

THE

Collectors' Digest

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SEPTEMBER, 1957

Editor: HERBERT LECKENBY,
12 Herbert Street,
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or

c/o YORK DUPLICATING SERVICES,
12A The Shambles, York.

FROM THE EDITOR'S CHAIR

THAT ETERNAL PROBLEM. In the correspondence column you will find letters on that vexed question - prices. They come from Frank Lay, chairman of the London Club and Frank Unwin, stalwart member of the Merseyside one. Both Franks have been very frank in expressing their views and, as I, as editor, am involved I'll add a few words too.

First, I am in cordial agreement with Frank Unwin that it would be a thousand pities if our hobby deteriorated into a 'business'. But honestly, I don't think there is any danger of this. There may be some who join us who are "on the make" but they are very much in the minority. On the contrary, there are numerous acts of comradeship which remain unheralded except to a few directly concerned. Here are examples. On the very same day as I got the letters from the two Franks, I received two others, one from Len Fackman expressing his and Josie's great appreciation of an offer at very reasonable prices of a large number of early S.B.Ls. from Frank Machin of Preston. The other came from Margaret Cooke of Manchester in which she said she was sending off a parcel of S.B.Ls which we had previously agreed should be shared out as a gift between the four Clubs. A generous gesture. Those are just two instances I know of out of many.

Now 95% of this burning question concerns the Hamilton papers, especially the Magnet. There are few complaints where the other papers are concerned. Why is this? Is it that Hamiltonians are more

business minded than the others? Of course not. Frank Lay puts his finger right on the spot in his reference to supply and demand.

When the London Club was formed years ago they straight away got down to tackling the question of prices. Their efforts were by no means unrewarded, but since then our numbers have at least trebled. The supply of the more popular papers however, has not increased in proportion. Thus that inevitable law is ever present. To conserve what we had, should we have tried to keep the newcomers out? No indeed! Why, a big proportion of those who have joined us since that eventful day are the salt of the earth in this little world of ours. Others, though more in the background, we should not like to be without.

Anyway, let's hope the ventilation of this difficult question will do good.

* * * * *

OUR VISITORS. Following Leslie Rowley's visit to York (sorry his surname was made unrecognisable in that last minute notice last month) alert Jack Wood got some interesting pars. into the "Yorkshire Gazette and Herald." Here are some of them. Thanks Jack for some good publicity.

When Mr. Herbert Leckenby and a few like-minded enthusiasts formed the Old Boys' Book Club some ten years ago to foster their mutual interest in the books and magazines of their youth, they little realised that in less than a decade their interest would have won Club members in all parts of the world.

In recent months, Mr. Leckenby, a retired Army telephone exchange supervisor, has had the added thrill of meeting many of those with whom he has only previously corresponded. From all parts of the world they have come to see him at his home in York, and while in this country they have also taken the opportunity of meeting fellow Club members in London, Leeds, Liverpool and Birmingham, where the four Club Branches have their meeting places.

Several members from Australia have been among the visitors, and one of the more recent visitors is Bill Hubbard, an expert agriculturist from Kenya. Another Government official to come to this country was Brian

Holt, who is in the consular department and brought a party of visitors with him from Iceland. Latest overseas visitor to come to this country on a well-earned leave is Leslie Rowley, who has completed his term in the Embassy at Tokio and is expecting a posting to the Middle East on the completion of his leave. He was in York this week after visiting the London section of the Old Boys' Book Club, and he is going on to meet enthusiasts in other parts of the country.

As one might expect from a man who bears a strong personal resemblance to Johnny Bull, one of the Famous Five of Greyfriars, as pictured by artists Leonard Shields and C. H. Chapman, Leslie is a keen Hamiltonian and has a profound interest in the works of Charles Hamilton - Frank Richards.

Next overseas visitor to meet the Old Boys' Book Club and individual collectors of the Magnet, the Gem, the Nelson Lee, the Boys' Friend and other libraries of the past, will be Bernard Thorne, who hails from Toronto, the former Canadian "York."

* * * *

BOYS WILL BE BOYS. Ben Whiter tells me that the provisional date for publication is November 4th. Look out for it.

* * * *

OUR ANNUAL. Progress is excellent. Already our publishers have completed Breeze Bentley's "Lord Mauleverer"; Jack Wood's "Browsing in Hamilton Byeways" and E. C. Mason's "Pippiniana" which deals with Roland Quiz's delightful characters remembered with affection by the children of late Victorian days. Then there's in hand Gerry Allison's "Frank Richard's Schooldays", Geoff Hockley's "Maxwell Scott's Second String" and Don Webster's "The Holiday Annuals." Eric Fayne is busy on "Turn Back the Clock" and Roger Jenkins likewise on more Magnet history. There's more I'll tell you about next month.

Orders continue to come in well, but so far there's a lack of adverts. I hope you will remedy that for the peace of mind of

Yours sincerely,

HERBERT LECKENBY

Blakiana

Conducted by JOSEPHINE PACKMAN

27 Archdale Road, East Dulwich, London, S.E.22

Owing to the length of Walter Webb's first article in this new series of his, No. 8 of Eric Copeman's "Teasers" has had to be held over until next month.

In October "Blakiana" there will also be an article containing much new information concerning MARK OSBORNE. As you might guess, this is thanks to "our roving reporter" Bill Lofts, who has been doing his stuff again.

The second of the "On Tour with Sexton Blake" articles will be published in November.

Thanks to a kind friend, who saw my advert for S.B.L's and offered me 150 (1st series) which I snapped up at once, I now have many stories I have been seeking for years. Some, in fact, such as "The Ivory Screen", by Teed, I had given up all hopes of ever seeing, so you can imagine how happy I am! This particular story, incidentally, features the return of Huxton Rymer. I have of course, already thanked my good friend, but I again express my appreciation through this medium.

JOSIE PACKMAN

* * *

ON TOUR WITH SEXTON BLAKE

By Walter Webb.

FOREWORD

To one thing at least can the connoisseurs and collectors of Sexton Blake stories lay undisputed claim. They can point to the fact that through the agency of his authors and the enterprise of his editors, no character was made to travel more widely within the confines of his own country nor more extensively abroad than their world-famous favourite character, Sexton Blake, of Baker Street, London.

