

The
Collectors' Digest

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SEPTEMBER 1951.



Boys of the Empire, No.48, 3rd September, 1901.

W. Martin, 93, Hillside, Stonebridge Park, N.W.10.

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SEPTEMBER 1951

Editor, Miscellaneous Section,
Herbert Leckenby, Telephone Exchange,
C/o Central Registry, Northern Command, York.

FROM THE EDITOR'S CHAIR

Problem: I have had a few letters lately suggesting too much space is taken by the Club reports. In contrast, quite a number of others say emphatically, "The Club reports are the very first section I turn to." So where are we? I can assure you it's no bed of roses running even the C.D. What's more, the problem is likely to grow with more Clubs in the offing, and the thought, "the more the merrier".

Well, when starting our magazine the intention was "facts and figures, articles appertaining to the hobby, and an intimate family atmosphere in which all could feel they could be in the news." With all the present difficulties it's not always easy to get the perfect blend. Still, on the whole I think we have succeeded.

However, where the Club reports are concerned, those most closely concerned have talked it over and it has been agreed that they could be pruned somewhat without losing their usefulness. Hope you'll all be satisfied.

Holiday: Shortly after this reaches you I hope to be off on holiday, needless to say to my usual haunts in London town. It will be a kind of busman's holiday, but I would sooner have a day that way than a month by the sea. I can do with a break, for things have not been easy lately. Back invigorated I shall be down to the Annual in earnest.

=====

Shock: Just before we "went to press" last month we learned of another staggering increase in the price of the coloured card we were using for the cover. We had to bear it for that issue, but the increase is so serious that it is impossible to carry it any longer. Consequently this month we have been compelled to adopt a coloured paper one. Well, after all, the Magnet and its companions only had paper covers, so why not our little C.D.

=====

The Annual: Up to the time of writing this, orders have come in splendidly. A good proportion are from new chums thus adding to the value of the "Who's Who". Last month I made a request for "occupations". Johnny Geal and several others vote this a good idea. I do think it will add to the interest of the Who's Who, for if you all play up it will show what a representative lot we are. So don't be shy, let's know how you earn your daily bread.

=====

Talbot: The long awaited "Tom Merry" book with the "Toff" playing a prominent part should be out by the time you receive this. Would someone please send a review.

=====

Tribute to an Artist The "School Friend" recently ran a popularity competition and the school story came out top. It is a pleasure to record that the editor said that no small share of the credit was due to the artist, for the artist is often forgotten. The pleasure is added to in this particular instance, for the artist in question happens to be a member of our circle, Miss Evelyn B. Flinders.

=====

O.B.B.C. Liverpool! A meeting with the object of forming a branch of the O.B.B.C. with headquarters at Liverpool will be held at the home of Donald B. Webster, Waterloo House, 7 Crosby Road, South Liverpool, 22 (Phone: Waterloo 79) on September 30th. It is expected that Donald will act as

chairman, and Frank Case, 4 Dee Street, Liverpool 6, as secretary. All interested are cordially invited to get in touch with either of them in good time.

Here's wishing a successful launching in Liverpool.

And Another: Before these lines are in print a meeting will have been held (August 24th) of the Australian O.B.B.C. (Victoria). Report to follow.

Which all delights the heart of

Yours sincerely,

HERBERT LOCKENBY.

Adverts. urgently wanted for the Annual.

Can ANYONE obliged with Gem number 946, please? I will pay a good price. Josephine Packman, 27 Archdale Road, East Dulwich, London, S.E.22.

WANTED: Lees, Chums, Nugget 3ds, Comic papers, Detective Libraries. Sale, Lees (old series). L. M. Allen, 3 Montgomery Drive, Sheffield, 7.

G. S. HENTY items wanted by Pete Martin, The Saturday Evening Post, Philadelphia 5, Pa., U.S.A.: ALL BUT LOST, 3 vols., Tinsley Brothers, London, 1869; CAPTAIN BAYLEY'S HEIR, Blackie, 1889; COLONEL THORNDYKE'S SECRET, Chatto and Windus, 1898; THE CURSE OF CARNE'S HOLD, 2 vols, Spencer, Blackett and Halam, 1889; DOROTHY'S DOUBLE, 3 vols., Chatto and Windus, 1894; FACING DEATH, Blackie, 1883; THE DRAGON AND THE RAVEN, Blackie, 1886; JACK ARCHER, Samson, Low, Searle and Rivington, 1883; FRIENDS THOUGH DIVIDED, Griffith and Farran, 1883; CHUMS, Vol.I, 42, June 28, 1893 to Vol.I, 47, August 2, 1893, containing JOHN DILLON OF DUNNAMORE, SEASIDE MAIDENS, being a special number of Tinsley's Magazine for 1880 or 1881, bound as a book and also appearing as a gift book.

Please quote prices desired and a description of condition. Date on ads in back of such items as JACK ARCHER and FRIENDS THOUGH DIVIDED should match dates on title page.

The First of a New Series

THE MEN WHO WROTE FOR BOYS

By Herbert Leckenby

No.1 - Sidney Drew

Sidney Drew (born 1878) was a star author in the halcyon days of the serial story. I suggest that period as being the last few years of the 19th and the first decade of the 20th century. For it was then that the serial was given in generous instalments, new readers were provided with a concise summary whereby to pick up the threads, and, all important, the authors' names figured prominently. Thus many of them in time became dear and familiar friends to the boys of the day.

Writing a successful serial story was a difficult art; the author had to be an adept at finishing an instalment at an exciting, breathless moment, so that the youthful reader would remain in a state of suspense for a week, and then go post haste to its newsagents in order to learn what had really happened.

