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VOLUME 17, No. 201

SEPTEMBER 1963

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FOUNDED in 1946 by HERBERT LECKENBY

Vol. 17

Number 201

SEPTEMBER, 1963

Price 2s. Od.



CONSPIRACY

It is rare that an editor finds in his paper something which he did not know was going to be there, but that was my lot last month. When I opened my own advance copy of the 200th number of Collectors' Digest I thought for a moment that some calamity had occurred. But when I realised that I was the victim of a deep-laid conspiracy I somehow felt that joyful stirring of the heart which only comes once in a lifetime.

The secret had been well kept. I found that even my own family had been in on it - and I had never once had an inkling of what was in the wind. Naturally I reproved my printers (in a rather luke-warm fashion) for allowing anyone to tinker with the magazine, and my printers were contrite (also in a luke-warm fashion).

That insert in our 200th issue is something which I will cherish till my dying day. I am not conceited enough to think that I am

deserving of all the very nice things which were written about me, but for many days since it has been pleasant to hold unusually high my inevitably swollen head. My very grateful thanks to all who were concerned in putting such a charming plan into operation.

Grateful thanks, too, to the great mass of readers whose letters flooded into Excelsior House in the fortnight following the publication of No. 200. I should like to print them all, but to do so would occupy every inch of the magazine for a couple of months at least. I will just conclude by quoting an East Anglian reader who wrote: "So often advance blurbs are not to be relied upon. You told us that the 200th number would be the greatest issue of Collectors' Digest yet published. It was! The greatest and finest of all time."

Thank you, readers all, for your wonderful response and co-operation. I am so happy that C.D. No. 200 made you happy.

ANOTHER BOUQUET

Having given our printers a luke-warm dressing-down and received their luke-warm apologies it will not come amiss if I now pay tribute to them. In turning out our Double Number in the height of the holiday season and making a most wonderful job of it, they did us proud. It took many weeks longer than with a normal issue, and it entailed continuous streams of varying instructions by mail and telephone from a fuss-pot of an editor. They never turned a hair, and if the young lady at the end of the line said "It's that AWFUL man again," she said it so that I did not hear it. Collectors' Digest owes a lot to many people - and high up on the list of good folk to whom we owe a real debt come the wonderful York Duplicating Services. (Bless them!)

GREYFRIARS BACK

It is good news that some of the earlier work of Frank Richards is to appear in the high-class periodical LOOK and LEARN. With the sad memory of Rookwood in the Knockout, with first-class stories reduced to indifference by mutilation and change, we reserve any comment at the moment. The promise seems to be that the old stories will be reprinted word for word. If this is done, LOOK and LEARN can expect every support from Collectors' Digest readers.

THE 1963 ANNUAL

With this issue we send the usual order form for the 1963 Collectors' Digest Annual. It hardly seems possible that "Annual Time" is round again - but for many weeks we have been in the thick of preparing this giant Year Book. Once again, it is our aim to make it the finest of all time.

It will help us if you can send in your order early. To ensure no possible disappointment, an advance order is necessary. It is not possible to print many extra copies to cater for possible late orders. The cost of the Annual is as usual 15/- plus 1/6 towards post and packet.

Also on the order form is space for any advertisement which you may like to include in this widely-read production. The cost of advertisements in the Annual is twopence per word, serial numbers counting as one word. If you have something to advertise - wants or disposals - please do. The more advertisements we can obtain, the more help we get towards our very heavy production costs.

Next month we shall lift the curtain and let you know some of the treats in store in the 1963 Collectors' Digest Annual.

THE EDITOR.

* * * * *

O B I T U A R Y

ROBERT FARISH, Mallsknowe, Longtown. Died at the age of 62.

Mr. Farish contracted polio at 16 years of age. Was severely handicapped, and since the age of 50 has been confined to a wheelchair. Was mainly responsible for the formation of the local branch of the British Polio Fellowship. Served as secretary, chairman and president. He had a number of stories and articles in Longtown dialect published by the Lakeland Dialect Society. A keen reader of Collectors' Digest over many years.

* * * * *

FOR SALE: Bound volume of Magnet No. 1461 - 1526 in mint condition. £7
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SALE: Holiday Annual 1929 - 10/-. Schoolgirls Own Annual 1925. Big Book for Boys - 4/- each. 30 Collectors' Digests 6/- the lot. Would exchange for Nelson Lees, etc.
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FOR SALE: Mint condition "Sexton Blake Libraries" 1956 - 1963, "Boys will be Boys" 1957, Boy's World Nos. 1 - 5. WANTED: Nelson Lee Libraries 1924 - 1933. S.O.L.'s St. Frank's. Good condition essential. Full details to:
N. PRAGNELL, 33 BRAE STREET, LIVERPOOL, 7.

WANTED: Magnets 751, 752, 753. Good loose copies or volumes containing same. Also wanted: Early Penny Popular Nos. 12, 13, 45, 47, 48.
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HAIL and FAREWELL

By Bette Pate

Across the Border our friends have an ancient proverb - "Is math an sgathan null caraid" which, translated from the Gaelic tells us "A friend's eye is a good mirror." That surely sums up the relationship between Sexton Blake and his host of admirers. To so many of us, he became a real friend of long standing and because his image is imprinted on our characters, as well as on our hearts, time will only serve to enhance rather than destroy this legendary figure.

Each author and artist presented a different facet of this man who became for countless thousands the epitome of all that was best in the British characters. Yet everyone who had followed his famous adventures from the Victorian era to the present Elizabethan stage has, I am quite sure, always had a very clear image in their own mind's eye. Countless readers saw him as a friend and, equally important, as guide and mentor in their impressionable years so that there are many now who have cause to remember Sexton Blake with real affection for the help he gave them through his wise example.

Having met Blake at a really early age I can speak from personal experience. My original image of him was that of the stern parent keeping a watchful eye and restraining hand on the young, impetuous Tinker whose faults, by contrast, had their own appeal.

Then, having discovered a whole new world as the ability to read opened wide the doors of knowledge, I journeyed around this world with the Baker Street pair. And in their friendly company I found it a vastly more interesting and exciting tour than the school geography books ever led me to believe. Above all their adventures took me to England, to fabulous London and all points west ... perhaps that is when my heart first went swandering and a dream, which I still cherish was born; but certainly Blake never led me astray otherwise.

Later, in High School days, there were many points of knowledge gained from the Baker Street Case Books with Eric Parker continuing to present the famous pair in, I feel, their best known image. During the war years we saw England and her people in every aspect of those grim and gallant days through the eyes of Blake and Tinker. They served their country as only they could, putting patriotism before every other consideration, a sentiment echoed at home and abroad by their admirers. Those same admirers who realized that Blake represented the sum total of all those decencies and loyalties for which they themselves were also prepared to fight and die.

The post war years found Blake still our ideal friend but in this brave new world, sadly out of place. His code of living had become a subject of mockery to the younger generation, most of whom had grown up without the pleasure and privilege of knowing Blake and Tinker, the lovable Mrs. Bardell and dear old Pedro. Now America had taken the lead in many fields and amongst other old and hallowed British institutions, Sexton Blake was soon to be engulfed in this sea of seas - Atlantic progress.

Even for an adult who had long outgrown a teenage crush for the irrepressible Tinker, Sexton Blake still exercised an incomparable attraction. But I was becoming acutely aware that my friend Blake was fighting a stern battle for existence and more important still was marshalling all his forces to retain his integrity and personality. With the advent of the New Look, his friends, seeing a startling metamorphosis in their mirror, realized that in his fight he had won the first fight but lost the final battle the name alone remained unchanged.

Personally, I said goodbye to Blake and Tinker then, so this is simply a post-script of farewell. But even as he himself was facing this last fateful era he still proved to be the same friend to me I had always known and admired. Not only did he serve to introduce me to a host of grand friends here and abroad, he was the reason for my amateur efforts in the writing field which also brought me good friends and much pleasure.

To Sexton Blake I owe a great debt of gratitude for in so many ways I have found

him a very real friend indeed. I have known him in childhood, adolescence and as an adult and always our weekly meetings were a highlight in my existence. Whatever else came and went, Blake was always there the example of a strong yet gentle man, wise, tolerant, with understanding sympathy for the weakness of others despite his own superior strength both mental and physical, in so many fields.