The aim of this and succeeding articles is to try and recapture a little of the old glamour - to relive some of those exciting moments when Blake, together with Tinker and Pedro, crossed swords with those

colourful personalities of the past - Rymer, Plummer, Wu Ling, Ferraro, Marie Galante, and others, resulting in many a thrilling chase in many a distant part of the world.

* * * *

We commence our tour with Blake in a case which took him amidst some of the most popular beauty spots in Southern England, when on the trail of a missing grocer, he came up against an old enemy, Dr. Ferraro, the criminal-surgeon.

No. 1. THE MYSTERY OF THE FOUR BUFFALO BILLS

(Author - Coutts Brisbane)

As far as Sexton Blake was concerned this case commenced in a small village called Dinsley, sixteen miles outside London, when, having motored down from Sussex in the Grey Panther after completing a minor case dealing with some missing documents, he stopped at a small stores for some tobacco. It was to immediately find himself involved in a little drama. From the frail, tearful, middle-aged woman in charge of the establishment, one Emily Hibbs, he learned that the owner of the business, John Raby, had disappeared in mysterious circumstances. Not a case which Blake would ordinarily have taken up, but the grief of the little woman who seemed genuinely very fond of the missing man, to whom she was betrothed, found a responsive chord in Blake's tender heart, and prompted him to take up investigations on her behalf. A letter found in a pocket of a coat belonging to the grocer gave Blake his first clue, whilst a second, purporting to have been written by Raby to his promised wife-to-be and postmarked from Horsham, was, to his trained mind, so palpable a forgery as to warrant a trip into Horsham without delay.

Arrived in Horsham, Blake stopped at the old hostelry known as the Blake Stag, and made a few discreet enquiries of the waiter who served Tinker and himself with breakfast. After producing a photograph of Raby, the waiter was able to identify the grocer as being one of a party of three men to whom he had served coffee some hours previously.

Leaving Blake and Tinker in the Grey Panther, undecided whether to go on to Pulborough or take the turn towards Worthing, it will be as well, for the sake of clarity, to state exactly the place of origin where events first began to shape themselves. They began on the other side of the Atlantic when five crooks conspired to blow open the safe of a wealthy man named Vanderdongen and steal the

contents - one million dollars' worth of jewellery. The safe-blowing was entrusted to one of the gang, a man named Grant, who, having accomplished this by no means easy feat, then doublecrossed his confederates and achieved the even more hazardous feat of smuggling the goods out of the country into England, and himself as well. Grant was a cousin of Raby's, and bore an astonishing likeness to him. To escape the vengeance of his confederates who had pursued him to England, Grant planned to kill Raby and take over his identity, but falling in with the master-criminal, Dr. Antonio Ferraro, he was persuaded by that astute crook to drop his plan and, in return for a share of the spoils, Ferraro guaranteed him immunity from the vengeance of his former confederates. The four American crooks cruising along Sussex country lanes came upon Ferraro and a confederate in a black saloon, and seeing Raby, whom they mistook for Grant, in their company, naturally called upon the master-crook to hand over his charge. In a mad chase through the countryside revolver shots were exchanged and the touring car wrecked. With Blake and Tinker now on the trail, it developed from that point into a three-cornered race for supremacy.

Having tried the Worthing road to no avail, Blake turned back to the Pulborough Road. From an A.A. man he learned that two Royston cars had passed that way the previous night, the first a black saloon, the second a tourer, the driver of which was obviously anxious to contact that of the saloon. Entering Pulborough, the entrance to which on that particular side is down a hill with a right-angled turn at the bottom, Blake came upon the tourer lying in a field. Near by, Tinker discovered the body of a man, killed by two bullet wounds. It occurred to Blake that the policy of the occupants of the black saloon would be to ditch their car at the earliest opportunity and since there was nowhere along the shallow Arun thereabouts where they could safely run the car into the river and rest assured it would not be discovered, he deduced that a chalk pit situated about three miles outside Arundel, beside the old Midhurst Road might be the crooks' objective. Sure enough, in the midst of a tangled mass of blackberry bushes sixty feet below was the black saloon. From his investigations of the wrecked car Blake deduced that Raby had been a prisoner inside, and an examination of a couple of guide books dealing with Devonshire and Cornwall leant him to the theory that a visit to one or both of those two places might pay dividends. First, however, enquiries at the County Arms in Arundel where, from a description of a man who made a telephone call there the previous night, Blake recognised the

presence into the affair of his old enemy, Dr. Ferraro.

Examining the guide book dealing with Devonshire, Blake discovered that the section dealing with Torquay had been removed, so a visit to that seaside resort being indicated with possible fruitful results, he and Tinker motored in that direction. Following on behind them came a sarsaparilla van, containing four men all attired in a wild west outfit and made to look like the late, lamented Bill Cody, otherwise Buffalo Bill. They were the crooks whom Grant double-crossed on Long Island, still on vengeance bent.

Two days in Torquay having failed to unearth any information regarding Ferraro, Blake and Tinker travelled to Paignton. There again, were the four Buffalo Bills, attempting to sell what they advertised as being their "world-famous sarsaparilla, made from herbs and roots gathered by the Indians of the Mojave Desert, and the old original sarsaparilla root itself which, together, was guaranteed to cure almost anything." Information from the proprietor of a shooting gallery sent Blake and Tinker towards Kingswear in a bid to locate Ferraro. The Buffalo Bills struck the same trail. Enquiries at Kingswear revealed the fact that Ferraro and his party had taken the road to Totness in two cars - Norris two-seaters. At the ferry to Dittisham the old ferry-man recognised Raby as one of a party from a photograph Blake produced, and then from an A.A. man at a cross-roads they learned that a Norris two-seater had taken the road towards Plymouth. It being clear by that time that Ferraro's party had split up, Blake purchased a motor-cycle for his assistant, and left Tinker to follow the other trail on reaching Dartmouth.

