STORY PAPER

COLLECTORS' DIGEST

VOL. 24 Nº 280 APRIL 1970 2/6

Film Fun 2D.
(EVERY TUESDAY.)

No. 66, Vol. 2. April 30, 1921.

BEN TURPIN & CHARLIE CONKLIN

The Paramount Mack Sennett Mirth Makers.

This Week's Film: "A SPECIAL AT-RACK-TION."

1. Oh, I say! Oh, what a nice-looking little lady—eh? And Ben and Charlie thought so, too. They did indeed, indeed they did. In fact, old Charlie did the lolch ship, and he said: "I'm off home to write to her. I am!" "Oh, are you?" said Ben. "Oh, all right, my bonnie boy! Oh, you clever little fellow! Write to her, will you? 'Where'-be?" said he wittily.

2. Rem. II.—The humble apartment. Very well, then. Here we have old Charlie inscribing the epistle. And what do we see Ben doing? Is he doing the earnest gaze at the old wire soap-rack? In good math he is. And he says to himself: "Ah! Jesus! Cheerio!" says Ben. "I will yet put it across Charlie, and make him feel absolutely nincpence a gross! Yes! It must and shall be done!"

3. So while old Charlie was concluding his epistle with a Scotch, Ben popped out and stuck the jolly little soap-rack into ye olde and ancient pillar-box. "And that's that!" remarked Ben. "And now to await Charlie and his communication." So off he pops, round the corner. Smart old bean, Ben—eh? Agreed—what? Right!

4. Ta-ra! Ta-ra! Enter Charlie, with letter. Observe Ben round corner. "Ah!" says Charlie, sticking said letter into slot. "I wondah," says he, "I wondah when I shall get a reply from hah? Bai Jove, how I love hah!" And all this time old Ben was round the corner doing the cheery chuckle. "'Tis well!" said Ben. "'Tis extra!" (Continued on page 80.)

STORY PAPER
COLLECTORS' DIGEST

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W. H. GANDER

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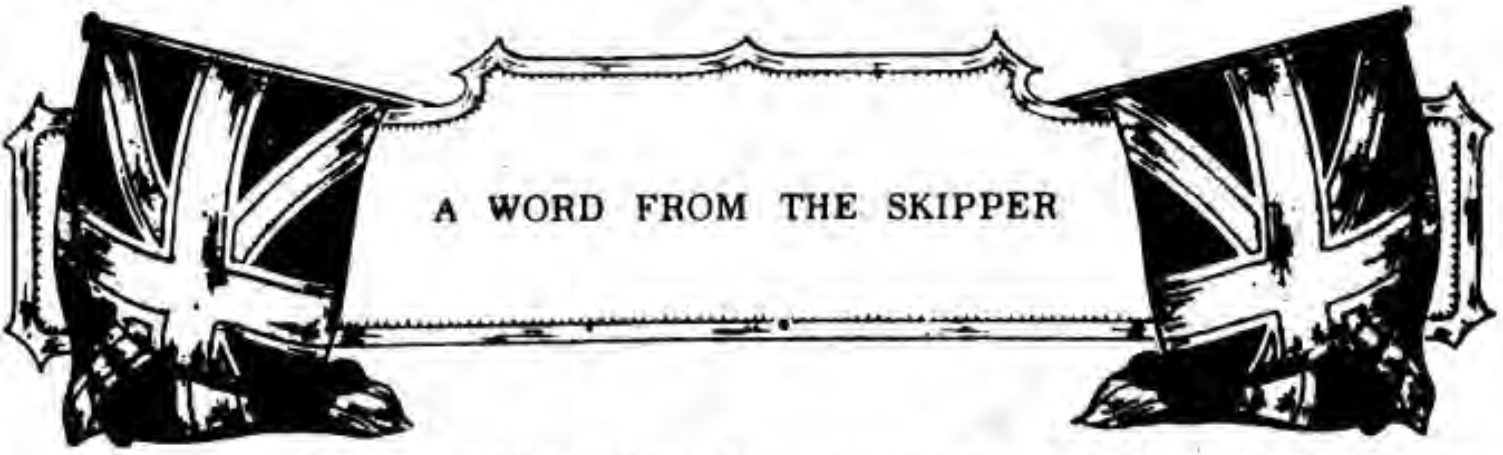

THE SWALLOWERS

When I was a child, I used occasionally to visit some relatives who lived at Plaistow. There were four in the family, and they were fussy eaters. At supper time each wanted - and had - a different brand of cocoa. I recall the inward chuckles I enjoyed at seeing the four different cocoa tins standing on their kitchen table. I doubt whether, nowadays, one could even find four different brands of cocoa on sale in the shops. For small firms have been swallowed up by large firms and large firms are being swallowed up by still larger firms. And so it goes on.

These giant takeovers are done usually in the name of increased efficiency and lower prices for the consumer. We all know that the last thing that the elimination of competition can really mean is lower prices for the consumer, and, if my experiences with various 'Boards' are any criterion, it doesn't mean much in the way of efficiency either.

Perhaps, for us, the saddest takeover was when the Amalgamated Press, with which most of us had grown up, was swallowed whole. We commented in C.D., years ago, that the time might come when the giant swallower might itself be swallowed by an even more gargantuan swallower. We didn't think it could really happen - but it seems that it has. A critic of the process, reported in the national press, refers to the first giant in the following terms: "its top-heavy unwieldiness, its bureaucracy, its elephantine lethargy" and goes on to say that the even bigger giant will be "even larger, even more alien, even more autocratic."

You and I stand, on one side, looking on, in the sure knowledge that at least one person is unlikely to benefit from any deep swallow - the customer.

TREVOR WIGNALL

Like you, I occasionally enjoy myself by browsing over old books. The other day I was turning over the pages of one, in a second-hand book shop, and I came on the words: "My payment for Sexton Blakes was £50 on the nail."

I bought the book which was, apparently, the autobiography of a writer named Trevor Wignall. Before the first world war, he seemed to be doing some work for the Amalgamated Press. In fact, he evidently did plenty of work, and he comments that such a large quantity of his work was accepted because he was never in any great hurry to be paid for it. "There was money to spare in Fleetway House," he writes reminiscently - but still they liked to keep their writers waiting for payments due.

"Back wanted to know if I was any good at boys' stories. I said I was. I had never written one, but that was a detail. He then asked if I could rip off a serial of 80,000 words in a couple of weeks or so. Back did not give me an open-and-shut commission, but he did state that he would receive me at Fleetway House the following Tuesday, when I was to produce the opening instalment. I faced him on the Tuesday with the instalment in my left hand and the remainder of the tale in my coat. I had written the lot between Friday night and Tuesday morning."

That was the beginning of Wignall's association with the

Amalgamated Press. It did not take me anywhere, he says, but it did much more than pay my rent. "Back pushed me off on J. N. Pentelow, who knew more about top-class cricket than he did about running the Boys' Realm."

One gets the impression that Wignall wrote plenty of Sexton Blake tales, but I can only come across two credited to him in the Sexton Blake Catalogue - "The Japanese Detective" and "The House With the Red Blinds" - both published in 1920. But the impression given by the autobiography is that this work for the A.P. was done about 1913. It could be, of course, that Wignall wrote stories for the Union Jack or other papers, and he might have extended these stories for 1920 publication. No doubt our Blake experts know all the answers to this little query, and what puzzles me may be quite clear to them.

END OF A JOURNEY

I have just received back from my bookbinder the final bound volume of my complete run of MODERN BOY. It took a very long time to get them all done - but they are completed at last. The volumes, all containing perfect copies from 1928 till 1939, gleam from my bookcase with their pristine binding of green with gold lettering. And I sit back and survey them, uncertain whether to be proud or sad over a long, long task completed at last. After all, I don't know how long they can rest in my bookcase. When the time comes for me to move to my thatched cottage near the sea - we all have hopes - I shan't have room for at least half the books which I have had bound down the vista of the years. But, for a while, I'm proud of them.

