

VOLUME 16
No. 185

Collectors' Digest

MAY 1962
Price 2/-



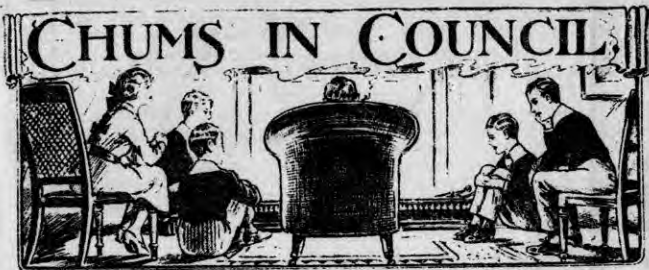
Collectors' Digest

FOUNDED IN 1947 by HERBERT LECKENBY

Vol. 16 Number 185

MAY, 1962

Price 2s.0d.



THE EDITOR CHATS WITH HIS READERS

THE GREEN BAY TREE:

Last month we referred to a reader who was asked to pay £17 for a volume containing 34 Magnets of 1939. We gave our opinion that such prices are deplorable. All the same, it is certain that most of us, at different times, have paid quite happily through our noses for certain items which we wanted. In such cases, where a bargain is made and fairly kept on both sides, nobody can have any cause for complaint. It is another matter entirely when a purchaser pays for something and then gets landed with a load of junk or items which he did not order or want.

Ever since our movement started the petty shyster has been in our midst, on the look-out to "pull a fast one" over some unwary soul. The day of the large-scale swindler in old papers seems to be passed, but the petty shyster is always with us. He appears to flourish like the green bay tree. At regular intervals, at this office, we get reports from readers who have had unhappy experiences.

Our advice to purchasers, when dealing with unknown vendors, is to ask for a detailed description, in writing, of the papers you are buying - the quantity involved, the serial numbers, and the condition of same. If the seller is "too busy" to give you this information, you will have had a lucky escape.

Above all, exercise your own common-sense. This green bay tree flourishes on the careless and the unwary. Where largish deals are involved, use an intermediary. This is a protection for both purchaser and vendor.

Most sellers and most collectors are straightforward people. For the recognised "dealer", his reputation is part of his assets. You may have to pay a little more when buying from him, but it is to his advantage to give satisfaction to his customers. And it is a fact that there are awkward customers among purchasers also. The vendors have not a monopoly of the black sheep.

So much passing from hand to hand thrusts up the price of much material, gradually reducing it to junk in the process. This junk is compost for the green bay tree.

We repeat, use your common-sense. You may lose a snip thereby - but it's unlikely.

YOUR EDITOR ON HOLIDAY:

Towards the end of May, your Editor hopes to snatch a brief holiday in Dorset. This means that the press day for our June issue must be put forward a little, and advertisers and contributors are requested to send in material as early in the month as possible.

THIS MONTH'S COVER:

Our cover this month is a novelty which we think will be welcome to our readers. It is a hitherto unpublished picture of Tom Merry, by R. J. Macdonald, the famous Gem artist who died some years ago.

THE EDITOR

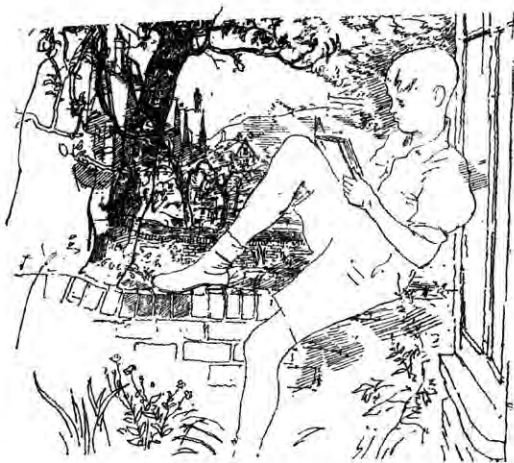
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RESULT OF OUR APRIL COMPETITION

The prizes in our Pedro Contest were won by the following entrants whose five adjectives were nearest to those selected by the Editor:

P. J. CREIGHAN, Monaghan, Eire, who will receive the two issues of the Sexton Blake Library for the next six months.

MISS E. J. PATE, Drummoyne, Australia, who will receive a new volume to add to her library.


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MAY 1912

There's been an awful lot of new papers out lately. A chap's pocket-money goes just nowhere, these days. Last month there was the "Dreadnought", and a day or two ago my brother Doug brought home a new one called "Cheer Boys Cheer". The editor of this one is Hamilton Edwards, who runs the Boy's Friend. He always seems a bit smug to me. Doug says he teaches us to lead clean lives, but I think we wash too much anyway. Jessie, our maid, gets chapped hands from washing them too much, and she rubs Melrose on them.

"Cheer Boys Cheer" is a fat paper - 36 pages, and that's four pages bigger than the Magnet. It's nearly all serial, too, so I don't think I should like it. Doug says that "Nipper's First Case", all about Nelson Lee and Nipper, by Maxwell Scott, is good, so I may try it.

They've just put a statue of Peter Pan in Kensington Gardens, and I went with Mum to have a look at it. It is chiselled in bronze by Sir George Frampton. I told Mum I would rather have seen a statue of Tom Merry, and she laughed.

Nothing very worthwhile in the Gem this month. I suppose the best story was "Figgy's Folly." It was good in parts, especially the train smash, but it was a kind of love story about Figgins and Cousin Ethel. My pal, Lindsay, says that his sister cried

over it, but I thought it a bit soppy. Flossie Lindsay says its the best Gem she has ever read, so we don't all see things in the same way.

There's quite a good series of short thriller tales running in the Gem, about a detective called Kingston, and his assistant, Dolores. They are written by Robert W. Comrade.

We went to Clacton for Whitsun, going down on the Clacton Belle. A big ship with giant paddle-wheels. It rolled a bit after we left Southend, and Mum kept sniffing her smelling-bottle. She didn't like the trip much as it reminded her of the liner "Titanic" which hit an iceberg last month.

Dad bought me Lot-O-Fun. I can't help laughing. He always splits his sides over Dreamy Daniel. Then he gives the paper to me and says: "Here you are, Danny. It's awful rubbish, but it'll keep you quiet for five minutes." Dreamy Daniel has had a space machine this last few weeks. He keeps going back down the ages with it. Underneath one of the pictures they printed: "There are speed traps for motor-cars and aeroplanes, but none for Dreamy's space machine."

Speaking of aeroplanes, the famous aviator, Wilbur Wright, has just died in America, of typhoid fever.

Going back to Lot-O-Fun, I only look at the pictures usually, but they have just started a new serial called "The Mystery of the Picture Palace," and I think I shall read this. I like going to the pictures, especially when they show plenty of comics. I like Max Linder best. When I grow up I shall either run a picture palace or be a tram driver. I haven't decided which.

On the boat, Doug had the latest Boy's Friend 3d Library. It was a school story called "The Fourth Form at St. Basil's," by Henry St. John. It's advertised as an 80,000 word story. Fancy 80,000 words for 3d. It's indelible.

I bought the latest Magnet while we were at Clacton. I read it when we went out for a brake ride to St. Ogyth. It's been a good month in the Magnet. By far the best story was "The Road to Ruin." Valence had been expelled for being friendly with Banks, the bookmaker. Wingate and Courtney asked the Head to give Valence another chance, but the Head was adipose and wouldn't. One day a new boy named Trevelyan arrived from Cornwall. Because he was Cornish he was dark and swarthy and had long hair. He saved Hazeldene from Banks. Doug says that Hazeldene used to be nicknamed Vaseline, because he is so greasy. This new senior, Trevelyan, turned out to be Valence in disguise. When the Head found out that he had saved Hazeldene, he gave Valence another chance. So Valence is back at Greyfriars for good. I think it's a bit indelible that Valence could really have come back and called himself Trevelyan and nobody recognized him, but it was a grand story.

Back at school after Whitsun my form started Euclid. Awful stuff. Carter takes the Nugget Library, and he has the latest one: "Tafty & Co and the Billy Goat". I don't care for the Nugget, but Carter laps it up.

A new automatic telephone exchange is being tried out at Epsom. The first in this country with a dial. They say it will take you 27 seconds to get a number instead of 62 seconds on the old system. It takes us longer than that on our phone.

Flossie Lindsay lent me her new copy of Young Folk's Tales called "Mabel and the Magic Goloshes." I read it when nobody was looking, and found it quite all right. I got the Union Jack this week. A good story called "The Cashiered Captain." Plenty of Tinker in it. I like Tinker.