A past master at the game was Sidney Drew, who I believe wrote only for Pearsons and what I will call for convenience the Harmsworth papers. It was many long years before I learned that his real name was Edgar Joyce Murray, and then I was told by an editor who knew him well. I remember at the time I had a longing to try and get in touch with the men who had given me so much pleasure in my youth. I turned to my old stand-by - the London Telephone Directory, and there, sure enough, I found an Edgar Joyce Murray. "Surely," thought I, "this will be Sidney Drew, it's hardly likely there will be two with that rather unusual combination of names." Alas! I was wrong, for on getting a courteous reply from the subscriber in the 'phone directory, I was told he had never had any aspirations as an author and knew not his namesake. So I never had the pleasure of hearing from Sidney Drew.

However, to get down to a sketch of his career. He will be best remembered as the creator of two striking, several men in one character, Graydon Garth and Ferrers Lord, patriots, Empire builders, inventors, mystery men and multi-millionaires. Graydon Garth came first and appeared in many thrilling, spell-binding serials in Pearson's Big Budget and

Boys' Leader.

Two of the stories in the "Big Budget" appeared under the eye-arresting titles - "The Vanished Fleet" and "The Mysterious Army". Written in a slick racy style, unusual but minus the absurdities of the present-day fantastic story, they provided delightful fere for the boy of the day.

Followed "A World in Arms" in the early days of the Boer War; another masterpiece. Here let me pause to tell a personal experience. You know how I love to slip them in.

Some time ago I had the luck to obtain quite a lot of Big Budgets from John Medcraft. I snapped the string and tore open impatiently his typically well-wrapped parcel, for I had been waiting forty years for the contents. I turned the papers over eagerly, then paused as one particular copy caught my eye. Its front page portrayed a vivid scene in Trafalger Square, drawn by Val Reading - the story the first instalment of "A World in Arms". Instantly my thoughts travelled back through the years to a Saturday night long before I had reached my teens. It was bath night, and in those days that meant a tubbing before the fire. Whilst my younger brother was being cleansed by mother I set reading the Big Budget. My turn came and whilst my ears were being vigorously rubbed I noticed my father pick up and start reading my B.B. I watched anxiously, for, as I have said before, he usually frowned on my beloved weeklies. However, on this occasion he was in benevolent mood, for after a while he put it down without comment. Out of the bath I grabbed it and stole off to bed. That copy displayed on the front page, that scene in Trafalger Square; a tiny insignificant incident of fifty years ago, yet I could see it as though it had happened yesterday. It just shows you, the influence those papers had on the life of a Victorian boy.

However, to proceed. About the same time as "A World in Arms" was appearing in the "Big Budget" Sidney Drew wrote his first serial for the 2d. Boys' Friend. It was another with an exciting title - "Wolves of the Deep" and it was the first story of Ferrers Lord. In it was also introduced the young Chinese prince, Ching Jung, a character who was to remain popular for years. Ching could speak King's English as immaculate as a B.B.C. announcer, but he usually chose to chatter sway in weird pidgin English. He was also a marvellous conjuror.

"Lion Against Bear" followed "Wolves of the Deep" and on the rise of the Boys' Friend to a penny came "Beyond the Eternal Ice", the story of a race to the North Pole. In this was met for the first time an unusual comic character, Gan Waga, an Eskimo. Many more Ferrers Lord stories followed, among them "Through Trackless Tibet"; "Mysteris", "The Unconquerable" (all in the Boys' Friend), "The Blue Orchid" (Boys' Herald), "Twice Round the Globe" (Jester) and "The Millionaire Sportsman" (Boys' Realm).

In these Ferrers Lord stories Sidney Drew had a habit of suddenly switching from thrilling adventure to broad slapstick humour in which Ching Lung, Gan Waga, Tom Prout, Barry O'Rooney and other members of the crew of the marvellous submarine "Lord of the Deep" were concerned. This, to me at any rate, rather spoilt the rhythm of the stories; they were grand yarns, nevertheless.

Like many of his time, Sidney Drew was very versatile. He wrote stories of many types including school yarns. For the Hermsworth papers his most popular school was Calcroft. First serial, "Kings of Calcroft" appeared in the later days of the 1st d. Boys' Friend. Complete stories concerning the same school ran in the Mervel twenty years later. Also early in the penny Boys' Friend there was "The Boys of Barrowby" (Ching Lung's Schooldays).

For Pearsons (Big Budget and Boys' Leader) the school was Renthorpe, two of the stories being "Rivals of Renthorpe" and "That Terrible Term". One of the characters therein was Bunter, quite a different kind of Bunter to the one known to fame.

In all these school stories humour predominated, house rivalry and the like.

As proof of Sidney Drew's versatility here are the titles of some other stories which flowed from his pen. "The Peril to Come" written anonymously for the "Boys' Friend", "The Blind Boy", a tale of the coal mines, and "The Rival Cinematographers", also in the "Boys' Friend"; "Prince of the Circus" (Boys' Realm), "Wings of Gold" and "Man Against Monster" (Boys' Herald), "A Branded Name" (Jester).

Other stories for Pearsons were "Peril Island", "In Terror's Realm", "An Eye for an Eye" (a great yarn this) in the Big Budget, and "The City of Darkness" (Boys' Leader). Do not the titles give you a wistful kind of feeling?

Several of the Harmsworth stories were reprinted in the Gem, Magnet and other papers, and, of course, in the Boys Friend Library.

I almost forgot to mention that Sidney Drew was one of the legion who wrote Sexton Blake stories, both under his real name, and his adopted one, and, if I remember rightly, he introduced Ferrers Lord into two or three of them in the Union Jack.

'Tis said Sidney Drew scorned a typewriter and wrote in a very microscopic but perfectly legible hand. He often had to be chased for his copy, but it always came along eventually; which was all to the benefit of the boys of yesteryear.

HAMILTONIA

Conducted by Herbert Leckenby

In our August, 1950, we published an article "Through England with the Famous Five". It made a hit, for straight away bouquets came in. Well, its author has come along with another one which again takes you right into the magic Frank Richards country. As it is pretty lengthy I will hand it straight over to Jimmy Walsh.

CHUMS ON THE OPEN ROAD

By James Walsh

Goin' to take a Sentimental Journey
To Renew Old Memories.

