

Collectors' Digest

VOL. 17, NUMBER 203

NOVEMBER 1963

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THE DREADNOUGHT²
AND BOYS' WAR WEEKLY

Vol. 1. No. 10 November 28th, 1944. 1^D



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Vol. 17

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THE LIMIT!

In our opinion LOOK AND LEARN is one of the finest papers on the bookstalls to-day for older youngsters. It is an instructive paper, and it succeeds remarkably in making instruction interesting. This is no mean achievement. Without being dull in the slightest degree, it is a paper of which parents and schoolmasters approve. The appeal of LOOK and LEARN is to the more intelligent older child. Just, in fact, the very type of intelligent child who would delight in the stories which Frank Richards was writing between the wars.

The Greyfriars stories arrived in LOOK & LEARN No. 91, dated 12th October. On the front page was the announcement: "Meet the original Billy Bunter in the stories that made your parents laugh." In his Editorial, the Editor announced: "The stories have become classics of their kind. The author, Frank Richards, was a scholarly man who wrote millions of words about Greyfriars - and as a recreation wrote one complete Bunter story in Latin..... I have decided to publish

some of them in their original form in LOOK AND LEARN."

The actual offering was a substitute story, originally entitled "Bunter's Prize Essay," from the year 1928, drastically pruned. This story is to be followed by another substitute effort, "Bunters's Barring-Out", from the year 1923.

It is almost certain that these substitute stories were selected in error, though the mistake is inexplicable, for it could have been so easily avoided. But equally inexplicable is the drastic abridgment of any story, for even a story by Charles Hamilton would be rendered near to worthless under such treatment.

What on earth was the use of undertaking a most worthwhile experiment if its chances of success were to be negatived from the start? Surely the risk would not have been too great in allowing two whole pages of LOOK & LEARN for the Greyfriars instalment. These two pages would probably have carried three chapters, and the whole story would have run its course in five weeks. Was it quite impossible, as we were promised, to present the stories in "their original form"?

The stories would have suffered but little from gentle shrinkage brought about by skilful pruning. But wholesale abridgment, with bits written in to link up indigestible chunks, is something quite different. Let us hope that the powers-that-be will think again, and, even at this late hour, serialise a genuine story in a way which will give it a chance.

From any viewpoint, it is rather deplorable that a substitute story, so heavily abridged, should be put out as an example of the work of the late Frank Richards.

THE ANNUAL:

And now to lift the curtain on a few more attractions which you will find in COLLECTORS' DIGEST ANNUAL for 1963. Richmal Crompton, world-famous creator of "William", writes a delightful account of "THE PRE-BUNTER BOOKS FOR BOYS". John Upton strikes a new note with "MEMORIES OF THE PICTURE SHOW". Harry Broster presents a new angle on some of the old stories, his article bearing the intriguing title "HEART OF OAK". Our youthful Lee expert, Neil Beck, is in festive mood with "SOME CHRISTMAS LEES". For Slade fans, and that seems to include nearly everybody, there is a brand new story entitled "ADVANTAGE VANDERLYN". This is a sequel to "The Boy in the Corner" which was so popular in the recent 200th issue of Collectors' Digest.

Have you yet ordered your copy? Don't leave it too late.

THE EDITOR.

BLAKIANA

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

NAME THE AUTHOR. (7) *** By Walter Webb

WHY THE ANONYMITY ?

The surest way of arousing the curiosity of the reader is to place before him a story from which the name of the author has been deleted. He reacts to it as he would to an anonymous letter, and wonders who could have written it.

This was the state of affairs in 1905, when the UNION JACK, after ten years' publication, during which time the name of the author, except on very rare occasions only, was generally given, suddenly reverted to a policy of strict anonymity, this anonymity coinciding with the decision to publish long, complete stories of Sexton Blake permanently.

Since no reason for the change was given through the medium of an editor's chat page and there appeared no logical reason for such a policy, the reader's puzzlement can be understood, and there is no doubt that it inspired a steady flow of enquiries at the UJ office. To this day the reason for the anonymity of those old-time Blake stories has not been given, but that it aroused certain suspicions in the mind of the reader of that era is obvious, for, at one point, the editor had need to stress the fact in the pages of the paper that all his stories were written by British authors and illustrated by British artists, which pointed very conclusively to the fact that in the minds of some a foreign element had crept in and was resented.

Why, then, to allay these suspicions did not the sponsors of Sexton Blake alter their policy and give an author's name to the stories? Their attitude is difficult to define, and the only answer seems to be that some of the stories tendered - from outside contributors mainly - were of such quality as to necessitate considerable revision by a staff writer, under which circumstances no particular author's name could be given, and rather than publish the yarn under dual authorship - which was never favoured at the A.P., anyway - they decided on a policy of anonymity.

In those days difficulties faced the apprentice in that no clear picture of Blake was afforded him. There was no E. R. Parker to guide him with a visible picture, and the formation of a mental vision was given no definite outline because staff writers, Graydon and Goddard, had their own conceptions of Blake, and freelancers like Hayter and Maxwell both portrayed him differently.

Taking into account also that a writer used only in trying his hand at school and adventure stories and not being versed in the art of detective story writing, some revision of his proffered work might have been deemed necessary, and, although it must be admitted that there was very little mystery attached to those early stories, most of which were straight-forward adventure yarns describing a series of exciting (?) incidents, with no plot at all to speak of, they did tend to stretch an author's ability just a little further, and if that little extra was not there it had to be supplemented by another's hand.

Some of the stories attributed to A. C. Murray in the official records point to the correctness of this theory. Like the novels under the Desmond Reid byline in the latter issues of the SBL, they vary markedly in style and quality. That Murray was responsible for UJ No. 359 describing Blake's adventures as a territorial, is without doubt, but No. 398 was obviously passed to him for revision, for there is definitely a confliction of styles here, the more predominant being that of a man who wrote under the byline of "Fenton Ash". This and other sporting stories dealing with racing (Nos. 296, 308, 311, 326, 343, and 476), football (No. 433), and billiards (391), will, no doubt, bear A.C. Murray's name in the official list, but I feel convinced that they were all revised by the author and were originally penned by the man who wrote as Fenton Ash.

Significantly the word "Ash" comprises the initials of the well-known Arthur S. Hardy: but this is not to say that Ash was Hardy - he wasn't, for the writing proves such, though it is not improbable that Hardy worked with Ash in turning out the originals. The wrestling story (No. 250), was certainly written by Hardy, a claim which may be verified by the time this gets into print. According to the late H. J. Garrish Ash's real name was A. J. Atkins, and he was the father of F. St. Mars, who wrote the famous nature stories in the STRAND.

ERNEST A. TREETON

In view of his remarkable dialogue into which he was wont to invest not only words of extreme rarity but also those which will not be found in any dictionary, it is rather surprising that a writer named

Ernest A. Treton has never been identified with having written some of the early Sexton Blake stories.

Treton was, in fact, easy prey for the researcher, not only on account of his highly dramatic style but because he was never stumped for a word or an expression, and if there was no word to suit him he would invent one. Words like "grumped" "gruffed" "girded" "humped" and "vented" punctuated his dialogue at regular intervals, and since these words were entirely his own invention in so far as appendage to dialogue is concerned, it is wholly unlikely that any other author would have used them in that capacity. The task of a researcher, therefore, in ferretting out his unsigned work is not made particularly difficult.