Readers often ask me in despair - Is there any purpose in going on and trying to acquire a collection? There is only one answer. Have patience and persevere. Those elusive copies always turn up, at long last.

THE EDITOR

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WANTED: Good loose copies or volumes containing one or more of the following: GEMS 801, 817, 826, 828, 832. Also POPULARS 401, 403, 407, 413, 415, 422, 441. Also GEMS 727 - 737 inclusive.

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DANNY'S DIARY

APRIL 1920

The Boys' Friend has been quite good this month. All the Rookwood stories have concerned the new boy, Arthur Beresford-Baggs, the son and heir of Sir Japhet, the war millionaire. First of all Arthur clashed with Mornington in the month's opening tale "Mornington's Enemy." Then a number of fearful relatives descended on Arthur, all disgracing him more or less. In succession the tales were "Arthur's Uncle," "Arthur's Aunt," and "Arthur's Cousin." The cousin was a red-hot Socialist who despised money but liked to get hold of it without working for it, if he could.

This has been a fairly entertaining series, though a bit painful in parts.

The Cedar Creek tales, all very good, went on with the search for the gold-mine of Bronze Bill. Frank Richards & Co. take their Easter holidays in California, searching for the gold-mine, while trying to hold off Cabrera and his band of ruffians. The stories are "The Rival Gold-Seekers," "The Golden Arroyo," and "Well Won." In the end Frank Richards and his friends ended up the richer by £500 each. Last tale of the month was "Todgers the Speculator" in which Chunky wanted to gamble over Honk's elevator shares - he could not persuade Frank Richards to advance the money for the speculation, so Chunky forged Frank's signature. Luckily, he was checked in time.

The Labour Party has won its first by-election - winning the seat at Dartford from the coalition candidate. It is the first coalition loss. Bank rate has gone up to 7% - whatever that means - and the butter ration is now to be 1½ ounces per person a week. But butter is so dear - about 3/4 a pound - so not many people buy it, in any case.

Doug gave me a Boys' Friend Library this month. It is by R. W. Comrade, and it is called "In Trackless Space." It tells of a journey to the moon, and it is very exciting. Doug says it is far-fetched as nobody could live on the moon as there is no air there. I asked him how he had found out.

A very weak month in both the Magnet and Gem. The Magnet's first was "The Blindness of Bunter," in which Bunter pretended to be

blind, much to the annoyance of Mr. "Horace" Quelch. Next came "The Feud With Friardale." Mr. Prout accused a greengrocer named Burke of profiteering. So Mr. Burke's son, Paddy, and a gang of louts, started a feud with Greyfriars.

"The Circus Hero" was very mixed up. Captain Punter turned up as a circus manager, and Kipps, the star of the story, befriended two children named Gerty and Tony Jenkins. Last tale of the month was "Cup-Tie Champions" which told of a feud between Loder and Larry Lascelles.

Dad and Mum went up to the theatre in London one evening and saw the new play "The Skin Game" by Galsworthy. The stars were Edmund Gwenn and Helen Haye, and Dad and Mum thought it a splendid play. The Prince of Wales, who has been touring abroad for some months, is now in the South Seas.

There have been some good films at our cinemas. A very interesting one was "Sexton Blake and the Mystery of the S.S. Olympic" featuring Douglas Payne as Sexton Blake. It was about the theft of a formula for hardening steel, and almost the whole picture was filmed on the famous liner. In this programme we also saw the new Charlie Chaplin 3-reeler "A Day's Pleasure."

"A Peep Behind the Scenes" was a lovely picture, from the story by Mrs. O. F. Walton. The stars were Ivy Close and Gerald Ames.

Charles Ray, one of my favourites, was good in "Greased Lightning" and another of my favourites, Ethel Clayton, was in "The Woman Next Door."

Evelyn Thaw and her son, Russell Thaw, were in a rather poor film called "Her Mistake." Evelyn Thaw was in a big court case in America at some time, and Doug says it is a mistake to think the name of the star can make a good film.

The opening tale in the Gem was really awfully silly, though I confess that it interested me. It was called "Tom Merry & Co's New Role." There was a strike on the local line through Rylcombe, so Tom Merry and Co. ran the trains and Gussy became a porter. Too silly for words - but it helps if you like trains, as I do.

"Trimble's Tanden" was an invention of Skimpole's, and it introduced Baggy and Teddy Trimble. The next story was just too silly.

It was "Miss Priscilla - Form-Master." Miss Fawcett came to St. Jim's for a time, and Mellish disguised himself as the Head. Whoever thinks up a plot like that? Finally, "The Refugee at St. Jim's" was an old boy named Calder who was being searched for by a private agent named Mr. Preece.

There is a new series of stories appearing regularly in the Gem. They are by Michael Poole and are stories about Jolly Roger at St. Katie's. They leave me a bit cold.

EDITORIAL COMMENT: The stories about St. Katie's, which Danny mentions, started in the Gem in April 1920 and ran for nearly five months. The serial, which had just finished, "Quintin's Heritage," was also by Michael Poole, under a pen-name. It is difficult to tell whether the St. Katie's tales found any popularity. Danny says they left him cold, and I, personally, never found Michael Poole easy to read. The editor may have hoped to bolster up the sub-stories then running about St. Jim's, but sub-St. Jim's plus St. Katie's, made an uneasy combination. A few of the tales were collected and reprinted in an early S.O.L., and one of the St. Katie's yarns was reprinted in a Holiday Annual.

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TOP PRICES for Collections or Items surplus to requirements.

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TWO STORIES BY DEREK LONG

by Gerry Allison

I have been re-reading the series in Blakiana of some ten years ago by Walter Webb, entitled "CENTURY MAKERS." In these articles, Mr. Webb reviewed the work of the major writers of Sexton Blake stories.

This made me think of the authors at the other end of the scale who only just managed to break their duck, as it were. How fascinating it is to read the Sexton Blake Author's 'Who's Who" by Bill Lofts and Derek Adley in the 1958 Collectors' Digest Annual and reflect on what S. Gordon Swan recently called the 'special magic of the name of Sexton Blake.'

Take Derek Long for instance, who wrote just two Blake yarns in the Sexton Blake Library. "Identity unknown" says Bill Lofts. But the two stories reveal that Derek Long was fully aware of all the magic of Blake's character - and of that of Tinker and Mrs. Bardell, too.

The two stories he wrote are "The Case of Lord Greyburn's Son," SBL 3/133, and "The Mystery of the Italian Ruins," SBL 3/224. I reviewed the latter in the Collectors' Digest in 1950 - twenty years ago! - and this is what I said:-

> "Written with humour and good characterisation. An Inspector Tryon of Scotland Yard was new to me, but very solid. Quite in the Harker/Coutts tradition. And Porgy Bates, a would-be Humphrey Bogart, almost stole the show.
>
> "The action never flagged, both Blake and Tinker were themselves, and the whole story was logical and credible. To find sly bits of humour like the following was really delicious.
>
> "'Hey, copper! I'm being followed.'
>
> "'Don't call me copper,' said the copper coldly."

I have just read the tale again with great enjoyment, and also "The Case of Lord Greyburn's Son" - for the first time. I must mention the superb cover illustration by Eric R. Parker on the latter S.B.L. I found that Inspector Tryon also appeared in SBL 3/133. Here he is for the first time in the Blake saga - page 39. The scene is the bar of the Red Lion Inn at Middenhope:-

On his way to the lounge, Blake heard the hum of conversation, and gently pushed the bar door open a moment as he passed. As he looked inside a smile curved his lips, and he fixed his gaze upon the broad blue back of a man standing about three yeards away from him.