This couplet from a popular song serves as my theme for our annual holiday reminiscences.

Most of us, at some time in our lives, have taken such a journey or, if not, have had a strong desire to do so. Such a journey will most often be of a strongly personal nature - to the scene of boyish escapades; the site of a former home which, like the loved ones it sheltered, may have long since departed; or to trace the adolescent footsteps of a would-be Galahad in which the ideal walk always took the longest way round!

Those of literary bent may follow in the footsteps of their favourite characters and trace the meanderings of

Mr. Pickwick or of Little Nell and her grandfather from the Old Curiosity Shop to the little village which marked the end of her long journey and short life.

Now you who have read your share of "the hundred best books" may have been inspired by their author's magic pen to visit that country forever associated with their lustrous names - the "Dickens Country", the "Scott" and "Hardy Country", the Lakes of the "Wordsworth Country and the Moors of the "Bronte Country," and in doing so you will have known the thrilling fascination of actually seeing with your own eyes, sights and scenes long familiar to your mind and imagination.

It is to such scenes that our little journey leads us - into a country that, if it has not yet earned the literary approbation of the places quoted, has been made by its beloved author no less dear to our hearts and real to our minds; you will know it as - "The Frank Richards Country".

The term is, perhaps, a little vague and elastic and it is well that it should be so; for map and compass will play a smaller part than our imagination and if, on our tour, we cannot always say positively that we are right, well then, we will not know the disillusionment of being proved wrong.

Now when I speak of this "Frank Richards Country" I do not refer merely to that small and compact world which, with the grey old pile itself as the focal point, encompasses a Village and a Town, a River and a Common.

For schooldays are behind us and holidays enlarge the vista. Wherever and however they travelled within our own fair counties, so we can too. For this is our big chance to DO AS THEY DID - in Fact as well as Fancy.

II

Well, you have been kind enough to volunteer to join our little party of Good Companions, so let's prepare for our Sentimental Journey.

If we call ourselves Terrible or Fistical or Famous, members of the fraternity will understand that these pseudonyms are intended to be sentimental also, and not provocative (and a tendency to thickening of the arteries or thinning of the thatch would soon convince the others!)

Let us pack our favourite holiday yarns in our knapsacks and when we stop to camp or just to rest and light a pipe, we'll read to one another a favourite passage or maybe cull a route our youthful fellow-trevellers have trod before us.

Frank Richards was not always too precise in pin-pointing the landmarks for us yet, as we remarked before, we are glad it should be so. For the enchantment of his country is that every dusty lane may be the one they took and every grassy dell the one in which they pitched their tent. And if they have not benen that way, well - perchance we shall meet them yet!

But stay awhile! We still have to solve the same pressing, but pleasant, problem that beset our youthful friends when Meuly's yacht or Mr. Vernon-Smith's plane was not readily available - just where we are going and by what means.

We have an extensive choice of locomotion. Firstly there's our feet and that - as Mr. Bunter pointed out to Master Bunter on one of the few occasions when that fat and lazy youth did not wish to bestow his unwelcome company on his "old pals" - provides a method that is healthy, hygienic - and cheap!

We may hire a dinghy and follow the course of the silvery Thames or a horse and caravan and follow the Open Road.

"Bob" (he has taken on the mantle of his namesake; he has no mop of curly hair but he has got big feet so we let it pass) being the mechanically-minded member of the party suggests, with an eye on the baggage, that we might pick up another "Methusalem" - you remember Bob Cherry's Trike? But that - and who having seen it could ever doubt it? - was the only one of its kind and did it not finish up, to the unceasing delight of his friends, in a thousand pieces?

We reconsider a beast for the burden. "Jimmy", the Rookwood enthusiast, recalls "Trotsky" the little pony and the equally small trap whose numerous lockers provided a stowage capacity unexcelled by Tubby himself.

Talking of horses and ponies prompted "Tom" the St. Jims follower to bring up the subject (he was looking rather hard at us at the time) of Donkeys. Did we not, he asked us, remember "Seven Schoolboys and Solomon?" I was about to make a witty rejoinder concerning asses but, remembering Monty Lowther's rotten puns on the subject, I desisted.

I suggested bikes, having in mind that we might pick up the new owner of Muccolini's Circus and drop in on it at Broadstairs or Brighton or some other pleasant South Coast

resort where that fat freak of a fortune-teller diddled us out of half-a-crown. (Rather a pity he wasn't drowned when Mucy left him cut off by the tide at Broedstairs! I would like to point out to the other cheps the very cleft where he dangled at the end of a rope - to save his fat life, not finish it!)

However, "Bob" pointed out that on a previous occasion when bikes and circuses got mixed up (that was the time the same fat brigend had diddled the owner himself as well as his clients and donned the mantle - and the wig - of the unfortunste Mr. Whiffles) the bikes got trampled on by an escaped elephant which, naturally, was somewhat to their detriment!

Well! well! what a choice! Bosts and Caravans - Horses, ponies and Donkeys - Trikes and Bikes.

There's only one way to decide; we put it to the vote - the Feet have it!

III

So here are we Chums on the Open Road at last, seeming it eagerly for familiar places and the no less familiar faces of the Chums who have gone before us.

A group of cyclists wearing school jackets and bosters wheel past us; we are not surprised to note that one has a dark complexion. We catch his answer to an unheard question - "Sure thing, if we bet first!"

If only he had said "Sure thingfully"!

We carry on with enthusiasm undiminished, for even the dreary high-road has its exciting memories - the big cer en route for Folkestone, galvanised into roaring life as it tries to shake off the evil Chink - or was it the Greek or the Italian? - and the bullets seeking billets in the tyres; the desperate chase through side-lanes, the fellows holding on for dear life as it sways and lurches. But don't worry! Ferrars Locke is at the wheel and safe arrival at the host-pier is assured!

Yes, the highway has its memories - not to mention its terrors, we feel, as a hare-brained young ass shaves us with his motor-bike - "Coker still at it!" we grunt.