A few samples of Treton's unusual phrasing will not be amiss, since they will serve to give some idea of what was one of his chief characteristics; so here, then are six brief sentences taken at random from "Two Newcastle Lads" a story he wrote for the "Boys' Herald" in 1905, which ran from issue No. 91 to No. 103.

- (a) "I dinna doot ye're richt!" quickened Andy.
- (b) "Ye can't leave 'em out!" Harold warmed.
- (c) "You young hound!" he gnashed.
- (d) "Yes, I've got a few dents" grumped Andy.
- (e) "It's a pleasing place, I must alloo!" he humped.
- (f) "Well?" he gruffed.

Very unusual dialogue this, which, it must be conceded, could never have been duplicated by another writer. Now, here are six more examples, taken from a few UJ stories, also written in the year 1905:

- (a) "Do you know of any recent chartering?" quickened Blake.
- (b) "I'll do it, if I stick to the rudder like paint," Tinker warmed.
- (c) "Curse you!" gnashed Grafton.
- (d) "You infernal dog!" vented Grafton.
- (e) "I know, sir: I've learned the game from you down to the ground!"
prided Tinker.
- (f) "You've got rid of the only master carpenter we had," he girded.

Below are the titles of the stories of Sexton Blake from which the above were taken, and though not confirmed by the official records, I am confident were written by Ernest Treton: "The Ocean Detective," (No. 81), "The Warder Detective," (No. 91), "Twice Round The World," (No. 104), "The Reporter Detective," (No. 117), "The Collier Detective," (No. 143).

It is worth mentioning that by the time the last story in the above

list was published all the unusual words had been deleted either by the editor or the author himself due possibly to the fact that some readers, mystified as to what they meant and looking in the dictionary without success, may have been prompted to write in and ask for enlightenment. Since No. 143 is the last traceable story by this writer he may have been asked to make the alterations himself and, as a result, decided to take his work elsewhere. Pure theory, of course; but it is not conceivable that a writer will drop suddenly and en bloc all words which up to that point had characterised his work unless he had been expressly forbidden to use them.

Surprising that so little has been written about Treoton up to this point. One has the impression that he must have been an obscure and none too successful journalist: but, the fact is, that he was writing for a very long time - in the region of 40 years, dating from the early days of the Harmsworths in the 1890's to those of the A.P. in 1934.

Strange that a man who was writing for so long and still at work for CHUMS in the middle thirties should be overlooked in this way. And yet, perhaps, not so surprising after all when you come to think a little deeper, for it appeared that Treoton preferred to work under a non-de-plume, as it was rarely that his own name appeared above his writings. He was a stockily built little man, always pleasant, and with no great education, always smoking cigarettes, and generally hard-up, as was the case with the majority of his fellow contributors, who used to bring yarns in, quickly written, and be glad to get the cash. He was very popular with everyone, and was a friend of Hamilton Edwards.

FENTON ASH

To have one's work mentioned in the DAILY TELEGRAPH is most flattering to any author. To have it praised to the extent that it "suggests Jules Verne, Rider Haggard, and Fennimore Cooper in their boldest and most entrancing moods," is the sort of write-up that any author of the early 1900's would have dreamed of without believing that it could really happen to him.

But when Fenton Ash's fine story, "The Radium Seekers," was published by Messrs. Pitman early in 1906, the book critic of the "Telegraph" said just that, which makes it clear that the talents of the author were considerably above the average in the field of boys' fiction.

Information about the author is sparse, though an editor, now dead, once wrote that the boyhood of Fenton Ash was spent in South Wales, on the shores of the Bristol Channel, where most of his available time was

passed in the pleasures of boating, sailing, and yachting - which indicates that the author had more than a little fondness for the sea. Later he studied engineering professionally and music as a hobby. Like many other UJ writers, he was a great traveller. His stories of the weird and wonderful were, as a matter of fact, follow-ups of the dormitory yarns he was fond of relating at school, for, when there were no printed narratives available to read, he would use his imagination and write them up himself, much to the appreciation of his schoolfellows.

A long time ago the author was an occasional contributor to UJ, and just before Sexton Blake began his long run of weekly appearances, wrote two very good adventure yarns, (Nos. 30 and 60). From these stories and the style in which they were written, I am convinced that Fenton Ash wrote at least two Sexton Blake stories, - "Bankrupt!" (No. 247), and "Sexton Blake In Cardiff," (No. 261), both published in 1908. Both were extremely well written, with good plots and characterization, and, in an era in which the Sexton Blake story was not of particularly high merit, were quite outstanding.

Unfortunately, the name of the author was not long seen in the realms of boys' fiction - at least, not in so far as the three major publishing houses, Harmsworth's, Cassells, and Newnes, were concerned - and what happened to him is problematical. He may have died suddenly, left the country, or, like the celebrity who wrote as "Max Hamilton" continued in the profession under a different name and in a manner so lucrative as to make the continued writing of boys' literature no longer worthwhile.

THE MAN WHO WAS "IDA MELBOURNE"

In these much changed times it is good to see a link, be it ever so slender, which has yet to be severed from the past. Today the SCHOOL FRIEND bears not the slightest resemblance to that of the twenties, excepting in one small yet pleasing instance. A name, which is all that holds old and new together - that of Ida Melbourne - can still be seen now and again to bring back memories of an era when the paper was a worthwhile product for a girl to read. And, as far as the UJ is concerned, it brings back memories of that paper too, for "Ida Melbourne" was the pen-name once used by Horace Phillips, one of the very few survivors who wrote Sexton Blake stories in the pink-cover era of that periodical.

The obvious query is - is Horace Phillips still contributing to the SCHOOL FRIEND under his old feminine pen-name? Or, has another writer taken over, and, if so, who is he? Charles Hamilton was still writing in his 80's, and it is possible that Horace Phillips is still doing

likewise in a very small way - the more probable explanation is that "Ida Melbourne" now conceals the identity of a younger writer, since it was a well-known policy that pen-names were conferred upon authors who contributed paper-backed fiction irrespective of whether they approved or not.

At present, no proof of Mr. Phillips's participation in the Blake Saga has been discovered, and, lacking any knowledge of how the author would have handled Blake, it is not easy to make a prediction of what story, or stories, he may have penned. But something of his style is to be observed in No. 385, containing a story entitled "The Father Of The Chapel," which, despite its title, does not deal with religion.

WHO PASSED THIS ONE?

It has been said that Peter Cheyney once wrote a Sexton Blake story which was rejected. Evidently Mr. Cheyney was not writing in the right era. He should have been contributing in 1911, when an author could get good money for any kind of tripe. Like that served up in the UJ story, "Only An Alien," (No. 386), for instance, one of the most incredible, over-sentimentalised, and futile Blake stories ever written!

In these days of the all round improvement of the Blake story, one approaches the much earlier model with a certain amount of indulgence, and in a mood mellowed by the atmosphere of nostalgia which pervades it. But, when one comes across a yarn, which, even in those days, was an insult to the intelligence of the reader, he is moved, since he has praised certain stories in the same era deserving of the thumbs-up treatment, to give the downward motion in cases when, in his opinion, the work of the author warranted it.