Blake continued his pursuit of the car containing Ferraro and Raby, and discovered that they had abandoned the road to Plymouth having turned northwards after crossing the Avon towards South Brent. Beyond South Brent, on a lonely and unfrequented road, Blake discovered the tracks of Ferraro's car leading out over the moor. Disaster then overtook the detective, for his appearance was seen by Ferraro, and under threat of being shot down, Blake was compelled to enter a house and there tied up by one of the master-crook's confederates. In that lonely habitation on the edge of the desolate waste of Dartmoor was the inoffensive, middle-aged grocer, Raby, helpless under the influence of a brain deadening drug. Soon after Ferraro left, leaving his prisoners under the surveillance of two confederates, the house was raided by the four Buffalo Bills, who, mistaking Raby for their old confederate, would have carried out their vow of vengeance had not Blake intervened and explained how

Ferraro had hoodwinked them.

Leaving Blake still a prisoner we follow Tinker on the trail of the second car. After several false leads he struck a road leading to Ivybridge where he discovered definite traces of his quarry. At Plympton the Norris had turned north. At a crossroads near to Tavistock Tinker made enquiries of a R.A.C. man, to be informed that a Norris car had gone into Tavistock and then returned a little later proceeding towards Liskard. Back to Ivybridge went Tinker, and continuing on towards South Brent made enquiries of a policeman of Blake in the Grey Panther. Divining that his master's objective was a place named Yalland on the edge of the moor, Tinker arrived after a bit of carburettor trouble to rescue his gov'nor from his predicament. From the incoherent ramblings of one of Ferraro's minions, mortally wounded in the clash with the Buffalo Bills, Blake learned that the criminal-surgeon was on his way to Helston, that very old Cornish town whose inhabitants indulge in a festival every year, called the "Furry" or "Floral" dance. Tomorrow would be the day this carnival took place, and the streets would be thronged with people arrayed in fancy costumes. Leaving Raby in charge of a doctor in Plymouth, Blake and Tinker took the trail leading out of Devonshire into Cornwall, parked the Grey Panther in Porthleven, and mingled with the gay throng in the Furry Dance. In that mardi gras setting was the final act in the drama staged. With both parties of crooks, pursued and pursuers, effectively camouflaged in the colourful costumes of the pageant, and Blake and Tinker in pursuit of both, also likewise attired, the climax was confused, but exciting.

Ferraro and his associates and Grant, after loading a farm cart with a large bag containing the loot of the Vanderdongen safe-blowing, attempted to reach Porthleven, in the harbor of which a motor-launch was awaiting them. But although Ferraro made his getaway safely, Grant fell to the bullets of his vengeful associates and died for his crime and the treachery which followed as a result of it. With Blake recovering the loot, so ended his thrilling tour of the Southern counties and his frustration of the designs of the Four Buffalo Bills.

The story on which this article was based was published, Thursday, 25th April, 1929, with E. R. Parker contributing the cover and inside illustrations. (Union Jack No. 1332).

* * * *

What was Blake's greatest case? The opinions on the debatable question must be conflicting and varied, and certainly interesting.

Without doubt, however, one of the biggest triumphs of the detective's career was the occasion, many years ago, when he smashed a plot hatched by a confederation of some of his most notorious and implacable enemies to cripple Britain's power in the Middle East, and Suez in particular. This will form the nucleus of an article - the second in the series "On Tour with Sexton Blake."

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ANSWER TO TEASER No. 7 (AUGUST, 1957 C.D.)

The story quoted from last month's article was written by PAUL URQUHART and its title was THE BORO' COUNCIL RAMP (S.B.L. No 593 issued in October, 1937). Stories by the same author appeared under the "by-line" of LADBROKE BLACK.

This writer contributed the Peter Brim series to the U.J., a series of eight which appeared in 1927 and 1928 and all of which were illustrated by old-time artist H. M. Lewis. According to Herbert Leckenby's article, THEY WROTE OF SEXTON BLAKE, in the C.D. Annual 1950, 18 S.B.Ls. were published as by Urquhart and four by Black. In C.D.97 under heading of "SEXTON BLAKE 1954", Derek Ford recommends THE BORO' COUNCIL RAMP, and in C.D. 99 in "EPICS OF ESCAPE", Victor Colby describes the coffin scene in his own words.

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MY TWELVE FAVOURITE U.J. (BLAKE) STORIES
(as selected by Josie Packman)

- | | | |
|-----|---|------------|
| 1. | The Death Club | (No. 558) |
| 2. | At the Full of the Moon | (No. 710) |
| 3. | The Pearls of Benjamasin | (No. 1014) |
| 4. | The Painted Window | (No. 1015) |
| 5. | The Tubu of Confucius | (No. 1023) |
| 6. | The Slave of the Thieves Market | (No. 1026) |
| 7. | The Adventure of the Giant Bean | (No. 1031) |
| 8. | The Adventure of the Yellow Beetle | (No. 1224) |
| 9. | The Temple of Many Visions | (No. 1225) |
| 10. | Doomed to the Dragon | (No. 1226) |
| 11. | The House of the Wooden Lanterns | (No. 1227) |
| 12. | The Mystery of Mrs. Bardell's Christmas Pudding | (No. 1157) |

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HAMILTONIANA

compiled by HERBERT LECKENBY

At the Northern Club's August meeting, Stanley Smith, from the chair, referred to the 50th Anniversary next February, of the Magnet's birth! He emphasized the necessity to get planning forthwith plans to celebrate such an important event, not only in our circle but in a much wider field.

Jack Wood revealed that he had already been busy in York. As a result there's the possibility of an exhibition at the Public Library on the lines of that memorable one of some years ago, but on this occasion with the Magnet given pride of place. He had also been in touch with concerns with plenty of window space.

Well, how about Hamiltonians all over the country and abroad getting down to it in similar fashion. There's a bookshop in Sydney I have often heard about that might willingly help in co-operation with our many members in that city and its vicinity.

Then maybe, Messrs Cassell's might consider publishing a new Bunter Book to coincide with the event, and persuade book-sellers to make special displays along with copies of the Magnets of different periods loaned by our members. Also photos of Frank Richards and C. H. Chapman and special sketches by the latter.

Further, national and local newspapers could be approached with the idea of publishing articles on the remarkable record of the paper, and so on and so on. It is an important occasion you know, and there's nothing like taking time by the forelock.

So get your wits and your pens to work chums, and keep in mind our bumper number. We shall want plenty of articles for that.

* * * * *

Here's a letter from Frank Richards in which he agrees with Jack Wood about the thinness of the new Billy Bunter's Own.

FRANK RICHARDS REGRETS

August 9th, 1957.