At length we are out in the quieter lanes and, what with the heat and dust, begin to feel the need of liquid refreshment. And lo! in rounding a bend of the road there it was - the very epitome of every little inn that ever refreshed a

thirsty wayfarer in this Frank Richards Country!

The creaking signboard proclaims it as the Bunch of Grapes, confirming its familiar aspect as we gather round the horse-trough - the very one, we declare in which the Famous Five ducked the great Horace Coker!; and that episode brings recollections.

For had not those cheery chums arrived here, dusty, dry and thirsty as we ourselves, that warm sunny day, and beheld as we did now - "The little old-fashioned inn, with its porch, its diamond-paned windows, its red-tiled roof, half-hidden by creepers and foliage. The bench by the table under spreading branches and the prospect of ginger-pop."

Well, the "ginger-popfulness", as Hurree Singh remarked, may have been terrific, but we partook of something a little stronger and then proceeded on our way.

Fields and footpaths pass under our feet until at length, rather hot and tired, we find ourselves on the willow bank of a little river, rippling in the sunshine.

"What more delightful spot to lunch?" we ask as we choose a grassy patch amongst the willows.

As the kettle boils we have a tacit understanding as to just where we are - and a thousand memories to dispute the claim of any local inhabitant who fancied he knew better!

After a pleasant and substantial lunch we sit for a while idly watching the river; and what with the glare of the hot sunshine and its reflection on the placidly-flowing water, our heads begin nodding drowsily. Its very quiet hereabouts with no one else in sight; but up-river I seem to hear faintly the splash of oars and the calling of merry voices; gradually they die away - must have landed on the island - - probably a picnic there - - -

I had thought to take leave of you here in this pleasant, drowsy spot but, before I close, I must tell you about a rather remarkable happening that took place a little later.

I am not sure how it came about, but I remember sitting with my friends on the river bank and then next thing I knew I seemed to be on my own. I was strolling along a quiet, dusty lane lined with green hedges and clumps of trees that filtered the hot sunshine when I was awakened from a reverie by a sound - the clip-clop of a horse's hooves.

I was not unduly surprised to see a caravan rumbling along behind - gipsies I surmised. But as my eyes caught

two little pin-points of glass flashing back the rays of the sun I thought I recognised something familiar in the figure - at least in its girth! And as the van drew nearer I was still more surprised to recognise the figures of five sturdy youths dressed in white flannels.

When almost abreast of me I heard a familiar squeak from the gasping fat fellow - "I say you fellows, when are we stopping for lunch?"

Drawing aside I gave the caravan a close scrutiny as it passed. Why yes! incredible as it seemed, it was the same green-painted one that had rumbled out of the yard of Old Lazarus' shop in Courtfield, just thirty years ago!

I rubbed my eyes, too surprised to speak, as it grew smaller in the distance and at last vanished round a bend in the lane.

But that is not the most surprising part of my story. Later, as we were all walking together, "Tom" drew me aside and confided to me a remarkable happening in which he had figured. He also, it appeared, was walking alone and he also had seen a horse and caravan in similar circumstances.

But, in his case, his attention had first been attracted by the sun reflected in one little pane of glass and he had then observed that six other cheery-looking youths accompanied the van. As they drew near he was as surprised as I had been by the fat squeak to hear the youth with the eye-glass drawl - "Bettah let me lead the horse. Blake desh boy; it requires a fellow of tact and judgement!"

"And would you believe," he asked me wonderingly, "that when I looked closely at that caravan it was the very same one that had left Rylcombe over thirty years ago?"

Well, that is our story and we leave you to put your own interpretation on it.

You may remind us, with a knowing smile, that we did have a substantial lunch down there by the river and we did feel drowsy after it. We prefer to believe that, for the occasion at least, we had a kind of "second sight"; and if you haven't got that - well what are you doing in the Frank Richards Country anyway?

I leave you as I commenced, with a little quotation - for I find that a snatch of conversation I heard as the caravan passed me has been recorded by a well known pen -

"Some day," Bob Cherry remarked, "We'll have a real trip, and go right round the giddy globe in this old bus. What?"

"Some day!" said Harry Wharton laughing.

"The some-dayfulness," remarked Furree Singh, "will be terrific!"

Well, what say if we all meet and join up with "the old bus" - someday!

THE PICK OF THE SERIES. No. 9.

The Cricket Series

It has been suggested occasionally that our favourite author was not at his best when writing of sporting events. This suggestion may be true, but I think that none can deny that in his descriptions of Cricket matches Mr. Richards completely captured the atmosphere of the summer game. When writing of Cricket Series, the first to come to one's mind is undoubtedly the Lankester Story, which has already been considered in the Pick of the Series. Never was the spirit of Cricket more delightfully personified than in Lankester, the Wizard. The Da Costa Series, which had appeared a little earlier, also cunningly caught the spirit of the game. Da Costa, the Eurasian with the tortuous character, at last was able to carry the spirit of the game into his daily life. A grand series. Cricket played a large part in the Vernon Smith-Bertie Vernon Series, and, though in some ways these stories were not so happy as those mentioned above, they nevertheless captured the atmosphere of white flannels, smooth pitches, and the click of bat meeting ball.

I think that, to write such superb pictures of Cricket, Mr. Richards must have a genuine love for the game. As we read his gems of pen-painting, we can clearly see the setting sun lengthening the shadows of the trees, as Harry Wharton, going in last as the result of his feud with his relative Stacey, starts hitting all round the wicket. The Stacey Series, one of the Magnet's finest, would always be memorable for its Cricket episodes, if for nothing else. As was once said by someone else who loved Cricket - "There's a breathless hush in the Close to-night.."

Strangely enough, I cannot recall one series of either St. Jim's or Rookwood where the willow played a very large part.