The Cricket is going well at school. I wonder why the Magnet artist always shows the boys playing cricket with neckties on. He makes the pitches look awfully rough, too. Our sportsmaster would lay an egg if we turned out for games with ties on.

Mum took me to the Chelsea Flower Show in the grounds of Chelsea Hospital. The King opened it the day before. I was a bit bored, but Haughty Culturists like it. In the evening Dad met us, and took us to see "Ben Hur" at Drury Lane. Arthur Woner was "Ben Hur" and Reginald Owen was "Messala". The race on the revolving stage was terrific.

The editor of the Magnet keeps printing letters from boys who run what they call an anti-Magnet League. I wonder he bothers about such things. It's quite indelible.

SOMETHING NEW IN DETECTIVE FICTION.



A Story of the Wonderful Adventures of Stallabrax, the Great Detective.

By S. H. AGNEW. Author of "The Whispering Strangers" "The Vampire Men," etc.

OUR MAY COMPETITION

We invite readers to write and tell us the name of the story from their youth which they remember with the greatest happiness, and to tell us, in not more than 50 words, the reason why they have such happy recollections of it. It can be any story from any paper. Your favourite story on account of something exceptional in the story itself, or maybe on account of some happy personal experience on the day you read it.

A new book prize for your library will be awarded to each of the two readers whose entries tickle the editor's fancy the most. Closing date: MAY 16th. Entries may be written on a postcard or a sheet of paper, with your name and address, and should be sent separately and marked "May Competition."

An additional prize will be awarded for the best overseas entry, sent from places outside Great Britain and Ireland. The closing date for overseas entries is JUNE 16th. These should be sent in the same way as home entries, and marked "May Competition - Overseas."

CORRECTION

With our review of "Bunter, the Caravanner", in Collectors' Digest last month, we quoted the price as 9/6. This should have been 10/6. Prices seem to go up, these days, with monotonous regularity, without any advance notice being given.

YE OLDE CYNIQUE INN

Too many people stop looking for work when they've found a job.

HAMILTONIANA

The idea that the life of a gipsy is a "bed of roses" is quite an erroneous one. Remember, where there are roses there are thorns. This new character, created by your popular author, will bring home the hardships of an out-door and so-called "care-free" existence. Make the acquaintance of Mick right away.



By
**Frank
 Richards.**

FAMOUS SERIES

No. 19

The opening story of the Mick, the Gipsy series, of 1923. A familiar theme, down the years, in the Magnet - the boy stolen when very small. This story even introduced one, Barendro, a name well-known to early Magnet fans. Mick is discovered to be the younger brother of Aubrey Angel. Not among the Magnet's very greatest, this series, but very readable.

Artist - C. H. Chapman.

THE FIRST GREYFRIARS STORIES -
OR THE EARLY WRITINGS OF CHARLES HAMILTON

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By W. O. G. Lofts

A writer, in an article some years ago, suggested that 'Frank Richards' had perhaps penned a few dozen stories for the Trapps Holmes papers 'Smiles', 'Funny Cuts', 'Worlds Comic', 'Picture Fun', 'Vanguard' and 'Coloured Comic', and brought the very speedy reply from Charles Hamilton, that he had most certainly written no fewer than one thousand tales for the above mentioned publications.

Recently I completed my investigations on these papers, and compiled a full list of stories and various pen-names used. I can confirm that Mr. Hamilton was perfectly correct in his statement and was in fact being very modest at the same time! A rough estimate of stories written by him in these papers would be much nearer the 2,000 mark.

It has been a most fascinating experience tracing this early work, and probably at times I have felt as much excitement as the late Walter Dexter, who traced an earlier Sexton Blake story in No. 6 of the 'Halfpenny Marvel', when it was generally believed that the very first story of this great detective appeared in the 'Union Jack.' I must confess that in the past I have been rather critical on the reports given mainly in the press, of Charles Hamilton's alleged output, claiming that he wrote a full length 'Magnet' and 'Gem' story each week for years. Obviously, to even the most ardent Hamiltonian, substitute stories did appear at times, and his output was far less in this field than claimed to be.

But since I have discovered, that when he did write the actual St. Jim's and Greyfriars story for the Amalgamated Press in the same week, he also at the same time had no less than four other stories appearing in the Trapps Holmes publications. I cannot but marvel how he managed to turn out all this material to be published in the current week.

Probably the most astonishing discovery made by myself, is that almost a year before the first story of Greyfriars appeared in the 'Magnet' (February 15th, 1908) the comic paper 'Smiles' No. 47, dated March 19th, 1907, featured a story about Greyfriars entitled 'The Captain's Cure.' This probably was the forerunner of the school we know so well, and the story was written in the best 'Frank Richards' humorous style, where the Captain of the school - a youth named Conway - (the predecessor of George Wingate perhaps) cured two bullies of the fifth, named Lamb and Sharp, of smoking cigars! Another boy mentioned was Tom Lawrence of the Lower Fourth (Remove) who maybe was at the school before Harry Wharton and Co arrived.

Another story of Greyfriars appeared in the same comic - a little later in No. 59 dated June 11th, 1907 entitled 'The Cricket Captain' when the school played against Redclyffe and lost by an innings!

The village of Friardale has always featured prominently in the Greyfriars stories in the 'Magnet', and it will be of great interest to many that Charles Hamilton wrote about a Friardale School, where the master mainly featured was the teacher of French - a Monsieur Mornay, who not only spoke and acted like the famous Monsieur Charpentier, but could easily have been taken for his double or twin brother!

The very first Trapps Holmes paper published was the comic 'Funny Cuts' in 1890, but I cannot find any trace of Charles Hamilton's work until 1899. From then on he seemed to turn out countless stories like a machine, and for the interest of readers who collect information about his school stories I list some of them below for their records:

Clifton College / Chigville School / Birchemwell House / Clarence College /
Castlemoor School / Chumley School / Clivedale College / Friardale School /
Grayle College / Greyfriars School / Headland College / Dugdale College /
Northorpe / Northcliffe College / Ravensbourne College / Professor Crommers
School for Young Gentlemen / Redclyffe School / St. Serolis College (Eastbourne)

St. Hilda's / St. Freda's / St. Kit's / Swarthmoor School / Swarthmoor College / St. Cuthbert's / St. Michael's / St. Tim's / St. Denny's / St. Steve's / St. Kate's / St. Mick's / St. Mary's / St. Luke's / St. Mildred's / St. Dunstan's / St. Oliver's / St. Winifred's / St. Ronan's School / St. Cecilia's / and St. Andrew's / the latter featuring all Scotch boys.

When one takes into consideration that dozens of stories were written featuring only one of the above schools one can get some idea of Charles Hamilton's tremendous output.

A weakness that I have always found in the writings of Mr. Hamilton has been the repetition of boys names - but when one considers his amazing output I feel that he can be excused on this point. St. Ronan's School featured a Gore / Mr. Mimble (any relation to the Greyfriars Gardener?) and a headmaster by the name of Dr. Lascelles (who may have been the father of Larry the Greyfriars games-master.) St. Kate's had Arthur Nameless / Clavering / and Mr. Balkeley. Another series of stories featured a Dick Russell and Edna Maitland. Clivedale School had a Clare and a Gerald Blane. (The latter presumed to have been a substitute writer's character in the 'Gem') whilst last but not least St. Oliver's (written in 1906) boasted a Trimble / Figgins / Carne / Cleveland and an Indian boy of the name of Kouml Rac, who was not only nicknamed 'Inky' by his schoolfellows, but spoke exactly in the same manner as Hurree Singh of the Greyfriars Remove! I wonder if he is the same character who arrived at St. Jim's in October 1913!

Apart from school stories, Charles Hamilton wrote hundreds of adventure yarns, covering countries from all parts of the globe. Many stories appeared under his own name, whilst others were under a variety of pen-names. The compiler of these, may like to add them also to their records - to the names of 'Frank Richards' 'Martin Clifford' 'Owen Conquest' 'Hilda Richards' 'Ralph Redway' 'Harry Dorian' (Circus stories in Pluck) 'Prosper Howard' (first stories in the 'Empire Library' and B.F.L. 'School under Canvas') one can add the following:

Gordon Conway / Ridley Redway / Gillingham Jones / Frank Drake / Robert Rogers / Robert Jennings / Eric Stanhope / Talbot Wynard / Cecil Herbert / Nigel Wallace / Robert Stanley / Raleigh Robbins / Hamilton Greening / Freeman Fox / and others.

Even when a story was anonymous one could tell that Charles Hamilton wrote it, not only by the style, but by his initials appearing at the end of the story. Another very strange characteristic of his early writings, was the habit of always ending a story in capital letters using the same words as the title.