More talented pens than mine will write finer epitaphs, but no one could be more sincere in paying tribute to this famous character of fiction who has played such a starring role for 70 years. For me he became a living personality and an inspiring example. And, in addition he gave me the key to "Tie - nan - Og", that Gaelic land where the blessed keep the secret of remaining ever-young at heart where he himself in the Land of Ever-Living will never really be lost to us.

MEMORIAL EDITION OF "THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF FRANK RICHARDS" - 25/- . Packed with interesting reading and many fascinating pictures, with a long supplement on Charles Hamilton's work by Eric Fayne. Obtainable from any bookshop or direct from Collectors' Digest office. The Editor of C.D. will mail the autobiography to any address in the world.

DANNY'S DIARY

S E P T E M B E R

1 9 1 3

Two trains left Carlisle in the early morning of September 2nd on their way south to St. Pancras. The first, a very heavy train, left at 1.35. It was steaming badly and when nearing the top of Ais Gill in the Pennines it could get no further and stopped in order to make up some steam.

The second train left at 1.49. This, too, was steaming badly, but it was a light train so it went at a good speed. The driver and the fireman were both trying to get more steam, and they ran past all the Mallerstang signals at danger. The second train crashed into the back of the first, and immediately fire broke out from the gas lighting.

Fourteen passengers died almost without trace in this terrible disaster, and many were injured.

Doug has had all the Union Jacks this month. They were "The Secret Report" featuring the Scorpion; "The Black Jewel Case" introducing Yvonne; "The White Mandarin" about Wu Ling; "The Case of the Motor Cyclist" featuring Professor Kew; and "The Missing Heiress" which was another story about the Scorpion.

I read "The Secret Report" which was quite interesting though I found it rather heavy going. The Scorpion, whose real name was Charles Major, had a baby-faced and rather wicked wife called Julia. They stole a report which, had it been secured by Germany, would have made Britain no longer a first-class power. But Blake and Tinker defeated them.

The Editor of the Union Jack has been receiving letters from readers who are surprised to find a reformed character called John Marsh in the U.J. while the same character is engaged in crime with Plummer and Carac in a serial called "The Great Conspiracy" in the Dreadnought. The editor points out that it must not be taken that stories in the Union Jack run in strict sequence of time. I wonder whether the editor is

pulling our leg. I reckon it more likely that "The Great Conspiracy" is an old story reprinted.

The paper "Cheer Boys Cheer" closed down this month and a new one called "The Boy's Journal" has taken its place. I can't see much difference, really. The new paper has a number of serials and several short stories. The best serial is "Cast Out by the School" by Horace Phillips.

Doug and his friend Wobbly Defrayne went to the St. James's Theatre to see a new play by Bernard Shaw called "Androcles and the Lion." It is a fable and among the players were Leon Quartermaine and Donald Calthrop. I mentioned to Doug that I would like to see it and Wobbly neighed like a horse and said "Babies in arms are not admitted." Doug makes some queer and most horrible friends. Wobbly is all teeth and trousers, and smells like a chemist's shop.

Every week Mum has a paper called "The Weekly Friend." She bought her first copy while we were at Southampton and has had it ever since. They are now giving prizes of furs for fifteen correct football results. I wish Mum could win a Meer-squash.

The Gem has been really excellent again this month. "The Black Sheep" was about Cutts who pretended he was writing a play, and he got Digby to write out some of it. Cutts used this to pretend to Major Cutts, who was Dig's father's friend, that Digby was in terrible trouble and needed money. It is one of the best Gems I have ever read.

"Fatty Wynn's Hunger Strike" was quite funny. Mr. Ratcliffe put Fatty on a diet of bread and water. Awful for Fatty.

"The Ragtime Schoolboys" was good. Lowther started a Ragtime Band and played at a Regatta. The story introduced Lord Eastwood and Cousin Ethel.

"Cussy's Guest" was Fisher T. Fish from Greyfriars and the story was a riot.

Doug took me to Brooklands towards the end of September and we saw a flying display. A Frenchman called Pegoud flew a Bleriot machine upside down and he also turned somersaults. When someone asked him what it felt like, he said it was like being upside down in a barber's chair. Doug reckons that in years to come we shall all fly everywhere. What larks!

The Magnet has been good again. In "Up Against It", Walker, the prefect, was given as a study a converted box-room at the end of the Remove passage, so that he could keep an eye on the Remove. Peter Todd and Co. made him glad to leave.

In "Bunter the Prize-Winner", Bunter entered for a competition in a paper and won. He expected hundreds of pounds but got fourpence. Next week, the Remove were forbidden to play football, so they got out at night to practice. This story was "The Moonlight Footballers."

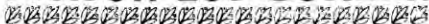
The last Magnet of the month was "Bravo, the Bounder," another football story.

This month I also had a Penny Popular. I like it, but can't often afford it. The Sexton Blake story was called "The Master Cheat" about a prince of cardsharps. The Jack, Sam and Pete tale was "On Equal Terms." But best of the lot was the St. Jim's story called "Rough Justice," all about Mellish making a lot of mischief among the chums. Doug said that when it appeared in the Gem a few years earlier, it was called "A Tell-Tale." The new title "Rough Justice" which was much better, was actually a chapter heading in the story.

It has been a very warm, dry month, and the water-carts have been out in the streets to lay the dust. I love to see the water-carts going along, spraying all round, and making everywhere smell so nice and fresh.

ADVERTISE in the 1963 COLLECTORS' DIGEST ANNUAL

Nelson Lee Column



CONDUCTED BY JACK WOOD

THE 'CHARLES WENTWORTH' MYSTERY SOLVED

By W. O. G. Lofts

..... "Can anyone throw any light on the identity of 'Charles Wentworth' who, as far as I can trace, first appeared in THE BOYS REALM in 1927. At one time, it was thought that this was another pen-name for E.S. Brooks, as he introduced the St. Franks boys with the Blue Crusaders in later stories under his own name. Although the stories are Brooksonian in the plots by the mysterious 'Charles Wentworth' the style differs. The Blue Crusaders were of course created as far back as 1905 in the pink BOYS REALM. The author Arthur S. Hardy, and a main character Fatty Fowkes - based on a real footballer, William Foulke, the twenty-stone goalkeeper for Sheffield United in their best period 1897 to 1902"

So wrote an old friend of mine Leonard M. Allen in this column over ten years ago, and to my knowledge the mystery has never been solved. With E.S. Brooks denying that he ever wrote under the 'Charles Wentworth' pen-name, it seemed that the identity of this author would never be known, until recently, when I had another meeting with a former chief sub-editor of THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY, also on the same group of papers as the BOYS REALM.

'Charles Wentworth' said my informant, "No wonder that the identity of the author is a big mystery - you see the person never really existed. It was just an editorial name to cover re-written old stories, and probably several persons could lay claim to it - chiefly Percy Clarke ('Martin Frazer' the S.B.L. author) and Walter Shute ('Walter Edwards' the S.B.L. author). The actual story behind the creation of the name was as follows

"As you know well, the large pink BOYS REALM was still running

up till mid-1927. With a falling circulation, it was decided to start a small new series entitled 'The Boys Realm of Sport and Adventure.' Certainly a more popular size.

You will appreciate that in the case of a low circulation, the only thing an editorial staff can do is to experiment, to find out what sort of stories were popular with readers, and what was not. In view of the tremendous popularity of the Blue Crusaders in former years, it was decided to reprint some of the old stories - but modernised by being editorially re-written, and also naming a new author to them, to suggest that they were completely new in every way. So 'Charles Wentworth' was created in the editorial office - though readers with very long memories would remember the same name appearing in the MARVEL - though it had no connection.

The stories, however, only brought a luke-warm response from readers, and then someone in the office, had the bright idea of bringing the Blue Crusaders together with the boys of St. Frank's, and who else would write these stories better than E.S. Brooks the creator?

It was, of course, perfectly true that many of the St. Frank's tales in the Boys Realm were not written by Mr. Brooks, and one could indeed name many authors who had a hand in them! Harry Tomlinson Wright who was the editor, and wrote many stories under the non-deplume of 'Howard Grant', possibly wrote a few, plus Andrew Murray, Balfour Ritchie (later editor of the BOYS FRIEND LIBRARY), though I believe that the R.T. Eves you mention did actually write THE NIPPER AT ST. NINIAN tales much earlier - which was his schooldays but not at St. Frank's.