OLD BOYS' BOOK CLUB

London Section. August 19th

The Modern School, Surbiton. Attendance 21

Unsurpassed as is customary Host Eric Fayne organised a very successful meeting and what a happy and enjoyable one it turned out to be. The grand feed in the Rag was an immense delight to the young and old boys and including the members of the fair sex present. Formal proceedings were soon dealt with and Chairman Len was happy to welcome two new members, J. McGeedie and L. Swan. The latter is Wheeler Dryden's representative in England, and it was understood that Mr. Dryden had every intention of being present at the meeting, but was unable to do so owing to pressure of other engagements. A new design of club stationery for official use was approved. Then came competition time and host Eric had designed a very fine Cryptogram. This was greatly enjoyed and was won by John Geel who was presented with red "Magnet" No. 223 as his prize. As usual, the popular Packmans filled the second and third places, their prizes being cigarettes and "Gem" No. 73. Highlife Quiz was won by Len Packman and Bob Whiter, with Ian Whitmore third. A team quiz was held and the majority of the questions held no terror for the participants. Then the Co. adjourned to the school's cinema and here host Eric gave a very fine and enjoyable film show, judging by the applause and laughter. But all good things come to an end and so best thanks to Host Eric and Madam for a wonderful time. Excelsior.

Next meeting at 13 Raphael Road, Hove 3. September 16th. Our editor and vice-president hopes to be present.

BENJAMIN G. WHITER.

OLD BOYS' BOOK CLUB

Northern Section

Quite a number of members being on holiday, the attendance on August 18th was considerably reduced, being 13 in all. Bill Williamson, acting chairman, said that was the number at our first meeting, so we were back where we had started. Nevertheless, we were not discouraged - or superstitious.

Then came news of one who was not on holiday but in hospital, our chairman, of course. I had seen him just before

the meeting and was able to report that Reg. hoped to be going home in the next few days. He would have to take things easy for some time. He hoped, however, to be at the next meeting. If he is, needless to say, he will be received with open arms. The meetings have never been quite the same with our Reg. absent.

Minutes were read, and treasurer Gerry Allison announced that cash in hand was £4.4.7., added to which was the Library stock now estimated at about £35. A healthy position indeed. Income from library in July was £2.3.0.

Next for half an hour we concentrated on an Eliminating Quiz, a really intriguing idea, kindly passed on by our London comrades, and prepared for us by versatile Gerry. For the benefit of others, this is how it works. A paper is chosen for the keyword (in our case it was "Rainbow"). From each of the seven letters you have to think of a school; master; scholar; old boys' paper or comic character; place name; and author. One point is awarded for each effort; thus you can get 49 points in all. But then comes the elimination. A member starts to read out his efforts. If for "R" - School he has given say "Ravenscar" (as I did), and someone else has given it (Gerry did) you lose that point, so does everyone else who has given it. When all have checked the one with most "sole" efforts wins. The idea is, of course, to keep off the obvious. It's not much use thinking of "Wynn" or "Wingate" for "W" - Scholar, for instance. Where we were concerned the veterans had the advantage and I managed to come out top by beating Henry Stables by a short head. Prepare another one, Gerry.

The next meeting will be on September 8th. We are looking forward to visits from Tom Hopperton and Don Webster (Liverpool). It is proposed to link the meeting up with a visit to the Exhibition at the Bradford Public Library, Darley Street, earlier in the day. It is hoped to put on a real good show.

HERBERT LECKENBY,
Northern Section Correspondent.

Report of Meeting, Midland Section, OLD BOYS'
BOOK CLUB, July 23, 1951, at Room 7, Birmingham
International Centre.

About twenty were present who thoroughly enjoyed the

short talk given by our Treasurer, the Rev. Mr. Pound, on Old Boys' Books. It was soon evident that he is certainly something of an authority on these Old Papers, and I venture to say that he is Greyfriars boy through and through. A notable feature about the Rev. Pound is his "Hamilton" method of serving up historical facts and clever wit on one plate. Some of the interesting things he recalled were: The mean, grasping nature of the Billy Bunter of early years as compared with the fatuously selfish but likeable fat porpoise of today. The exceptionally hard spiteful nature of the Bounder in the Magnets of early years, almost completely lacking the many points of sterling quality that Frank Richards in latter times infused into his writings of this now really admirable Removite. After Mr. Pound's talk, Mr. Parsons came forward to point out that the first Club Circular which had been compiled by our Chairman, though of an excellent content, had nevertheless an interesting error. As no one else seemed to spot it, Mr. Parsons explained that Bob Cherry's famous greeting is Hello Hello, not Hello Hello. Black mark, Mr. Corbett! An excellent quiz was sent in by Mr. V. Smith, and Mr. Gregory scored $9\frac{1}{2}$ out of a possible 10, and deserved the prize of three "Gems". Mrs. Brown saved the day for the ladies of the Club by finishing a good second with $7\frac{1}{4}$. And so a nice clean copy of The Magnet for this ardent supporter. The Treasurer's statement disclosed that our finances are sound, but, we're not cashing any postal-orders, however positively you may be expecting them. One of our keenest members, Mr. Fletcher, leaves us now to train for the teaching profession. Good luck, Chum, and we will note your desire to be kept informed of our activities. You will hear regularly from us.

Meeting closed at 9-30 p.m.

P. L. MELLOR,
Secretary.

THE NELSON LEE COLUMN

All communications to Robert Blythe,
46 Cerleton Road, Holloway, London, N.7.

Collecting Nelson Lee's and Magnets has been a hobby which has given me much pleasure for a good many years, and since the advent of the Story Paper Collector and the C.D. that pleasure has been increased tenfold.

It has been of great interest to me to read the viewpoint

of fellow hobbyists concerning other, and perhaps lesser known papers. Sometimes, because of what has been written, I have been persuaded to read these papers for myself, and doubtless that has been your experience, which, of course, is just as it should be. To promote a friendly interest in all boys' papers is the whole object of the S.P.C. and the C.D. It is one of the fundamental principles upon which the London club has been built. It is the policy of the Leeds club, and, I hope, that of Birmingham too.