Until I compiled a full list of Charles Hamilton's work I always had the impression that he wrote for the firm of Trapps Holmes Ltd., long before he started writing for the Harmsworth Press, but on the evidence collected by myself this was not so. Stories under his own name appeared in the 'Union Jack' in 1894 - some five years prior to his work for the comic paper firm. A point however which I am still rather puzzled over is Mr. Hamilton's statement some years ago that he ceased to write eventually for Trapps Holmes Ltd. - under the persuasion of Percy Griffith - who was the first Magnet and Gem editor. According to my records Mr. Griffith left the Amalgamated Press around 1911 - and yet stories by Charles Hamilton were appearing in the Trapps Holmes papers at least up to the end of 1915! Of course there is the strong possibility that these may have been reprints of some earlier tales - but certainly not all.

There is also the likelihood of Trapps Holmes Ltd. having plenty of material in hand, but knowing the working ways to some extent of juvenile publishing firms, I should think it most unlikely for them to hoard hundreds of stories for several years!

It is my intention to publish at some later date a complete Bibliography of the work of Charles Hamilton, and I hope, that until this does appear, the reader will have

gleaned knowledge of the early work of the greatest school story writer for the fiction juvenile market of all time.

As these Trapps Holmes publications probably boasted as big a circulation as the 'Magnet' and 'Gem' in their day, the stories by Charles Hamilton obviously pleased countless thousands of readers. To those readers who may regard these types of comics as trash I could in closing do no better than quote Mr. Hamilton's own words about them:

'These comics were very well circulated in their day, and were very well-paying propositions. They were utterly unlike the so-called 'comics' of the present day - it was before American trash invaded this country and vulgarised everything.'

* * * * *

THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF FRANK RICHARDS -
2nd Edition (Charles Skilton 25/-)

A Review by Roger M. Jenkins

Charles Hamilton seldom wrote anything that was not immensely readable, and the Autobiography is a fascinating account of some of the episodes in his life. It has all the old magic of narration, and when one begins to re-read it there is the same old reluctance to put down the book until it is finished. And yet ...

It would be dishonest not to say that there is a 'but'. When the spell is snapped, one realises the shortcomings. Why was there such complete reticence about his childhood? Surely this is the most important time in the life of a writer for children. What a pity that nearly all the narration relates to the period before the first world war. As the author remarked, everything else seems to have become telescoped, but there are all sorts of things we should like to know about the 'twenties, especially the reason why he gave up writing for the Gem for some years. Again, how we should have liked to read about the disputes with J. N. Pentelow and others which were deleted from the Autobiography and consigned to the locked drawers. And what would we not have given for some anecdotes with descriptions of how they were built up into Magnet and Gem stories. Perhaps the revisions that Charles Hamilton had agreed to carry out would have met some of these objections, but alas it was not to be.

We must count ourselves lucky to have what we do have, and there is no doubt that the new edition is a great improvement on the old. It is well printed on good paper, and has twice as many illustrations - though I personally could have wished for some from Magnets of the golden age. But most important of all, there are fine additions to the book - a preface by Charles Skilton and a postscript by Eric Fayne. This postscript gives a competent and skilful survey of Charles Hamilton's

work from the collector's point of view, facts and opinions being expertly blended. Even the inveterate collector will find some novel facts and stimulating opinions in this section.

All in all, the new edition is something that no collector can afford to neglect. If it proves to be as transitory as the previous edition, it would be wise to secure one's copy before it too vanishes into limbo.

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AN ECHO OF THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY

By the Editor

In his Autobiography, Frank Richards refers to the first substitute story with which he became acquainted - a story in which the Terrible Three were carried away in a balloon. The story to which he refers was obviously "The Terrible Three's Air Cruise". Years ago I recall writing about this story to the late Herbert Leckenby, and he replied: "You know who wrote it, don't you? It was by Edwy Searles Brooks!" I took it for gospel at the time, but I wonder now whether it was fact or whether Herbert was making a guess. "The Terrible Three's Air Cruise" was by no means the first substitute story in the Gem, as the Autobiography seems to suggest. That honour (or otherwise) goes, I believe, to "D'Arcy Minor's Chum" in No. 53.

By a coincidence, I referred to the Air Cruise story in an early chapter of my "Tom Merry Cavalcade" which appeared in a C.D. Annual a few years back.

* * * * *

CONCERNING A REVIEW

In a review of "The Autobiography of Frank Richards" in a Northern newspaper, the critic winds up with the following:

"Mr. William George Bunter, O.B.E., now living in retirement after a distinguished military career in the Catering Corps, said last night: 'If I had not been invented it would have been necessary for me to exist.'"

"That sounds a paradox, which shows that I gained something from my education at Greyfriars other than a succession of bumpings, thumpings, and a capacity for consuming jam tarts.

"Without me dear Frank Richards would have been nowhere. I doubt whether the other characters of Greyfriars could have sustained his weekly output without me.

"Schoolboys, I feel, would soon have sickened of the priggishness of Harry Wharton if there had not been the contrast of myself - a mean, dishonest, untruthful, cowardly glutton.

"Bob Cherry and Frank Nugent were more human, because they were allowed to have some faults, but Wharton was impossible.

"I not only became the leading character in the stories, but my individual style of speech, with its "Yarooks" and "Yaroops" enabled Richards to fill many lines of type,

which otherwise would have demanded some invention in the story-line".

That facetious little piece is obviously intended to be funny, and, perhaps, it is mildly amusing. But what strikes us in connection with so many newspaper reports on the subject of Frank Richards' work is the faint breath of patronage which is evident, and, in many cases, that the writers of the articles have little real knowledge of the matter on which they are writing.

* * * * *

LET'S BE CONTROVERSIAL

No. 57. THE MAN AND THE MOMENT

All through history we find instances of the right man being in the right place at the moment when he is most needed. The question is: Does the man make the moment or does the moment make the man?

Charles Hamilton came on the scene at the right moment. The so-called middle classes had come into their own by the turn of the century, and I imagine that the children of the middle-class families formed the bulk of his readers. The education Acts of late Victorian times had brought the three R's to the children of what used to be known as the working class. So, from early in the century, there was a great new juvenile reading public - vaster than ever before in the history of this land.

The reading public was there, but money was not abundant in most cases, so that reading matter had to be produced cheaply. Men were needed who could write stories which would entertain the boys and girls of the new education. But, because the papers were sold cheaply to meet the limited pockets of the public, the authors could only receive a comparatively low rate of pay for their work. Therefore, to make a reasonable living from their work, men had to write prolifically.

Charles Hamilton was, of course, the most astounding exponent of these gifts. There were many writers who could turn out good stories occasionally; there were others who were fairly prolific without being very good. Charles Hamilton is unmatched as one who could produce both quantity and quality. He was a phenomenon.

He lived at exactly the right time to take full advantage of his gifts. Had he been born forty years sooner he would have been too early; had he been born forty years after, he would have been too late.

His biggest advantage was that he was a young man at the time when the great demand for reading material was beginning. There were a few other writers who were prolific, and whose work seems to have been popular in its day - Henry St. John, Sidney Drew, Clarke Hook, to mention but three. These, however, seem to have been much older men - the opportunity came, perhaps, just a little too late for them

to take full advantage of it.

Supposing Charles Hamilton had been born into another age - forty years earlier or forty years later. How would he have employed his gifts? It is almost impossible even to surmise.

He was at his greatest when using a canvas of huge, unprecedented dimensions. The years as he approached his peak and passed it provided that canvas. He had the talent and the energy to grasp the opportunity which that huge canvas offered for his particular genius. Did Charles Hamilton make the opportunity, or did opportunity make Charles Hamilton?

His finest series ran to anything from 300,000 to 500,000 words. In recent weeks, scores of our readers have written, expressing the hope that these great series will be republished in book form. It is a wonderful hope, but, in my view, nearly an impossibility. The modern Bunter books comprise about 60,000 words. Imagine the China series, the Stacey series, the Rebel series in book form. They would make immense volumes, and the cost of printing them would be so high as to place them beyond the reach of the youngsters for whom they were intended.

I shall not be surprised if something of the sort is attempted, but I rather dread the experiment, for I cannot see any of the greatest old series being presented in modern book form without wholesale slashing plus the so-called modernisation of dialogue. Some of the shorter series might possibly be successfully issued between stiff covers, but I would not bank on it. The longer series would, inevitably, be mere shadows of their former selves.

A new type of monthly Schoolboys' Own Library might meet the purpose, but, even in the old days, the S.O.L., deservedly popular though it was and is, was not without its drawbacks. The Rebel series had a new, premature ending given to it; the Bounder-Captain series was wound up before it was completed; a Lee series, as noted in our columns recently, was dotted with incongruities from pruning.