He was a big man with dark hair well brushed down, and blue, contemplative eyes, with a steady serene gaze, a gaze which at the moment was just the least bit troubled.

Blake struggled through the intervening people, and clapped him on the shoulder.

"Good evening, Tryon!" he smiled.

Detective Inspector Tryon of Scotland Yard started and stared at Blake.

"Sexton Blake!" he exclaimed. "So here you are at last. I've been wanting to see you."

The two shook hands warmly. They were old friends, and sometimes old rivals, but friendship always prevailed over rivalry. Tryon had a great respect for the shrewd mind and deep knowledge Blake brought to bear upon his cases. At the same time Blake knew that Tryon was one of the best men the Yard possessed. Always thorough and consciencious, Tryon was sometimes capable of brilliance. The sight of the two of them together was never called upon to bring ease of mind to the criminal fraternity.

That is what I regard as very fine writing. Obviously the author has a real love of his subject, and is superbly aware of the magical atmosphere which surrounds Sexton Blake. I imagine myself that he wrote these two stories with immense pleasure. We must always be grateful to the century scorers, but when one sees a player make a small score with such apolmb, how one wishes he could have knocked-up fifty.

ADDENDA: I had finished the above article, when a feeling came over

me that I had not done my homework properly. Wishing for the hundredth time that "Collectors' Digest" was indexed - I got out my copies for 1966 to 1968.

And there it was - in No. 262, for October 1968 - so recently. The article I remembered - "I Meet Derek Long" by W. O. G. Lofts! I can only advise you to read what Bill tells us about Derek Long. It confirms my own impression that he had a great sense of humour. I still think it a pity that we have only two Blake yarns by this writer.

@ @ @

THE PICTURESQUE PEN of G. H. TEED by 'Anon'

I wonder if the youthful reader of the "Union Jack" ever appreciated the fine descriptive - almost poetic - writings of G. H. Teed. I doubt it.

Take for example his story "Poisoned Blossoms!" appearing in U.J. No. 1305, dated 20th October, 1928, in which he described Yokohama.

"The great golden ball that was the sun lay in the lap of the hills to the west, its rays making a glittering mass of jewels of snow-clad Fujiyama to the east. The bay was as smooth as glass; the whole panorama of Yokohama softened and toned to exquisite beauty in those few moments while day knelt under the benediction of night."

What a mental picture this passage conjures up of the scene that confronted the eyes of Sexton Blake and his youthful assistant, Tinker, from the deck of the Pacific mail-steamer "Ecuador" at Yokohama, before she cleared for Honolulu.

A few paragraphs further on, another fine word picture is painted with deft strokes of Teed's pen, when Blake is introduced to a group of people.

"He saw but one unit of the group which stood by the rail. All the others blurred into an indistinguishable mass.

"He was conscious of only one thing at first - hair of golden splendour, such as never before had he seen grace the head of woman. Then he found himself gazing into twin pools of deepest violet.

"For a space of time that might have been but a moment, or might have been an eternity, the keen-faced man of the world was held enthralled by those violet eyes. He was conscious of a tremulous smile, of a fleeting glimpse of wondrously beautiful slimness of limb and body, of the lovely turn of throat and proud carriage of the little head. Then with a little flash of her white frock, she was gone."

This beautiful young girl, so aptly described, was June Severance, yet another in the long list of interesting feminine characters the author introduced to U.J. readers. Not only did she make Sexton Blake's heart beat just a little faster, but also became closely involved in the quest for the six diamond-studded gold ikons, the reason for Blake's presence in the Far East in the first place.

Later on, Teed displayes his first-hand knowledge as a world traveller, in describing that really beautiful paradise known as the Hawaiian Islands. Having been there myself, I can vouche for every word.

"In climate and richness of soil, in luxuriance of verdure and grandeur of hill and valley they cannot be excelled. Oahu, the island of which Honolulu is the port, may be the most favoured in many ways, and, indeed, it is destined to be the chief mart of the little archipelago. But for sheer rugged beauty, the island of Hawaii, from which the group takes its name and which is by far the largest, is incomparable, topped as it is by the grandeur of that still active volcano, Mavna Loa - the fire-god of the natives."

This charming little geography lesson continued on in the same vein for several more paragraphs, delighting the eye of the reader.

Travelling on the same ship was the villain of the story, a Eurasian, named Caspar Nigan, and friend of June Severance. Nigan owned sugar plantations on the island of Hawaii, some 150 miles by sea from Honolulu, and invited June to see them. This she did, and what followed in the bungalow makes an exceptionally graphic piece of erotic writing.

"For the first time that evening, a twinge of uneasiness seized her; but she put it aside ....

"Then from somewhere outside there came a thin, reedy, wailing

sound, quivering as it grew, and deepened to a wild throbbing that seized upon the senses like a drug. Slowly the girl grew rigid. Another instrument seemed to join in, then another, and another, until the whole invisible orchestra was beating out a wild, haunting concatenation of sound that had had its birth among the savage orgies that had formed the ritual of the savage peoples of the islands long, long before the curse of the white man had descended upon them.

"Scarcely realizing what she was doing, June Severance allowed Nigan to drag her to her feet; then she gave herself to the swaying magic of the music, drifting around the room as lightly as a bit of cotton blossom in the breeze.

"Then came a soft swishing, swishing, accompaniment that made her nerves tingle to the very tips of her toes - the soft rubbing of dried grass it might have been, or the swaying of leaves in dim forest aisles. It was the magic of the medicine men of old, the apex of the sacred hula-hula, which, even in these days is kept only for the ears of the initiated.

"Fight as she would, June could not withstand the lure of that devil's music. Her will seemed to be entirely submerged in those insidious notes that hammered against her ear-drums.

"Then she seemed to drift away upon a rose-tinted cloud, and was scarcely aware when Nigan drew her to a pause close to the curtains at one end of the room. Nor did she see the dusky girl in the grass hula-hula skirt who slithered into the room, a garland of waxy white flowers in her hands, while her long brown eyes were fixed on Nigan.

"His head gave a sign. Murmuring something in her own tongue, she slipped the garland of blossoms over June's head. One swift glance she gave again to Nigan before disappearing behind the curtains. June with the wreath of blossoms over her shoulders, stumbled a little as Nigan took her arm and assisted her to the divan.

"A wave of great sweetness seemed to be engulfing her, rising about her like some witches' miasma sending the blood rushing through her arteries, until the pain was physically acute.

"Then she was caught up in the arms of a languorous wave that carried her gently, ever so gently into a haven of wondrous beauty. She

yielded to it, sank and sank, with a sense of delicious repose from which she had no desire to be drawn back.

"Then sweet and utter oblivion, while the hungry arms of that thing of evil beside her, caught hold of the garland of drugged blossoms, hurled them across the room then swept her slim body to him, while he babbled incoherent madness."

The foregoing was an extremely well written sequence of seduction, although somewhat unusually strong for a schoolboys' publication, even by todays enlightened standards. I don't think any youthful minds suffered from it; in fact I'm pretty sure the implications were over their heads.

It is fairly obvious that G. H. Teed did not write down to his young readers, nor did any other Blake author, let me hasten to add. He wrote good exciting yarns and used descriptive passages second to none.

THE END

"But just a minute," I can hear you asking. "What happened to June Severance, drugged and helpless in the arms of Caspar Nigan?"

Well, Sexton Blake was at hand to save her from the "fate worse than death" as the novelists used to phrase it, and after she had recovered from the effects of the drugged blossoms —

"....she ran towards Blake. Before that astonished individual knew what was coming, her white arms were about his neck, her body was raised close to him, and her warm lips were pressed to his.