It was with a great shock and mounting indignation, therefore, that I read an article by Roger Jenkins in the July S.P.C. which I consider to be the most scurrilous attack upon Edwy Searles Brooks and the Nelson Lee (or any other author and boys' paper for that matter) that I have ever had the misfortune to read.

Most of you, I think, receive the S.P.C. so you will know why I'm getting all hot under the collar. Those of you who don't, and haven't a clue as to what I'm talking about, will have to forgive me, but I feel so strongly about it that I'm going to devote all our space this month to answering the author's statements.

Incidentally, Bill Gender has given me permission to write here instead of the S.P.C. as he agrees with me that an answer and refutation should appear as soon as possible.

It would be easy for me to sit back and say, "Why should Nelson Lee supporters bother their heads about such a ridiculous tirade? We know that the St. Franks stories are amongst the finest ever written for boys, and they are worthy of our support. In any case, no-one will take any notice, and the Nelson Lee will remain just as popular, despite what Roger says."

Unfortunately, in this imperfect world, it doesn't work out like that. One could write till one's blue in the face commending a certain subject, and unless the reader is already in agreement, make little headway. But let an article, like the one I'm talking about, be written, and the idea is implanted in the mind of the reader (especially if the reader has never read a St. Franks story) that all the stories that appeared in the Nelson Lee were pure tripe and not even worth looking at. Furthermore, anyone who READ them, and with enjoyment, were pure ignoramuses incapable of realising that they were wasting their time.

It may surprise Roger to learn, if he cares to go through the "Who's Who", that there are over 60 collectors of the Nelson Lee. Are we then all to be classed as simple-minded because we like reading the St. Franks stories? Of course, the whole idea is absurd.

During the past few years, there have been several attacks on the Nelson Lee. I wonder why? One chap who had some scathing remarks to make, afterwards told me that he had never even read a St. Franks story! Well, I ask you! If Roger has ever read any, it was only to find fault, for, because of what he says, I can hardly imagine that he had read any with the purpose of enjoying them.

And now, because he has made such sweeping statements, I feel that the only proper way to deal with his article is to answer it section by section, giving chapter and verse, as it were.

In the very first paragraph we find Roger getting himself into a happy frame of mind by proving, to himself at least, that as the Hamilton stories in the Schoolboys' Own Library held the field practically undisputed until 1936, therefore they were the most popular. Well, so what? I don't know about then, but the Greyfriars stories to-day are more popular than those of St. Franks and only a fool would dispute it. But why bother to mention it? After all, it's supposed to be an article about the demerits of the Nelson Lee, not about the merits of the Magnet, etc. The whole idea, of course, was simply to enlist the sympathies of Hamilton fans from the very start by saying in effect - we all think that the Hamilton stories were more popular, therefore that proves what I'm about to say.

In any case, does he not know that most of the A.P. papers were divided into "camps"? The Magnet, Gem, Boys' Friend Weekly etc. were one, the Nelson Lee, Boys' Realm, Nugget etc. were another, and so on. Also we have been told that there was plenty of rivalry between the various editors in those days. The S.O.L., until the demise of the N.L. was definitely within the orbit of the Magnet group, so it is not surprising that the majority of the stories were by Hamilton. When the N.L. was merged with the Gem, then it too came within the Magnet group, and so found a place in the S.O.L. and that, I may add, only because of the demand. Can you imagine the A.P. spending money in printing books

for which they felt there was no market? Then again, has he forgotten the Monster Library, (which was in the Nelson Lee group) the biggest and most ambitious scheme in the whole realm of boys' periodicals? Would the A.P. have published them if the St. Franks stories were not popular?

However, I'm digressing, so let's look at the next paragraph. Here he says (concerning the 45 St. Franks yarns published after 1936), "They were a sorry lot ... with one or two exceptions all detective stories and a great deal of the action took place in imaginary foreign countries—"

We'll ignore the crack about "sorry lot" and deal with the latter statement. I have gone to the trouble of checking all those 45 S.O.L's and here's the result. Bearing in mind that the Nelson Lee series were split up into 2 or 3 S.O.L's we find that there were no purely detective stories and that there were only three with the action taking place in fictitious foreign countries (there were only five in the whole 19 years of the N.L.'s existence!). For the rest we have six school stories with a detective element, two barrings-out, five school stories pure and simple, and three quite normal adventures.

It's quite obvious from this that Roger has never read any of these, otherwise he wouldn't have made such rash statements which can be easily disproved. He concludes this paragraph with the words, "Neither the supporters nor the opponents of St. Franks set much store by them and so we need consider them no further." I feel somehow that that sentence calls for some pithy comment, but to tell the truth I'm still so stunned by his cool assumption of arbiter of our likes and dislikes that I'm speechless - or almost!

At this point I find that I'm over-running my space, so regretfully I shall have to leave a lot unsaid that should be said, and confine myself to the main points.

On page 230 he says, "It has often been asserted that Edwy Searles Brooks created only one real character, and that was Handforth minor." Shades of Edward Oswald Handforth, Archie Glenthorpe, William Napoleon Brown, Reggie Pitt, Timothy Tucker, Lord Dorriemore and Umlos, to name only a few! What a ridiculous statement to make, and how clearly it shows Roger's lack of knowledge of the St. Franks stories! Isn't it a pity that Mr. Brooks didn't realise this at the time? Look how much trouble and energy he could have saved himself and how dull the stories would have been. It was his

gift of characterisation, in fact, that made so many of the stories outstanding, but Roger would not have you know that.

As a matter of fact, I asked him at the last meeting, who were the people represented by the words, "it has often been asserted". He said that he couldn't remember off-hand but there were several. Upon being pressed, he mentioned the name of one person present, said person immediately denied having said anything of the sort. Roger also mentioned another chap who had said so in a letter. I later spoke to him on the 'phone and received another denial. Both of them, I may add, would not have hesitated to agree, had they actually said so. I can only assume from this that Roger had misunderstood their remarks.