Picture Blake and Tinker imprisoned in a cellar of a building in London's East End. It is impossible for them to get out by their united efforts from the inside. Nobody from the outside knows of their imprisonment. How to get them out? Even the author was stumped, apparently. So what does he do? He has one of his characters - a young Polish girl - dream up their predicament. Unfortunately, her dream does not clearly define the actual situation of the building, and, so, Pedro is brought in. An article of apparel, worn by one of his masters, is given him to sniff at, and then, in broad daylight, beginning in the West End, the three - the girl, Mrs. Bardell, and Pedro - the latter on the leash, traverse the busy streets of the metropolis until the East End is reached.

Whilst the reader is prepared to grant his author a certain amount

of licence, did this particular contributor really expect him to swallow the fact that even a bloodhound of Pedro's capabilities could have followed a scent which hundreds of people must have crossed and recrossed, to finally lead his companions right outside the building in which Blake and Tinker were imprisoned? And did he imagine that his reader could ever swallow the fact of a woman of Mrs. Bardell's seventy - odd years, and considerable avoirdupois, being physically capable of tramping from one end of London to the other?

These and other absurdities abounded in the story, the author of which should have been taken by the scruff of his neck, his manuscript rammed down the back of it, and both deposited on the pavement outside No. 23 Bouverie Street, with the kindly advice to confine his limited capabilities to the execution of fairy tales, or similar stories of a nature calculated to appeal purely to the very young.

Nor was the editor, who so insulted the intelligence of his readers, blameless, and should have been dealt with in such manner as to have prevented him from ever again hoisting on an unsuspecting public similar drivel, although, of course, it was quite likely that he himself wrote it, and, in consequence, there was nobody to stay his hand.

A clue of authorship is furnished by the introduction of a Scotland Yard official, named Martin. This detective-inspector was used by, at least, five writers - Michael Storm, Norman Goddard, John Bobin, A. C. Murray, and Lewis Carlton. The first three can be eliminated immediately. Storm had gone - and could never have been guilty of such atrocious work in any case - Bobin hadn't started; and the style ruled out Goddard completely.

OLD BOYS BOOKS: Australian Collector wishes to sell 218 Nelson Lee Library 1917 - 1922 starting at 120 mainly consecutive. Condition mainly good. English relative will arrange delivery. Offers wanted.

J. L. SLATER, 57, ROSEBANK, EPSOM, SURREY.

WANTED: MAGNET No. 1559. Can any reader assist please.

JOHN TROVELL, 16, BOURNE ROAD, COLCHESTER, ESSEX.

WANTED/AVAILABLE/OBTAINED:- B.O.P.s., Chums (200 Vols.) Magnets, Gems, Populars, U.J.s. All Boys/Girls Books. S.A.E.

G. REARDON, 20 ASHLEY ROAD, NEWMARKET.

FOR SALE: Sexton Blake Libraries (1957-1963). All in mint condition. 1/- each. *Boys Will Be Boys* E. S. Turner. Mint.

WANTED: Nelson Lee Libraries, Schoolboys Own and Boys Friend Libraries (St. Frank's only). Good condition essential. Fullest details to:-

NORMAN PRAGNELL, 33 BRAE STREET, LIVERPOOL, 7.

Hamiltoniana

BROOKS AND HAMILTON

* * *

By Roger M. Jenkins

Ross Story's provocative article in the 200th number of the CD - and its echoes! - have proved very engrossing indeed. One must admire her for her loyalty to her favourite author, but surely (as Robert Kelly says) it is not necessary to disparage Hamilton in order to support Brooks. The Nelson Lee must have a wide circle of supporters among CD readers, enough to sing loud praises in favour of St. Frank's without indulging in cat-calls at Greyfriars.

I have re-read the extract quoted from No. 562 of the Nelson Lee, which is supposed to prove that Brooks was better than Hamilton, but I regret to say that I can see nothing special in it at all. Some of the brighter children at the grammar school where I teach English can produce work as good as that, but it never occurs to me that they will make outstanding writers. It may be, of course, that the extract suffers from being torn out of its context. But on the surface it appears to be a typical Brooks theme - a schoolboy doing something wonderful. It is possible that this sort of tale goes down well with youngsters when they go through the wish-fulfilment and Superman phase, but at my age I prefer the Hamilton version in which schoolboys try to do something wonderful and fail, with hilarious results all round (as in the St. Jim's Music Hall).

As Ross Story's conclusions are all drawn from the one extract, I cannot see for the life of me how she can justify the sweeping statements she has made. I fancy, however, that I could justify a completely contrary conclusion on one aspect of writing, at least - characterisation and motivation.

Hamilton had the rarest of all gifts, the ability to portray a character vibrantly alive. In Harry Wharton he depicted a decent lad with a streak of stubbornness and pride that could easily lead to his downfall - and so it did in two famous series that will never be forgotten by Magnet readers. It was indeed Shakespeare's own formula

for his great tragedies, to depict a hero with one fault in his character that would eventually be his undoing - Lear with his impetuous cholera, Macbeth with his vaulting ambition, Othello with his jealous suspicions, and Hamlet with his fatal indecision. Harry Wharton's downfalls followed the same pattern, step by step, painful to read yet ineluctably fascinating. Events were against Wharton, but it was the weakness in his own character that made them so disastrous for him. Nothing was strained, nothing forced.

What can be found comparable in the Nelson Lee? Well, there was Handforth's downfall. He got up one morning and found it was raining, which threatened cancellation of a match. He became awkward and trying, and when the rain stopped he still went on being awkward and trying for no good reason that any reader could see. Brooks just said that Handforth felt that way. It seems to me that Brooks could portray villains and hypocrites and eccentrics, but characters who were neither wholly good nor wholly bad were beyond him. You will find no Whartons, Vernon-Smiths, and Cardews in the pages of the Nelson Lee. The nearest is Travers, and his actions seem unpredictable. He changes his mind not because of the pressure of events but because, like Handforth in the story above, we are told he just feels that way. Brooks's characters seldom seem to be so much alive that we imagine them leading independent lives of their own: he is always nudging us, telling us things that we ought to learn from their speech and actions rather than from the author.

Walter Fleming raises the point about mystery stories. I should agree that (apart from the Mysterious X stories in the Gem) the villain is usually quite obvious in Hamilton's stories. This was, of course, deliberate. A story which depends on a surprise at the end can be interesting to read once, but then it is finished and done with. Hamilton told me that he deliberately made his villains obvious, because he hoped the stories would be interesting from quite a different standpoint - that of character and incident. I have re-read the Courtfield Cracksmen series many times. I am not in the least bit interested in the villain; the series is just a delightful vehicle for displaying the Greyfriars characters in slightly different circumstances, and the reactions of Vernon-Smith and Bunter to the new form-master are alone sufficient to make the stories worth reading. As for the Wharton Lodge Christmas in that series - well it begs description, and makes all the other Magnet Christmases seem like substitute stories. But the mystery is not worth thinking about, as Walter says. It was never intended to be.