Dear Herbert Leckenby,

Many thanks for the C.D. - and as many to Jack Wood for his kind

reviews of Billy Bunter's Own. A spot of kindness was needed. Jack refers to the "unfortunate thinness" of the volume, which is putting it with much mildness. I should have said "emaciated". The quality - I hope at least - is unimpaired; but the quantity - or lack of it - is as deep a disappointment to me as it can be to any reader. Item after item was excluded for "lack of space", till I began to wonder what - if anything - would be left. However, Christmas is the time for ghosts, so I shall hope that some readers at least, may welcome this ghost of an annual.

With kindest regards,

Very sincerely,

FRANK RICHARDS.

* * * *

CONTROVERSIAL ECHOES. NO. 3

DR. BIRCHEMALL.

Bill Lofts writes:- "As a boy, I enjoyed the Birchermall stories. But, reading them today, I find them crude and childish. The difference of course, is that the tales of Greyfriars were suitable for all ages, and that is why we can still read them today. The St. Sam's tales were meant to be read by boys, and that is why I find them boyish today."

Don Webster writes:- "For youngsters hilarious stuff, but for the "old boys" not so funny. I read a few, but whilst agreeing some of the expressions and spelling were funny, they had a "sameness". I do think they were not beneficial to the Magnet, especially as they appeared in the centre pages. Furthermore, once a month would have been sufficient."

Bill Hubbard writes:- "I agree entirely with you. The Dr. Birchermall stories played a part in the Magnet and although there were times when they were undoubtedly below standard, they must have had an appeal to some Magnet readers, possibly the younger ones, otherwise they would not have carried on for so long."

* * * *

CONTROVERSIAL ECHOES. No. 4

Do we owe anything to the Substitute Writers?

This controversial topic seems to have aroused the greatest

interest of any since this series commenced. Here are the views of some of the experts in the hobby:-

HERRBERT LECKENBY (our editor) writes:- "In my time I have been as severely critical of the "substitute" or "stand-in" writers as anyone, but sometimes I have wondered if we have hardly been fair to them.

After all, should the star of some successful play fail to put in an appearance one night, and an understudy is called upon to take over the part, it would be unsportsmanlike to "give her the bird" if she has not got into the skin of part in the manner of the star. So with the subs in the Magnet and the Gem. For various reasons at times the star failed to deliver his lines, but, in the tradition of the stage, "the show must go on."

Some of the subs, as we know well, had been quite successful in other parts, but you can't pitch-fork suddenly a star of farce or melodrama into a light comedy role.

Further, we must remember that the stories were written for boys, the great majority of whom were not so discerning as we who criticise with our boyhoods long behind us. I spotted Pentelow's work, but I was well past my teens when I did so.

No! Let's be fair to the subs, for without them the sequence might have been broken, and if that had been so we might never have had the opportunity of reading a Hunter Book or of watching him on television. As you so rightly say, if there had been no subs, we shouldn't have been able to argue about them in this day and age, which would have been a pity."

ROGER JENKINS writes:- "I agree with practically everything you say about the substitute writers. They did keep the Magnet and Gem alive when Charles Hamilton was too busy to write for these papers himself. But I think it is rather the editor than the substitute writers who really deserve the credit. After all, these writers performed for purely mercenary reasons; they were writing about schools created by someone else and were forced to imitate (almost always unsuccessfully) the style of the original author.

Even if they were gifted writers themselves they could hardly have been expected to write with the loving care of the creator of the schools in question. They were just stop-gaps, probably glad to earn a little extra money, but certainly not writing for the sheer creative enjoyment of an originator.

Under such adverse circumstances it is little to be wondered

at that the vast majority of the substitute writers were so painfully inept. It is always a source of surprise to me that some collectors do in fact like some of the substitute stories. With the possible exception of the Gem story "Misunderstood", I could cheerfully see the whole lot consigned to oblivion. And I am not unmindful of those written by a certain Magnet editor, whose culminating folly was to remove two finely drawn Sixth Form characters from Greyfriars - Courtney and Valence.

RON CROLLIE writes:- "In my opinion we owe a very great deal to the substitute writers. It is about certain that the Editor of the Companion Papers would have asked Mr. Hamilton in 1915 to write for the Boys' Friend in any case, and if the substitute writers had not kept the St. Jim's and Greyfriars series running then, I should imagine that the Gem and Magnet would have ceased publication in 1916 or at the latest 1917.

And let us be honest. It is only now that we have reached the age of discrimination that we reject the efforts of the substitute writers. When we were lads, we revelled in any story about St. Jim's or Greyfriars, no matter who wrote it. And who shall say we were wrong? If it comes to that, I can still enjoy re-reading "Holiday Camp", "The Cross Country Cup", "Harry Wharton's Rivals", or "A Very Gallant Gentleman", - & fine yarns by that most maligned of substitute writers, J. N. Pentelow.

Without Greyfriars and St. Jim's, the circulation of the Magnet and Gem would have practically disappeared in no time, and they would be remembered now, if at all, as two papers that fell by the wayside after a promising run of ten years or so, due to a change in their presentation.

I propose a hearty vote of thanks to the gallant band of substitutes that kept our schoolboy heroes going until the Master was free to take over again".

DON WEBSTER writes:- "I cannot see any redeeming feature in favour of the substitute writers. When I read in a Magnet (about No. 930) that Fisher T. Fish wished to buy an evening paper to see the football scores, and Skinner doing likewise in another issue, I feel that the author has 'slipped' and has little knowledge of his characters. Furthermore, I'll never forgive the sub-writer who killed off Arthur Courtney. Comment would be superfluous!"

ERIC FAYNE SUMS UP: The writers of these letters show an interesting

divergence of opinions. Each seems to agree with about 75% of what I said in my original article, and I find that I agree with about 75% of what each one of them says.

Mr. Crollie suggests that as boys we revelled in any story about our favourite characters, no matter who wrote them. That is not completely accurate - at least, so far as I was concerned. To be honest, as a very small boy I much enjoyed "A Mission of Mystery", only to be disappointed, years later, when I re-read it and found it to be a sub-story. It had a good plot, but was inexpertly written.