The 'new' first story then featuring the Blue Crusaders editorially rewritten appeared in No. 26 of THE BOYS REALM OF SPORT AND ADVENTURE dated 14th January 1928 under the 'Charles Wentworth' pen-name. They continued right up till issue No. 63 that same year - when the last was entitled 'The Missing Crusader.'

It is quite possible that the assumption E.S. Brooks wrote the previous stories was from the fact that No. 64 was editorially advertised in No. 63 as also by 'Charles Wentworth' yet when it appeared it bore the E.S. Brooks name under the title. This was of course an editorial slip-up, as Mr. Brooks always wanted his own name to appear under stories personally written by him, and I believe that he always had his wishes respected in this matter.

Whether the Blue Crusaders and the St. Frank's boys combined tales were popular with readers is hard to say. Certainly Nipper and Co. at St. Frank's were very popular in the NELSON LEE LIBRARY at that

period, and the decline of them so suddenly not much later was truly amazing.

* * * * *

JUST WHAT THE READERS WANTED!

By H. Charman

It has been said by some critics that the St. Frank's stories were not really school stories and that E.S. Brooks could not write a genuine school story.

If these critics would trace the development of the Nelson Lee from the beginning they would find that this is not quite true.

When the Nelson Lee Library first appeared in 1915 it was intended by the publishers to be a Detective Story paper about the adventures of Lee and Nipper, and it continued as such for about two years.

The stories were by various first-class authors, but Brooks soon became the most popular.

In No. 112 he introduced St. Frank's into a story, and this story was so popular that he had to settle Lee and Nipper at St. Frank's permanently. From then on, Brooks wrote the story in the Lee every week.

Two other very popular characters Dorrie and Umlosi, were introduced, and from then the stories became a mixture of school, detective and foreign adventure, and were immensely popular.

At various times the paper reverted to purely detective stories of Lee and Nipper, but the readers would not have them. They liked Lee and Nipper, but only at St. Frank's. The stories were so popular that they ran for many years in the Nelson Lee Library and were re-printed over and over again in many other papers.

The Holiday Series, which have been especially abused, were, I think the most popular series of all and we boys looked forward to them weeks before they were due, and I am sure we learned more about the world from them than we did from our lessons at school.

It is therefore unfair and shortsighted to criticise the stories and the author as some people do.

The stories were different from any others at the time, and this was intentional. They satisfied a demand for something different from the usual school story or the usual detective story.

As long as the stories followed the school, detective, adventure mixture the Lee was a great success, but it began to go downhill as soon as the style of the stories was changed.

I am afraid that today there is no market for such stories, and Mr. Brooks is wise to write for adults, at which task he seems to be doing very well.

* * * * *

WHEN ROSS STUCK HER NECK OUT

MAURICE KUTNER writes

Ross Story is certainly "sticking her neck out" by asserting that E.S.B. is a better writer than C.H. I admire Mrs. Story's confidence, but this subject has been frequently debated and discussed in the pages of C.D. over the years, and there surely cannot be any decisive answer. In the days of 1917 to 1921 when I was never without a quantity of periodicals bulging my pockets, the Nelson Lee Library took my interest on the same level as the Boys' Realm and the Marvel and was read every week. Boys are very impressionable creatures and I have often thought that if only the illustrations by Arthur Jones had appealed to me more. Who knows? I might have become a staunch Nelson Lee fan!

ROBERT KELLY writes:

While I am glad to see more Nelson Lee news in the Digest I can't help feeling that far too many Lee enthusiasts carry a massive inferiority complex about with them. They seem to be unable to write about their favourite author without dragging the name of Charles Hamilton into the discussion and criticising his work.

Hamilton devotees can I am sure stand reasonable criticism about their favourite author but some of the points made by Ross Story are quite ridiculous.

The fact that E.S. Brooks was able to make the transition from writing stories for boys to writing crime stories for adults does not prove that he was a better writer of school stories than Hamilton. However, Ross Story gives the game away when she writes that "Hamilton was fortunate in that he was able to continue writing his school stories long after the market had closed to his contemporaries."

If Ross Story stopped to think why the Magnet and Gem survived while other companion papers were going on the scrap heap she would surely be forced to admit that it might have been because Hamilton was producing better work than his contemporaries. Perhaps the greatest triumph of Hamilton's two creations was that they survived the 1930's, a time of great danger for boys weeklies not cast in the Thomson mould.

Three possible factors caused the decline and fall of the Nelson Lee magazine in my opinion.

First was a possible fall in quality in the St. Frank's stories themselves about 1928-29, second a less attractive format than the Magnet and Gem and third an outdated title (Nelson Lee often did not play a prominent part in the peak years of the paper.)

But whatever caused falling circulation the result was greater editorial interference and from this time on the paper was doomed.

Had the second new series been given a format similar to the Magnet and had Brooks been granted a freer hand the Nelson Lee might indeed have survived until 1939-40.

BLAKIANA

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

NAME THE AUTHOR!

By Walter Webb

PART 5

WARD MUIR

Not the least interesting aspect of the hobby in recent years has been the periodic denouement of authors hitherto not considered as having written any boys' stories for the more popular papers of the past. Also, those whose names have remained quite unknown until recently. Like that of Ward Muir, for instance.

Here was a man who wrote a lot of boys' stories for Hamilton Edwards and his papers, but hid his light under a bushel so successfully that not a single reader of his stories apparently knew who he was. As far as the dwindling survivors of his day are concerned, he still remains as someone never before heard of, although an editor - the same BH editor mentioned earlier on - remembers him as a nice, genial, gentlemanly fellow, very reserved and quietly mannered, with a style rather heavy and unimaginative. Although a sound worker, his stuff was never clamoured for, but he was good in an emergency.

A personal research has enlarged somewhat on these details, and it is now known that his full name was Wardrop Openshaw Muir, the son of a clergyman. Born in 1878 the author was educated at Merchant Taylor's School and Brighton College. He was not of a very robust disposition, apparently, for, at the early age of 16, the first symptoms of lung trouble were detected, and these, developing during and after maturity, ultimately proved fatal. In June, 1927, just after Charles Lindbergh's sensational 3,600 miles solo Atlantic flight, Ward Muir died of consumption at the age of 48.

His pen-names are scattered intermittently amongst the many paper collectors are desirous of collecting today. What they were, for the moment remains a mystery. Did he, like nearly every other contri

contributor to the Harnsworth papers, write Sexton Blake stories in the old days? An interesting question to which an answer may be found in the not-too-distant future.

* * * * *

THOSE INVOLUNTARY EJACULATIONS!

Back to clues on authorship again; this time to those which may be found in the varied exclamations of surprise so many authors were fond of having their characters give utterance to from time to time.

One has to disregard such phrases as "Great Scott!" "By Jove!" and others equally as common, for every author used them in the course of his narrative at some time or other; but the reader's attention becomes arrested at once at expressions like "Great Jupiter!" "Egad!" "Pon hon our!" and "Bless my life!" for, obviously, they were phrases exclusive to only one or perhaps, two particular writers.

The archaic expletive directed at the largest planet of the solar system was used by E.J. Murray (Sidney Drew) whilst the obsolescent ejaculation "Egad!" can be observed in many A.S. Hardy stories, i.e., "And the beggar will refuse to see you," said Silward Harborough, "No, egad, he won't" and "I was interrupted by a masked villain who came here to rob me. Egadi He nearly finished me, too!" (Extracts from "The Blue Crusaders" by A.S. Hardy.) Also, "Egad, I think he must be trying to catch the boat-train!" cried Sexton Blake. (Extract from "The Stolen Gainsborough" U.J. No. 191).

The other two expressions were used by only one author - E.J. Gannon - and can be observed in many non-Blake stories he wrote under his pen-name, Beverley Kent. This writer also used the exclamation "Cricky!" which he spelt as I have written it - without the "e", which was unusual. But, without the guidance of these clues, it is a simple matter really to pick out Gannon's stories, for he had a very distinctive style, which made his identity obvious before the completion of the first chapter.