"'You are wonderful, Mr. Blake,' she said softly."

THE END

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STAUNCH CHUMS AT ST. JIM'S

St. Jim's was amazed. The news spread over the school like lightning. There was a thief in the college. And Blake was accused! Jack Blake accused of theft!

His chums received the news first with incredulity, and then with passionate indignation. The juniors of the School House mostly shared their feelings. There were a few exceptions. Percy Mellish, who had long yearned for the downfall of Blake, hoping thereby to rise to the leadership of the School House juniors in his place, hardly concealed his satisfaction. He had no doubt that Blake was guilty. He took care, however, not to express this opinion within hitting distance of the chums of Study No. 6.

The New House juniors received the news with more mixed feelings. They were incredulous at first. But the fact that the accusation came from the New House disposed them to put faith in it. Before long there were few boys in the New House who did not believe that Blake had taken the football money from Sleath's desk. But there were three important exceptions to the general rule. Figgins & Co. scouted the idea that Blake was a thief in the most scornful manner.

"It's all rot," said Figgins. "Blake has made us sit up often enough, but we're not going to run him down on that account. He's no more a thief than I am."

And the Co. loyally agreed.

"That's all very well," said Pratt, a New House junior and a leader in the denunciation of Blake. "But if he didn't take the money, who did?"

This was a poser, and Figgins & Co. could not answer it. Even Figgins was a little staggered by the subsequent developments of the case. It was all very well to assert that Blake was innocent, but it could not be denied that matters looked very black against him.

After Monteith had laid his complaint before the doctor, Blake was sent for. He came into the Principal's study very pale, but with head erect. The doctor gave him a searching look, but was compelled to acknowledge that he could discover no signs of guilt in the boy's face.

"You know what you are accused of, Blake?" he said, quietly.

"Yes, sir."

"You deny it?"

"Absolutely."

"You adhere to the statements you have made to Kildare?"

"Yes, sir, because they are true."

"The matter must be thoroughly sifted," said the doctor. "I need not say that if I am satisfied of your guilt, you will be expelled from the school."

"I should deserve it, if I were a thief, sir."

"If you are innocent you have nothing to fear, but I shall certainly thresh out the truth. Kildare, bring the juniors who share Blake's study here."

Herries, Digby and D'Arcy were soon brought in. They gave Blake encouraging looks, and the tears started to the boy's eyes as he read their unwavering faith and loyalty in their faces.

"Herries, you have shared Study No. 6 with Blake ever since he came to the college. Have you ever had any reason to doubt his honour?"

"No, sir. He's all right, and the best chum a chap ever had."

"Do you others say the same?"

"Of course, sir," said Digby.

"I believe him to be a weally honouwable fellah," said D'Arcy. "He has been vewy good to me evah since I came, and I wespect him highly."

"You have, I believe, an unusual amount of pocket-money for a boy of your age, D'Arcy?"

"My kind aunts send me tips sometimes, sir. My Aunt Adenlina --"

"Have you frequently sums of money in your possession?"

"No, sir; nevah more than a fivah or a tennah."

"Five or ten pounds is an excessively large sum for a junior to possess," said the doctor severely. "Have you ever missed any money since you have been in Blake's study, D'Arcy?"

"Nevah, sir!"

"You are absolutely certain on that point?"

"Quite certain, Doctah Holmes."

The Head drew a breath of relief.

"This is a point in favour of Blake," he said. "Why should he go across to the New House, running a thousand risks, when, if he made up his mind to steal, there was plunder under his very eyes?"

"But the money is gone, sir," said Monteith.

"Certainly, and circumstantial evidence is against Blake. I have another question to put to you, Herries. I believe you would be likely to know if Blake had a sudden accession of pocket-money, if he spent more than usual at any time."

"Yes, sir. We have a common fund in Study No. 6."

"Since Blake's visit to the New House, have you noticed him to be in possession of more money than usual?"

Herries paused, with his mouth half-open, and his face flushing. His embarrassment did not escape a single eye in the room.

"Come, speak out!" said the doctor sharply.

Herries gave Blake a helpless glance. Blake bit his lip. He knew what Herries was thinking of - that unlucky half-sovereign which had just been expended in the tuckshop.

"It was nothing, sir," stammered Herries. "There was a half-sovereign --"

"Please be more explicit."

"Blake had a half-sovereign, but it was his own --"

"Was it, to your knowledge, in his possession before he went to the New House?"

"No, sir."

"Where did you get that half-sovereign, Blake?"

"I found it in my pocket, sir."

Blake made the answer bravely, but he knew how absurd such an answer must sound. He flushed. Monteith openly sneered, and Kildare looked uneasy. The doctor's brows set in a frown of portentous severity.

"You found it in your pocket," he repeated.

"Yes, sir," said Blake desperately. "I didn't know it was there. I pulled out my handkerchief, and it rolled on the floor."

"I saw it, sir," exclaimed Herries, glad to be able to bear witness to something. "He flicked it out with his handkerchief, and it rolled on the floor. I picked it up, and saw that it was a half-sovereign."

The doctor's face was beginning to set like iron.

"So Blake flicked out the coin by accident, Herries?"

"Yes, sir, quite by accident!" said Herries eagerly.

Monteith, who saw what the Head was driving at, grinned.

"And then he explained that he found it in his pocket?"

"He said he didn't know where it had come from. Didn't you Blake? He didn't know he had a half-sov. left. We were all surprised to see it, sir."

"No doubt," said the doctor drily. "And now, Blake, do you still maintain that you don't know how that coin came to be in your pocket?"

"Yes, sir. I must have shoved it in there some time when I was in funds, I suppose, and forgotten all about it. You see, I never keep money in that pocket, and that accounts for my not finding it."

"You keep your handkerchief in that pocket? Yes? And you have put it in and taken it out a good many times, I presume, since the last time you were in funds. Yet you never chanced to flick the half-sovereign out till just after your visit to the New House, when a certain sum of gold was missing?"

Blake was silent.

Herries, with the best intentions in the world, had borne blacker evidence against him than any of his avowed enemies. D'Arcy and Dig were dumbfounded by this new turn of events.

"Please tell me, Sleath, the exact coins missing from your desk," said the doctor.

"A five-pound note, sir, six sovereigns, and two half-sovereigns," replied Sleath.

"And you still deny knowing anything of the missing money, Blake?"

"I have told the truth, sir."

"I am afraid you have stated a physical impossibility," said Dr. Holmes drily. "How long is it since you were in funds, as you put it?"

"A couple of weeks, sir."

"Then you wish us to believe that the coin was in your pocket for a fortnight without coming to light, although you must have taken out and replaced your handkerchief scores of times?" exlaimed the doctor.

Blake's eyes sank to the floor. There was a painful silence in the room.

Blake raised his eyes. He looked around him almost wildly. Kildare avoided his glance. Upon Monteith's cold, hard face was something like a look of pity. Pity from the head prefect of the New House - his bitter enemy. The vague thoughts of a plot against him crumpled away in Blake's mind as he caught the prefect's expression. Monteith could feel pity for him - because he believed him guilty, and knew that he would be expelled from St. Jim's.

But there was comfort in one direction. There were three faces that still told of faith and firm belief - three staunch chums who would stick to him through thick and thin. Herries, Digby and D'Arcy, impervious to logic, cared only for the evidence of their own true, warm hearts, wavering not for a moment in their loyalty.

The doctor's voice broke the silence which had become oppressive.

"The facts then are these, as I have gathered them. You went to the New House with D'Arcy. You let him leave alone, while you went back, with an excuse which may or may not have been true. Sleath found you in his study. Immediately after you were gone, he missed the money. A half-sovereign was picked up where you had been ejected from the study. Later, you are found with another half-sovereign in your possession. It is revealed by accident, and the explanation you give is absolutely inadmissible. Have you anything more to say?"