His article is liberally sprinkled with such phrases as: "never better than average", "writing is naive", "plot spasmodic", "tortuous", "defects in characterisation — painfully obvious", "nauseatingly reminiscent of 'Eric - or Little by Little'", "bereft of ideas (!!!)", "dialogue was unreal", "hopelessly bungled" (referring to certain scenes), "reactions unnatural and completely false", "highly artificial", etc.etc. (What a juicy collection of adjectives!) everyone of which demands an article in itself.

I wonder if I were to say that my opinion of Mr. Brooks' writings was the exact opposite in every case to that of Rogers I would be accused of as much bias in favour of the Nelson Lee as he shows against? Probably! But in all fairness, I say, read them yourself, and if you read them with an open mind I feel certain that you will agree more with my views than with Roger's. A word of warning, though. Do not, for a start, read any later than 1929. Not, let me hasten to add, because they are not worth reading, but because from that time onwards, in Mr. Brooks' own words, he "felt he was flogging a dead horse" and the stories were not of the excellent standard that had prevailed until this time. For the reason, and to answer the final paragraph in Roger's screed, I can only refer you back to C.D. No.35, pages 313-314, where I have gone into the matter in some detail.

Finally, let me say this. This article has not been written as an attack on Roger himself (as a matter of fact we get on quite well together, and have had many friendly arguments).

Letter Box held over until next month due to lack of space. H.L.

 B L A K I A N A .

SEPTEMBER 1951.

THE ROUND TABLE

I have been particularly pleased to welcome a very keen Sexton Blake enthusiast to the headquarters of Blakiana since my last chat. Yes, our good friend Bill Colcombe came along from Southend and we had a most enjoyable week together. Needless to say we went through piles and piles of old U.J.'s and S.B.L.'s and as usual when any of us have the urge to explore the pages of the past, we discovered some surprising and some amusing things all of which will eventually be explained in these pages. Bill hopes to write a history of the 2nd series S.B.L. one of these fine days and his visit here helped him towards this goal, for he spent hours and hours going through my collection and managed to discover things which surprised us both. But it IS good to be able to meet other Blake enthusiasts as I have said before and this time I managed to record one or two of our little chats on my magnetic tape recorder and the result will be a permanent pleasure for me. Before starting on this chat I played one of them through and it seemed as though Bill were still in the room. One of the main things discussed while Bill was here was the possible formation of a bi-annual Convention at which Blake fans could discuss various aspects of the hobby and of Blake in general. Our good friend Harry Honor of Heathfield, Bill and I think that it would be a very good idea. We feel that Sexton Blake is being neglected. With all due respect to the O.B.B.C we feel that a lot more time could be spent discussing the many and varied characters, authors and yarns which have been, as I said, somewhat neglected. It would not be fair to the Hamilton or N.L.L. groups to insist on a regular Blake session and although we have no intention that Blake fans should break away from the O.B.B.C. we feel that a separate "get together" of Blakians once or twice a year would prove to be both interesting and informative. Of course it would be impossible for ALL Blake fans to be able to attend such a Convention as we have in mind, but if there is only a nucleus present we can still make the affair something which will be of benefit to everyone interested in the character. Here are the main details as far as we

we're be able to compile it at present.

1. To be called The Sexton Blake Convention.
2. To meet at least twice a year, if possible in the spring and autumn of each year.
3. Venue to vary and to be arranged by mutual agreement.
4. The objects of the Convention are to further the research into Blake matter and increase the interest in Blake among C.D. readers. To discuss and allocate fields of study to the members of the Convention, the results to be studied at a future meeting and published in the C.D. if desired.
5. The Convention to remain within the framework of the Old Boys Book Club.

Harry Homer, Bill Colcombe and myself are very keen on the proposals but we want to know what YOU think and if YOU are willing or able to take part. Your views and your suggestions will be most welcome, so please write and let me know as soon as you can.

I have before me a letter from Mr. A. H. Sykes of 378, Liverpool Road, Southport, Lancs. He says:-

"In the interests of accuracy and as a loyal Northerner I must protest against a statement by Walter Webb in his article, "Sexton Blake in the Edwardian Era" appearing in the current issue of the C.D. This is to the effect that the name "Lomax" suggests that its owner had Mexican blood in his veins. "Lomax" is a Lancashire name of local origin derived from a small spot called Lomax in the parish of Dury. When surnames came to be used a native of this place whose Christian name was say Nicholas, would be called Nicholas of Lomax and this became later Nicholas Lomax. An alternative form of the name is Lomas. These surnames are quite common in Lancashire, but are now to be found in many parts of the country. The well-known character actor of stage and screen Mr. Herbert Lomas, hails from Lancashire.

And from Derek Ford of 42, West Bond St, Macclesfield ~~YORK~~ Cheshire:-

"Noting your par on "Lady Kelly" I thought you might like to read about the lady in question so I am sending you the book, you can let me have it back at your leisure. Like Mr. Darwin I have greatly appreciated Mr. Webb's revealing articles on the S.B. authors - he must have a splendid

collection to refer to and I am sure he must be "inside" at the A.P. - perhaps you or he will let us know more about HIL? I wonder if you saw in "Answers" the other week, the opening lines to Lawrence Meynell's short story "Benefit of the Doubt" - they were:- "Call me John Drummond, which is false.....". What a coincidence!

This month our star writer Walter Webb has a brickbat and a bouquet. I would welcome his reply in answer to the brickbat but would be extremely pleased if he would let us have an article about himself and his collection. How about it Walter?

I haven't received any articles or features for the 1951 Annual yet. Come along Blake enthusiasts, please help me out. And don't forget I want material for the C.D. too. The position is getting very serious as a matter of fact. I have been promised a few articles for a very long time but they have not come along and I do need them in order to introduce a little variety into the pages of our section.

Cheerio for now.

H. Maurice Bond.

All correspondence to:- H. M. Bond, 10 Erw Wen, Rhinwina, Cardiff, South Wales.