A word not to be observed in the repertoire of the modern Blake author but which was in common use by the old guard in compiling their sentences of dialogue is the word "cried" i.e. "Look out, guv'nor!" cried Tinker. It appears that even in those far-off days there were a few who boycotted it, but, on the whole, it was a word much favoured by the Victorian, Edwardian and early Georgian writers, and it is in his extensive use of the word that J. C. Jones's stories can be picked out, for, sometimes, like A.S. Hardy, he would write down four or five successive sentences of dialogue and use the word "cried" in every one of them, giving the impression that his inventory of such phrases was strictly limited.

It is believed, but not confirmed, that Jones's full name was Jonas Geoffrey Jones. His best known pen-name was "Ambrose Earle". It is also believed that he wrote as "Geoffrey Gray". If this be so, then it is highly probable that he was Geoffrey Murray as well, but this is subject to confirmation, of course. Jones suffered from that most terrible of all afflictions - blindness - and died many years ago.

* * * * *

NOSTALGIA IN THE MODERN S.B.L.

A breath of nostalgia was brought into the pages of the S.B.L. recently, when a little word previously not used in a Sexton Blake story for nearly 40 years was brought back again - not in a Blake novel, but in a letter to MAILBAG, written by no less a correspondent

than our own editor.

That little word was "ere" which some of the early authors used instead of the word "before," and which seems to have disappeared completely from the modern English novel and, indeed, from the repertorium of the English language as well, so when I saw it reappear in No. 511 of the Library, I was reminded of some of those old-time Blake chroniclers who used it in the days of long ago.

Fenton Ash and William Bayfield seemed rather fond of the word, and, to a rather lesser extent, so did Dowling Maitland and A.S. Hardy; but no two authors used it to the extent of Dr. J. W. Staniforth (Maxwell Scott) and W. B. Home-Gall (Reginald Wray), who seemed particularly enamoured by it, and, in the case of the former, often commenced a sentence with it. A Blake story of doubtful origin with the word "ere" used prominently through its entire length might well be traced to either of these two authors, and it forms quite a useful clue in the identification of some of the early contributors.

* * * * *

SOME FACTS AND RETRACTIONS

It is worthy of comment that before the advent of the official records the great majority of those anonymously published Sexton Blake stories in both the U.J. and S.B.L. had been identified of authorship, and the official lists served to confirm their accuracy in most cases. There were one or two instances where researchers had gone astray and the last of the Confederation stories in 1926 can be quoted as an example; but, even here, the final three were spotted as being of a different authorship from the originator of the series, and, as far as my own lists are concerned, no alterations were necessary, since the name of the substitute - Gilbert Chester - has always appeared as the author. So much can be learned from an author's style, his dialogue, and, among other things, the way he interpreted that bond of comradeship which existed between detective and assistant in those early days. Chester's repartee was quite different from that of Robert Murray's and this was noticeable in the three aforementioned stories.

On the other hand, mistakes are bound to occur in such forecasting, particularly in the case of two authors having a similar style of diction - Norman Goddard and Jack Bobin form an ideal example - and when two writers collaborated - as in the case of A.C. Murray and J. G. Jones, whose stories were published under the joint authorship of "Andrew Gray and Ambrose Earle" - and a closer inspection of certain U.J. stories reveal that such theories of mine as A.S. Hardy having written yarns of Blake on the turf and Alfred Bernard being responsible for stories of Blake and Tinker on the music-hall stage, may be inaccurate. But, whoever the latter writer may have been, he certainly never contributed after 1908, and his Blake stories - five in all - were published in issues Nos. 111, 147, 151, 192 and 256, and I can only assume that he was a better actor (he was said to have had stage experience) than he was author, for these stories were very mediocre.

The origin of such stories as those which featured Blake at Newmarket, Ascot, and at various other race meetings may never be definitely known. There is certainly a touch of Hardy in these yarns; but there is also something of the style of William Bayfield in them too, and the possibility of them collaborating as in the case of Murray and Jones, cannot be ruled out. Both wrote tales of Blake with horse-racing as the theme.

These stories were written in the same vein as a few others which appeared in the U.J. before Blake was recalled to its pages, under a pen-name the surname of which is not without its significance and will be commented on later.

It is reasonable to assume that when the Sexton Blake stories were restarted in 1904 those authors who, up till then, had contributed stories in the U.J. featuring their own particular characters, would be invited to continue their contributions but with the difference of including in their narratives and making as the central character Sexton Blake.

Many of the better known writers of that era have been discovered - Craydon, Goddard, Maxwell, Cannon, Hayter, have all come under the microscope of the vigilant researcher and proved officially as having penned some of those early Blake's. But, what of the others?

A glance down the list of contributors of that pre Blake era reveals such names as T.C. Bridges, John Stanton, Dowling-Maitland, Alec G. Pearson, Arthur S. Hardy, W. Spate, Reginald Wray, Paul Herring, Singleton Pound, Tristram K. Monck, H. Winter Gale, Fenton Ash, Douglas Grant, S. Clarke Hook, Ellis Ellison, Dudley Brand, Edgar Pickering, C. E. Pearce, Max Hamilton, and the best known and most highly esteemed of them all - Charles Hamilton.

This number can be reduced by singling out the pen-names and giving the author's real name. For instance, Wray and Ellison were W. B. Home-Gall; Dowling-Maitland and Monck were T. D. Maitland; Winter-Gale was probably Edward or Ernest Cannon - It is not known which of the two Christian names the author laid claim to - whilst others - Stanton, Grant, Brand were probably pseudonyms of other authors as yet unknown. It would be safe to rule out Charles Hamilton and S. Clarke Hook, as it is improbable that they wrote any Blake stories.

W. Spate was apparently an elderly author, and was in no way connected with the Sapt (without the "e") who wrote that solitary Lobangu yarn in the U.J. in 1922. He was, it seems, quite a well-known author, whose work was published by John and Robert Maxwell, who had publishing houses in Fleet Street and Ludgate Circus. Spate wrote a humorous cricket story entitled "Cricketers Guyed" in 1886, which was edited by W. G. Grace, and had other work of his published by S. French of the Strand.

Charles E. Pearce was, besides being a boys' author of some repute, a crime specialist as well. A well-known figure in publishing in his day, Pearce was a former editor of the South London Press, and was for four years, between 1882 and 1886, in the editorial chair of FUNNY FOLKS. Between 1896 and 1910 he wrote about 70 novels, including some serials for ANSWERS. A famous character of his was Polly Peachum, who he revised in later years. Certainly an author who could have written a good Blake yarn, it may yet be discovered that he was among the anonymous crowd of the pink covered era. His last work was NURDER MYSTERIES, 1924. He lived in Chiswick, and died in November, 1924.

Edgar Pickering has already been stated by me to have been a pen-name of Alec G. Pearson's. Some years ago I had it officially that Pearson wrote under a host of pseudonyms, including G. Wells Campbell, Capt. Coleman Groom, Capt. Russell Scott and Edgar Pickering. The last named is, apparently, the rightful one of a different author, which is a further indication that one cannot take everything from official sources as being the gospel truth.

As a matter of fact, Pickering was a top-class writer of his day, who could command the sum of 3/6 for his work. And 3/6 a princely sum in those days - bought a wealth of reading. The author wrote for several publishers, the best known being Hutchinson & Co., for whose long extinct "Boys' Golden Library" he contributed several novels. These books made a splendid addition to any book-lover's library being handsomely bound in cloth, with bevelled boards, richly gilt and full gilt edges.

But Edgar Pickering was not the only writer who temporarily forsook the more profitable channels of writing to enter the less remunerative ones that rippled through the Blake field. There were others of whom many interesting details are available, but which must be held over.

Hamiltoniana

LET'S BE CONTROVERSIAL

No. 69. THE GHOST STORY

We know that large numbers of substitute stories of Greyfriars and St. Jim's, commissioned by the editors, appeared in the Magnet and the Gem. So far as I know it has never been suggested that any of our favourite authors themselves employed "ghost" writers to do any work for them.

It would, at any rate, explain some of the controversy which has occasionally occurred in our Blakiana column, when one contributor declares that a certain author was paid for a particular story, while another contributor avers emphatically that the particular story bears the hall-mark of another writer.

Did Charles Hamilton, staggering under the incessant demand from editors for more and more of his work, ever employ a "ghost" writer? I am quite certain that he did not after the first World War. Of the few years before the first World War I am not so certain.

There are some stories in that period, in both the Magnet and the Gem, which have a strangely hybrid flavour. There are stories which were obviously written by a substitute author, yet show the Hamilton touch in places.