Blake shook his head.

"You believe me guilty," he said brokenly. "I can only repeat that I am innocent, and you won't believe me. I've only got my word to give you."

"Can you expect your word to be taken against an overwhelming mass of evidence?"

"I don't know. I'd take a fellow's word, unless I knew him to be a liar. I am innocent."

"I wish I could believe you," said the doctor wistfully. There was a terrible pause. "If you choose to confess, Blake, I will deal with you as gently as I can. You must, of course, leave St. Jim's. But in view of the good record you have borne till now, I will allow you to leave quietly, without a public expulsion, if you make what amends are in your power."

"If you mean returning the money, sir, I cannot, because I did not take it."

"He's innocent!" burst out Herries.

"Silence, Herries!"

"I can't be silent, sir! He's innocent, and I know it, and so does Dig; don't you, Dig?"

"Of course I do," said Dig, half-crying. "As if he'd take the dirty money."

"It's a wotten shame," said D'Arcy, with a catch in his voice. "He nevah took the money, sir. He nevah did."

Kildare made a step forward. The Head looked at him.

"Have you anything to say in Blake's favour, Kildare?"

"Only this, sir, that he's the last boy in the school I should have suspected of being a thief. I know things look black against him. But there's a chance -- Would it be too much to ask, sir, to ask you to suspend judgment for a few days, and let Blake remain until - until the matter is cleared up a bit? The money may be found - it ought to be found - and I can't help thinking that there may be a

horrible mistake somewhere."

The doctor was evidently impressed. He hesitated.

"Do you not see, Kildare, that it will be a very painful position for Blake himself?" he asked. "It is useless to expect to hush the matter up. Blake will be pointed at as a thief by the boys."

"Let him decide for himself, sir."

"Very well. Blake, what do you say?"

"Oh, let me stay, sir," exclaimed the boy eagerly. "I'm certain that something will turn up to prove my innocence."

The doctor coughed.

"For the present, then your sentence is suspended, while every effort is made to find the missing money. I presume you have the number of the missing note, Sleath?"

"Unfortunately, no, sir. I never foresaw anything of this kind, of course."

"It cannot be helped. The money must be found. You may go now. Kildare and Monteith will come with me, and Taggles will search Blake's belongings in our presence. Then, if the money is not found, I must conside the next step. You may go."

The New House seniors returned to their quarters. They carried away a firm conviction of Blake's guilt. Blake, looking white and utterly depressed, was taken away by his chums. And then the search commenced for the missing money.

(ANOTHER INSTALMENT NEXT MONTH)

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EARLY STRUGGLES (continued) By Bob Blythe

E. S. BROOKS and "THE SCOUT"

Monday, June 2nd, 1913.

Bernard Everett, Esqre.,
THE SCOUT.

As I told you in my last letter, I devoted last week to writing four instalments of "IN QUEST OF MILLIONS." I have been taking particular pains over this story, bearing in mind your hint to give a little information in each instalment. Two instalments will be typed and corrected to-morrow, when I shall post them. The other two will follow on Wednesday or Thursday.

This will leave three instalments to complete the yarn, and I shall let you have these somewhere about the middle of this month.

June the 6th, 1913.

Dear Mr. Brooks,

Instalments Three and Four of "In Quest of Millions" are inclined to drag a little, and you use rather too many long words. These are matters which I can adjust quite easily, otherwise they are all right.

Yours sincerely,
BERNARD EVERETT

June the 19th, 1913.

I am afraid I must ask you to make a few alterations in the Sixth Instalment of "In Quest of Millions."

Some of the party ought to make an effort to rescue Clive, while the others are dealing with the crocodile. They must not talk about his case being hopeless without attempting to help him.

Then, on page 96, the explorers must not steal the canoes. They must find some other way of getting hold of them.

The second portion of chapter 17 is rather slow, and it does not get one much forwarder. Will you cut out some of the parts I have marked on pages 100 and 101, and make a bit more of the sand-storm?

I am returning the MS. herewith.

June the 23rd, 1913.

The alterations you have made in the Sixth Instalment of "In Quest of Millions" have much improved it.

July the 24th, 1913.

I have received a rather long list of criticisms of your story from a reader, and as some of the points he raises seem rather important, I shall be glad if you will arrange to come up and see me on Monday afternoon next, about 3 o'clock, so that we may talk the matter over.

I am enclosing a copy of the points raised.

July 24th, 1913.

Thanks for your letter received this evening. I have read your reader's criticisms, and I was rather amused. My critic appears to be an extremely hard person to please, and is presumably desirous of airing his own knowledge of Australia, having apparently lived there for some years.

I think the only necessary answer to his criticism is that he is evidently under the impression that "In Quest of Millions" is an account of a personal tour in Australia, and not fiction, purely and simply. The main incidents and scenes are represented to occur and be in the unexplored region of the continent, and therefore I am at liberty to describe mountain-ranges and rivers as high and as wide as I find necessary. I have mentioned no actual places, so he cannot say I have misrepresented the known parts of Australia.

There can be no question of the yarn being misleading, because it is not written as a guide to Australia. If I had wilfully named well-known places and described them all wrong he would have had something to grumble about.

As to the blacks being unable to keep up with the horses; that, I think, is for me to decide. In my orgininal MS. (you cut it out) I mentioned that the horses had been bought cheaply and were poor beasts, and unable to travel fast.

It is too paltry to answer such criticisms as using the words "trail" and "grazier," and dressing my characters in pith helmets and well-worn riding breeches. Both the words are perfectly correct, and I consider that I am at liberty to attire my characters as I choose. What do you think? Don't you consider it absurd for your hypercritical reader to mention such matters?

I have referred to the arrows in a later instalment, and no doubt he will see it. The geyser and the python both occur in the unexplored region, and, anyhow, pythons do exist in Australia, to the best of my knowledge.

No doubt when my critic reaches the spot where the party reach the gold, lying about like stones, he will write to you and say that it is absolutely untrue to Australia; that he has never seen such a sight! Neither he, nor any other man has, but if I had stuck to real solid facts in an imaginary adventure story such as "In Quest of Millions," I am afraid you would not have accepted it for publication. Practically the whole yarn is supposed to take place in the unexplored part of the continent, and I have naturally used my imagination. I have also spent many hours in looking up facts concerning Australia, and it is rather disconcerting to have my story picked to bits as this reader seems to have done. But I am wrong; I am not in the least disconcerted; I am merely amused, as I am sure you must be also.

If you think it necessary for me to call and see you, I shall have great pleasure in coming on Monday, as you suggest.

July the 25th, 1913.

I thank you for your letter of yesterday's date, and shall be very glad if you will come up and see me on Monday afternoon next at 3 o'clock.

August 19th, 1913.

I must take this opportunity to apologise for being a little late with the last two instalments of "In Quest of Millions." Any future work I do for you will be sent in promptly to time ----or rather, well before time. I should very much like to write another serial for the "Scout." Could you drop me a line, and let me know the type, or types, of story you would most care to have? If you can do so, I will submit a synopsis at once; and if you consider it satisfactory, will turn in the beginning of the story

within the next week or so.

August the 22nd, 1913.

I should like to see a synopsis of a Polar Story, if this is in your line at all, and I shall be glad to look at a synopsis, any time, though I should not be able to publish the story until next year.

October the 16th, 1913.

I am enclosing herewith a cover picture, around which I shall be glad if you will write me a story of between 3,000 and 4,000 words.

I am in no immediate hurry for the MS. but should like to have it in about a month.

Yours sincerely,
BERNARD EVERETT

November 20th, 1913.

