest that tastes had changed, but such a suggestion would be merely an excuse for failure which came about as the result of mishandling of the papers on the part of someone. It is surely true that with all the papers I have mentioned there were definite signs of deterioration for some time before the final collapse came.

Often, deterioration must have been due to a change of editorial direction. A new editor, trying desperately hard to be clever, made changes which were really a break with tradition. Schoolboys, who used to be the most conservative of creatures, did not like breaks with tradition.

There are certainly indications of a change of editorial direction in the Popular of the Spring of 1930. The editorials became longer, and were loosely and facetiously written:

"Do you like yarns about the wild Congo? Yeah? About mysterious black tribes, roaring man-eating lions, and all that? Yeah? Good! Then get this into your noddles. Our new series deals with the wilds of the Congo. Yaroop! Ooooooh! That's got you where you live, I bet!"

That sort of thing seemed foreign to the Popular. The editor spread himself more and more. The numbering of chapters was abandoned. Whole pages were given over to comic pictures. More whole pages

were devoted to the ravings of Willie Wangle, the boy wizard. More and more space was given to more and more illustrations, though the old favourite artiste, with the exception of Chapman, gradually disappeared from the paper. Pages were devoted to competitions, to announcements of pseudo-free gifts, and to general advertisements. The entire system of presentation became less attractive to the more thoughtful reader, and only the editor can be blamed for this.

All the same, it must be admitted that, during many long periods throughout the roaring twenties, far too much space in the Popular had been devoted to advertisements. The same thing happened for many years of Modern Boy, but for years Modern Boy comprised 32 pages and sometimes, when advertising was very heavy, 36 pages.

While I believe that slapdash editing helped to kill the Popular, it is clear that the editor had problems to face at this time. Since 1917, the paper had been a vehicle mainly for the presentation of the Hamilton schools. By 1930, it was proving impossible for this to continue. It has been pointed out that the Greyfriars tales continued until the end - and so they did. This is, however, no indication that Greyfriars was more in favour than either St. Jim's or Rookwood. It was just that Greyfriars tales were available, while the supply of St. Jim's and Rookwood had petered out.

The genuine stories from the Gem had been exhausted. Charles Hamilton had written but little for the Gem for a good many years past. A good many of the earlier Gem stories had appeared twice in the Popular - a few of them three times.

By the Spring of 1930, the supply of Rookwood tales from the Boys' Friend was running out. Charles Hamilton had written no new Rookwood stories for years. To eke out the few remaining Rookwood tales, the editor alternated them with some slapstick tales of Calcroft by Sidney Drew. It was not a happy or satisfactory solution.

Soon, the supply of Rookwood tales was exhausted. The editor went back to the Rookwood of 1915. Last year, in Collectors' Digest we referred to the series about Gunter, the Head's nephew - a series which featured in the Boys' Friend in 1915. For some obscure reason, this series had been written up, with a great many alterations, into one story, entitled "A Bad Egg" for the Popular of 1920. It was a most astonishing occurrence, and why it was done is quite beyond the bounds of comprehension. In 1921, the series, in its original form, was published in the Popular.

In 1930, it was published yet again in the Popular. Also the series about Jimmy Silver's racketty Uncle John, who redeemed himself

by joining the army. And other tales from 1915.

We have to remember that the old stories of St. Jim's and Rookwood had also featured throughout the twenties in the Schoolboys' Own Library. So, with St. Jim's and Rookwood unavailable, the editor of the Popular was clearly looking for fill-ups, and he was at his wits' end. He landed on the Cedar Creek tales, which had appeared originally in the Boys' Friend, and which had been reprinted in their entirety in the Popular. Plenty of them had also been reprinted in the Boys' Friend Library and in the Schoolboys' Own Library.

This time, in the Popular, they did not last long. It could be argued that by 1930, there would be a new generation of readers who would not remember a good deal of Cedar Creek. But such an argument would ignore the hard core, that largish group of readers who continued to take the paper for year after year after year. Also, the editor was suffering from that lack of method which can be seen in all this varying reprinting, when reprints were rushed out in various papers to meet the demand for the Hamilton schools.