In a modern issue of Schoolboys' Own I cannot envisage anything but ruthless cutting and wholesale alterations. Few of us would be very satisfied with that. I should be deeply sorry to see the Hamilton image clouded by anything which would, almost inevitably, be second-rate.

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

DON'T FORGET! "GOLDEN HOURS" NO. 4. Next issue will be in June with articles by well-known personalities. Copies 4/- each.
 Write: S. SMYTH, 1 BRANDON ST., CLOVELLY, N.S.W., AUSTRALIA.

CONTROVERSIAL ECHOSNO. 56. A STAR HAS SET

J. YORKE ROBINSON: No smoking! When I was a lad Charles Hamilton taught that smoking for boys was bad form - and I never acquired the habit.

STANLEY SMITH: When you suggest that the high moral code of the Hamilton stories is old-fashioned you are talking out of the back of your neck. It may be that this country is going through a phase during which many eternal truths are being neglected. It has happened before but we shall get back to essential decencies as we have before. Old-fashioned? Bosh! You might as well suggest that the Ten Commandments or the Sermon on the Mount are old-fashioned. They are still the most up-to-date things in the world. Decency, respect, consideration, good manners, morals, playing the game - these aren't dirty words! They are part of the essentials of life. We are still suffering from the supreme idiocy of war, coupled with the excesses of the birth of the Farewell State, and the affluent society has brought a "new low" in standards. The same thing has happened before, but out of the depths has risen greater decencies. The code of the Hamilton stories is as up-to-date today as it was when it was first brought down from the mountain by Moses and when it was restated years later on the Mount. It is even more than up-to-date ... it is an eternal verity.

W. J. A. HUBBARD: I entirely agree with you that C.H. should have received some reward for the wonderful work he did over so many years. He is far from being the only one, however - take C. B. Fry, for example. Perhaps C. H.'s political views did not meet with approval in high places.

The high moral tone of the Hamilton stories may seem old-fashioned but I think you will find that many more boys are keen on correct conduct than you imagine. I noticed this particularly when I made many visits to my old school - Leyton County High School - a grammar school of good repute that has been going for many years. I found boys madly keen on sport, polite, well-behaved, very well-dressed in the official uniform, and well under control of both masters and prefects. I saw the school captain come down on swearing, and many of the boys seemed jealous of the good name of the school. I feel that modern boys are no better and no worse than they were when I was a boy.

GEORGE SELLARS: There was a good moral attached to many of Charles Hamilton's stories, especially in the blue Gen, the red Magnet, and some Rockwood stories. That is one reason why these stories are remembered so well by old readers. Our old friend left behind him his great work for thousands, old and young, to enjoy, and this I believe was his dearest wish - something greater than any honour a nation could give him. God bless him.

ERIC FAYNE adds: How badly I must have written if I gave readers the impression that I regard decency, etc., as "dirty words!" If, as Mr. Smith suggests, the country has reached a "new low" in standards, surely the Hamilton code cannot be very widely practised today. Does the average boy in 1962 condemn juvenile smoking, gambling, bad language, and any form of vice as the Hamilton stories condemned them?

It may well be a phase through which we are passing. Out of the depths may well rise greater decencies. I hope they do. I can't see much sign of them yet.

SALE: C.D. Annuals 3 - 12, C.D. Nos. 37, 39 - 144, Captains 13, 27, 28. Chums 1925 (fair copy).

MELL, 49 GRACEFIELD GARDENS, LONDON, S.W.16.

THE ROUND TABLE



BLAKIANA

CONDUCTED BY JOSEPHINE PACKMAN, 27 Archdale Road, East
Dulwich, London, S.E. 22.

The news that Pedro is coming back is really splendid. Mr. W. Howard Baker has already done much for we "old stalwarts", and with the return of Pedro he is indeed to be thanked most sincerely for this further gesture. As Eric Fayne said last month, it is of course up to all of us to show our appreciation not only by buying the story but by getting as many of our friends as possible to do likewise.

JOSIE PACKMAN

* * * *

BY ANY OTHER NAME

By Victor Colby

The question has been posed in March Blakiana, "supposing Blake's name had been Jackson Drake would we still have felt the same about him?"

I consider that any name, or combination of names, that roll freely from the tongue, have dignity and a connotation of action and adventure as Jackson Drake certainly has - would have been equally effective as the name Sexton Blake in ensuring acceptance by readers.

I do not believe that a stilted, artificial or frivolous name would have endeared the character to us. I feel that Falcon Swift, Fielding Torrance, Herbert Trickett and Martin Trackman of the early boys' papers did not deserve to endure.

Nor do I think that commonplace names like John Lyon, Harry Marks, and John Smith of Nugget Library, True Blue and Pluck respectively, could ever become immortal.

However, there were many names every bit as satisfying as "Sexton Blake". His closest rival, Nelson Lee, is a case in point. This is where fate and editorial policy came in. If the handling of each of these two characters had been reversed, I haven't the slightest doubt that we would be reading today the Howard Baker editions of the Nelson Lee Library, and following the adventures of Nelson Lee and Paula Dane; and in the Sexton Blake Column, devoted to that St. Frank's Schoolmaster Detective, Mr. Sexton Blake, we would bewail the fact that no new stories of Sexton Blake had been published since the war.

Sexton Blake is a wonderful character, but his pre-eminence is the outcome of many fortuitous circumstances, involving name, time, place, editor, publication, quality of story and popular appeal. In the case of Sexton Blake these factors have happily resulted in continuity of publication, which has led to, and been strengthened by, a habit formation in the reader, leading him to ask for the "mixture as before", and to re-associate himself time and time again with a character he has learned to love and admire over the years, and whose adventures he wants to follow always, never being obliged to say goodbye to the character here at the end of any one tale but only "until our next grand meeting, in your next great story."

* * * * *

HE'S DONE IT AGAIN!

Erstwhile Sexton Blake author John Creasey has entered yet another field as co-publisher of the "New Strand Magazine". Featured in the first copy was Dennis Wheatley who, in the Detective Weekly years ago, had told of the pleasure that Sexton Blake and Tinker had brought him. A Blake author and a Blake admirer together launch a new worthwhile project.

Victor Colby.

(Sherlock Holmes also is featured in every issue. Len and I have them all! J.P.)

DUNCAN AND MICHAEL STORM

(The following letter was sent to me just before Christmas by Tom Hopperton. Unfortunately I mislaid it, and it has only just come to light. I have written to Tom, but I feel I should again apologise here. Josie Packman.)

Walter Webb's comments on the two Storms in the C.D. Annual were most interesting, and it's a pity that his patient persistence has not reaped a richer reward. It was suggested in "Story Paper Collector" some years ago that Michael and Duncan were one and the same and I felt then and remain convinced that this was impossible.

Michael was an exceptionally polished writer for a boys' author. He had, in fact, a distinctly adult style, and his appeal must have been greatest among the older readers. Humour was not his strong point, being practically confined to a little schoolboy badinage. Now, if the two men were identical, there are some awkward questions to answer. Why should Michael kill off both himself and the considerable goodwill of his name to start again from scratch as Duncan? How was he able within a couple of years to divest himself of every trace of his previous style and begin his second career writing Duncan's slap-dash, slap-happy slapstick? Any why should he wish to make such a change, which was certainly not for the better?

Michael Storm may well have been a pen-name. I formed the opinion when reading the Ravenscar stories that he must have been a Yorkshireman. The school was sited in a peculiar place, presumably to exploit some particular local knowledge, and he showed a detailed knowledge of the topography, manners, customs and dialect of the West Riding.

Duncan Storm was certainly a pen-name, and that of Gilbert Floyd, who had held an executive position in Fleetway House and was no mystery man. (See C. M. Down's article in "Story Paper Collector" No. 77). With that point settled, can he be back-dated to show him as Michael? On internal evidence, the answer must be NO!

Walter's tentative theory that Mrs. Duncan Storm was a Blake writer is based on the remark of his No. 3 informant, but No. 3 is writing from memory about people he did not know and nearly fifty years after the event. The woman who sold Back the ghosted stories obviously knew the terrain well enough to find Teed as the ghost and to sell the results as Michael's. This does not make her either a Blake author or Mrs. Duncan.

This last point should be capable of solution. Was Floyd married? My own impression was that he was a foot-loose bachelor who roamed about

at his own sweet will. If he did have a wife, she remained in the background, a thing which hardly squares with the idea of an active husband-and-wife team. Down's article, in any case, knocks on the head the suggestion that this "Mrs. Duncan" wrote Duncan's stories.