But before I reached my teens, I knew a genuine story from a substitute effort. I also knew that the only good stories of St. Jim's, Greyfriars and Rookwood came from the same pen. At about twelve years of age, I wrote to the Editor to ask, "Am I right in thinking that the chief writer in the Gem and the Magnet is Charles Hamilton, who wrote of St. Jim's in Pluck?" The Editor replies, "Your assumption is quite correct."

Mr. Jenkins and Mr. Webster refer to the killing off of Courtney in "A Very Gallant Gentleman" as a major blunder of a sub-writer, while Mr. Crollie speaks of it as a fine yarn which he enjoys. Personally, I dislike it intensely, as I dislike all the substitute stories, but I must admit that I have never been unduly perturbed at the polishing off of Courtney and Valence. It has always struck me as impudent of Pentelow to kill off Courtney to provide a Roman holiday in the form of a bit of sensationalism, but nothing more.

I believe I am right in saying that many years had gone by since either Courtney or Valence had been to the fore in a story; and, so far as I know, there was no sign that either of them was ever to star again. Mr. Hamilton himself abandoned such sterling characters as Monteith and Lumley-Lumley, and, that being so, nothing would really have been lost if Pentelow had killed them both off in a story in the same way that he dealt with Courtney.

I consider that the worst of the substitute writers was the one who wrote in the Gem between 1928 and 1931, not because he wrote badly but because he abandoned traditions. Pentelow's Roman holiday in 1917 was an isolated case, but between 1928 and 1931, the old ideas were being jettisoned wholesale.

Mercenary reasons - well, I suppose that professional writers, good or bad, have some sort of similar reasons, though, as Roger says, the creator wrote with real love of his own characters - a love which the subs could not be expected to have.

The crux of the matter, probably, is that Charles Hamilton was

and is an exceptionally gifted writer; actually far superior to the class of work he was handling. It was for these reasons that hundreds of boys continued to take the Gem and Magnet, long after they became adults, and why the demand among adults for his work is so remarkable today. The substitute writers were competent enough for the type of work they were doing, but were entirely incapable of reaching the amazing standard of Charles Hamilton.

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LET'S BE CONTROVERSIAL. NO. 6

(In this series, Eric Fayne touched on certain matters of interest to students of the Hamilton Papers. He gives his own view superficially. If you will write to him, expressing your opinions on the topics he discusses, he will summarise readers' views in future issues of the C.D.)

No. 6. WERE THERE TOO MANY CHARACTERS IN THE GEM AND MAGNET?

In my opinion - yes - particularly at St. Jim's. The last major characters to be introduced were apparently Redwing, in 1917, and Wildrake in 1921, but up till those dates large numbers of characters had arrived since the beginning and had remained on the scene.

It has been argued that a profusion of characters provided variety in the stories, but so far as I am concerned, it was a variety with which I would happily have dispensed. Much of the charm of the Rookwood series lies in its very limitation, its economy in characters, which kept the prime favourites in the limelight. From 1927 onwards, Frank Richards quietly dropped many of the minor characters at Greyfriars, variety of characters giving place to a subtler characterisation of the leading lights.

I believe that one Who's Who of Greyfriars listed a Remove form of something approaching 50 members - a far larger form than one would find at any public school - and heavily unbalanced when compared with other forms at Greyfriars.

At St. Jim's, the profusion of Co's among the juniors - The Terrible Three, Blake and Co., Figgins & Co., Grundy and Co., Redfern and Co., Racke and Co., Levison and Co., - plus a great many single characters, all of whom starred from time to time - tended to diffuse the light over the scene, and lessened the possibility of characterisation work. I found irritation in the fact that, while the limelight swung confusedly over so many comparative newcomers, there was

neglect of boys whose characters had been cleverly developed in earlier days. I would shed no tears over the permanent departure of Grundy, Wilkins, Gunn, Trimble, Wildrake, Racke, Scrope, Clampe and quite a few others.

It's just my point of view. What's yours?

* * *

Do You Remember?

By Roger M. Jenkins

No. 25 - Magnet No. 242 - "The Greyfriars Insurance Co."

Although Fisher T. Fish was an unprepossessing character he never failed to hold the readers' interest. Like many of Charles Hamilton's freakish characters he changed with the passing of time. In the very early days he was brash and boastful, a typical American extrovert, but he was not unpleasant, and was even invited to spend a holiday at Wharton Lodge. At this period he was deemed a sufficient attraction to be featured in a Gem story. As the years went by he became more unscrupulous and devoted to the pursuit of money, but his exploits still made interesting reading. At the beginning of the first World War, however, when animosity towards the Americans reached an unprecedented height, he became downright unpleasant, the very epitome of everything dishonourable: even Skinner and Snoop despised him. The stories about him in those days still leave an unpleasant taste in the mouth. It is not surprising that during the 'twenties he was scarcely featured at all, and finally in the 'thirties he reverted to something like his immediate pre-war self, except that he seemed more reticent. His moneylending was confined to fags, and his avarice took the less conspicuous form of reckoning up the cost of the spread on the few occasions on which he was invited out to tea.

"The Greyfriars Insurance Co." was written in 1912 when Fishy was the bustling American hustler, when the red Magnet was at its very best, and when single stories were the almost invariable rule. This was the period when stories about Fishy were most numerous, varied and amusing. The prelude to the launching of the scheme was a mysterious outbreak of throwing stones through study windows, and with this auspicious background Fishy offered to insure against breakages for a penny a week, and did quite a trade.

Bunter was especially attracted to the sickness insurance scheme, run on Lloyd George lines. Wingate cured him of his first painful illness by homoeopathic treatment, i.e. by the application of a cane! Bunter then tried it on Mr. Quelch, and (having read an advertisement

for a patent medicine) told his astonished form-master that he had a general tired feeling, a dizziness in the head, and a weakness in the joints of the limbs. Other symptoms included a slight fluttering in the heart and a feeling of cramp and heaviness all over. The mysterious illness was rounded off with spots before the eyes, a bad taste in the mouth, and a peculiar dryness in the throat. Fishy, however, was not paying illness benefit without a doctor's certificate, but what Bunter failed to get by deceit he later obtained by blackmail.

Vernon-Smith had refused to join the insurance scheme, and was soon treated to another stone through his study window to bring him to heel. But Fishy was, as usual, too clever, and his indignation knew no bounds when someone else took a hand in the stone throwing campaign and smashed the windows of all the Removites who had insured with him, after which the insurance company went bankrupt.