I enclose the short story herewith, and I have called it "A DESPERATE HOUR." I think it is about 4,000 words in length, or, perhaps, not quite so long. I hope you will find it suitable. I also enclose the illustration --- the incident of which I have faithfully described.

November the 26th, 1913.

I am sorry that I do not like your story, "A Desperate Hour."

"Sir Jimmy" as you call him, is not very Scout-like in wanting to rob the eagle's nest. It would be much better, from our point of view, if he went down to take a photograph, and then the bird attacked him while he was busy, and followed him as he climbed up the rope to where he could secure a good foothold to defend himself properly.

If you do not care to alter the story as suggested, perhaps you will let me see another in its place.

I am returning the MS. herewith.

January 3rd, 1914.

Dear Mr. Everett,

I enclose herewith A DESPERATE HOUR, altered according to your requirements. I must apologise for the delay, but was extremely busy the few weeks before Xmas. I trust the story will now meet with your approval.

I have been thinking over the Polar story, and will let you have a synopsis in very soon.

With kind regards, and every best wish for the New Year.

Yours sincerely,
E.S.B.

January the 8th, 1914.

Dear Mr. Brooks,

I am now enclosing a formal offer for "A Desperate Hour" which you have much improved.

Yours faithfully, BERNARD EVERETT

That closes the "Scout" correspondence. And what had Edwy achieved? One serial of nine instalments and two short stories! Who'd be a boys' story writer?

DO YOU REMEMBER? By Roger M. Jenkins

No. 81 — Magnet No. 520 — "A Very Gallant Gentleman"

Pentelow was editor of the Magnet and Gem from 421 to 579 of both papers, and during this period the publication of substitute stories was put on an entirely new footing. Before and after his editorship, Charles Hamilton's material was used whenever it was available, but during Pentelow's regime the substitute stories were regarded as being just as valuable as the genuine article. Occasionally Pentelow would insert a chapter or two in a genuine story, and at other times he would write or commission substitute stories to be inserted in a Hamilton series, as he did in the Wally Bunter series. "A Very Gallant Gentleman," which probably deserves the title of being the most celebrated of all substitute stories, was written to be inserted in the series dealing with the arrival of Redwing under the name of Clavering, and Clavering does indeed play a small part in this story. It is interesting to wonder why Pentelow tried to link his own substitute stories to the genuine ones in this way; perhaps he hoped they would be more likely to carry conviction if he did so.

Pentelow had read all the file copies of the Magnet and Gem from the very beginning, and he used his knowledge to good effect when he compiled the famous Galleries which were histories of particular characters at the two schools. He also used this information to make his own substitute stories more valid by continually referring in them to past events or half-forgotten characters like Contarini in the Gem. Among his researches he came across the famous red Magnet stories of Courtney and Valence, and there is no doubt that they made a very deep impression on him.

Courtney was Wingate's greatest friend in the Sixth form, and he was in love with Vi Vilence, the sister of another Sixth-former who had a weak nature and was given to shady practices like gambling and visiting the Cross Keys. Vi Valence was always asking Courtney to help her brother, and the situation was rather like the relationship between Hazeldene, Wharton and Marjorie Hazeldene, except that it seemed more credible because it dealt with older characters. In "A

Very Gallant Gentleman" an incendiary bomb was dropped on the Cross Keys, and Courtney went in to save Valence. Courtney was badly injured and died. We were told that Vi Valence died somewhat mysteriously shortly afterwards, and Valence left Greyfriars. So three characters were disposed of in one number of the Magnet.

Those who enjoy sentimental death-bed scenes had a field day: Wharton kissed the dying Courtney and Bob Cherry "flung his arms round Harry's neck and laid his head upon his shoulder and sobbed like a child. George Wingate stood almost choking and the Head had tears in his eyes." It was all strange stuff to find in the Magnet, and it no doubt helps to explain the deep antipathy that existed between Hamilton and Pentelow. Other substitute writers were just stand-ins, but Pentelow assumed a proprietary interest, introducing new characters and killing off old ones.

It is amusing to look through the editorial columns of the Magnet in following weeks. Pentelow modestly announced that this story had brought more letters of praise than any other Magnet story for years (a claim that can be taken with a pinch of salt), and he added that many readers confessed to crying over the last chapter. The note of self-congratulation was marred somewhat when he showed his annoyance with a critic who had complained that removing Courtney and Valence has left a gap in the stories. Pentelow sharply rebuked this critic by saying that nobody had heard much about them for some years (which was rather an odd defence for someone who kept resurrecting the past himself). The truth is that the Greyfriars Sixth form was never so interesting again. Gwynne, North, Faulkner, and Sykes were just names, whereas Courtney with his conflicting loyalties always presented an interesting problem to the reader. There can be no doubt that Pentelow butchered him to make a Roman holiday, and it is just as well that his tenure of the editorial chair lasted no longer than it did.

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MR. NORMAN EVANS MEETS

A BOY WITHOUT A NAME

I have now read Frank Richards' two stories, "The Boy Without a Name" and "Rivals and Chums," and I found it an enjoyable, though I must confess, somewhat surprising experience.

Here were the familiar 'goodies' and 'badies' which appear in so many television programmes, only in these stories the clothes were different, the language different, strangely stilted to a 1970 ear. But, of course, the 'goodies' and 'badies' Frank Richards used provided such an easy, unthinking and flattering self identification for the reader.

I kept thinking of affinities with the world of Kipling and the "White Man's Burden." This provides an unchallenged moral basis and when mixed with lingering traces of Edwardian nostalgia serves as a sharp source to add savour if not flavour. For the reader there is a vicarious pleasure in rubbing shoulders with blackguardly evil because there is the safe cleansing through the Clare/Courtenay afterwards.

Strong plots, moderately successful use of suspense and quite a lot of the dull thud of the obvious.

Originally I assume the readership was either Council School kids looking at toffs, or Middle Class children who thought of themselves as small toffs looking at large toffs from afar. But now the events are hardly credible, conversational style creaks and although there are some marvellous descriptions, it seems to me characters didn't develop. Goodness and badness deepens, but people don't change.

So they are fascinating social documents and they relate quite directly I think to the controversy of nature and nurture.

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LET'S BE CONTROVERSIAL

No. 145. TAKE WITH JUST A MODICUM OF MAGIC

Mr. John Wernham has conducted an interesting experiment with his re-issue of "Boy Without a Name." He passed a copy of the story to two of his friends, who, presumably, were reading Charles Hamilton for the first time, with the request that each should write a criticism of the work. These two gentlemen are obviously scholarly people. Last month we published the reaction of Mr. Martin Hammond, and, in this month's Digest, we print the comments of Mr. Norman Evans.

We do not cross swords over the reviews which these two gentlemen have given the book, but both seem to have stepped on one side to muse with wonder over what made the Magnet tick, and why it was such an extraordinary success in its day.

Mr. Hammond saw Greyfriars as a place of escape for boy readers who were writhing in the shackles of Victorian parents. Mr. Evans sees the readers as Council School boys looking with awe at toffs, or middle-class offspring who were themselves imitation toffs. The two scholars have overlooked the main reason for Hamilton's success - well-written school stories were immensely popular, with the added charm of the Peter Pan quality of the characters in the saga. There was really nothing else.

The experiment, in fact, cannot quite be fair. For any intelligent adult to read "Boy Without a Name" with real appreciation, nostalgia must play its part. A story written for boys is just that and nothing more for any adult who does not have memories taking him far back beyond the purple hills.

"Boy Without a Name" is not really typical of Hamilton at his best, despite the outstanding characterisation of the Caterpillar. I take with a grain of salt the claim that the author regarded "Boy Without a Name" and "Housemaster's Homecoming" as his finest stories. In my experience, he thought that each new story he wrote was better than the last. I doubt whether he would have considered his star work as appearing as long ago as in the time of the first world war. True, he would usually agree with one's acclaim of some particular

old story, but he would qualify it with the hint that his writing had got better all the time.