I should not like it to be thought that I consider Brooks to have no merits at all, but, when Hamilton is denigrated as a writer or damned with faint praise, someone who wishes to see both writers regarded in a fair light gets pushed on the defensive. I think that although individual characterisation is not Brooks's strong point, he can deal very well with characters en masse. Reactions to tyranny, to wizardry, to lost worlds, to elemental disasters like floods and storms, where he can sweep the reader along with the tumultuous surge of events - these usually come over very well indeed in the pages of the Nelson Lee. But as for stories of an amusing kind on a quieter level, like bickerings among the staff at Greyfriars (so appreciated by adult readers), or tales centring around a single character acting the part of the lone wolf, these do not come over so well at St. Frank's.

Which author do I prefer? Well, as I see merits and defects in each, I am not bold enough to state my conclusion. I leave it to you, dear reader, to guess.

(Roger Jenkins's criticism of Charles Hamilton will be found in his article "Flaws in the Diamond" in the forthcoming CD Annual.)

* * * * *

WHO DID WRITE THEM? By Laurie Sutton

Quite recently I obtained four Magnets of the 1925-26 period, all of them substitute stories. As a matter of interest I looked up the list of sub. stories and their authors compiled by Bill Lofts and published in last year's C.D. Annual under the title of "The Next Best Thing". I found that the stories referred to - Magnets 901, 904, 905, 972 - were listed as having been written by S. R. Shepherd, S. E. Austin, G. R. Sawways, S. E. Austin respectively.

However, a close study and analysis of the four stories in question reveals beyond any reasonable doubt that, whoever wrote them, they were all written by the same author! I feel that any reader must agree that the evidence contained in the following extracts of unusual phrasings and quotations taken from them is a convincing proof of this fact.

In Magnet 905 (listed Sawways) the author makes a curious analogy on the speed of a Marathon runner - obviously he was thinking of a sprinter. In 972 (listed Austin) we have again "...at a speed that would have done credit to a Marathon runner;" and also, "...in training for the Marathon, Sunter?" (a reference to sprinting).

In 905 the author makes another queer reference to "a bend in the passage" - again in 972 "a bend in the passage."

In 905 a reference to the Close (as distinct from the Quad); in 972 four references to the Close.

In 901 (listed Shepherd) we have an expression from Fishy, "I reckon you skates..." In 904 (listed Austin) Fishy again, "I reckon you skates..."

In 901, "the sun was shining brightly without..." In 904, "in the passage without"; in 972, "the passage without." In 901 more references to the Close.

In 901 "his prominent proboscis"; "his proboscis"; "his aurral appendage"; in 905 "his prominent proboscis"; "his proboscis" (mentioned four times); "his pedal extremities,"

In 901, a reference to a pond in a field opposite the school gates; in 905 a reference

to a pond opposite the school gates.

In 901 "...never been seen in Greyfriars" (not the usual at); in 972, "...better than anyone in Greyfriars."

In 901, "The remainder of the day passed uneventfully enough;" in 905, "The rest of the lesson passed uneventfully enough."

Without detracting from the tremendous amount of work and research that Bill Lofts has accomplished in this field, it does seem to me on the strength of this evidence that he has been misinformed as to the authorship of many of the stories published in "The Next Best Thing", and that we still do not have anything like an accurate and complete list of substitute stories and their authors. In point of fact it is quite clear that such a desirable state of affairs is impossible considering the lapse of time since the publication of the stories. It is our misfortune that the Magnet and Gem authors apparently failed to keep detailed records of all the stories they had published in these papers; and still more so that the A.P. doesn't appear to have detailed and reliable records.

I must confess I am a bit dubious about accepting the assurance of authors about stories they claim from memory to have written between thirty and fifty years ago; particularly in view of the recurrence of themes and similarity (and even duplication) of many titles. No doubt many titles were altered by bright editors, anyway!

My own careful and critical study of many hundreds of Magnet and Gem stories indicates that there are literally dozens of substitute stories in our O.B.B.C. "official" lists which are still credited to Charles Hamilton. Many of these are, I feel, an insult to his memory, being utterly absurd, worthless, and in the same category as others that are acknowledged as such. I have, in fact, an abundance of evidence and quotations to support my view of the stories I have in mind, quite apart from the faulty characterization (characters acting "out of character") which is usually the best guide to a sub story.

I hope shortly to elaborate on this subject with the help of quotations that will, I am certain, convince any student of Hamiltoniana that he can safely add a considerable number of additional titles to his list of substitute stories in the Magnet and Gem.

- - - - -
LET'S BE CONTROVERSIAL

No. 71: A HIT OR A MISS

The topic of the substitute writer is always with us, and there is little doubt that it always will be with us. A reader whose letter appeared recently in Yours Sincerely makes some extremely interesting comments on the subject though some of his conclusions are fallacies.

Our reader said: "It is only since we have grown up that we criticize." He contended that when we were boys we could not tell a substitute story from the genuine article.

I am aware that there are some readers who claim that they could never detect one from the other, and it always surprises me. My own view is that any youngster who thought the substitute stories and the genuine ones all came from the same pen cannot have been a very avid reader of Hamiltonia at all. I myself read the Gem and the Magnet from a very early age and I have read them ever since. I cannot recall any time when, to quote Gerry Allison's apt illustration, the sub story did not cause the cinder to grate between my teeth. (cont'd on page 18)..

November 1913:

As a birthday treat Doug took me to the 12th Annual Motor Show at Olympia. My birthday was on a Friday, but Doug could only take me on the Saturday, on account of school. It was interesting, but hard on the feet. There was a 12 h.p. Talbot for £210, and a 25 h.p. Vauxhall for £180. With this one they gave a 3-years guarantee. The smallest car was a 9.5 h.p. Standard for £195. It had 5 lamps, ample room for two, a windscreen, a horn, a spare wheel and tyre. The tax is £3-3s a year, and it does 40 miles to the gallon.

A salesman saw Doug looking at the Standard, so he pointed to the announcement about "ample room for two" and said: "You look a wise young man. This car would be just right for you and your little bit of fluff."

Doug went red, but I laughed like anything, because it reminded me of Doug's young lady who is named Frede.

In the Boy's Friend & Library which Doug bought outside the Motor Show it is a most unusual month, for in one of the issues there are two Sexton Blake stories: "Sexton Blake's Zulu" and "The Slave Market." Doug says he never remember the B.F.L. ever having two stories before in one issue.

There have been five stories in the Magnet this month. It happens that way some months, the calendar being what it is. The first one was "The Greyfriars Gold Seekers" which was about a magazine which hid 20 golden sovereigns in the earth of Greyfriars and made a competition for somebody to dig it up. Eventually Alonzo Todd found the money and gave it away to provide socks for cennibals. I was not keen on this story. Next week came "The Coker Cup" in which Coker presented a magnificent silver cup for competition among the Greyfriars teams. Too much sport in this one for me.

"Cast up by the Sea", however, was a very good story indeed, about a very wealthy boy called Cholmondeley who was impersonated by the sole survivor of a shipwreck. "The Biter Bit" also was very good. Fisher T. Fish was very inquisitive about Monsieur Charpentier, and he tried to pry into the French master's private affairs.

Lastly a serious tale called "The Scapegoat" about Harry Wharton taking the blame for something Peter Hazeldene did. It was for the sake of sister Marjorie.