And now back to the Popolaki Patrol. Oddly enough, though the Popular had always been largely a Hamilton paper, none but the Popolaki Patrol ever appeared in that paper under the author's real name. At the time I never read the Popolaki tales, though I assumed that they were reprinted material. In 1966 I have found them entertaining reading, and I have come to the conclusion that they were specially written for the Popular. At any rate, I have never come on them elsewhere. Characterisation is good, and the dialogue and geographical backgrounds are convincing.

It is a series of this type, set by the Congo, which should bring home to all of us the very real genius of this amazing author. He was the most prolific, the most successful, and the most popular master of the school story. He was no mean hand at turning out a readable series of detective tales. But beyond that, and far more remarkable, he could write, with impeccable atmosphere of the Wild West, of the South Seas, and of Africa, in long series of tales where he seldom put a foot wrong.

This sort of thing was not entirely a matter of a sound education and a vivid imagination. It must have entailed long and constant study of the geography, of the peoples, and of the political dispensation of the many lands of which he wrote. Goodness only knows when he found the time for that essential study. Excellent, readable writing was by no means the only factor which made Charles Hamilton the most successful boys' writer of any generation.

The Rio Kid series, which had been running with great success since the start of 1928, ended in the Spring of 1930. It is impossible to decide whether they ended by the editor's or the author's wish. They were followed immediately by the Popolaki Patrol stories, which ran for three months. Then the Rio Kid came back for a spell. When the Kid finally departed from the Popular, it was time for the editor to shout: "Take to the boats. Editors and sub-editors first."

It was clearly impossible for the Popular to continue as a Hamilton paper. Here we have the reason for the change of name, and for the fact that the Ranger, which replaced the Popular, was in every respect not merely the old paper under a new name.

The result of the Inquest? Well, it is just possible that the main culprit was the Schoolboys' Own Library which had lapped up so much of the old material. And, of course, the fact that Hamilton had not written of St. Jim's or Rookwood for so long.

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CONTROVERSIAL ECHOES

No. 96. THE ROSE:

CLIFF WEBB: The question of choosing suitable names for fictional characters seems to me to be a very tricky one indeed, and whatever name one chooses for a particular character is unlikely to find favour with everyone. Yet Frank Richards seemed to have a knack of selecting suitable names for his brain children, despite some duplication.

Possibly the duplication was not entirely due to the writer's apparent fondness for certain names, and I certainly do not think it was due to forgetfulness on his part, for the names of his characters are very important indeed to any author. I would think that the more stories of a particular type one writes, the more difficult becomes the task of selecting suitable names for the characters. It may be that when Frank Richards was writing for several magazines at the same time, most children were only allowed one publication per week (perhaps 'Danny' was fortunate in that respect) and no doubt any others were obtained by "swopping."

If that was the case, it is not unreasonable to suppose that Frank Richards would not have worried unduly if he allowed similar names to crop up in different publications. He could hardly have imagined then that in fifty years time the whole of his output would be scrutinized so closely by enthusiastic collectors of his life's work

Miss E. MAGOVENY: Mr. Stewart is right. Too many freakish names are wrong, I believe. Tom Merry's name was a mistake for a character who was supposed to be taken seriously. It was a kind of stock name for a stock figure. Also, St. Jim's is a silly name for a school - no dignity like Greyfriars, Rookwood, or even St. Frank's.

(St. Jim's was merely the boys' name for their school, which was correctly named St. James's. Nothing wrong with that, surely? -ED.)

ROBERT WHITER: The theory about Frank Richards not knowing about the Greyfriars story competition intrigued me, but I share your views on the subject. Frank often mentioned having a big collection of Magnets and Gems which went to salvage during the war. It seems to show that he liked to see his work in print. So, unless he were abroad during the run of the competition, it is difficult to accept that he did not see it. This also would apply to the Ken King tales.