My personal opinion is that dozens of stories in the earlier blue Gem and during the Gem's Indian summer were superior to "Housemaster's Homecoming" and that "Boy Without a Name" was small beer when compared with the golden age of the Magnet.

Mr. Evans seems slightly bewildered with it all, and sums up "Boy Without a Name" and "Rivals & Chums" as social documents. I think they are nothing of the sort. The reprint of these old treasures is a pearl beyond price for the enthusiast, and we all welcome it as such. But "Boy Without a Name," with its heavy etching of deep black and pure white, with its use of the hackneyed "missing heir" theme, and with its painful and unbelievable stress on extreme snobbery, gives off more than a faint scent of old lavender.

In 1915, Hamilton was writing his own impression of what public school life was like, and dozens of his contemporaries copied him and also gave their impressions of what Hamilton thought life at public schools was like. I think it probable that, in real life, there is just as much snobbery in Coronation Street as there ever was in the public schools.

Long years ago, Mr. Buddle, another member of what Mr. Greeley called the "intelligentia," met Hamilton for the first time in the Gem's "Captain Mellish" series - and got hooked. True, any writer can make anything happen to any of his characters, but I think it credible that an adult interest could be captured by the fresh, bubbling fun plus the overall brooding mystery of that Gem pair. I doubt whether he would have been "hooked" by "Boy Without a Name," though, once "hooked," he could credibly have enjoyed it later.

I think it just possible that Messrs. Hammond and Evans, bewildered by "Boy Without a Name," might, like Mr. Buddle, have reacted differently to "Baffled" and "Caught Redhanded."

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NEWS OF THE CLUBS

MIDLAND

Meeting held 24th February, 1970.

This was an evening without a set programme, but as we are very much a gathering of old friends, I think members greatly enjoyed the extra opportunity for a get-together in informal chats. Certainly as usual the time just whizzed by.

Passed around for inspection were tonight's anniversary number, School Friend No. 198, dated 24th February, 1923, also the Collectors' item, Vanguard No. 1, dated 4th May, 1907.

After formal business, reference to correspondence, etc.,Tom Porter reported that he had recently visited Harry Broster. Members were interested to hear that Harry was busily engaged on the enjoyable task of renovating a vintage car.

Later quite a discussion developed on the topic of the recent ban on Bunter Books at Ipswich. Members naturally felt that the good lady was taking matters altogether too seriously, but several members referred to similar cases of a character being unduly boosted, because of his popularity with readers. This tended to spoil the stories, as witness Handforth at St. Franks.

Certainly Bunter has ballooned out into a rather odious, if tremendously funny character; almost like a modern "Anti-hero." We sigh for the halycon days of the good old Magnet, with Bunter only a lesser luminary among several star characters. Fine stories about such people as Wibley, Vernon Smith, Coker and Mr. Prout as Headmaster, aided and abetted by that bully, cad and rotter, Loder, as his trusted Head Prefect and Captain of School.

Two brain teasing items were a quiz won by Ivan Webster, and a word game, changing the letters in say D'Arcy to spell Merry.

No meeting is complete without a raffle, and very happily our newest member, Bob Wareing, won the first prize.

Then homeward bound, for some of us via the local "Three Fishers."

EDWARD DAVEY

LONDON

As hitherto stressed, the Club is fortunate in having so many good hosts available for the monthly meetings and the March gathering was no exception. Here, at their Kensal Rise home, Larry and Gladys Peters saw to it that everyone was made welcome. It was very pleasing to see both George Keppell and John Addison both recovered from indispositions and new member, Brian Williams. The latter was noticed at the conclusion of the meeting with a plentiful supply of reading matter, obtained, no doubt, from the librarians.

Leslie Rowley, in the chair, soon had the programme going in great style. Bill Lofts gave information as to what the next "Magnet" facsimile reprint is going to be, the Flip set. Furthermore, Bill went on to say that his own work, a Catalogue of Old Boys' Books from 1777 until August 1969, will soon be published. Details published elsewhere in this current issue of "Collectors' Digest." By the way, it is contemplated that a full list of Magnet titles will be published in one of the aforementioned facsimile reprints.

The second one of Jack Corbett's "Collectors' Digest Annual" articles about Mr. Crofts was read by Bob Acraman.

Larry Peters' Quiz was won by Ray Hopkins; Winifred Morss was in second place and Ben Whiter came third. Prizes generously provided by Larry and Gladys Peters.

Brian Doyle provided the Jack Corbett recording of his Greyfriars Fantasy.

Then the Chairman, Les Rowley, took over with his hidded names quiz. Charlie Wright and Ray Hopkins were dead heat winners and John Addison a good third. Here once again, the very good prizes quite staggered the recipients.

Owing to the pressure of work, the April meeting has been transferred to the Richmond Community Centre on Sunday 19th. Kindly let Don Webster know in good time so that he can order the teas. Writing of teas, a very good spread was put on by the hosts and ably served with the help of the other two ladies behind the scenes. Mention also should be made of Ron and Kit Beck, plus Neil and Susan, who made the journey from Lewes.

UNCLE BENJAMIN

NORTHERN

Meeting held Saturday, 14th March, 1970.

The Brotherhood of Happy Hours, as Herbert used to call O.B.B.C. gatherings, certainly lived up to its name on this March meeting. Firstly, the good number present, seventeen in all, or as our schoolmaster Chairman, Geoffrey Wilde, put it - he was very pleased to see such a good-sized "class." Several who had missed a few meetings were there - Harry Lavender from over the Pennines, Ron Hodgson from Mansfield, and Gerry and Myra Allison from Menston. Then Gerry had good news from two postal members. Tony Holliman had had a wonderful scoop of Magnets in response to an advertisement locally, and William Lister of Blackpool has had a story published in the Christian Herald, and we congratulated both.

More items to give pleasure were advance news of another Magnet facsimile series, and, of course, the re-instating of Bunter Books in the Ipswich library. Geoffrey read to us a series of letters published in the "Times" from a variety of people, including a schoolboy. Other members had various news cuttings and we all felt very cheerful at this satisfactory outcome.

Tom Roach had written the first part of our attempt at "What Happened to Hacker?" and now Jack Allison read this to us. We have had a taste before of Tom's gifted humour and this was up to his usual high form. Montgomery Snooks figured as a temporary Master of the Shell, as Mr. Hacker had been left by the last writer as a tutor at Popper Court, and an outrageously funny schoolroom scene was much enjoyed.

The refreshment interval was an opportunity for a good chat, and afterwards we had a Quiz sent in by John Jarman. Cryptic sentences concealed hobby character names, and after an easy one for No. 1, we had to get down to it. Jack Allison came first, with nine correct and a (suspiciously) large number had eight right! We all were very amused by this item and thanked John for his ingenuity.

This brought the end to a very happy evening.

Next meeting, Saturday, 11th April, 1970. (The Annual General Meeting.)

M. L. ALLISON

Hon. Secretary.

****

SALE: Greyfriars Annuals from 1922 to 1928, 52/6; 1929 to 1935, 50/-; 1936 to 1941, 47/6. Price includes postage.