I do not believe for a moment that Charles Hamilton ever had the time or the inclination for reading substitute stories after they were in print. How was it then that occasionally the creations of substitute writers appeared in his stories. In the middle history of the papers I believe that this was due to the editors changing names on the manuscripts. Certainly it happened in the case of Mr. Pilbeam.

About 1930 a Gem substitute author retired Mr. Linton and replaced him with Mr. Pilbeam. In at least one of the stories which the genuine writer contributed before the reprints commenced, Mr. Pilbeam appeared. Charles Hamilton told me that he had never even heard of Mr. Pilbeam. In his stories he wrote of Mr. Linton. Somebody in the editorial

office changed the name. The overall impression at the time was that the genuine Clifford had used a substitute writer's character.

Delarey and Phyllis Howell, to mention but two of Pentelow's creations, were referred to by the genuine writer in his stories. Here, I think it likely, we have instance of Pentelow altering the names in the manuscripts.

Not so easy to explain away, however, is the case of Mr. Erasmus Zachariah Pepper, who owned a barn. Mr. Pepper and his barn appear to have been an invention of Pentelow, but both were featured in genuine Hamilton stories some years after Pentelow's influence had left the Gem.

Mr. Poppers barn was the rendezvous for Pentelow's stories of the St. Jim's parliament. Years earlier, when the blue Gem was very young, there were genuine stories about a St. Jim's parliament.

For a time there does seem to have been a link-up between the stories of Charles Hamilton and Pentelow which is all the more remarkable because the styles of the two authors were so utterly dissimilar. It is known that the two men clashed.

Yet it is a fact that, some years later, the brilliant little series of the Story Seven saw Tom Merry & Co running a teashop in Mr. Pepper's barn. It really does not make sense, unless he created Mr. Pepper and the barn, that Charles Hamilton should use them, long after, or even know anything about them.

Odd is the case of Clifton Dane in the blue Gem. Dane was the creation of a substitute writer, a man whose style was quite unlike Hamilton's. Yet Hamilton adopted Dane, and, in blue cover stories, often introduced him. It is inconceivable to me that, with the very large St. Jim's cast of his own creation, the genuine author should read a substitute story which was published against his wishes, and adopt the new character therefrom. The most feasible explanation is that the substitute writer introduced Dane under the instructions of the genuine Martin Clifford.

Charles Hamilton told me emphatically that, with the exception of "The School Under Canvas," he never wrote a story which appeared under the pen-name of Prosper Howard. Yet Prosper Howard created Gordon Gay in the Empire Library - and, down the years, Charles Hamilton frequently used Gordon Gay.

In the blue Gem and the red Magnet the majority of stories stand out, without any doubt as genuine material. There are some which are obviously substitute efforts. But there are a number on which it is difficult to pass an opinion - and it is hard to see why this should be so. It has been suggested occasionally that these were written by

Charles Hamilton on an "off" day. More likely, I think, that they were ghost stories, touched up by the genuine hand. One does not, at any rate, find any of them after the first World War.

Bernard Glyn was certainly a genuine character. Yet Glyn was spoken of as being at the school, in a substitute story which appeared before the genuine one which told of Glyn's arrival. Unless Mr. Hamilton himself told the sub-writer about Glyn, the sub writer must have read the genuine Glyn story in manuscript form in the editor's office. In that case, the editor held back the genuine story to replace it with a sub story which at that time had not been written. It doesn't make sense.

To my mind the most striking indication of a possible ghost writer is found in the 1913 blue Gem story "Misunderstood." As a sub story it is fairly successful, though it lacks the Hamilton magic and would never deceive the real student. But this story has a stock Hamilton theme. The boy who sees two people in danger, goes to help the one whose need is the greater, and is accused of cowardice for neglecting the other. Down the years this theme was used a good many times at the various schools, though I believe (without checking) that this was the first instance of its being used. At the end of the story Manners was presented with his famous camera.

If the story were a normal sub specimen, slipped in by the editor, the fact of Charles Hamilton repeating the same theme and keeping Manners' camera as a stock topic, is strange. But if the theme was sketched out by the genuine writer, and worked on by a ghost writer under his direction, the whole puzzle falls into place.

I have just been reading an article which Roger Jenkins wrote in 1946. Now I am sure it is unfair to quote from an article which a colleague wrote long ago. With the passing of the years our taste may change a little; our knowledge increases; we become less hampered by prejudice. I loathe my own articles which I wrote even a few years back, and it embarrasses me if I ever read them. I could often be confounded if anyone was so unkind as to quote many of my own old articles.

Roger's old articles stand up to the passing of time far better than mine do, so I hope he will forgive me for quoting him here. I only do so because a comment he made in his 1946 article provides an interesting point in connection with the theme I am now handling.

Mr. Jenkin's wrote:

"These (the 'Nippy from Nowhere' series in the Gem' were in all probability written by Clive R. Fenn, the only person

who ever used Mr. Hamilton's pen-names without his disapproval. And one can appreciate the reason, for these tales seem to be written by the hand of the master himself. It is unfortunate that if the employment of substitute writers was inevitable, the A.P. did not always call at first on the son of Marville Fenn,"

I don't suppose that today, seventeen years later, Roger would be of the opinion that the "Nippy from Nowhere" series, which told of the St. Jim's chums on tour with a motor caravan, seemed to be written by the hand of the master himself. According to the Gem catalogue, the Nippy series were written by S. E. Austin, who wrote a large number of sub stories in both the Magnet and the Gem.

However, my reference to Mr. Jenkin's very old article is not on account of the Nippy series. I have quoted from the article simply for the statement: "Clive Fenn, the only person who ever used Mr. Hamilton's pen-names without his disapproval."

It seems obvious that Roger must have got that from Charles Hamilton himself. But, so far as I know, there is no reference anywhere to Clive Fenn having written any substitute story. There seems to be no record that Fenn ever wrote a Magnet or Gem sub story for the editors. Yet he was the only man who used Charles Hamilton's pen-names without his disapproval.

Then for whom did he write?

Surely for Charles Hamilton. Is it not feasible to think that he may have been a "ghost" writer - working under the direction of the genuine author?

Much of this is conjecture - but it is fascinating to conjecture. No doubt we shall go on conjecturing for many years to come.

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CONTROVERSIAL ECHOES

No. 68. THE HEAVENLY TWINS

GEOFFREY WILDE: Though one always thought of the Gem and Magnet as the 'Heavenly Twins' it was hardly to be expected that the 'Vital Spark' could glow equally bright in both simultaneously. Probably the 1933-35 period was the time when their combined level was at its highest, though for the connoisseur this is perhaps clouded by the realisation that the Gem was carrying reprints which, for all their quality, were not quite what the originals had been. The two papers touched a high level simultaneously, though, in the summer of 1939, with the Black Box series in the Gem and the Water-Lily series in the Magnet,

Though the vital spark is an unmistakable feature of Hamilton's best stories, I've

never quite found myself in agreement with the idea that it disappeared after about 1934. The '27 - '34 period stands supreme because the lamp of genius burned steadily throughout; thereafter there were times when it fluttered a little. But such splendid tales as the Portercliffe series of 1935, the Watch-Chain and Seahill Park series of 1937 and the Carter series of 1938 - and I think there are others - show no diminution of the flame that I can see. I agree that there are noticeable modifications of style and mood, but these I would regard as marking a normal difference between what might be called middle-period and late-period work, observable in any writer. Here I follow Roger, but I do feel he goes too far in suggesting that the greatest of any man's work comes in his middle period. Truth be here find some of the freshness and inventiveness of youth combined with the greater maturity and wisdom of experience; but what of that particular sanity, depth and serenity that comes with age? In any case, are Othello, Lear and Antony and Cleopatra really middle-period Shakespeares? Surely not.

BASIL ADAM: I really must put in a word in favour of the sunny yellow covers of the "Magnet". When I first bought the Magnet in the early 1930's I was always attracted by its cheerful cover, especially in the summer months when it seemed to personify for me, at any rate, the long beautiful summers of that period. Mr. Shield's illustrations covering the great Lancaster series, and most of the other great series at this time were much more adult than later illustrations in the Magnet. I must admit that some of the red, white and blue Gems were attractive too.