LAURIE SUTTON: I have just found a Pontifex - in Magnet 950 "The Ragging of Mossoo" (April 1926). It is quite possible, of course, that in isolated cases the Pontifex was slipped in by the editorial office. I notice in Prout yarns of the late twenties and the thirties, where pompous descriptions might ask for the middle name, Charles Hamilton merely refers to Paul Prout. As you say, the vast majority of middle names were created for Pentelow's Galleries and for "Who's Whos." I wholeheartedly agree with you that Chas. Hamilton, as a craftsman with a pride in his work and reputation, would certainly check on his work fairly regularly.

RAY HOPKINS: I was amused at the comment regarding the unusual names of some of the Slade inmates. This never struck me at all, because in life one meets so many people whose names cause a surge of amusement to well up inside one. Good manners forbids an outward expression of this amusement, but one can treasure same until one is alone and then let forth a chuckle.

WANTED: GEMS up till No. 1379 then 1452, 1512, 1526, 1531. Write with price required to:-

LOFTS, 56, SHERINGHAM HOUSE, LONDON, N.W.1.

WANTED: Holiday Annuals 1921 - 4. SALE or part exchange H.A. 1935, B.O.A. 1884/5, 1888/9.

MILLER, 50 HILLSIDE GROVE, LONDON, N.14.

BLAKIANA

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

SEXTON BLAKE REVIEWS

As we announced last month, only one issue of the Sexton Blake Library is now to be published each month. Two new stories are now available in the shops, and here is what our reviewers have to say about them.

CASE OF THE MUCKRAKERS

Wilfred McNeilly
 Mayflower 3/6

Bloomsbury, the middle 1920's.

An artist's model is murdered, the artist, Alex Quayle is framed by the murderer Paul Grabe. Quayle escapes and is not heard of again.

These are the opening moves in a mystery that is to involve Sexton Blake forty years later.

Fleet St., the middle 1960's.

Lord Salvus, press baron, is being blackmailed by the proprietors of a scandal magazine who threaten to expose him as the former artist Alex Quayle.

The only person to know the details of his past, must be the murderer Grabe, who must also be working hand in glove with the magazine proprietors, so Blake is commissioned to find Grabe, and this proves to be no easy task.

With Tinker and Paula Dane, Blake follows a trail obscured by time, a trail that is to involve them with many odd and dangerous characters before they are able to write finish to this bizarre case.

Adele, Duchess of Derwentwater, makes another appearance here. I like this character, and the Duke, but they have yet to fulfil the promise shown in "A Corpse for Christmas."

Blake readers who have criticised the sex element in past issues of the library, will not, I hope, be put off by the cover.

This is a readable and entertaining story, but I can't help feeling it could have been improved by being longer. Although slickly written it is lacking in descriptive detail.

Ray Norton

MURDER ON THE MONTE:

ROSS RICHARDS (3/6)

Spending three more months under the chill, grey skies of a cheerless English winter was a prospect Blake did not relish at all. He did not particularly relish Sir Joshua Ivey either; but when that tycoon offered a commission which would afford him long hot spells of Riviera sunshine, Blake threw prejudice to the winds and accepted. Having fought the battle of Brooklands in the days of Alfred Edgar, the opportunity of being able to speed across four countries behind the wheel of a high-powered racing car as a participant in the Monte Carlo Rally was too great a temptation for Blake to resist, even though the job of bodyguard to a clever young car designer hardly measured up to his talents as Britain's No. 1 Private Investigator.

This novel breathes freshness, but it is a freshness born of topicality rather than originality. An enthusiast of the old Blake school might be prompted to add that this is because of the almost complete lack of sex. Well, he could be right - certainly I would not disagree. But let this be said of author, editor and publishers - there was ample opportunity here of including those touches of sex and sadism so characteristic of the Fleming books, though due to their avoidance of tactics so typical of the modern thriller, a novel in the old Blake tradition has materialised, its very innocuousness placing it in the 'U' certificate category.

For me the way Blake and Tinker are characterised means a lot. Criticism is disarmed here, though I was surprised to read that Blake's assistant had for years been trying to live down and forget his better-known nickname of Tinker. I always thought Tinker liked to be addressed as such. Changes have been accepted as inevitable in the S.B.L.; but changing the name of a character cannot be regarded as a logical necessity, surely?