Walter's No. 2 man, of course, appears to clinch the matter with the definite statement that the two were one, and one could wish that he had amplified the bald statement. But, and it's a big but, it has been repeatedly asserted by Fleetway House insiders that no-one really knew anything about Michael. No. 2 is perhaps giving opinion as fact.

No. 1 candidly admits that he isn't too clear about which was which. I suggest on the balance of probabilities that No. 3's memory slipped a cog and betrayed him into the same position as No. 1 of confusing the two names.

We are still no wiser about Michael's real identity, but with what evidence we now have the probability seems to be (1) That Michael did die before the 1914 war (2) That it was Mrs. Michael who sold the spurious stories to Back and (3) That the only connection between the Storms and the root of the whole trouble was that when Floyd was casting about for a pen-name he decided on the one for which he knew Michael had no further use.

TOM HOPPINGTON.

* * * * *

SEXTON BLAKE LIBRARY TITLES AND AUTHORS (3rd series) (Contd.)

No. 161	The Income Tax Conspiracy.....	A. Parsons
No. 162	The Case Against Dr. Ripon.....	W. Tyrer
No. 163	The Case of the Shadowed Footballer.....	P. A. Clarke
No. 164	The Loot of Pakistan.....	A. Parsons
No. 165	The Case of the Stolen Mine.....	R. Hardinge
No. 166	The Curse of the Track.....	A. J. Hunter
No. 167	The Mystery of the Red Cockatoo.....	A. Parsons
No. 168	The Man who Went Wrong.....	J. Lewis
No. 169	The Mystery of the Deserted Camp.....	J. N. Chance
No. 170	The Affair of the Spiv's Secret.....	A. J. Hunter
No. 171	The Man Who Backed Out.....	A. Parsons
No. 172	The Case of the African Emigrant Settler.....	R. Hardinge
No. 173	The Motor Coach Mystery.....	W. Tyrer
No. 174	The Secret of the African Settler.....	R. Hardinge
No. 175	The Mystery of the One Day Alibi.....	A. Parsons
No. 176	The Riddle of the Sealed Room.....	R. Hardinge
No. 177	The Riddle of the Russian Bride.....	A. Parsons
No. 178	The Case of the American Tourists.....	A. J. Hunter
No. 179	The Man from Algiers.....	F. Warwick
No. 180	The Mystery of Avenue Road.....	A. Parsons
No. 181	The Riddle of the Highwayman's Stone.....	R. Hardinge
No. 182	The Town of Shadows.....	J. N. Chance
No. 183	The Mystery of the Woman Overboard.....	W. Tyrer

No. 184	The Terror at Tree Tops	A. Parsons
No. 185	The Riddle of the Nigh Garage	R. H. C. Gibbons
No. 186	The Case of the African Trader	R. Hardinge
No. 187	The Secret of the Living Skeleton	J. N. Chance
No. 188	The Affair of the Hollywood Contract	W. Tyrer
No. 189	The Case of the Damgra Millions	A. Parsons
No. 190	The Riddle of the Receiver's Hoard	J. N. Chance
No. 191	The Death of Miss Preedy	J. Lewis
No. 192	The Mystery of the Devil Mask	R. Hardinge
No. 193	The Case of the Missing Surgeon	A. Parsons
No. 194	The Tragedy of the Bromleighs	R. Hardinge
No. 195	The Case of the Discharged Policeman	J. Lewis
No. 196	The South Coast Mystery	J. N. Chance
No. 197	The Mystery of the Missing Angler	W. Tyrer
No. 198	The Riddle of the Rajah's Curios	A. Parsons
No. 199	The Legacy of Hate	R. Hardinge
No. 200	The Case of the Dead Spy	J. N. Chance
No. 201	The Case of the Secret Agent	R. Hardinge
No. 202	One of Eleven	W. Tyrer
No. 203	The Man from China	A. Parsons
No. 204	The Madman of the Marshes	F. Warwick
No. 205	The Case of the Crime Reporter	R. Hardinge
No. 206	The Man who Left Home	J. Lewis
No. 207	The Riddle of the Prince's Stooze	A. Parsons
No. 208	The Mystery of the Haunted Square	J. N. Chance
No. 209	The Secret of Capri	F. Warwick
No. 210	Witness to the Crime	A. J. Hunter
No. 211	Those on the List	A. Parsons
No. 212	The Cottage Crime	W. Tyrer
No. 213	The Secret of the Sixty Steps	J. N. Chance
No. 214	The Mystery of the Forbidden Territory	R. Hardinge
No. 215	Living in Fear	A. Parsons
No. 216	The Evil Spell	W. Tyrer
No. 217	The Great Dollar Fraud	A. Parsons
No. 218	The Old Man of the Moors	F. Warwick
No. 219	The Case of the Naval Defaulter	W. Tyrer
No. 220	With Criminal Intent	R. Hardinge
No. 221	The Mystery of the Crooked Gift	A. Parsons
No. 222	The Case of L.A.C. Dickson	J. N. Chance
No. 223	When the Jury Disagreed	A. J. Hunter
No. 224	The Mystery of the Italian Ruins	D. Long
No. 225	The Case of the Spiv's Secret	A. Parsons
No. 226	The Affair of Danny the Dip	W. Tyrer
No. 227	The Tragedy of Windyridge	R. Hardinge
No. 228	The House in the Woods	J. N. Chance
No. 229	The Mystery of the Rio Star	W. Tyrer
No. 230	A Case for M.I.5	F. Warwick
No. 231	The Millionaire's Nest Egg	A. Parsons
No. 232	Partners in Crime	J. G. Dickson
No. 233	The Mystery of the New Tenant	A. J. Hunter
No. 234	The Case of the Green Caravan	R. Hardinge
No. 235	Retired from the Yard	A. Parsons
No. 236	The Case of Two Crooked Baronets	W. Tyrer
No. 237	On the 11.40 Down	J. G. Dickson
No. 238	The Mystery of the Blitzed Tower	A. Parsons

No. 239	It happened in Melgrove Square	A. J. Hunter
No. 240	Hated by All	J. N. Chance
No. 241	The Case of the Indian Dancer	A. Parsons
No. 242	The Headmaster's Secret	R. Harding
No. 243	The Crimes at Fenton Towers	W. Tyrer
No. 244	The Man from Persia	J. Lewis

MEMORIAL TABLET TO FRANK RICHARDS

A memorial tablet to the memory of Charles Hamilton is being erected at Charing Crematorium. It bears the following words:

In Loving Memory of Charles Harold St. John Hamilton, creator of
Billy Bunter, died 24th December, 1961.

'Dignum laude virum musa rebat mori'

Horace Odes 1. XXIV.

Readers who may be on holiday in Kent this summer will no doubt like to call at the Crematorium and see the tablet.

10/- each offered for the following Magnets: 1308 - 1315; 1319; 1320; 1351. Good condition essential. Or I have the 1923 Holiday Annual which I will exchange for any four of the above or 1941 Holiday Annual or Thomson Papers 1935 - 1941. 12 Modern Boys and 5 Pilots also available for exchange.
P. HANGER, 72 GLASGOW STREET, NORTHAMPTON.

WANTED: S.O.L. 58. B.F. (Green 'Un) 762, 764, 780, 1042, 1257, 1264, 1294 to 1298
T. TIMBERTREE ROAD, OLD HILL, STAFFS.

FOR SALE: 2 copies Felix Farley's Bristol Journal (newspaper) dated 1911 and 1915.
Offers: MRS. M. JARRETT, 111, WINCHESTER ROAD, BRISLINGTON, BRISTOL, 4.

WANTED: Old series Nelson Lee Library. Also Monster Libraries. Please send Nos. and prices required to: LOFTS, 56 SHERINGHAM HOUSE, LONDON, N.W.1.

WANTED: Most issues between 400 and 500 GEMS. Most issues between 772 and 879. Also Nos. 935, 953, 954, 956, 975, 980, 984, 985, 989, 990, 992, 993, 998, 1129, 1150. MAGNETS: 45, 52, 134, 136, 141, 195, 295, 237, 238, 239, 277, 318, 319, 353, 400, 417, 442, 439, 706, 719, 752, 773, 751, 752, 762, 763, 764, 809. Most issues between 821 and 890. 900, 921, 924, 925, 936, 938, 940, 942, 943, 946, 949, 951, 965, 967, 968, 996. POPULARS: 183, 190, 370, 385, 452, 455, 466, 474. Your price paid or liberal exchanges. Volumes bought containing any of the above issues. Good condition essential.
ERIC FAYNE, EXCELSIOR HOUSE, GROVE ROAD, SERRITON, SURREY.