Note: I offer my sincere apologies to all those friends who have written to me during the last month and to whom I have not yet replied. I have been so overwhelmed with work that I have not been able to get down to all my correspondence but will be writing them in due course.

WANTED!!! 1st and 2nd series S.B.L. Please state numbers available together with price and general condition.

To the address above.

HAS ANYONE MANAGED TO GET A COPY OF THE SEXTON
BLAKE GRAMOPHONE RECORD ISSUED PRE WAR???

(SEXTON BLAKE IN THE EDWARDS ERA.)

by Walter Webb.

Chapter Three.

Six years later Hamilton Edwards was to republish Maxwell's first Blake story in the "Boy's Herald", but with a difference both in title and principle characters. Sexton Blake and Tinker became Michael Hearne and Flip, and the title was altered to "Michael Hearne, Detective" or "The Missing Heirloom". This ran as a serial covering a period of 6 weeks, and as soon as it ended Hamilton Edwards followed it up with "Michael Hearne's Double". This also was a reproduction of one of Blake's earlier adventures with a change of title and principal characters, being, in fact, Herbert Maxwell's second story of the Baker Street detective, published in the U.J. (No. 71) under the title of "The Cue of Three". It would seem that Edwards held Maxwell in high esteem as a detective story writer, for he published three other stories at least in serial form by him. These did not run in the "Herald" but in "The Boy's Friend" and were entitled as follows:-

(a) "Sexton Blake in the Railway" (b) "The Schoolmaster Detective" and (c) "Sexton Blake in America".

Mr. Murray Graydon was the third author to be introduced by the new editor to the new Blake stories, though under the pseudonym of Arnold Davis. It was explained to me from Fleetway House some time ago that it was no uncommon thing in those early days for more than one author to write under the same pseudonym, or rather under the same pen name; hence the reason why Arnold Davis was Alec G. Pearson one week and covering the identity of Murray Graydon the next. I submit, however, that it would be more accurate to say that more than one author had his work published under the same non-de-plume, whether he liked it or not! However, the policy of giving any sort of authors' name to the Blake stories was soon discarded and a system of anonymity adopted. There were one or two isolated instances when a favourite writer's name was disclosed, as, for instance, when Paul Herring was mentioned as the author of "The Fisherman Detective" (No. 141) but following this; and for the next twenty five years, the policy of strict anonymity was faithfully pursued.

The theme of the aforementioned story was one of deep sea diving, and Editor Back gave his readers the interesting information that the author himself had done some deep sea diving himself in his younger days.

The new Editor, determined to press on with the new series and make Blake a permanent feature of his paper, decided on a programme of stories whereby readers of all ages and of all kinds of literary taste should be catered for each week, the result being that some of the most popular boys' authors of the day were enlisted in the Blake ranks, whilst others, like Cecil Hatter, who had, hitherto, chiefly contributed to the adult papers, were also asked for material.

This, under the cloak of anonymity, we had stories from Henry St. John, who seemed to be able to put his hand to any sort of tale, whether it be school, sport, adventure or romance; Maxwell Scott, a grand writer, in the top flight of boys literature; Cecil Hatter, close friend of the late C.J. Cutcliffe Lyne, and like the latter a much travelled man, and a rattling good story teller to boot; Arthur S. Hardy, one of the best, if not THE best of all sports writers, equally at home with football, cricket, golf, billiards, swimming, etc; Mark Darran, a quite capable detective-adventure story writer who, like Mr. Murray Graydon, later tended to specialise on Blake; Sidney Drew, creator of Ferrers Lord, and a specialist in humorous school yarns; Stanhope Sprigg, who wrote several very good stories in serial form for the comic papers; but left the staff after only a brief stay; these and several others were commissioned by William Back to boost the now famous character and present in as over-riding a variety of style, subject, and treatment as possible a weekly budget of Sexton Blake stories as were most likely to appeal to the majority of his readers. Nor was William Back averse to publishing the work of a woman writer on occasion, setting an example to the editor of "Pluck" in this respect. "Pluck's" lady writer was Florence St. Mars, who wrote at least one serial for the U.J. and it has been said that she was the daughter of the author who wrote under the pseudonym of Fenton Ash. If Florence St. Mars wrote any Sexton Blake stories then there were two lady writers of the famous detective's exploits and not one as hitherto suspected.

Just over a year ago I was in correspondence with a gentleman who had himself written a few Sexton Blake's in

the early days, and know William Back quite well. He remembered the editor telling him the identity of the lady who wrote some of the Blake tales, but whether she was "Max Hamilton" or not, is doubtful in view of the fact that the latter and T.C. Dowling-Maitland have been judged to have been one and the same individual. Dowling-Maitland was certainly of the male-species and was, like Stanhope Sprigg, an agent for other writers; obviously, therefore, there can be no connection.

An interesting fact in regard to this lady writer is that she is still alive and will soon be entering into her eightieth year! She is recognised primarily as a successful playwright rather than a fiction story writer, and once again I have to record the fact of a Blake writer with stage experience, for early in her career the lady faced the footlights. She is Cicely Hamilton, and in view of the identical surname she possibly used the Christian name of Max to conceal her sex. Born in London in the year 1872 she commenced her professional career as a journalist later, going on the stage, she spent twelve years between acting and free lance journalism; her first play being produced in Brighton in 1906, and later at Wyndham's Theatre. Her work appeared in various magazines and periodicals; and in addition to her stage and literary work she was also a good speaker. Her lectures, however, were mostly confined to feminine topics. Her last book of note, "Lament for Democracy" was published in 1940. and her latest play "The Princess of Pandemonia", a comedy (first time on any stage) is due for presentation at the Birmingham Repertory Theatre during its Spring season of drama which opens on March 6th.

Chapter Four will appear next month.

STOP PRESS:

Received by Air Mail a copy of "New Zealand Listener", containing full page write-up on our activities, with extracts from articles by Harry Homer, Charlie Wright, etc., also front page facsimilies of old boys books and C.D.'s.

Details next month.