Walter Webb

PETER CHEYNEY AND SEXTON BLAKE

BRIAN DOYLE writes:

It is quite correct that author Peter Cheyney never had a Sexton Blake story published (as stated by W. O. G. Lofts in February C.D.), but the general assumption by many people that he did is probably due to Cheyney's part in "Tinker's Notebook," which appeared in the "Union Jack" in the 1920's. After having had his Blake story turned down by

H. W. Twyman, Cheyney put up an idea that he should contribute a regular feature called "Tinker's Notebook," in which Tinker would supposedly discuss modern police methods, detection, and so on, and also recall some of Blake's cases as illustrations. Twyman agreed and Cheyney wrote the feature (in collaboration with an ex-Scotland Yard detective named Harold Brust) for about the first 18 months of its run. At a later date, the A.P. were only too delighted to accept Cheyney's by-then best-selling stories, and serials by him appeared in the "Detective Weekly" and "Thriller," featuring his popular character, Lemmy Caution.

It may also be worth recalling that Peter Cheyney was more qualified than most to write detective stories. He had been News Editor of the "Sunday Graphic," an ace Fleet Street crime reporter, and special investigator to a leading London magazine group. He was a keen student of criminology in all its aspects and wrote several non-fiction books and many articles on the subject. He had also been a stage and film actor - always an asset to a writer of imaginative fiction!

NEWS OF THE CLUBS

MIDLAND

Meeting held 25th January, 1966:

The attendance was poor, only seven members attending. These were Jack and Madge Corbett, Norman Gregory, Ivan Webster, Ian Parish, Win Partridge and Jack Bellfield.

In a discussion on future programmes Jack Corbett made an offer to bring along his record, "Floreat Greyfriars," for our March meeting. It was readily accepted and we look forward to an enjoyable evening as we understand that the record is first-rate.

With Tom Porter absent, our monthly feature of Anniversary number and Collector's item was missing though the acting secretary did pass round Gem No. 316 which he afterwards made a prize for the raffle which was won by Madge Corbett.

The acting secretary also gave a humorous reading from the 1939 Holiday Annual, "Billy Bunter's Fearful Affliction."

An unusual quiz, "My Inspiration," followed which was conducted orally. Extracts were read in which various Greyfriars characters

told of the things which inspired them. The name of the character was omitted and the members had to guess who it was.

A discussion on the topic, "Was Charles Hamilton as adaptable a writer as he could have been and why did he not try his hand at writing adult stories as Edwy Searles Brooks did?" This idea originated from our treasurer, Norman Gregory. Norman is, as we know, one of the debunkers of Charles Hamilton and often severe in his criticism of the great man. He made the point that in his opinion it was both lack of initiative and waste of great literary talent that Charles Hamilton restricted himself entirely to juvenile literature. Jack Corbett, however, maintained that it was perfectly right that the great man should confine his efforts to the thing he could do so superbly well.

This was a keen and lively discussion and it was a pity that more members were not there to enjoy it. Jack Corbett made some very disparaging references to the Nelson Lee, but Edwy Searles Brooks has his admirers among our members and was defended quite vigorously. It would not do for us to be always agreeing. Such discussions as this add spice and variety to our evenings together.

Our next meeting is on February 22nd at the Arden Hotel.

J. F. BELLFIELD

Correspondent

NORTHERN

Meeting held 12 February, 1966:

Members arriving 6 p.m. onwards found the library open as usual and Librarian Gerry Allison did brisk business. At 6.30 p.m. our Chairman Geoffrey Wilde opened the meeting officially with a warm welcome to all, especially those who had been unavoidably missing last month.

The formal business over, we listened to news from Gerry's large and varied postbag. There had been a good response to our Library advert. in C.D. We were sad to hear Herbert Chapman had been in hospital, and Tom Hopperton was recalled there. We wish our two friends good recovery.