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The Postman Called

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

W. O. G. LOFTS (London): Whilst I have the greatest admiration for the enthusiasm of Messrs. O. W. Wadham and S. Gordon Swan, in their interest in 'the Lesser authors,' I feel I ought to point out the extreme difficulties one has in gaining details about them. Apart from myself, Walter Webb and Frank Vernon Lay have spent years trying to glean biographical details on such authors as 'Michael Storm,' 'Fenton Ash' and many others of the old brigade. Most of them died before or about the 1st world war, and consequently even editors who may have known them have also passed on. Many indeed disappeared completely from the face of this earth - as no records have been found of their death. In this category comes even S. Clarke Hook (whom I did write of some years ago), R. Coutts Armour, Arthur S. Hardy and Lewis Carlton. The only man I ever met who knew Alec G. Pearson was G. R. Samways - and only then that he lived in his own town of Portsmouth. Even 'J. R. Cannon' died during the 1st world war - but readers can rest assured that if any details of old authors do come to light they will be given in C.D. Apart from all this it must be remembered that our editor is always doing his best to cater for the majority of readers - and I presume that they are nearly 90% fans of Hamilton or Brooks.

LEN WORMULL (Romford): So the fattest and funniest schoolboy in fiction is once again publicly vilified. Rejected so often by his own school-fellows, it is the turn of Ipswich public library to deny Bunter house room. Unfair to fatties, they say, and because the Bunter-style humour is not popular with children today. If the latter is true, then why all the rumpus?

True, the Bunters took over from Fatty Arbuckle in derisory epithets, but had they never been conceived, some other tag would have been cooked up. Boys will be boys. The "fat and thin" of it is that most people accept the situation good-humouredly. Take a few names from the world of films and showbusiness: Laurel & Hardy, Abbott & Costello, Andy Devine, Slim Summerville. The famous Teddy Brown extended his girth almost to the length of his Xylophone. "Fats" Waller,

one of the greatest jazz pianists. In recent times, there's Twiggy (the butt of cartoonists and comedians), Tessie O'Shea, Hattie Jaques, Stubby Hayes, the jovial Harry Secombe. Down in Aldgate there's even a Tubby Isaacs, famed for his jellied eels. Not forgetting, in our own sphere, those famous characters of Comic Cuts, Weary Willie and Tired Tim.

Despite the cynics and suppressors - and how puerile this latest snub! - nothing can deprive the great W.G.B. his place among the immortal fat characters of literature. I give the last word to my nine-years-old son, who has read his comic antics in VALIANT: 'I think he's funny, and so is old banana-nose Quelch.' Almost the last word, that is. I have a sneaking feeling someone in the Lee camp will be rubbing hands at the Owl's discomfort ....

(Readers will have noted that Bunter has now been reinstated at Ipswich Library. — ED.)

KENNETH BAILEY (Hereford): I enjoyed W. O. G. Loft's article on "Film Picture Stories" in the February issue, as I remember buying a few issues of this paper. The opening story in one of these issues was "Bombay Mail," another instance of me buying a paper because of its railway interest.

Recently, reading a Sunday Times article on a new book on T. E. Lawrence, I recalled that a serialised version of a book of his appeared in Modern Boy in the thirties. This was about R.A.F. life and led me to think that it must have been based on "The Mint." Perhaps other readers could verify this.

CHRIS LOWDER (London): The cover of the March "Collectors' Digest" was something of a pleasant shock to me. As you probably know, one of my interests is American comics - and the pictorial technique used on the front wrapper of that "Magnet" (speech balloons being used on the cover of a comic or magazine as a selling-point, something to grab the reader's interest) is supposed to be purely an American innovation.

Probably it was, back in the days of the Yellow Kid, in the early 1900's. But I doubt if even at the start of the American comic production proper (let's say: the late 1930's) the technique had been

brought to such a sophisticated level as that which was shown on the cover of that 1921 "Magnet" - i.e. the huge discrepancy between what Colonel Wharton hears over the phone and what the reader actually sees.

Of course, without the balloons the picture is nothing - but since many thousands of children would recognize Billy Bunter (as a popular and well-known character), and know, moreover, that it was not "Harry Wharton speaking," I am sure their curiosity would have been aroused more than with a normal 'static' cover. It would be interesting to know the circulation figures for that particular issue, plus the ones before and the ones after. I'm pretty sure sales rose significantly.

VICTOR GILES (Barking): A paragraph in the Midland News of the Clubs feature (March C.D.) expressed the opinion that a suitable name for the hobby would be very helpful in giving status.

Has a determined effort ever been made to agree on such a name? It should be possible to find something appropriate, I'd have thought.

I recall a "Daily Express" article some years ago which has a bearing. A professor at Sheffield University knowing of no established designation for his special branch of Sociology devised a suitable name (which I'm afraid I forget!) and submitted it for the approval of the editor of the Oxford Dictionary; the compiler of that ultimate authority on the English language being perfectly willing, apparently, to consider a newly coined word for inclusion in later editions once he is persuaded that it is in regular use amongst a sufficient number of people who are agreed as to its precise meaning.

Surely it is not beyond the combined wits of our Hobbyists to invent a suitable name which can similarly win 'official' recognition?

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SALE: Chatterbox 1923, 20/-; Champion Annuals 1924, 1933, 21/- each; Greyfriars Prospectus 37/6; 'Bunter' Titles 10/6 each; Avery's "Schoolboy Grit," 12/6.

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SIDNEY DREW'S SCHOOLBOYS By O. W. Wadham

Many story papers in the early days of this century carried short stories and serials by Sidney Drew. He was a frequent contributor to THE BIG BUDGET, a BOYS' FRIEND-like weekly that flourished at the early dawn of the 1900 period. Sidney Drew sometimes wrote school tales, and I have been wondering if the author of the once much discussed play, "Young Woodley," ever read Drew's work. He certainly could have got ideas from it.

In the Christmas number of BIG BUDGET, published on Dec. 13th, 1902, Drew contributes a yarn called "That Rascal Redfern," a story of the boys of Ranthorpe School, and their efforts to open a new tuckshop, aided by a most entertaining and broad-minded Headmaster's wife. Hero of the story is Jacky Redfern, head of the fourth form at the school. When the tale commences Jacky is being given a big welcome back to school after the holidays. Soon as he can "ditch" his cobbers, Master Redfern goes into the hall. Let us now quote from the text:

"Someone kissed Redfern in the hall, and Jack did not even blush, instead he looked into a pair of sweet blue eyes, hugged their owner, and said cheekily: 'Oh, Nora, you look ripping. I'm just glad to see you. Give me another kiss you old darling.' Then through an open door, Redfern catches sight of a table loaded with tuck, and demands a few tarts.

"'As many as you like, dear. Will you have them right now?'

"'Not now,' replied Redfern, 'but I could eat YOU, Nora. And, oh, I say, darling, isn't it wretched that I can only speak like that on the quiet. It WILL seem funny to call you Mrs. Langton.'"

Nora Langton, is, of course, the Headmaster's wife, and Mr. Langton is described as a handsome young piece of homework, so maybe some readers wondered why naughty Nora wasted so much mush on a mere fourth former. All the slap and tickle business must have been quite unknown to James Langton, V.C., however, for according to the author there "had seldom been such a true bond of affection between master and pupil as between these two;" the Head and Master Redfern.

Pub haunting did not worry Reddy like it did so many of the Greyfriars lads. In another part of the story he drove into the yard of the Apple Tree Inn, was invited into the parlour "where the highly-polished tankards winked and winked again." The jovial landlord offered ale, but not for our hero - he settled for ginger wine.

A minor character in the Ranthorpe stories was called Bunter,

but he was not a fat boy. The tubby junior was called Fatty Bonsor, and all he did besides eat was giggle. In the story I have mentioned, an American boy called Washington Miles was introduced, but, unlike Fisher T. Fish, of a decade later, he was a generous type with ample folding money.

If Charles Hamilton ever read that story of Ranthorpe and the precocious young Redfern, I take it he was "not amused." None of his characters ever carried on in that way. Even in this "permissive" age youngsters in the fourth form do not, as a rule, "pitch woo" to a headmaster's wife, and get away with it. Did Sydney Drew write many such yarns I wonder?

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