WANTED: Rockets, Sport and Adventures, also Triumphs (1924-28). Cash or exchanges from U.J.'s, Thriller, Modern Boys, Nelson Lee (1927-33) offered.
JOHN KING, 5 WHITE HART LANE, LONDON, N.22.

WANTED: S.O.L.'s 42, 258, Nelson Lee No. 130 (old series). Your price paid plus postage. The advertiser has some S.O.L.'s, Nelson Lee, Gems and Magnets for exchange only.
BRIAN HOLT, BRITISH EMBASSY, REYKJAVIK, ICELAND.

NELSON LEE COLUMN

CONDUCTED BY JACK WOOD

THAT FATAL CHARM

By R. J. Godsave

Was the introduction of the Moor View Schoolgirls in the Nelson Lee Library detrimental to that paper? On the surface it would appear that such was not the case, as they were introduced when the circulation was steadily rising.

To my mind, a subtle change occurred in the characterisation of the St. Frank's boys, and it seemed that their behaviour was not consistent with their own characters.

Unlike the Magnet, the earlier Nelson Lee's did not have a girl's school in the vicinity, and consequently, girls rarely entered into the picture. Except for the holiday cruises and Christmas parties, when the sisters of a few boys were invited, there was little mention of girls.

With the sudden arrival of the Moor View girls in the neighbourhood of St. Frank's the effect on the boys was considerable, they appeared as shadows of their former selves.

Whereas, the Cliff House girls were in the early Magnets, and "grew up" as it were, with the Greyfriars boys, the Moor View girls gate-crashed into the lives of the St. Frank's boys. The effect of this abrupt entry was a restraining influence which the Moor View girls seemed to exercise on the St. Frank's juniors.

Perhaps the close proximity of Moor View School and St. Frank's made the meeting of the girls and boys more likely than that of Cliff House and Greyfriars.

At the same time, the stories which featured Irene Manners and Co. were of a high standard and paradoxically their presence added greatly to the interest of the reader.

I had often thought that the earlier holidays and Christmas parties were rather bleak in that Nipper and Co. did not have the society of girls of their own age. After all, Violet Watson, Ethel Church and Agnes Christine could not equal the number of boys and the parties were rather unbalanced.

It does seem to me that a different set of boys entered the pages

of the Nelson Lee with the Moor View girls, and this could have been one of the contributory causes of the decline of the Nelson Lee Library.

* * * * *

ANOTHER SLANT ON "HANDY"

By James W. Cook

With reference to Ross Wood's article "HANDFORTH FOR EVER" in the April issue of the C.D. I share her enthusiasm for Handy and Co., while understanding Frank Vernon Lay's distaste for the leader of Study D at St. Frank's. Frank's explosive outburst stemmed from the attitude which Handy displayed to new boys and his bullying propensities towards other juniors though one must concede the point that these boys invariably deserved Handforth's attack.

Obviously the character of Handforth demanded the treatment meted out so faithfully by Brooks whereas Bunter was the comic relief to the Greyfriars Dramatis personae thus dispelling the gloom so frequently found in the stories about Greyfriars.

Though Bunter generally created a laughable diversion from the heavy going narrative there were not one redeeming feature about Billy that you could have held up as a model to the 'young man's guide to manhood.' Handforth's good points easily outweighed his dubious values and not one of the readers of the MAGNET can truthfully accord the character of Billy Bunter this quality. Bunter was a clown, not a clever one or a funny clown, but just the comic relief made necessary by the introspective environment Frank Richards so admirably built up in his stories.

Ross Woods has a soft spot for Nipper. There was a man for you. A dozen 'Nippers' would put things to rights in our world of today. I often tried to emulate this golden character, this great power throbbing with intense activity at St. Frank's, but I never could. I have, at times, come across people like Nipper and marvelled at their strength and authority. Could Greyfriars boast of such a similar character as Nipper? He was real enough.

WANTED: Sexton Blake Libraries 1st series Nos. 11, 17, 37, 105, 109, 111, 198, 201, 219, 2nd series Nos. 293, 296, 306, 422, 474, 485, 520, 667. Union Jacks 689, 691, 693, 702, 704, 725, 736, 740, 785, 788, 793, 798, 800, 803, 809, 811, 813, 814, 818, 1041, 1064, 1098, 1390. MRS. J. PACKMAN, 27, ARCHDALE ROAD, ELSWORTH, DULWICH, LONDON, S.E.22.

WANTED: S.O.L.'s Nos. 60 and 68. Magnets Nos. 829, 862 - 865, 867, 868, 874, 869, 879, 884, 886, 897, 900.
DR. R. WILSON, 100 BROOMFIELD ROAD, GLASGOW, N.1.

Sexton Blake Today

Margaret Cooke reviews the latest novels in the Sexton Blake Library

DEATH IN DOCKLAND (No. 497)

DESMOND REID

This is a grim tough thriller concerned with thugs, tortures, a Mr. Big and the ex girl-friend who double-crossed him.

Sexton Blake was engaged to investigate the case by 'the Baron' after the girl-friend's body had been thrown from a car in Dockland almost at the feet of Arthur Kirby doing a "Dockland after Dark" feature for his newspaper. For a change Kirby left Blake to investigate without his help and Blake, requiring a second opinion early in his enquiries consulted Tinker because "the blonde-haired young man could always be depended upon for a bright initiative guess when the facts themselves were unpromising." Tinker was by his side too, cool, efficient and active when Blake turned failure into success and rescued two people from a horrible death in one of the most exciting and vividly written incidents ever to appear in the S.B.L.

The advance blurbs call this book "thrilling, mystifying and exciting," and parts of it are. Whether it is also Desmond Reid's "finest novel for many a month" is a matter of personal taste.

It is a good book, well written, fast moving, peopled with well-drawn characters of various types and having one main theme - who was the dead girl - why was she tortured to death and which description of her life and character was the true one.

Even those readers who normally dislike tough thrillers will be interested in this book which gives more space and stress to Blake's investigation and to contrasting characterisation than it does to violence. Kirby's reintroduction towards the end of the novel led to a surprising ending to the case amongst the characters with whom it began - the gang itself.

Probably the nearest approach to the best of the old Blake stories which we have seen for some time.

TORMENT WAS A REDHEAD (No. 498)

RICHARD WILLIAMS

An amusing and original story, about Tinker's troubles with a diamond-broker's red-headed Secretary.

Intent on meeting this newly acquired girl-friend, Tinker refused Blake's offer of help and disobeyed the Doctor's orders to "go home to bed and rest" after a head injury; passed out cold in the girl-friend's flat - and made possible her ingenious plan to steal a consignment of diamonds leaving Tinker to face a charge of collusion in the crime. Too angry and puzzled to think clearly after a series of unpleasant incidents, Tinker felt compelled to warn Sexton Blake that he was insane and therefore of no further use to him as partner and assistant. A cool, secretly amused, Blake took quick unorthodox steps to prove that Tinker's fears were groundless and that he was innocent of any crime.

A good story with a sound plot, good dialogue and characterisation. As always when seen through Tinker's eyes Blake appeared as a warm affectionate, intensely human character. I feel certain that all Blake-lovers will enjoy this book as much as I did.

Old Boys' Book Club

MIDLAND

For the March Meeting we had the best attendance for a long time - thirteen - and were delighted to see Norman Gregory again. George Chatham too made a welcome re-appearance.

Again we had an excellent evening marred only by the absence of Harry Broster who had a few days before, lost his mother. The sympathy of all the club members was sent to Harry and his family. In his absence there were no minutes and little business and the programme - a full one - commenced at 7.30. Last month there was plenty of Hamiltonians. This month more Brookians. Joe Marston began with an interesting quiz on St. Frank's, which was won by John Tomlinson. John followed on with a most absorbing talk recalling his first acquaintance with St. Frank's in the 20's and tracing the St. Frank's Saga right down to 1940 in the last S.O.L. of all. Tom Porter followed this talk with a "Guess the Number" item which won for Ray Bennett a "Nelson Lee". More "Nelson Lees" were distributed to the other members.

Next was "Collectors Items", a feature introduced by the Chairman some months ago. This month he brought along the complete set of "Greyfriars Herald - 1st series" and after a brief talk about them, passed them (18 in all) around for inspection. After the interval there was a game "Guess the Name" won by the Treasurer. Ted Davay followed with a fascinating talk on Harry Wharton's character with reference to various Magnet series. To complete the evening's programme Madge Corbett obliged by reading a number of selected poems from the Greyfriars Heralds which Tom had brought along.

TOM PORTER - Chairman

MERSEYSIDE

Meeting held April 8th.