Geoffrey introduced a discussion on the report in the "Daily Mirror" that the character, "Billy Bunter," had been written about in the "Vanguard" in 1907 by H. Phillpots, before appearing in the "Magnet" in 1908. We recalled that Frank Richards himself told us that he had

written about Billy Bunter before the turn of the century, but the stories were not accepted. Curiouser and curiouser - was the general verdict. Mention was made of the fine tributes to the passing of E. S. Brooks recorded in C.D., and Jack Wood reported that two publications were to be issued by "Berkeley Gray" and "Victor Gunn." Elsie Taylor told of seeing Bill Lofts, of London, giving an interview on T.V.

After this stimulating talk, we settled down to a quiz compiled by Gerry. Twenty-four questions ranging from the military title of Bob Cherry's father to the Latin meaning of "Paul Pontifex." (And all those who wrote something about 'bridges' for 'Pontifex' were sadly disappointed.) Ronald Hodgson was the winner, followed by Elsie Taylor and Jack Wood. Gerald then produced a Red Magnet, No. 271 and requested his brother Jack to give a reading. Jack gave a good rendering of Bunter's outraged feelings at having Dutton and Peter and Alonzo Todd put into the study he had previously had to himself. "They are three freaks," he spluttered. "There'll be four freaks in the study then," consoled Bob Cherry. Another short quiz was then presented by Mollie Allison based on the final Bunter Book, "Bunter's Last Fling." From those who had not read it came some hilarious answers, but the final count showed Alan Barker first, followed (again) by Jack Wood and Elsie Taylor.

Welcome break for sandwiches, tea and biscuits, and conversation. Then Geoffrey brought out our late Secretary's collection, which he and Frank's brother had been cataloguing for sale. The latter wished our Library to have first choice, followed by Northern members, and there was sorting and choosing of our old friend's much-prized books. They will still be cared for and loved.

Next meeting Saturday, 12 March, 1966.

M. ALLISON
(Hon. Sec.)

LONDON

It was quite appropriate that Brian Doyle, the retiring chairman, after welcoming one and all to the eighteenth Annual General Meeting of the club, should call upon Len Packman to address the gathering. It will be remembered that in the self-same room at 27, Archdale Road, East Dulwich, London, S.E.22. the very first meeting of the club was held 18 years ago. Len was the host then together with Josie and daughter Eleanor. Len chose his remarks very well and was loudly

(continued on page 31)...

"SPARKS" and "YOUNG FOLKS TALES"

By O. W. Wadham

Little if anything has been said in Collectors' Digest about that coloured Henderson comic Sparks, that lived from 1914 to 1920. Those must have been difficult years for publishers, and with two better known and better selling papers, Lot-O'-Fun and Comic Life, it is rather surprising that the Henderson firm began Sparks at all.

It is true, of course, that another Henderson comic, The Big Comic, was born at the same time as Sparks, which shows that the old Red Lion firm must have been in an expansive mood in that fateful year of the Kaiser's war.

Big Comic was a black and white effort in the halfpenny class, and could never have been very popular, though it managed to survive the most difficult years of the war, 1914 to 1918. Its front page characters, Gay Gus and Shrimp, were a completely unimpressive pair, and I feel sure few, if any, comic collectors can even recall them.

In 1918 Big Comic was married to Sparks, and virtually ceased to exist, for not one of its characters came to life in the coloured weekly.

Not that Sparks had any outstanding comedians in its four pages of comic drawings. The front page pair, Ken and Katie, were very ordinary looking youngsters in the ten or eleven-year age group.

I have two copies of Sparks, Nov. 9, 1918, and Feb. 8, 1919. In both issues the pair are having fantastic adventures with giants and huge animals on the moon. Back page is shared by more entertaining creations; P. C. Neverwait is one, and Lemon and Dash, a couple of clay pipe puffing tramps complete the page.

It is mentioned several times in each number that Sparks has a monthly companion paper, Young Folks Tales. It seems that there were three issues of Young Folks Tales each month. Two Y.F.T. writers, May P. Japp, who wrote the many "Betty" stories, and A. E. Bull, author of the famous "Mabel" yarns, were serial contributors to Sparks.

Other story writers were T. Stanleyam King, Stuart Stewart, Alan Tempest and Harry Revel.