"The Greyfriars Insurance Co." was not an outstanding story, but it was typical of its time - competent, amusing, and well told. The particular retribution which overtook Fishy was probably more apt than on any other occasion. As a social satire, the character of Fisher T. Fish seems somewhat dated nowadays, but as the mainspring of the plot of a Greyfriars story he still provides an hour's good entertainment.

* * * *

Since writing the opening pars. about publicity for the Magnet Jubilee, Jack Wood has told me that he has heard from Messrs. Cassell's that they are agreeable to bring forward a Bunter Book they had intended publishing in March.

* * * *

LATE NEWS. Frank Vernon Lay reports:-

Billy Bunter's Own - Sold out notices going up!

The latest news from Hulton Press, who are distributing Billy Bunter's Own for the Guildford Press in that the entire edition has been sold. And further they estimate they could have taken orders for another ten thousand copies. Therefore, we advise all those who want to possess this volume to place an immediate order with a retailer who already has copies on order. It will be no use asking a bookseller who has not already had his order confirmed to get one. Many of the existing orders had to be cut down. Arrangements for Annuals for mainly Xmas trade are of course, made months in advance and it is now too late for a further edition to be rushed through. Anyway, it

is welcome news as it means that the retail booksellers have great confidence in Billy Bunter's Own backed as it is by the Hulton Press and may lead next year to a bigger and better Annual.

 Bound Complete years issue "MAGNET", 1936, 1937, 1938, 1939. £6.12.0 ea.
 Thirty very early "Magnets" £15. Forty 1934 "Magnets" £5.12.0.
 Sixtyeight 1926-1930 "Magnets" mostly clean file copies. £30
 Sixty different "Greyfriars" S.O.Ls. £30
 "Magnets" 1403 - 1428 Bound. 92/- Twentyfive 1935 "Magnets" unbound
 82/-. WANTED Bound "Magnets" pre 1935. "Greyfriars" S.O.Ls.
 LAWRENSON, 44 BLEAK HILL ROAD, ST. HELEN'S, LANCS.

SALE. Magnets, 414, 415, 421, 462, 430, 436, 440, 449, 451, 454, 456,
 458, 459, 460, 464, 556, 561, 572, 573, 574, 575, 577, 578, 582, 583,
 585, 588, 618, 619, 860, 1021. 3/- each.
 1240, 1449, 1516, 1539. 2/- each. Plus Postage.
 DAWKINS, 5 KINGSBURY DRIVE, ASPLEY PARK, NOTTINGHAM.

WANTED: In good condition for binding: S.O.Ls - 17, 18, 41, 42, 65
 and 66. 12/6 each plus postage.
 S.O.Ls. - 137, 162, 236, 257, 258, 259, 262, 397, 400, 411. 8/-
 plus postage. Nelson Lee, Old series No. 291 of January 1st, 1921.
 8/- plus postage.

BRIAN D. HOLT, BRITISH EMBASSY, REYKJAVIK, ICELAND.

10/- each offered for one copy of any of the following papers in good condition. One copy only required. Bo-Peep, Bouncer, Cheerful, Chuckler, Dazzler, Happy, Happy Days, Magic, Merry Midget, Okay, Rattler, Sunny, Sunshine, Target, Up-to-Date, All Picture, Coloured Comic, Film Fun and Kinema Comic. The last two must be in the 1920s.
 L. PACKMAN, 27 ARCHDALE ROAD, EAST DULWICH, LONDON, S.E. 22.

PLEASE HELP an old collector in early Gems and Magnets. 1d early Plucks, Boys' Friend, 3d and 4d Libs by Jack North, and other papers of interest, especially 1/2d Gems. Would be grateful for help boys.
 RICHARD WHORWELL, 29 ASPINDEN ROAD, ROTHERHITHE, LONDON, S.E. 16.

SALE: Treasure Trove Library, 1/- each plus postage.
 F. NACHIN, 38 ST. THOMAS ROAD, PRESTON, LANCS.

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LETTER BOXTHE C.D. ENTERS BROADCASTING HOUSE

The British Broadcasting Corporation,
Broadcasting House, London W.1.

13th August, 1957.

Herbert Leckenby, Esq.

Dear Sir,

We would be most grateful if we could register a subscription for three months to one copy of:

COLLECTORS' DIGEST

to commence with the August issue.

If this is possible, would you please send this issue together with an invoice for a period of three months to:

Librarian,
Room 231,
Broadcasting House,
London, W.1.

Yours faithfully,

F. Milnes, (Miss)

Librarian.

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HOBBY OR BUSINESS?

by Frank Unwin

Am I putting the matter too strongly when I suggest that this wonderful hobby of ours is, in certain respects, gradually deteriorating into a business, with the main concern not the enjoyment the Old Papers can give, but how much hard cash they will realise?

One or two of the recent advertisements in the C.D. have really appalled me. When the O.B.B.C. was first founded I think I am correct in stating that its main object was to provide the maximum enjoyment to all its members without thought of profit to anybody. I know that Herbert Leckenby has scrupulously and faithfully carried out this ideal, not least through the medium of the Collectors' Digest, that grand little monthly magazine which gives members just as much

pleasure as a very rare copy of the Gem, Magnet or Nelson Lee, and still at the very moderate price of 1/6d. More's the pity that certain advertisers are using it for other purposes than the one mentioned above.

Let us keep it as a hobby! I am quite sure that all the Sections are genuinely endeavouring to do this. Here, in the Merseyside Section, for instance, the wonderful spirit and friendliness has to be experienced to be believed, and shows our hobby at its very best. The Section is justly proud of its Library, but books which have been read by all members, and then considered "redundant" are offered to them at remarkably low prices, and at considerable loss to finances. This policy is in keeping with the objects of the Club, and will continue.

Am I wrong in suggesting that all Sections could be a little more co-operative and helpful in regard to books for disposal? Could we, for example, when somewhat large individual collections come up for sale, be just a little more willingly to supply the "small collector" with small items, instead of being a little too ready to sell them to the purchaser who will "take the lot" in order to avoid unnecessary time and trouble? After all, most members can only afford to buy in small quantities - the genuine members, in other words.