We all went to the Lord Mayor's Show on November 10th. This year's procession was an abridged reproduction of the Lord Mayor's Show of the year 1613, three hundred years ago. At the Guildhall banquet, Mr. Winston Churchill responded to the toast.

I had quite a nice bit of money for my birthday, and also some other presents which were not so useful. I bought myself some Coconut Chips which are little strips of coconut covered with pink or white sugar. They are very satisfying and not too dear, being four ounces a penny. I also bought "The Marvel" which contained "The Schoolboy Boxer" by A.S. Hardy, and "The Secret of the Towers", a Jack, Sam and Pete story by S. Clarke Hook. There was also a serial called "Football Fortune", all about the winter game, by Charles Hamilton.

DANNY'S D

FOOTBA
FOA Ripping Serial o
By CHAR

DIARY

I bought the Union Jack which contained "The Mystery of Walla-Walla", a story of Sexton Blske and Yvonne in Australia. It was illustrated by Val Reading. I would love to go to Australia, where you find the Kangaroo, an animal which carries its children in a purse on its stomach. It was an exciting story, and I gave that and the Marvel to Doug after I had finished with them.

I also bought Answers Library for Mum. This contained a story called "Two of a Trade" by Nora Vawdrey, illustrated by G. J. Gillingham.

I have had several Christmas Numbers already. Pluck Christmas Double Number starts a series called Tales from the Pictures. The first story was "Thirty Years After" from a film which is coming on at our own Gem. (That's the name of the cinema, not the book.)

With Chips Double Number they gave away a diploma to show you are a pal of Weary Willie and Tired Tim. Chips had a lot of Christmas pictures and stories, including a long one about George Gale, the Flying Detective.

Doug asked Mum if she wouldn't like to have a complexion like his girl, Freda. He said Freda never allows soap and water to touch her face. She uses tissue papers and a little bit of powder. I forgot myself and said: "Sounds dirty to me!" and Doug was very angry, and told Mum I am the rudest boy he has ever had the misfortune to know. That hurt my feelings as we are taught to be polite at school, like when you tread on a lady's foot you raise your cap and say "The pleasure is mine."

The Gem has been wonderful this month. (The book, not the picture palace). The first story "By Whose Hand" is one of the very finest stories I have ever read. It has everything.

fun, drama, fireworks, and mystery. Crooke was brutally struck down, and Kouni Rao was blamed for it, though Gore was the culprit. Gussy helped Glyn to make fireworks, and when Glyn lit his set-piece it read "The New House is a rotter."

"The Drudge's Chance" was another story about Lynn, the new boot-boy. "£100 Reward" was all about an escaped convict, with Cutts of the Fifth in a star part.

Then the Christmas Double Number - the first Gem ever to have a coloured cover. The story "The Mystery of the Painted Room" is the grandest Christmas story I have ever read. Tom Merry & Co went to Eastwood House, where Lord Eastwood had disappeared. And Gussy, who slept in the painted room, disappeared too. A long and marvellous tale. Also in this Gem was a free game, "The Race to the Tuckshop", and a story called "The Showman's Double", all about Tomsonio's Circus. The serial in the Gem now is "The Corinthian".

Final story of the month, a very funny one about the rivalry with Ryloombe Grammar School, was "The Schoolboy Raiders". A grand month of fine stories in the Gem.

There have been three bye-elections this month which is an extra election for some special reason like Sir Rufus Isaacs becoming Lord Chief Justice so he had to leave his parliamentary seat at Reading. Here the Unionist party won the seat from the Liberals. At Linlithgow, there was a Liberal majority of 521, but at Keighley the Liberals held the seat with an increased majority.

BALL
FORTUNE.
ial of the Great Winter Game.
CHARLES HAMILTON.

LET'S BE CONTROVERSIAL (conti'd from page 15)..

Our reader enquires: "Who would you call a substitute writer for Sexton Blake?" Here he is wide of the mark, for there is no connection at all. It was never claimed at any time that all the Sexton Blake stories came from the same man. But in the case of the Magnet and the Gem the editors maintained the myth that two separate writers turned out every story of Greyfriars and St. Jim's that appeared.

It has been suggested by some of our contributors in the past, that the great scandal of the old papers was that the work of substitute writers was published under the pen-names of Charles Hamilton. The genuine writer himself, though possibly with tongue slightly in cheek, subscribed to this view. Substitute stories may have been necessary to maintain the sequence - but such stories should not have appeared under the pen-names Frank Richards or Martin Clifford.

There is much common-sense, much justice, in that.

But pause, for a moment, and consider. The Sexton Blake saga belongs to nobody, although we may have preferred one author to another.

Things were very different with Greyfriars and St. Jim's. They belong exclusively to Charles Hamilton. There is not one man in the world who would suggest otherwise. But it might have been vastly different if every substitute story had been published under the name of its actual writer. Names like Pentelow, Samways, Warwick, and many others who butted in to fill the gap while the genuine writer was engaged in other fields. If those substitute stories had been published under the names of the actual writers things would have been vastly different. They would have been part of the Greyfriars and St. Jim's sagas and accepted as such - in the same way that every Sexton Blake story is accepted.

In my opinion only one man really gained - the financial aspect excluded, of course - from the fact that all the stories appeared under the pen-names of Charles Hamilton - and that man was Charles Hamilton himself. True, very much indifferent material was published under those pen-names, but this very system threw two things into violent contrast - the genuine and the imitation.

Charles Hamilton's reputation has lost nothing from the activities of the substitute writers. In fact, it gained enormously.

We should have liked the substitute stories no more and no less had they been published under the names of their real writers. But they would have been given some credit as part of the saga and they

would have avoided the odium which has become their lot for all time.

Plenty of Sexton Blake stories down the years were boring and badly written, but they never remained in the memory as the substitute Gems and Magnets did. I can recall only one Sexton Blake story which gave me the "cinder crunch". That was "The Man From Tokio". The original Granite Grant stories had been published anonymously. Before I had completed the first page of "The Man From Tokio" I know that it was not by the original writer and my disappointment was intense. In consequence, I have never forgotten it. Had I known in advance that the story was by a different writer there would have been no disappointment.

It was the recurring hopes and disappointments of the Gem and the Magnet which deeply blackened the substitute periods in the papers. Had we known in advance the names of the writers of the stories there would have been no lasting odium, for we should have bought and read only the stories of the writer or writers who appealed to us. In the same way as the readers of the Sexton Blake Library did before the war when copies of all the periodicals were in the shops to be bought or ignored as the whim took the purchaser.

Our Yours Sincerely writer said, referring to two substitute stories which were reprinted in the Gem: "Both stories were considered good enough for the re-prints, and some of Frank Richards' own stories were not."

But our correspondent is mistaken. Many of the genuine tales were omitted - but not because they were not good enough for reprinting. Simply because they were dated by topicalities, like "The Diabolists", "Tom at the Franco-British", and plenty of others, or were over-sentimental like "Figgy's Folly" and some of the Dick Brooke stories in a way which would have failed to ring the bell in the nineteen-thirties. As a result of these inevitable omissions - and other factors like the publication of the Christmas stories in November in earlier days - the seasons rushed by too quickly for the selector, so he had to leap ahead. In those days I was responsible for any amount of picking up of genuine stories which had been omitted on account of these leaps ahead. I think we can all rest assured that no genuine story was omitted because it was "not good enough for re-printing."