PETER HANGER: When I came into contact with the Magnet (1939) the Gem had almost finished and I had no interest in it till I discovered that Martin and Frank were the same chappie. I have always enjoyed stories of St. Jim's, but they never seem to ring the bell like Greyfriars and Rookwood do. I can't put my finger on the reason for this, but I know that I prefer post-war St. Jim's to the pre-war variety. And to my surprise I even prefer it to the post-war Greyfriars.

GEORGE SELLARS: I am certain that the blue Gems and the red Magnets were the finest stories of Charles Hamilton, and this is proved by the fact that the majority of readers are keen to obtain these papers and pay high prices for them. Why were they reprinted so many times? The answer is clear. The secret was the atmosphere in those stories which was never repeated in any later period of that very famous pair, the Gem and the Magnet.

ROBERT KELLY: From a purely artistic point of view I agree that the Gem covers were probably better than the Magnet. But surely the Magnet front covers had much more individuality and perhaps greater distinction. Leonard Shields of course did most of the covers from 1927 onwards and at his best he was unequalled in this field.

So far as the actual contents of the two magazines were concerned in the red, white and blue and yellow and orange period, at least it can be said for the Magnet that, the serial apart, all the features were complimentary to the main school story. This was not true of the Gem either during its "Indian Summer" or in the reprint period.

Finally, I agree that the Magnet in its last years achieved dignity and perhaps a little dullness too.

GREYFRIARS IS COMING BACK

The GUARDIAN, in an article by Terry Coleman, has given the glad news that some of the old Greyfriars stories are to be reprinted in LOOK and LEARN. In his article, Mr. Coleman makes the following statements:

Now this magazine, which is weekly, costs 1s, and looks like a tabloid version of

the "Children's Newspaper" is rather more sophisticated than the old "Magnet". What, I ask, makes Mr. Matthews revive Bunter, Bob Cherry, Quelch and Co.?

He gives a considered answer. Old Bunter, he pronounces, was a classical gentleman and he wants to give modern children the opportunity their parents had of meeting him.

But the idea of resuscitating Bunter is really that of Mr. Trevor Newton, managing editor of Look and Learn. Mr. Newton is plainly gone on Bunter. He leafs through a bound volume of the Popular of 1923 and says they're going to reproduce some of the original illustrations and that the layout too will be in the spirit of the old days.

But readers will get their Bunter in smaller doses than their forefathers. The stories which appeared about 1912 in the Gem and the Magnet were 25,000 words long. In the 1920s they were reprinted in instalments of a quarter of that length, and now the weekly episodes will be only 2,5000 words long.

R E V I E W

"JUST LIKE BUNTER"

Frank Richards

Cassell's 11/6d.

It is known that Frank Richards left an unfinished Greyfriars manuscript. His agents sought somebody to finish off that manuscript. Quite a few writers, apparently, were after the job, but, so far as I am aware, it has not been divulged who was given it.

Is "Just Like Bunter" the manuscript in question? No doubt keen students of Hamiltonia will read the story and decide for themselves.

Billy Bunter plays a comparatively small part in the tale. The stars are Vernon-Smith and Redwing. For the first 23 chapters the plot works up agreeably, and the incompatibility of Smithy and Redwing is cleverly portrayed.

On account of his reputation the Bounder is restricted to pocket-money of 2/6 a week. Here Frank Richards slips up. It is unlikely that an experienced master like Mr. Quelch (or the Bounder's hard-headed father) would, in these days, limit any public school boy to pocket-money of a mere half-crown a week.

On credit, the Bounder backs a horse. In fact he backs the same horse on three separate occasions and finds himself in debt to Soapy Sanders to the tune of £17. There is a well-written chapter in which the Bounder breaks bounds at night and Redwing saves him from detection. The two quarrel. The thorny friendship is at an end. Redwing's father is home at Hawscliff, so Redwing goes off to spend a few days with his father. So far so good.

But from Chapter 24 the Bounder goes abruptly out of character. The plot sags and sentiment oozes at the seams.

Redwing, from Hawscliff, rings up Wharton. Redwing is worried that the Bounder may be in money difficulties. Redwing had drawn £20 from his post-office account, just in case. He asks Wharton to let him know



PETER TODD

immediately if the Bounder appears to be in trouble. Wharton promises to do so, and adds the horrid modernism "Not to worry!"

But the Bounder has repented. "He had been thinking very hard of late, and he was conscious of a feeling of shame - shame for his unruly bad temper, shame for his cynical ingratitude. What a fool, and what a rotter he had been. If he had listened to his loyal friend instead of mocking him for 'pi-jaw' - if he had had sense enough, decency enough, to realise what he was losing in losing that loyal pal - But it was too late to think of that now."

It hardly seems feasible that a debt of £17 would bring a fellow like the Bounder face to face with ruin. For once he seems remarkably lacking in initiative. He writes a pitiful letter to Old Tom who "had always been so loyal, so sensible, and never in the least doubting or distrustful."

The Bounder has been gated for the term, so he sends Bunter up to Hawkscliff with the letter: "I shall not be here when you come back, unless you save my skin."

Off goes Bunter to the Redwing cottage at Hawcliff. "There was neither knocker or bell."

The Redwings were not at home. Bunter found them in a gully on a boat. John Redwing was stepping the mast and Tom Redwing shipping the tiller. There is no further mention of Old John in this sequence. Maybe the author forgot he was there.

"Letter for you, Redwing," squeaks Bunter.

It falls in the sea as Bunter tosses it to Redwing over the rail of the jetty. Then Bunter departs in a hurry and does not hear Redwing's query as to who sent the letter. Although he has so recently asked Wharton to communicate with him in case of emergency Redwing does not worry at the loss of the letter. "He dismissed the incident from his mind as the boat ran out to sea."

In the weekend which follows, the Bounder decides that Redwing has failed him in his darkest hour. It still does not occur to him to seek assistance from anyone but Redwing, but it does occur to him that he might rob Mr. Quelch. "Could he sink still lower - could he take that final plunge? He could not - he would not!"

The story is floundering in rhetoric. The Bounder tells Harry Wharton & Co. that he has decided to run away from school and that he will catch a train at 6 o'clock from Lantham Junction, The Head Boy of the Remove takes no steps to avert the crisis, but the Co lends the Bounder £1 to pay his fare. However, as the Bounder sets off, presumably for Friardale, Harry Wharton leaps on his bike and pedals off to

Hawkscliff to tell Redwing. Then, in his turn, Redwing leaps on his own bike and pedals off for Lantham, where he finds the Bounder on the platform. So the Bounder is saved.

Owing to the fact that the Bounder had been gated, Authority was keeping a strict eye on him earlier in the story. Yet on this particular afternoon he was able to travel via Friardale and Courtfield to Lantham - and back - call at the Three Fishers to settle his debt - and return to Greyfriars in time for call-over without being missed.

"Just Like Bunter" is hardly Just Like Frank Richards. It may be a popular addition to the Bunter series. The younger element may enjoy the sentiment and the ideal friendship theme. For this critic the ending just does not ring true.

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"BILLY BUNTER BUTTS IN"

Frank Richards

Four Square 2/6d.

First published in 1951, this story has the ever-popular theme of Harry Wharton feuding with Mr. Quelch. It suffers by being presented on the smaller canvas of the 65,000 word story. Nevertheless, it is entirely readable and is one of the very best of the post-war Bunters.

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OLD BOYS BOOK CLUB

MIDLAND

Meeting held July 30th, 1963.

In contrast to the last meeting when we had a full gathering, the attendance of seven was a trifle disappointing but for all that, it was a very enjoyable programme. It was Tom Porter's night and as usual it was well worth the hard work Tom had put into the preparation. Starting off with a fairly easy quiz (School Captains and Prefects) won by myself - prize - a Modern Boy, it was followed by "Guess the Number" contest. Norman Gregory got the nearest and again a Modern Boy was his reward.

We can always rely on Tom to bring along some very attractive Collectors Gem and his first exhibit was a GEM. In fact Gem No. 129 - the first of the Jerrold Lumley-Lumley series "A Rank Outsider." The special attraction of this was that it bore the same date, day and month of the meeting - 30th of July, 1910 - 53 years old exactly. For his second exhibit an old holiday number of the Magnet - No. 340 DEN - Harry Wharton & Co's Holiday. Date 15th August, 1914. For his talk Tom gave us an outline of the story "The Trickster Tricked" - Magnet No. 444, 12th August 1916.