Big business has, unfortunately crept into all our sports. Let us, for goodness sake, keep it out of our beloved hobby.

FRANK UNWIN.

* * * * *

7th August, 1957.

Dear Editor,

I cannot allow Mr. Prime's letter to go un-answered except by your goodself.

Prices are governed by one thing only - the law of supply and demand and, human nature being what it is, no words of any individual or Club will alter it. But if books are offered at silly prices then they will remain unsold and we have had proof of this in recent months.

If a collector can ill afford to buy a complete year then he shouldn't be daft enough to buy. No collector should allow the hobby to become such a mania that he has to be silly. Surely it is reasonable to buy complete runs and then dispose of those not wanted.

I often do. Furthermore, my chief delight in the hobby is meeting and corresponding with others of like interests and this involves helping them whenever possible and I cannot speak too highly of the help I have received from many collectors in all parts of the globe which help I have endeavoured to pass on to others wherever possible.

In the words of the apostle "Ask and ye shall receive."

Yours sincerely,

FRANK VERNON LAY.

S.B.L. REVIEWS

SEPTEMBER 1957

Stand-in for Murder (No. 389)

Desmond Reid

Advance publicity has done much to mitigate the feeling of shock occasioned by the report of Tinker's demise. As it says in the story, no one was more surprised than Tinker himself! How the contretemps was brought about is particularly well related by the author. Incidentally, the character of Septimus Manulty - "The Actor" - as he is also known, is going to remind old-timers very forcibly of one of their old established characters to wit, Leon Kestrel, the master-mummer.

Manulty had ambitions. One of them was to obtain complete control of a succession of organisations, including that of absinthe peddling, run by a gang-boss named Trevor Curlew, a mysterious, shadowy individual. Only Manulty knew Curlew's real identity, and therein lay the opportunity which inspired him to overthrow Curlew, and take over full control. To tell how Manulty was able to attempt his coup would be unfair to the author, and spoil a fine story. For the connoisseur in all the 1516 issues of the S.B.L. since it was founded in 1915, this is the first time Sexton Blake has been left out of the stories. But Tinker's a fine deputy, and Paula Dane, attractive and resolute, stands firmly at his side.

Rating.....Excellent

* * *

Find Me a Killer! (No. 390)Arthur Maclean

What a story! If Oscar's were awarded to Blake authors in the way they are handed out to film stars, Arthur Maclean would win one hands down with this effort. Without doubt, this is the best novel the author has contributed to date. By the same token, he has set a standard so high his colleagues are going to find it a difficult job to even approach it, much less improve upon it!

Accosted at the early hour of one o'clock in the morning, Sexton Blake is taken, at the point of a gun, to the scene of a killing. The dead man, once fabulous of wealth, enormous of power, is Basil Zherhoff an armaments manufacturer. Zherhoff could have been murdered, or he could have committed suicide. Either way it was Blake who had to find a killer - a live murderer, or a dead body with a signed confession.

Blake agrees to investigate. It is murder, as Blake soon found out. But who killed the armaments King and why? In the dining room of the Cock Tavern in Fleet Street, Splash Kirby tells Blake a story. It plants both Blake's feet firmly on the trail of the murderer. A grand novel I read and enjoyed with enthusiasm and, with the same sentiment, heartily recommend.

WALTER WEBB

Rating

Excellent

WANTED: Magnets 400/600. 1000/1250. Gems 1/900. 1250/1450.
Preferably bound. Advise price by airmail.
CHARLES VAN RENEN, BOX 50, UITENHAGE, SOUTH AFRICA.

FOR SALE: Boys Herald (No's 1 - 32. Aug. - Dec. 1903)
Boys Friend (No's 421 - 446. July - Dec. 1909)
Boys Leader (No's 79 - 101) March - Aug. 1905)
Publishers' binding, good condition. Offers in first instance to
EDITOR, COLLECTORS' DIGEST.

WANTED: Robin Hood Libraries (A.P.) No's 43, 46, 49, 50, 52, 53 also
Prarie Libraries.
F. MACHIN, 38 ST. THOMAS ROAD, PRESTON, LANCs.

WANTED: Magnets and Gems. Will exchange or buy. Hundreds of
duplicates.
D. O'HEARLIHY, 17220 GRESHAM STREET, NORTHRIDGE, CALIFORNIA, U.S.A.

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OLD BOYS BOOK CLUB

LONDON SECTION

The cruise of the 'Water Lily' or the cruise of the 'Nautilus' which ever you prefer, a choice at the informal and extremely happy gathering at Harrow on Wednesday, August 14th, host Frank Vernon-Lay. Both the cruises were in evidence as a bound volume of "Magnets" containing the 'Water Lily' series and copies of "Billy Bunter Afloat" were distributed. The occasion, well our Bernard Thorne of Scarborough, Ontario, Canada, was in the Old Country for a three weeks visit and was very pleased to meet Les Rowley, Tony Riley, Roger Jenkins, Bob Whiter and myself and our genial host, Frank Vernon Lay. What an evening! Loud was the laughter as we quoted the funny episodes culled from the "Magnet", "Gen" and "Boys Friend". 'Brotherhood of the Happy Hours', here it was in full evidence, a get-together equal to any we have had in the past. Our two overseas members really enjoyed themselves and even Bill Gander was not forgotten on this occasion as number 63 of "Story Paper Collector" was mentioned as one or two have already received some. Thanks for the happy memories, Frank and Bernard. September meeting at Frank Keeling's residence at 107, Dolphin Road, Folkestone, Kent on Sunday, 15th.

UNCLE BENJAMIN

NORTHERN SECTION MEETING, SEPTEMBER 10th, 1957

It was Ladies Night, and my word! a lively night. Mollie Allison was "star turn". She stepped into her brothers' shoes figuratively of course, and indeed it proved a case of like brother like sister. For a start she gave her schoolday views on the relative merits of Greyfriars and St. Jim's. She proved she knew as much about the subject as many a male. She then went on to read some extracts from a modern girls' school story wherein there was a damsel who had all the cunning of Vernon Smith at his worst. Then Mollie put on a quiz in which one had to link up Cliff House girls' Christian names with their surnames, followed by a twenty questions programme. Twelve objects in all, scorched some of them. The team, Stan Smith, Ron Hodgson, Ernest Whitehead and brother Gerry were in excellent form. Then the ladies formed a team, Mollie and Mrs. Allison, Margaret Jackson and Dorothy Robinson. They too did excellent, getting all but one. Yes, a grand evening. It makes one wonder if the name of the Club is hardly appropriate.