Like Lot-O'-Fun and Comic Life Sparks had a page of toy models, cut-outs and competitions.

To those collectors who cherish nostalgia for that difficult to

come by publication Young Folks Tales, the otherwise uninspiring Sparks should be of special interest, for the two popular writers, May P. Japp and A. E. Bull certainly seemed the most popular contributors to its pages in the 1918-19 period.

Sparks began life as a penny paper. It had only advanced one more halfpenny when the axe fell in 1920.

No doubt Chuckles, an A.P. effort, also born in 1914, got many Sparks readers as it was in the same tradition, but it, too, died in 1923.

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THE POSTMAN CALLED

(Interesting items from The Editor's Letter-bag)

E. N. LAMBERT (Chessington): Congratulations on yet another wonderful Annual. It goes from strength to strength through the years. I always look forward to the adventures of Mr. Buddle, and hope we shall hear more of him soon.

K. McWILLIAMS (Southampton): You were very close in your guess at 1913 as the date of that cinema poster in the Annual. "Gipsy Blood" was made in Berlin in 1911, the original title being "Zigeunblut." By 1915, Asta Neilsen was the foremost cinema star in Central Europe. Today she lives in retirement in Copenhagen, all but forgotten.

CHAS. H. MATTHEWS (Leicester): The Annual is truly magnificent. There can be nothing like it anywhere. For a keen collector of old periodicals it is **THE text book**. No matter how many times I look through, I am always finding something of absorbing interest that somehow I missed. Fancy giving the Beatles the O.B.E. Why not the Editor?

(The Editor, O.B.E. Old Boiled Egg? - Ed.)

NORMAN WRIGHT (Pinner): Some years ago in the Annual, Bill Hubbard wrote an article "Mainly Wrykyn," supposedly listing all the Wodehouse school stories that featured Wrykyn. It was therefore a surprise to come across two further stories of Wrykyn not mentioned in the article. They were "Jackson's Extra" and "Homeopathic Treatment" in the Royal Magazine for June and August 1904. Were these stories overlooked by Mr. Hubbard?

(Titles may have been changed. Wodehouse's "The Pot-Hunters" was serialised in the Boys' Friend in 1923 under the title "By Order of the League." - Ed.)

BILL STORY (Ontario): Seems my keenness and desire for the monthly C.D. just grows stronger and stronger. The best reading monthly at its price anywhere. It just gets better and better, knowing no limit. Keep it up, dear Editor.

J. A. WARK (Dunoon): I was studying the ground floor plan of J. S. Butcher's "Prospectus," and I was puzzled by the Junior Common Room and the Rag. Am I right in thinking that the former apartment was the place where the juniors met after prep, while the Rag was used for that purpose in later years? I just cannot find any reference to the Common Room in any of the Bunter books. A small point, but it has "needled" me quite a lot.

(The plans you mention are hardly authentic. For instance, it is well known that the Sixth Form had studies and bedrooms combined. The Common Room was known as the Rag. In the later Magnet, Charles Hamilton called it the Junior Day Room. I have not checked, but I have a feeling that it was not called the Rag by Hamilton in the later Magnet. - Ed.)

GEORGE SELLARS (Sheffield): The Frank Richards L/P record is excellent. My only criticism is that the Greyfriars song should be sung in Latin. If it had been printed in English on the cover, we could all have joined in. It seems very odd that only one C.D. reader has written in praise of the record.

(Plenty of readers have written in praise of the record, but it is only possible to quote from a small selection of letters on this page. We gave the record lavish publicity in our issues at the end of last year. - Ed.)

ROBERT MILLER (London): I am shattered to be informed that "The Test Match Kid" was not written by Patsy Hendren, my boyhood hero of the willow. Incidentally, when I read it - about 1926 - the Popular was definitely 2d.

Elsewhere Conan Doyle's "The Land of Mist" is referred to as "really a boy's book." Surely the word should be "hardly," as, fascinating as I found it, I cannot imagine many healthy boys finding it otherwise than an awful bore.