A game of Bingo based on Greyfriars characters proved very entertaining with Norman Gregory gaining most honours. There was a discussion "Did the S.B.L. have to finish? Is there any future for O.B. Books". All joined in with varying degrees of optimism or otherwise.

The reading of Jack Corbett's article in C.D.A. 1947 was continued (in his absence by Tom Porter).

The Library raffle was won by Ray Bennett and his prize was a Bunter Book and a B.F.L. The second prize went to Ted Davay.

HARRY BROSTER

NORTHERN

Meeting held 10th August, 1963

Once again we had a very good attendance for our monthly meeting, although we are in the midst of the holiday season, and this month we were pleased to welcome one of our new members, Alfred Henson.

After the formal business had been disposed of Gerry Allison gave us the news and correspondence of the month, which included letters from Ben Whiter and Eric Payne regarding the 200th issue of the C.D., and we were very pleased to hear again from Stanley Smith who hopes to be with us in the not too distant future. Another item of interest was a new Four-Square paper back, "Billy Bunter Butts In" which Jack Wood passed round. Jack also read an extract from the 'Yorkshire Post' about two brothers who were identical twins. The antics they got up to during their schooldays reminded one strongly of the Gastleton series. Jack then produced Nelson Lee Library Old Series No. 66, dated 9th September, 1916 and read an extract from the story which was 'The Mystery of the 10.20 Express'. It was surprising how much of the detail reminded us of the big train robbery which had taken place earlier in the week. Another item of news was from the 'Manchester Guardian' which stated that the Fleetway Press are going to re-publish some of the Bunter stories in abbreviated form.

This month's reading was from the book 'Jackson Junior' by P. G. Wodehouse, originally serialised in 'The Captain' and described the school's match with the M.C.C. very well rendered as usual by Gerry Allison.

After refreshments we all tackled a quiz sent to us by the London Club. It was an excellent and comprehensive test and Bill Williamson ran out a worthy winner, Frank Hancock being second and Ron Hodgson third. This took us on nicely to 9.15 when the meeting terminated.

Next meeting - 14th September.

F. HANCOCK - Hon. Sec.

MERSEYSIDE

Meeting held Sunday, 11th August

Copies of the No.1 Magnet are so rare that to even see one is quite an event. Thanks to Tom Porter, from Birmingham, who we were very pleased to see at our meeting, we were able to enjoy that experience. It is always a pleasure to have Tom with us and he spoke at length about his wonderful collection (surely the biggest in the country) and answered many questions on his methods of collecting and preservation.

We were also pleased to welcome Alf Hanson from Manchester. Bert Hamblett, our new member, attended his first full meeting and we are looking forward to his becoming one of the hard core of enthusiasts.

After tea Tom Porter introduced a "Bingo session". Nothing so common as "clickety click" and "Kelly's eye" however, this one was based on the school characters and the winners of the games played included Bert Hamblett, George Riley and Jack Morgan. Norman Pragnell then presented us with a series of anagrams which Tom Porter won.

Finally Tom introduced the discussion for the evening the subject being (a) Did Handforth spoil the Nelson Lee and (b) Did Bunter spoil the Magnet? Tom considered the answer to (a) was Yes because he contended that while E.S.B. tried to uphold Handforth as a decent and model schoolboy, his bullying, arrogant and rather stupid attitude at times somewhat belied that. He suggested that he dominated the later series of Nelson Lee to such an extent that it might well have been called "Handforth's Weekly"; Bunter, on the other hand, was never intended to be anything but an obtuse far boy, a figure of fun, and in fact the sub-title of the later Magnets was "Billy Bunter's Own". His answer to (b) then was No.

Norman Pragwell and many other of us at the meeting did not entirely agree with Tom. Norman stated that Handforth did not always dominate the Nelson Lee but agreed that on occasions, especially in the "China" and "Northeastrian" series he had been overdone. There were many stories in which he played only a minor part.

Bunter, however, we considered was given to us in overdoses in almost every story until he became nauseating. Many of us objected to the title "Billy Bunter Clubs" so often given to us and resent the idea that we are disciples of that ridiculous and impossible character.

This meeting was so fruitful that it went to extra time and it was with considerable reluctance that we finally had to come to a close.

Next meeting, Sunday September 8th - 6.0 p.m. prompt.

BILL WINDBOR.

LONDON

The holiday month of August generally sees a small attendance at our meeting, but on this occasion, Len and Josie Packman were agreeably surprised as the total number of members present at their East Dulwich meeting, on Sunday, August 18th, was 24.

Business was very brisk for both the librarians Roger Jenkins and Bob Blythe, a special room being put at their disposal. After everyone had satisfied their reading wants, the meeting proper commenced. The President, John Wernham, outlined the details for the Maidstone meeting and Brian Doyle spoke about the coach booking. All those going will be notified of the full details when finally settled.

Bob Blythe and Len Packman told of their happy visit to Edwy Searles Brooks and was it a coincidence that Bill Lofts read his article on Nelson Lee from the Fleetway Publications house magazine? Great fare for the Leeites. Laurie Sutton, with some awful puns, conducted an enjoyable quiz. New name for the winner, Len Spicer, who had come up from Reading for the gathering. Eric Lawrence was second and the 'Don' was third.

Another fine 200th number of the C.D. quiz, this time by Len Packman, was won by Bill Lofts; the 'Don' was second and Laurie Sutton third.

The Maidstone meeting will be held on Sunday, September 15th, 30 Tonbridge Road the address, phone Maidstone 2375. A very good programme has been arranged. C. H. Chapman and Miss Hood hope to attend.

Uncle Benjamin

BETTE PATE BEREAVED

We regret to learn of the sudden death of the father of Bette Pate, C. D. contributor and the secretary of our Australian Club. Collectors' Digest expresses its deepest sympathy to Bette and the family in their sorrow.

NOTICE TO LONDON CLUB MEMBERS

The London OBSC Meeting for September will be in the form of an outing at Maidstone.

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THE LATE BILL MARTIN'S COLLECTION SOLD BY AUCTION

A report by Brian Doyle

The late Bill Martin's extensive collection of old boys' books and papers has finally gone its several ways; the final breaking-up of the 2000-plus volumes (as well as a mountain of loose papers and odd numbers) took place at Messrs. Hodgson's Auction Rooms in Chancery Lane, London on Friday, 2nd August, 1963.

And in many ways it was something of a sad occasion. It's not a cause for rejoicing when a man's lifetime collection of rare books is shared out among a horde of eager (dare one say greedy) dealers who know a good thing when they see it.

But, looking at it from another point of view, I suppose it does enable other collectors to obtain certain books, or runs, for which they have been searching for years. It tends to keep the market 'on the move'. And, of course, it's extremely useful for keeping up-to-date with current values. It's always helpful to know roughly what one's prized possessions are worth.

How were the prices at the Bill Martin Sale? Were there extravagant bids - or spectacular bargains? Neither really. Let's take a quick look at a few volumes and the prices they fetched in the auction rooms...

Just under 100 volumes by G.W.M. Reynolds (author of many Gothic-style romances, including the lengthy "Mysteries of London") sold for just under £100 - an average of £1 per volume.

116 volumes of mid-19th century 'bloods' by such prolific authors as Prest, Errym and Pierce Egan, went for just over £150.

Edward Viles' "Black Bess" in 4 vols. went for £10.

26 books about the adventures of 'Jack Harkaway' (some duplicates) went for a modest £12.

Nos. 1-282 of the "Wild West Library" in 12 bound volumes for £16.

9 volumes of the "Boys Friend Library" (4 nos. in each) for £8 and 65 First and Early editions of G.A. Henty's books for £38.

Volumes 1 - 11 (bound in 6 vols.) of "The Thriller" together with a few other odd books, brought £21.

Vols. 1 - 31 of Brett's "Boys Comic Journal" (bound in half green calf gilt) £12 10s.

Bargains (or so they seemed to me) included 110 vols. of Bretts "Young Men of Great Britain" (Vols. 1 - 41 plus various duplicates, all bound in half-calf) for £5.

Vols. 1 - 65 of "Boys of England" for £4.

Nos. 2 - 264 of the Aldine "Invention, Travel and Adventure Library" (remember all those 'Frank Reade's?') in 19 bound volumes for £12.