There was a good attendance at this meeting, all the regulars, with the exception of Norman Pragnell, who sent his apologies, being present, and we managed to get off to an early start. Bill Windsor dealt with various items of section interest and the secretary followed with the financial report, and a brief account of his recent visit to the meeting of the London club; a somewhat disappointing experience, as he arrived at East Dulwich just after the meeting had ended. The evening was not entirely wasted, however, as he spent a very pleasant hour at Don Webster's home in Kew; a real treat to see our old friend once more.

For once we had neither a quiz nor a reading, but there was ample material for informal discussion at this meeting, and a good programme has been arranged for our next get-together in May, when we hope to break new ground with one or two items rather different to the usual form of quiz, etc.

No use any of those present trying to "Beat the Clock" the said clock registered going-home time all too soon, and it was with reluctance we had to take our leave - why is it we all find so much to say when it's time to go. However, we can continue next month on May 13th (6 p.m.) at Bill Windsor's - don't be late.

FRANK CASE

AUSTRALIA

Due to a series of unfortunate postponements, April was the first meeting for the year. So when members met as usual at the Book Bargain Bazaar at 6 p.m. on Thursday, 12th April, there was a very crowded agenda for discussion.

The Chairman, Syd Smyth, opened the meeting with a tribute to the late Charles Hamilton and members joined in an interesting discussion on the C.D. Memorial Issue. Unanimous opinion was that our Editor, Eric Fayne, had handled a rather difficult subject with very good taste and understanding, and the resultant publication had a professional finish of which he could be justly proud.

Cuttings received from Ron Hodgson dealing with the T.V. appearances of the Northern Club were then passed around for perusal. Jack Murtagh had also been in the news with a very pleasing write-up about the hobby and his own collection in The Daily Telegraph, Hastings, N.Z. More publicity for the hobby is also looming as Victor Colby reported that he had been approached by a Sydney reporter for details of the Blake Saga - so it's a treat in store for Blake enthusiasts.

A most interesting cricket study had been received from Bill Hubbard in Kenya and members were very pleased to see this distant collector whom they know so well through his unusual articles in the C.D.

Copies of the club magazine, Golden Hours No. 4 were then produced by the Editor, Syd Smyth and a lively discussion ensued. I'm sure that all those within the hobby circle will be interested to know that this issue features our most prolific contributor and amateur sleuth, Bill Lofts, on the cover - a fitting tribute to a collector who has done such an outstanding job for the hobby folk everywhere. Issue No. 5 of the G.H. will be available in June and subsequent issues will follow quickly as the club is now in charge of production.

Due to the long gap between the meetings there was a huge stack of letters filled with the usual interesting news. Good to hear from postal member Arthur Holland who is always with us in spirit Tom Dobson sends the welcome news from Melbourne that he will be joining his Sydney friends very soon. And members were pleased to extend a friendly welcome to greet a new collector in the circle, Mr. Cullis from Queensland who also hopes to join us later this year. Old faithfuls, Bill Gander, Ron Hodgson, Harry Broster, Don Webster and Frank Unwin with a new friend Frank Hancock entertained us with the news and views from other clubs and other parts of the world.

Financial matters were settled and the secretary asked those present to give their opinions on the C.H. Memorial Fund as suggested by Eric Fayne. One and all pledged their support but no definite decision has yet been reached as to which form they would prefer this memorial to take.

Next meeting will be held on Thursday, May 10th at the usual time and place. The members finished the evening in the nearby coffee shop, an ideal conclusion to three interest packed hours.

B. PATE - Secretary.

LONDON

What a delightful, happy and jolly meeting we had with Bill and Marjorie Norris at their Cricklewood residence on Sunday, April 15th. A very good attendance included our Les Rowley, home for a few days from Warsaw.

Eric Fayne had the honour of being the 100th member of the Hamiltonian Library, this item being included in a fine report by the librarian, Roger Jenkins.

New Nelson Lee Librarian is Robert Blythe, the first collector to have a complete set of the Nelson Lee Library. Incidentally, Bob is the host of the May 13th meeting at 40 Ellesmere Road, Dollis Hill, London, N.W.10. Kindly inform if intending to be present and bring a mug or cup. Laurie Sutton had compiled a very good quiz. Winner Don Webster 2nd Win Moras, 3rd Roger Jenkins and 4th Eric Fayne.

A suitable tape recording was made by all those present to send to the Golden Hours Club of Australia, thanks to the hosts for the use of their tape recorder.

Excellent Library business was done, a good sale of Hamiltonia, "Caravaner" and the Frank Richards Autobiography, a grand feed and the usual good get together all went to making the meeting a huge success.

The list of future meeting venues was revised and these will now take place on the second Sunday of the month.

Thus with thanks to our hosts, it was homewards bound once again,

UNCLE BENJAMIN

DAVID HARRISON

Members of the London Club have been shocked to learn of the sudden death of David Harrison in most tragic circumstances, which occurred when mountaineering in Northern Scotland.

David had been a winter member of the Club for nearly ten years, having devoted the summer months exclusively to cricket, and had just recently qualified as a member of the M.C.C. He was a great admirer of Charles Hamilton's work, a discriminating collector and, in conversation, a penetrating critic. His dry sense of humour which was coupled with a steady enthusiasm will be sadly missed at future meetings, and our deep sympathy is extended to Mrs. Harrison, so untimely widowed less than a month after her marriage.

R. M. JENKINS

NORTHERN

Chairman Geoffrey Wilde opened this, our 12th Annual General Meeting, in the presence of another very good attendance, and welcomed yet another new member, Harry Lavender. It did not seem a year since our last Annual General Meeting, but a year has indeed gone by, as Geoff pointed out, a very eventful one.

After the usual monthly business had been dealt with Gerry Allison referred to what had been a very successful (and very busy) month for him. P. G. Wodehouses's acceptance of the Presidency of our club brought in many appreciative letters, and Gerry had also received a visit from 'Otto Maurer' who will be well known to most readers of the C.D. for his very interesting articles on a section of our hobby. Our old member, Tony Potts wrote regretting his absence and the advertisement in the April C.D. brought in a good response.

We were all distressed to hear that one of our old members, Mrs. Vera Nicholls (Vera Coates) is in Leeds Infirmary as a result of an accident, and has also recently suffered two bereavements, having lost both her husband and her mother. We all send our heartfelt sympathy and best wishes and hope her health and her fortunes will soon take a turn for the better.

The accounts for the year to 31st March, 1962, were presented and discussed and it was agreed that once again they showed the club to be in a very flourishing condition with interest higher than ever. The election of officers followed, and the members paid us the compliment of re-electing us all, en bloc.

Jack Wood then raised an interesting point - the possibility that the publishers would keep the Bunter Books going with new authors. This certainly gave us all something to think about, having regard to the efforts of some substitute writers in the past. Jack made the excellent suggestion that a competition should be run by the

O.S.B. Clubs as a whole, to try and find the authors best fitted to the task. Other points raised were the re-printing of the best of the old stories, and the possibility of a new 'Magnet.' It was agreed that these would be fruitful topics of discussion at our Easter Conference.

Following an interval for refreshments we had a couple of games devised by Gerry Allison. One was the changing of the word 'Shell' to 'Fifth' a letter at a time, and the other involved filling in missing syllables in rhymed couplets, very ingenious this. Geoffrey Wilde was in top form and won both.

We went our separate ways at 9.20 p.m. several of us looking forward to meeting each other (and also friends from the other sections) at Matlock the following weekend.

Next meeting, Saturday, 12th May.

F. HANCOCK - Hon. Sec.

THE HARD COVER SCHOOL STORY CLASSICS

By W. J. A. Hubbard

No. 6. "THE LOOM OF YOUTH" (Alec Waugh)

I fear that I shall provoke some criticism by including "The Loom of Youth" in this particular series. It is such a remarkable gripping and dramatic school story, however, that I felt it just had to be included. The re-actions of readers who have read the book and my review of it in this article will be very welcome and I shall look forward to their comments in the correspondence columns of C.D. with great interest.

"The Loom of Youth" is one of the most outstanding school stories ever penned and it was actually written by a schoolboy as the author was only 17 years of age at the time. It is the story of his own schooldays for it is obvious that he was Gordon Caruthers, the hero of the yarn, in the main essentials. First published in 1917 it was reprinted ten times between that date and 1929 and quite a number of times since then which leaves no doubt of its popularity. Few school stories, however, have provoked such controversy and storms of protest for it was of the "realistic" type and was rightly or wrongly considered an attack on the public school system of the day. The controversy, in fact, was so bitter that Mr. Waugh was compelled to write a Note to a Pocket Library Edition in 1929 in which he stated that he had merely intended the book to be a study of public school life. He admitted, however, that the book had cost him many friends and that had he the re-writing of it then he would undoubtedly modify certain portions.