(The Popular's price became 2d from February 1922. - Ed.)



applauded at the conclusion of his address. After very good reports from both the club librarians, Roger Jenkins and Bob Blythe, it was stated by Len Packman that very few copies of the Sexton Blake catalogue were left for sale. He went on to say that fresh facts and figures had come to light and these would be given in Collectors' Digest and an addenda would be published to fit into the catalogue.

The election of officers for 1966 then took place. Two candidates for chairman, Bill Lofts and Don Webster, necessitated a poll. Josie Packman was the scrutineer, and after both candidates had addressed the meeting, it was announced that Bill Lofts had been elected by a majority 5 votes. Then Don Webster proposed and Eric Lawrence seconded a motion that the retiring chairman should finish out the meeting in the chair. This was agreed to. Two new members were present, B. Dennis from Bromley and M. King from Slough. Both went home with good supplies of reading material and the latter also took home a Sexton Blake catalogue and a copy of the Greyfriars Prospectus.

Brian Doyle gave out that Odhams will be publishing Billy Bunter's Holiday Annual on September 1st, price 9/6d.

Thanks to Bill Gander, Brian read out the article in the Canadian magazine, "Billy Bunter's Last Gorge" by Dan O'Neill.

The Greyfriars Prospectus Quiz, that the Leeds club sent for our enjoyment was won by Don Webster; his prize a Bunter book. Bill Hubbard's Hard Back Covers School's quiz was won by Brian Doyle. The rest of the retiring officers of the club were re-elected en-bloc, there being no other candidates.

The catering was first class, Josie, Eleanor and Alice doing a very fine job.

One of the enjoyable features of these meetings is the many enjoyable conversations that take place between all and sundry and on this memorable occasion it was no exception.

The last item of the meeting was the playing over of the Floreat Greyfriars record. Another very enjoyable feature. Then with the usual votes of thanks, too numerous to mention, it was time for call over once again.

Next meeting at 40, Ellesmere Road, Dollis Hill, London, N.W.10. Phone GLAdstone 8591 on Sunday, March 20th. Host Bob Blythe.

UNCLE BENJAMIN

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MERSEYSIDEMeeting held Sunday, 13th February, 1966.

It was good to have the section almost back to full strength after the cancellation of our January meeting due to illness. This was the first meeting we have ever been forced to cancel, but the 'flu bug, etc., played absolute havoc in our ranks. So it was pleasing to have an almost 100% turn-out at this meeting. The ever-faithful George Riley again made the long trip from Barnsley.

Once again a shadow had been cast over the meeting. We had been informed by his relatives that our esteemed colleague, John Farrell, had died in January, quite suddenly. John joined the section many years ago, and it says much for his enthusiasm that he regularly travelled from Wigan, in all kinds of weather, to enjoy the meetings connected with the books he loved so well. He was never completely well, and we all admired his courage, and his devotion to the hobby. We last heard his voice at our Christmas meeting, when, too sick to attend himself, he took the trouble of telephoning us to wish us well. So another grievous blow has been suffered by this section and by the OBBC. The Merseyside ranks grow even thinner with John's passing. How we shall miss him.

We had quite a full programme of discussion and quizzes. Bert Hamblett, who is quite an expert on film lore, provided a very entertaining quiz on screen detectives. This was won by the writer of these notes who in turn gave a simple quiz on the names of some of the homes of the school characters. George Riley won this by a whisker from Jim Walsh.

Our next meeting will be on Sunday, 13th March.

FRANK UNWIN

ARTHUR HARRIS REMEMBERS

Mr. Harris writes: It is with a sense of deep shock that I learn of the passing of Frank Pettingell. Only at Christmas he wrote that he wished we lived nearer.

His great interest was the old comics, and when he discovered that I took one he loved - Comic Home Journal - he was delighted, for he was acquainted with nobody else who knew about it. A year or two back I invited both he and Ernest McKeag to dinner at the Regent Palace Hotel, and what an enjoyable evening it was! Frank delved into the days of the old comics, and Ernest McKeag talked about a magazine "The Spindrift" he once edited. This is in the Harris collection.