The number of substitute tales reprinted was very small. It is my impression that the intention was to reprint none and that a few crept in through the carelessness of someone in the editorial office.

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

* * * * *

CONTROVERSIAL ECHOESNo. 69: THE GHOST STORY

ROGER JENKINS: Anything that I wrote seventeen years ago is surely too faint now to have any echoes left at all. I have, however, conferred with John Shaw that it was Charles Hamilton himself who wrote that comment about the Nippy from Nowhere stories. Clive Fenn was the son of George Manville Fenn, and was the only writer of stories about Charles Hamilton's characters who was not disapproved of by the creator of those characters.

Charles Hamilton admitted being vague about dates, but he was never uncertain about stories. He always remembered his own stories, and this is clear from the letters John Shaw received from him early in the last war, when he confirmed his authorship of very many stories, during the course of a long correspondence. For this reason I have always regarded John Shaw's list of substitute stories as being the most authentic and reliable of all. Similarly, I am prepared to accept Charles Hamilton's statement about the authorship of the Nippy from Nowhere stories.

Why Charles Hamilton did not disapprove of Clive Fenn's stories is not altogether certain. It is, however, clear that there was a momentous disagreement over the Gem in the late 'twenties, and Charles Hamilton refused to write anything for it for many years. In the particular circumstances of the time, it might well be the case that he preferred the St. Jim's stories to be written by Clive Fenn rather than by anyone else. Compared with some of the stories of the time in the Gem - for example, St. Jim's besieged by Russians in the Edwy Searles Brooks series - I expect that Clive Fenn's tales seemed almost as good as those by the genuine Martin Clifford himself.

W.O.G. LOFTS: Owen Evans; G. H. Teed; Michael Storm; Andrew Murray; J. W. Bobin; J. G. Brandon; and another very popular writer who it would be tactful not to mention - all had 'Ghost' writers for some of their Sexton Blake yarns.

Phyllis Howell was a creation of G. R. Samways, and not J. N. Pentelow, though, as you rightly suggest, the characters names were interloped in Mr. Hamilton's stories without his knowledge. Regarding the story 'Misunderstood' in the GEM it was actually written by E. S. Brooks, and was originally entitled 'The Coward of St. Jim's' - but there is no record to show that Brooks and Hamilton ever collaborated in stories for the Companion papers.

Clive R. Fenn most certainly did not write any substitute stories in the MAGNET or GEM - not only by official records. When Mr. Fenn was contacted some years ago by Tom Hopperton he remarked that the only story he ever wrote was rejected by Pentelow the editor. Then he (Fenn) was later most astonished to see that Pentelow had carved up his idea into five or six stories, which were later published. Clive R. Fenn's job was simply to answer readers letters in the MAGNET office.

Mr. C. M. Down recently told me that Charles Hamilton did create Gordon Gay & Co. in the EMPIRE LIBRARY, but only wrote the first few stories, and afterwards he (Down) and H. A. Hinton wrote the stories under the 'Prosper Howard' pen-name between them. A full explanation about all this would take an article by itself. The mystery of the creation of Clifton Dane in the GEM is most easily explained. Readers who have the GEM will have to have a full list of additional data since that was published in due course!

No. 57 THE FEUD OF THE FOURTH which introduced Clifton Dane was written by the editor PERCY GRIFFITH!

The substitute writer who retired Mr. Linton, and replaced him with Mr. Pilbeam was FRANCIS WARWICK, who wrote more stories than credited to him in the GEM CATALOGUE.

Personally I don't think Clive R. Fenn had the ability to 'Ghost' for Charles Hamilton. According to Stanton-Hope, and I'm only quoting what he told me, *he (Hope) as a personal friend of Mr. Hamilton had his full approval when he used his characters in stories.

W. S. GANDER: Phyllis Howell is found in G. R. Samways 'School and Sport' and also in Magnets No. 414 and 419. Presumably, these two Magnets were also written by Samways. An

interesting point: In Magnet 468 it is stated that Phyllis Howell had lost her only brother in the war a year before, but, later, Samways introduced her brother, Archie, to Greyfriars.

Gerry Was Right!

By W.O.G. Lofts

Some years ago, I took friend Gerry Allison to task, for suggesting that he could detect a substitute story in a few words. Although I still maintain that with sub-editing, interloping of phrases and other factors by sub-editors, one can be so wrong, though a general examination by an expert could possibly tell the difference - on this occasion I am most pleased to say that Gerry was right. "Wanted a Poet" No. 953 the Cedar Creek story in the BOYS FRIEND was written by a sub-writer but not as Gerry so strongly hints by G. R. Samways - but by Reginald S. Kirkham - who was a close friend of his.

In fairness to Eric Fayne our editor, who suggested recently that Charles Hamilton had written all the 205 stories, he had not only been misled by Mr. Hamilton, (who probably assumed he wrote them all) but it has been many years since he last read them, and one's opinions can alter a lot in a fresh perusal of them.

I have found evidence, that the above story was written in a great hurry, so probably the writer can be excused to some extent. At the same time I can also answer Ray Hopkins query in the August 'Yours Sincerely' on details about R. S. Kirkham - or 'Kirks' as he was affectionately called.

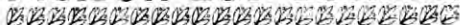
'Kirks' was considered a great humorous writer at the Amalgamated Press. Starting writing for THE SCOUT, he later wrote some early substitute Magnet stories, and at least GEM 568 "Denounced as a Coward". In 1919 he wrote many Bessie Bunter stories in THE SCHOOLFRIEND, mainly the humorous ones, whilst Horace Phillips wrote the serious themes. 'Kirks' wrote boys stories under the name of 'Frank Vincent' as well as numerous girls tales.

Around 1930 'Kirks' was left a large sum of money by his father, who had owned a large store in the South. Giving up writing, he went on a cruise round the world, and on his return started a successful fruit growing business in Kent. On his death a few years ago, he left over £32,000.

'Kirks' was an exceedingly popular man at the A.P., and was a leading light in all the house dinners, parties, and functions, and he was certainly far from unknown.

So congratulations, Gerry on proving that a Cedar Creek story was a sub, and I'm only too pleased to confirm (providing that they are correct) any Hamilton queries in the future.

Nelson Lee Column



CONDUCTED BY JACK WOOD

IMPERSONATIONS

*

By H. CHAPMAN

Tom Hopperton, in "Dear Old Pals" mentions stories about disguises and impersonations and wonders if the readers were convinced by them.

E. S. Brooks' stories have always been described as larger than life, far-fetched, and fantastic; but I contend that they were very seldom really impossible. In any case, he always told the stories in such a way as to make them sound plausible.

Take the cases of impersonation in the St. Frank's stories. There was the time, on one of the summer cruises when Reggie Pett dressed up as Violet Watson and sitting in a chair on deck flirted with Handy. Reggie was a slim, good looking boy, he wore Violet's clothes, and after all it was dusk. No wonder Handy was taken in, and they do say "love is blind".

Then there was the time when Reggie impersonated his own sister and accused Jack Mason (Gray) of stealing her handbag. No one had seen Pitt's sister before, and it was easy to fool most of the boys, although Nipper "tumbled" to the trick.