"The Loom of Youth" was not, however, the first story to publicise

the stresses and strains of school life and the corresponding dangers to boys. H. A. Vachell had already hinted of such matters in "The Hill" while E. W. Hornung - the creator of "Raffles" - had done more or less the same thing in his fine public school story "Fathers of Men" some years later. In his brilliant school story "The Harrovians" written just before the 1914-18 war Mr. Arnold Lunn had let fly at schoolboy delinquency at his own school with considerable effect and had received a corresponding broadside in return. Why then did the "Loom of Youth" cause such bitterness and bad feeling?

I think one of the reasons was the extreme youth of the author. His book was written, remember in 1917 when the Victorian tradition was still strong and boys of Mr. Waugh's age were not supposed to know of and speak of certain matters. Another reason and I feel probably the most important one was the fact that while Mr. Lunn, in particular, had not minced his words, he had shown his readers the boy mainly at his best, while Mr. Waugh showed him in "The Loom of Youth" nearly always at his worst. And Mr. Waugh had used real people, including himself, as characters in his book both as boys and masters, under disguised names. Sherborne, Mr. Waugh's own school was featured under the name of Fernhurst. Matters were also not helped by a rather supercilious attack on the public schools by the usual typical highbrow type who wrote the introduction. No wonder quite a number of people were annoyed.

What was "The Loom of Youth" all about? Well, it is nothing more than a plain unvarnished account, term by term, of a boy's life at school over a period of four years. It has little plot for all it endeavours to give is a picture of school life over this period and how it effects a certain group of boys. It moves at a tremendous pace and the re-actions of the hero to his surroundings are brilliantly described. Nothing could be finer to my mind than the presentation of Gordon Caruthers as a new boy - miserable and terrified of making a mistake and earning the derision of other boys. The sporting sequences and the grim intensity with which the various games at Fernhurst are played are written with perfect understanding which is not surprising for Mr. Waugh was himself no mean performer on the playing fields.

It is interesting to compare people's re-actions to "The Loom of Youth" today. Frankly one sometimes wonders what all the fuss was about for it cannot be denied that the story is no mean literary feat considering that the author was only 17 years of age and wrote his book in six and a half weeks. We are, however, far more broadminded today while more is known about schoolboy psychology. I think I can safely say that most men who have been educated at any reputable school will

frankly admit that as boys they have undergone some of the experiences of Gordon Caruthers and his friends. It is proximity to the facts of real life that makes any great play of book and it can be openly said that "The Loom of Youth" passes such a test with flying colours.

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YOURS SINCERELY

(Interesting Items from the Editor's Letter-Bag)

RAY HOPKINS (London): What an interesting nostalgic article by P. J. Hanger on the Thomson Papers. I think one's interest in the old papers in adult life does depend a lot on those which were met earliest in one's youthful days.

I have just finished reading the Feud with Cliff House series (Magnet 1937) the only series I recall where the girls had such "fat roles." It is odd to read of Marjorie Hazeldene & Co when one can recall having read other Cliff House stories featuring Barbara Redfern and Mabel Lynn. Another point about this series was the illustrations of the girls. Chapman did the interior sketches, but the covers by Shields reminded me of the Morcove girls, for it was he who illustrated the old Schoolgirls' Own for so many years.

(The book souvenir which is awarded every month for the Star Letter of the month, goes to the sender of the above. - ED.)

MRS. ROSS STORY (Worthing) I don't know who wrote "Odd Man Out", the St. Jim's story in the April issue, but I must say how much I enjoyed reading it. It is a long time since I read any Gem stories, but the characters of Tom Merry and his two friends seemed to come instantly to life in my mind when I read this yarn. Schoolboys had their jealousies, too - and they were often much more irrational about it than girls. Whoever this author was (why was he too modest to append his name?) let's have some more stories from him - soon.

BOB WHITER (California): Just received the January and February issues of the good old C.D. I enjoyed them so much. I liked the January

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HOW THEY BEGAN - No. 18

with words "Return of Sexton Blake". In the series was a villain who was able to impersonate a very small boy. He wasn't a dwarf, but had some sort of retarded development. Perhaps Blakiana can elaborate on the subject.

KENNETH KIRBY (South Africa): I noted with some amusement the storm which burst over my head, bloody but still unbowed, in the matter of

cover showing the film magazine, and I thought the Memorial Number wonderful. Surely our dear Old Chap must have smiled, way up yonder! Dan O'Herlihy came to see me, and we had an interesting chat. He tells me that David Niven and Alfred Hitchcock are keen Magnet enthusiasts. I went to Las Vegas, but seeing some well-known faces - Vernon-Smith, Skinner, Snoop, Racke and Mellish - I didn't linger. No, it's not my idea of a place, but at least I know now what it looks like.

P. J. CREIGHAN (Eire): I would like to know in which series Sexton Blake was supposed to have been killed. I think it was towards the end of the twenties, in the Union Jack. I remember placards announcing "Death of Sexton Blake", followed a week later by others

Tom Merry and Harry Wharton. Curiously enough my only supporter, Basil Adam, embarrasses me by claiming for Wharton the same conventionally "heroic" characteristics as tend to make Tom Merry, in my opinion, too much of a stereotype of the schoolboy hero. My opponents rush to claim for Tom the cheerfulness, courage and straight-forwardness which I would be the last to deny him. Surely it is Wharton's balancing defects that make him convincing and colourful.

I take considerable exception to Mr. H. Chapman's statement that "the Editor and other regular writers never miss an opportunity of comparing Brooks and St. Frank's unfavourably with Hamiltoniana." I cannot recall a single instance of your doing this, and I suggest that Mr. Chapman be asked to substantiate his canard or withdraw the remark.

(Thank you, sir. We get a good many bouquets, so we do not complain if a reader, now and then, thinks we deserve a brickbat. - ED.)

R. J. McCABE (Dundee): I enjoyed the Thomson Papers article by Mr. Hanger. In my youth I read nearly all of them, and still have many of the papers he mentions. The cover-item on the Digest was a familiar one. I read that very first issue when it was published.

ALEX PARSONS (Tranmere): Was Dr. Locke married? This may seem a silly question as one of the tales, "Great Fire and Greyfriars", refers to the Head's wife and his child, Mollie. Apart from this I have never read of Mrs. Locke and daughter. Would this story have been the work of a substitute writer, or did Frank Richards decide to let them fade away? May I suggest the idea of a page in C.D. for readers' queries to be answered?

(Mrs. Locke and the Head's family featured in quite a number of the early Magnets. All the Headmasters were married men, but as melodrama dropped from the stories, the family life of the Heads disappeared. We tried a queries column at one time, but readers used it but little, so it was discontinued. - ED.)

T. JOHNSON (Neston): In the 1954 C.D. Annual, which contains a list of boys' papers and dates of issue, The Sports Budget is listed as having commenced on October 23rd, 1923. I happen to have the first six issues, and I find the date of No. 1 is October 6th, 1923. Readers may like to make the alteration in their Annual.

CHARLES DAY (Keighley): I am so pleased to see in the Digest that dear

old Pedro is returning to the Sexton Blake Library. I have often thought that Pedro could once again be usefully employed by Blake and Tinker. Hardly a week goes by but one reads in the press that dogs are, in this modern age, used by both the police and the R.A.F. As regards a memorial to Charles Hamilton, why not a fund known as the Frank Richards' fund, for Dr. Barnardo's homes?

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REVIEW

"MR. LAUREL & MR. HARDY" (John McCabe)

Museum Press 21/-

Linked for most of us with the heydays of our favourite papers are visits to the cinema to see those superlative comedy actors, Laurel and Hardy. Dropping almost unannounced into the bookshops, and belatedly overtaken by the reviewers, is a delightful book which we heartily recommend to all our readers.

In simple, effective language, it traces the life-stories of these two great comedians - one an Englishman, the other an American. It tells how fate drew them together, and made them into the grandest comedy team in the history of the silver screen; how they climbed to fame; how they found themselves being eclipsed by Micky Mouse and Donald Duck; how they made the mistake of venturing into the full-length feature class. A true story, not without pathos, of two gentlemen whose friendship lasted till death parted them, just, perhaps, when the world needed them most.

This book is delightful nostalgic reading for all who, with their favourite periodicals in their pockets, set off to the cinema to see the latest Laurel and Hardy two-reeler without bothering at all what the main feature in the programme might be.

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NOTICE

Preliminary preparations will soon be in hand for the 1962 C.D. ANNUAL. Please get your articles in early to the Digest office.

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