Nos. 1 - 80 of the Aldine "Robin Hood Library" in 5 bound volumes for £6 10s.

Nos. 1 - 182 of the Aldine "Dick Turpin Library" including wrappers in 7 bound volumes, fetched £23.

314 Nos. of the Aldine "Detective Tales" in 43 bound volumes - £10.

And that 'mountain' of several hundred loose copies (a real browser's delight) That went for £21.

Altogether, the sale realised approximately £1050. Well-known dealers present included Ronald Rowse, R. A. Brimmell, representatives of several bookshops in Charing Cross Road, and our own Frank Vernon Lay. Fellow O.B.B.C. members there were Ben Litvak and Sam Thurbon. Famous actor and collector Frank Pettingell was also well to the fore in his bids for the older material. So was well-known book-stall-holder from the Farringdon Road.

And so, with a nod of the head here and a raised ball-point pen there to indicate bids, and in a little over an hour, the late lamented Bill Martin's fine collection gradually disappeared amidst 50 or so people and a smoky, dusty atmosphere.

The prices fetched were generally not as high as I personally feared they might be and there were a few bargains to be had if you went along with a few pounds in your pocket (nothing in the Hamiltonian line, by the way - that all went privately and via recent advertisements in the C.D. before the auction-sale).

Nothing approached the price fetched by a 43 volume run of the English Historical Review (1922-62) earlier in the afternoon, which was

in excess of £500.

But no doubt it might have done if there had been a few bound volumes of Magnets and Gems on offer

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N. VEAR, York: Congratulations on the 200th issue. I think it excellent.

Yours Sincerely

Interesting Items from
the Editor's Letter-Bag

C.H. CHAPMAN (Reading): I was delighted with the Double Number of Collectors' Digest. It is a production anyone would be proud of, and I congratulate you on a splendid achievement. It will, I am sure, give real pleasure to all readers. I can imagine how my dear old friend

Charlie Hamilton would have chuckled as he read it.

D. M. HILLIARD (Nottingham): Congratulations on the Double Century edition. A real sparkling addition to our English summer.

ALEX MATHESON (Wick): I spent a most enjoyable evening perusing the 200th number. The Mr. Buddle story was a "Gem" - quite the best so far. I look forward to many more. In fact No. 200 was a nicely-balanced issue with interest for all. I am charmed by the insert.

BRIAN DOYLE (Putney): With reference to Ray Hopkins' query about author Reginald Kirkham in Yours Sincerely:

Reginald S. Kirkham did, as Ray Hopkins says, write a lot of girls' fiction including stories for "Schoolgirls' Weekly" under the names 'Joan Vincent' and 'Hilary Marlow'. He also took over the Cliff House stories in "Schoolfriend" from Horace Phillips in 1921 and continued them until 24, when L.E. Ransome took over. He later wrote boys' fiction in several papers under the name "Frank Vincent". Also wrote 5 sub stories in the Magnet between 1917 - 24. He retired from writing in 1940 and set up his own business in Kent, becoming a very successful business-man and leaving £32,000 when he died some years ago.

Many congratulations on the magnificent 200th edition. It was really superb.

B. PERRY (Cuffley): Please continue to present more stories like "Late Summer Folly". It keeps the old characters alive. I have two old Gems "Wally D'Arcy's Chum" and "A Captured Chum" both by substitute writers. I did not know they were not written by Frank Richards, and I am sure the boys of those days did not either. It is only since we have grown up that we criticise. Anyway, both tales were considered good enough for the re-prints, and some of Frank Richards' own stories were not. In any case, whom would you call a substitute writer for Sexton Blake? Providing they appealed to individual taste nobody cared who the writer was.

JOHN STOKES (Dublin): Sincerest congratulations on happy anniversary and on super-terrific special number of C.D. to celebrate it.

JILL LYNE (Finchley): I was recently reading "Coker Takes Control" a Magnet about a teenage crook called Skip, under Coker's wing, somewhat on the same pattern as the "Flip"

This picture reaches us by courtesy of New Zealand reader Albert Watkin. It comes from the N.Z. equivalent of the

Yesterday's Heroes



Radio Times, and was used to illustrate a N.Z. broadcast on old boys' papers.

series without the endearment or cockney wit of the pathetic little waif I don't know if the Flip series came after the Skip ones, but Flip showed the author at his best whereas the Skip one was dry and unsympathetic.

(Flip in 1932; Skip in 1937. The Let's Be Controversial article "The Vital Spark" recently looked at this problem - ED.)

HAROLD LACK (Northampton): Most hearty congratulations on the 200th issue. It's marvellous.

MAURICE KUTNER (Clapton): What a grand production it was! So full of good things from cover to cover. It was just like a "Mid-summer Annual."

JACK OVERHILL (Cambridge): I'm driven to writing to you - there's no other name for it - driven by a sense of gratitude and thanks for all the pleasure you and your contributors have given me during the past year as month by month each fresh copy of Collectors' Digest comes in, bringing with it the same charm as each fresh copy of the Companion Papers did nearly fifty years ago.

BEN WHITER (London): Re the last trams in London, I had a ride along the embankment and purchased a complete set of souvenir tickets.

GEORGE SELLARS (Sheffield): I am delighted to learn from Roger Jenkins' article that the Frank Richards L.P. Record will be available for us after all.

H. E. ELLISON (St. Annes-on-Sea): Every issue of C.D. seems to be better than last. You are going to have an awful job keeping up with yourself.

JACK WOOD (York): Many congratulations on the excellent 200th C.D. A real feast of information and nostalgia which set a new high standard for an ever-improving magazine. Nicely duplicated, too, as always, so that this is, indeed, an edition to cherish - a thing of joy for ever.

W. J. A. HUBBARD (Kenya): Judging by his efforts to encourage interest in the St. Frank's stories Mr. Jim Cook is also an admirer of yarns of school life, but he rather surprisingly seems to resent the inclusion in C.D. of reviews of some of the best stories of this type ever written. He should remember that it has always been the policy of the magazine, even in the late Herbert Leckenby's time, to present all aspects of schoolboy literature, and the Hard Cover Books are one of those aspects. With regard to Slade, and the articles of Roger Jenkins, I hope that the continual demand for more Slade and more of Roger's articles will encourage both writers to continue with what are highly appreciated efforts which may be safely included among the finest items of their type ever written.

E. N. LAMBERT (Chessington): No. 200 has certainly come up to my expectations and reflects the tremendous amount of work put in to produce such a volume. It is indeed a forerunner of the good things we anticipate in the Annual later in the year. I am a great fan of the Slade stories.

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NOTICE TO LONDON CLUB MEMBERS continued

A 35-seater R.A.C.S. coach (colour: maroon with cream lettering) will pick up members of the party outside the front main entrance of Victoria Main-line Railway Station at 11 a.m. on Sunday, 15th September. Members are asked to be there at 10.30 a.m. to ensure that the coach leaves promptly on time. The party will proceed to the Royal Oak Hotel, Maidstone, where the Club's President, John Wernham, will welcome them to luncheon in the Oak Room. There will be at least one special guest of honour - Mr. C. H. Chapman, the famous "Magnet" illustrator. Lunch will begin at 1 p.m. and around 3 p.m. the party will move off (by coach) to Mr. Wernham's house, a few minutes away, for the actual Meeting. The coach will leave for London at 7.30 p.m.

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WANTED: Good loose copies or bound volumes containing any of the following Magnets - 45, 52, 131 to 149 inclusive, 195, 205, 237, 238, 239, 277, 318, 319, 353, 400, 417, 422, 921, 924, 925, 938, 940, 942, 943, 946, 949, 951, 965, 967, 988, 996. Most issues between 821 and 890, 900. GEMS - many issues between 400 and 500. Many issues between 800 and 879. Also numbers 935, 953, 954, 975, 980, 985, 989, 990, 992, 933, 998, 956, 1129, 1150, 984. POPULARS - 183, 190, 370, 385, 396, 452, 455, 466, 474. Advertiser has complete sets of Gem, Magnet and Popular but needs many good replacement copies before having final binding work done.

ERIC FAYNE EXCELSIOR HOUSE GROVE ROAD SURBITON SURREY
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ADVERTISE in the 1963 COLLECTORS' DIGEST ANNUAL

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