On another occasion Nipper was expelled from St. Frank's and returned disguised as a new boy. Nipper was a good actor, he dyed his hair a fiery red, wore dark glasses and adopted a shy attitude, completely different from his own personality. The story seemed to me quite convincing.

Contrast this with the Bunter book, "Bunter Keeps it Dark". In this story he is sent home from school for a week; but does not want to go. He blacks his face and puts on clothes from the theatrical box and pretends to be a visitor from India to see "Inky". We are asked to believe that all the boys are deceived and that even Mr. Quelch, he of the piercing, gimlet eye, fails to recognize the most stupid member of his form.

This is asking too much. Bunter, the Fat Owl, the world's fattest schoolboy, with his little turned-up nose, great big glasses, completely

disguised by blacking his face and wearing different clothes.

Apart from his appearance, Bunter had not the wit, intelligence and nerve to carry off such a deception. To me this was quite an impossible story.

E. S. Brooks always made his characters behave true to form and never made them act out of character.

* * * * *

DID FORMAT COUNT ?

E. M. WYATT thinks it did

When I read Bob Blythe's article in the March C.D. I too, like Alex Parsons was pleasantly surprised to find that the N.L.L. was more than holding its own in the affections of our fellow readers. I did think of writing a few lines to the Nelson Lee Column at the time but being no great shakes as a scribe I never got around to it. However, after reading Alex Parsons' most interesting article in the July issue, I felt I had to make the effort.

Mr. Parsons wonders whether the N.L.L. contributed to its own demise owing to its lack of size in comparison with its companion papers and I feel certain that this was so. As a youngster I often wished the Lee were larger as I had to endure many a taunt from my chums because of its smallness compared with other periodicals.

Some time during 1926 we were told by the editor that the N.L.L. was to be increased in size and I had hopes that at last the old paper would be equal in size to the Magnet and Gem. Alas! the new format fell a long way short of that and I felt greatly disappointed. About the same time, the stories, in my opinion, fell below the standard I had come to expect of them and so I finally forsook the N.L.L. As Mr. Parsons says, size and format played a big part in our schoolday reading. It was certainly so in my case. I still have a soft spot for St. Frank's though, and look forward to Jack Wood's column every month.

* * * * *

LETTER FROM ST. FRANK'S

By JIM COOK

To enter St. Frank's is like going through to another world. The transition is sudden and overwhelming. You begin to shake off the encumbrance of the modern way of life the moment you step off the clanking old local train at Bellton station. You feel as if a thousand years of time have suddenly dropped from your shoulders as you leave the station yard and walk into the old world village of Bellton. But the metamorphosis isn't complete until you enter the school gate of St.

Frank's in Bellton Lane. Then you begin to live. An entirely new vista opens up before you. Here, in the calm shadows of the elm and chestnut trees, here, in the peaceful Triangle where old Josh Cuttle, the school porter sweeps up the fallen leaves, the scene welcomes you and begs you to rest awhile. From the top of the horseshoe of buildings in the manner of a defiant barrier stands the School House which at any moment will disgorge all shapes and sizes of human beings escaping from their labours. And old Josh Cuttle with a fixed regularity would give a final sharp sweep of his broom and toddle back to his lodge to gloom over the lovely weather, the reign of peace and the cheerful schoolboys.

I had come down to see the old school on one of my regular visits and it is a strange fact that no matter how evil the weather there is a permanent sunshine here that will cut you off from the sullen clouds you left at home. As if you were in a dank, dark and eerie wood and you suddenly break into a clearing of bright sunlight and green meadows. Then the promise is fulfilled; this is what you have come to enjoy and it never changes. But some things may not change yet people alter. It may be a good reward, it may even be a tardy blessing for characters to change but it seems such a tragedy when somebody we know so well tends to slip into the background and merge with the nonentities. This has actually happened to Bob Christine of study No. 1 in the Modern House. In the early chronicles of St. Frank's Bob was often to the fore with ideas and resource and with his two study mates, Yorke and Talmadge, was generally sought after by Nipper to help carry out a scheme to a successful conclusion. In those days when Bob was captain of the old College House he was a force to be reckoned with. While the Ancient House always was top dog even when Ralph Leslie Fullwood was in command the College House juniors under Bob Christine's leadership easily took the honours in sport and their recognition of the Ancient House lay only in recruiting good players from it. It was left to Nipper to infuse the vital spark which had lain so dormant in the Ancient House under Fullwood's captaincy. But Bob's prowess as a form captain did not suffer even when Nipper established the Ancient House to its rightful order for Nipper was quick to realise the power of Study No. 1 in the College House.

And between them Nipper and Bob put many things to rights at St. Frank's until the coming of John Busterfield Boots. This amazing new boy became leader of the Monks and ousted Nipper from the Remove captaincy in a matter of days. Buster's supremacy was the outcome of his power of speech, his forceful manner and his remarkable gift of

organisation. Yet his ability to control the juniors who had fallen under his spell did not allow for the rude awakening that was to come later. It may well be that the genesis of Christine's lapse into obscurity began at this period. He is not the sunny, even tempered junior I once pictured him. Today he is just one of the crowd for Boots reigns supreme as captain of the Modern House. The great J.B.B. is vastly different to the image he created when he first came to St. Frank's and is really a nice fellow, but dear old Bob Christine, with his chums, Roddy Yorke and Charlie Talmadge appear to me to have accepted defeat and do not any longer blend with the strong characters here.

I approached Bob about his indifference to the new order and he diffidently explained that it was perhaps due to the four Houses which is now St. Frank's. When, in the old days, there were only the Ancient House and the College House there was a set challenge between the Monks - as the College House juniors were called - and the fossils of the Ancient House. But the change to four Houses split up the rival factions and an independence grew with each individual House. Bob considered that the change had brought about a lack of desire to fight for the mastery and though House rivalries and japes still went on it would never be the same as in the days when there was a definite outcome of a battle.

Today, the West House, under Reggie Pitt's guidance, can claim equal honours with the Ancient House for position as leading House but there is always the Modern House and the somewhat effete East House to break up the picture of settled glory. Perhaps because of its associations with the past the Ancient House will be, for me, the main House at St. Frank's.

The absence of Nelson Lee and Nipper makes itself felt all over the school and one senses the feeling of detachment on entering the Ancient House that you are aware they are not in the school.

Dr. Stafford, the headmaster, has received news from New Guinea concerning Lord Dorrimore's party and he tells me that this part of the world is becoming very important politically.

The summer holidays are over so it cannot be a prelude to the boys of St. Frank's spending the vacation overseas.

But trust Dorrie to pop up wherever there is trouble. And trouble there must be in New Guinea otherwise he would not be there.

Girls Own Annual 1888; Chums Annual 1921; 250 Picturegoers 1919-54. ALL GOOD
CONDITION. SALE or EXCHANGE LEES, etc.

CHAPMAN, 35, BARROW ROAD, BARTON-on-HUMBER.

UNFAMILIAR ASPECTS OF WODEHOUSEBy Gerry Allison

THE school stories by P. G. Wodehouse - comprising eight serials and nineteen short tales, written for The Captain, have been fully described and commented upon in our hobby magazines. Bill Hubbard had a full length article entitled "Mainly Wrykyn" in the Collectors Digest Annual for 1962. A few of the short stories were reprinted in the Holiday Annual.