Next Meeting, September 14th. Gerry takes over from Mollie. I was perturbed when I realised that owing to the workings of the calendar it's the day before the London Club's Folkestone meeting for which I am booked. I am torn between two loyalties.

HERBERT LECKENBY, Northern Section Correspondent.

MIDLAND CLUB MEETING HELD 29th JULY, 1957

Despite holiday calls which so much affect attendances at this time of year, an excellent programme was enjoyed by eleven members. From my own personal angle, I should think that Ted Davey's main contribution "Greyfriars Tramps" was unique in the fact that apart from being highly amusing, the same theme has not appeared before and would not be out of place sometime in the C.D. Jack Corbett acted as "Leslie Welch" in a special quiz and did very well with some snorters from various members. The evening ended with a fine reading from a "St. Sam's" story, and we have to thank Madge Corbett for her share in sounding off another great programme. Next meeting has been changed from August 26th to September 2nd in Room No. 8 Chambers of Commerce. At the start of the meeting there was much comment on the very enjoyable get-together with Northern Club. The glowing accounts given gave the most cause for much regret that they too were not in the party. The idea of the "conference" of the O.B.B.C. has caught on at last. Whilst I am on the subject of this last conference I would personally like to express my appreciation of the work done by Gerry Allison in particular in arranging matters at Chesterfield. Also to Stanley Smith in taking the chair and I am sure my appreciation is shared by the other Midland Members.

HARRY BROSTER, Secretary.

MERSEYSIDE SECTION MEETING - SUNDAY, 4th AUGUST.

Several of our members were away on holiday; consequently attendance was down, but still highly satisfactory for August Bank Holiday week-end. It was a most enjoyable meeting in every way, commencing with Pat Laffey's very excellent and original competition, "Heads and Tails", which was deservedly won by Jack Morgan, whose favourite character from now on is Hop Hi! Then followed a team game with a strong literary flavour entitled "Name the Characters", which was rather stiffer than the writer of these notes intended. However, it appeared to be enjoyed by all. The Chairman gave the welcome news of some interesting new additions to the Library, including the latest Billy Bunter Annual. By the time these notes appear, Don Webster will

be well established in his new appointment in London. The Merseyside members, and, I'm quite sure, all members, wish him all happiness in his new post. Needless to say, Don will be travelling up to Liverpool every month to preside at our meetings, which gives a good indication of his great loyalty, and affection for the Merseyside Section which he founded. Will all Merseyside members please note a very important change, consequent upon Don's move. As from September the meetings will be held at the usual place on the first Saturday of the month at 7 p.m. Thus, our next meeting will be on Saturday, 7th September when we hope to see some of the olders members who found it difficult to attend on Sundays.

FRANK UNWIN

NELSON LEE COLUMN

by JACK WOOD

Nostaw, 328 Stockton Lane, York.

Phone: 25795

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Having just returned from a holiday during which I contrived to include scils down the Mersey from Liverpool, the Clyde from Glasgow, and the Thames, I thought it might be well worth glancing through the files to see what use our authors made of these three great commercial arteries of Britain in recording the adventures of Nelson Lee and Nipper.

As the editor has put a premium on space this month, I am starting, as indeed, I did my own tour with Merseyside.

In the Detective Library there appeared two stories by Edwy Searles Brooks. One was Case No. 3, The Death Chair which had the famous detective in Manchester, and Nelson Lee in Lancashire. I haven't read the stories, so know nothing about them.

In Nelson Lee Library small series, in 1920, Lee, Nipper and the boys of St. Frank's came back to Lancashire to aid Dick Goodwin, the inventor of the Remove. Actually, Oldham was the main centre of activity when Goodwin's enemies were chased to their Lancashire home.

Later, in 1923, the Schoolboy Carvanners got to Lancashire in time to revisit Oldham and tour a cotton mill where Handy aired his

ignorance on the difference between a shop steward and a ship's steward! They also helped to right the affairs of Mark Finch, a boyhood friend of Goodwin.

Moving on to 1929, we find the School Train in Lancashire, and first we are introduced to Archie's Lancashire lass, a laughable story of the romantic Archie Glenthorpe's adventures in Proud Preston and Blackpool. The following week there are lively adventures in Liverpool, ending with the rescue of The Kidnapped Schoolboys.

The story opens with Handy and his friends in Lord Street, Liverpool, and the irrepressible leader of Study D hoping to come across Chinese opium dens, lascars, dagoes and crooks of all kinds. Of course, he takes his chums on the dock area, and on the overhead railway. Strange to think he could not go in the famous Tunnel, as it was not yet finished.

Before long, Handy, Church and McClure are "shanghaied" aboard a tramp steamer. Comedy, however, turned to drama when the boys were released in Birkenhead, and guided into more trouble by a member of the crew who was ostensibly taking them to the ferry, but kidnapped them in order to get some ransom money.

Handy and Co. escape from a cellar, only to be run down by a liner while rowing across the Mersey. By a strange coincidence it was the night boat for the Isle of Man whither their kidnapper had fled! Handy brings his man back from Douglas and soundly thrashes him in a five-round "mill". Thus ended a hectic adventure from which the School Train moved on to Manchester and Birmingham.

Scotland has come little into the Nelson Lee stories. In the Detective Library, Brooks centred The Golden Football Casket in Glasgow; earlier Maxwell Scott had Lee and Nipper in Scotland during Coronation Year, 1911. In Nugget Library, No. 50, Lee and Nipper were fighting Kew and Carlac in Perthshire to settle Nipper's wager.

The School Train also visited Scotland, but it was in Edinburgh and Kinlochty, not Clydeside that the story was laid. It was the story in which McClure's parents and grandparents were reunited, and Arnold McClure, in becoming aware of his ancestry, found a new Scottish independence of spirit. Before the satisfactory ending, McClure, turned out into a wild stormy night, had found shelter on a train which took him to Glasgow.

To be continued next month.

(This month apologies to Lee fans for short ration and to Bill Lofts for crowding out of "Information Received". I'll make good next month. H.L.)