Other juvenile literature by this author however, is less well known. In the 'C.D.' Annual for 1961, there is a masterly survey of Cassell's finest magazine "Chums," by Brian Doyle - "Through The Years With 'CHUMS'." If you refer to the list of stories contained in Volume 17, for the years 1908-09, you will find one called "The Luck Stone" a School and Mystery yarn, illustrated by Gordon Browne, and written by Basil Windham. I wonder if Brian was aware that the author of this story was really P. G. Wodehouse?

I have been told by Mr. Wodehouse that CHUMS was a favourite paper of his during his boyhood, and that he read it for years. He therefore knew exactly the kind of story the editor wanted. This story has been described - somewhat unkindly - as "professional bilge writing, produced after wide and purposeful bilge reading."

Purposeful - my eye! Wodehouse was an omnivorous reader of popular fiction. Henty, Haggard, Anstey, Conan Doyle, were all favourites, but especially the magazines. He had read acres of school fiction, and enjoyed it all. That was his only purpose in reading - enjoyment. Incidentally he had a wide knowledge of, and a deep respect for the work of Frank Richards. In a letter which he sent me soon after the death of Charles Hamilton he said:- "I was so sorry to hear of Frank Richards' death. I never met him, but he must have been a splendid fellow. And what a great writer of school stories."

The two had certain things in common. The gift of imparting happiness; their re-readability; and particularly an amazing knowledge of literature and a genius for apt quotation. Many present will remember the Hamilton Tag List compiled by Tom Hopperton. With this one can compare Jeeves, who quotes from Pliny the Younger, Whittier, Fitzgerald, Shelley, Kipling, Scott, Emerson, Shakespeare, Virgil, Dickens, Horace, The Bible, Burns, Browning, and many other authors and poets.

A writer in The Economist once stressed the debt of P.G. Wodehouse to Frank Richards. "When we are all ancient history" he says - "some smart pundit may very well prove that Wodehouse wrote Richards as well -

or perhaps vice-versa."

And in addition, if this learned scholar has in the course of his researches, come across the St. Frank's stories, and has compared Phipps with Jeevos, Archie Glenthorne with Bertie Wooster, and William Napoleon Browne with Rupert Psmith, he will certainly be able to prove that Wodehouse wrote Edwy Searles Brooks also - or, again, of course, vice-versa.

Besides writing for Chums, Wodehouse in his early days contributed stories, essays, articles, verses, etc. for many other magazines, including Answers, Punch, The Globe, Titbits, etc. In one of these articles Wodehouse reveals a remarkable knowledge of the Union Jack stories. He discusses the various types of villain which appear in detective fiction.

After dealing with The Sinister Men From China, Assam, or Tibet who are on the track of the jewel stolen from the Temple, and The Man With The Grudge, which has lasted as fresh as ever for thirty years, he comes to THE MASTER CRIMINAL. To end this short article, let me quote this delightful passage.

"We now come to the last class, Master Criminals.

The psychology of the Master Criminal is a thing I have never been able to understand. I can follow the reasoning of the man who, wishing to put something by for a rainy day, poisons an uncle, shoots a couple of cousins, and forges a will. That is business. It is based on sound commercial principles. But the Master Criminal is simply a ditherer. He does not need the money. He has got the stuff. What with the Delancy Emeralds and the Stuyvesant Pearls, and the Montessor Holbein and the bearer bonds he stole from the bank, he must have salted away well over a million. Then what on earth does he want to go on for? Why not retire?

But do you think you could drive that into a Master Criminal's head? Not in a million years. I have just been reading the latest story about one of these poor half-wits. This one, in order to go on being a Master Criminal, was obliged to live in a broken-down cellar on a smelly wharf on the river, posing as a lodging-house keeper. All he did with his time was chop wood in the backyard. And at a conservative estimate, after paying salaries to his staff of one-eyed Chinamen, pock-marked Mexicans, and knife-throwing deaf-mutes, he must have been worth between two and three million pounds.

He could have had a yacht, a fleet of motor-cars, a house in Grosvenor Square, a nice place in the country, a bit of shooting in Scotland, a few miles of fishing on some good river, a villa on the

Riviera, and a racing-stable. He could have run a newspaper, revived British opera, and put on Shakespeare at popular prices. But no! He preferred to go on living in his riverside cellar, which was flooded every time there was a high tide, simply because he wanted to be a Master Criminal.

One scarcely knows whether to laugh or weep. "

It's true, you know. Mr. Reece had his millions, but he never seemed to get much pleasure out of them. And now we have the Master Criminal who planned the recent Train Robbery. By the latest account, he is trying to flog fivers at half-price. He'll probably end up in the riverside lodging house!

News from the Clubs

MIDLAND

Meeting, 1st October, 1963:

As the room at the Arden Hotel was not available for the usual last Tuesday in the month, this meeting was put back a week. Nevertheless, despite the absence of the two Burton members, there was a full attendance. The twelve present were Norman Gregory, Harry Broster, Tom Porter, Jack and Madge Corbett, Jack Bellfield, Ted Davey, Ray Bennett, George Chatham, Gerald Price and Win Brown and Win Partridge. A quiz, set by Jack Bellfield was won by the Secretary, eleven right from twelve Hamiltonian questions. The library raffle was won by Norman, who received a BFL, a NLL and a 2nd series Grayfriars Herald. Before the talk there was a display of collectors items from Tom Porter's wonderful collection. First, bearing the date of the meeting Oct. 1st but 42 years old was a Nelson Lee Library No. 330 "Playing for the League". Another item dated Oct. 1st, 1938 was a Magnet. Also a Gem of the Dirk Power-Levison Series No. 660. This was 43 years old dated October 2nd, 1920. Most interesting was, I thought, a No. 1 Empire Library in tip top mint condition. The date on this was February 19th, 1910. This a Rylcombe Grammar School Gordon Gay yarn. As an interest to Jack Bellfield a football programme from 1921 - Cradley Heath St. Lukes versus Birmingham Trams. Jack was an official of the first named club and appropriately Tom is very keen on trams. Ted's talk was from a Magnet of the Valentine series and all the fine humour of Frank Richards was given full reign by a recital of the adventures of Horace James Coker "wrestling" with a book of 750 lines from Virgil. In Coker's opinion Virgil could have cut down to a fraction of that figure if he wanted to write a book. As Ted remarked Frank Richards could not be excelled for his humour and we had another example of the same when Madge Corbett read a part of the Tuckshop Rebellion (Magnet story) when the Remove barred themselves in the tuckshop against Mr. Hacker. This was the bit when Hacker called on a gang from Courtfield to help, to the utter disgust of Mr. Prout.

HARRY BROSTER

AUSTRALIAMeeting held Oct. 10th:

In the absence of Syd Smyth who is holidaying at the Barrier Reef, Ernie Carter opened the meeting. His pleasing task was to make a presentation to Stan Nicholls who has been host to the club for several years now, providing most congenial surroundings for the meetings entirely free of charge and always ready to meet the wishes of club members. To express their real appreciation for his generosity members chose a most unusual token, a 'stereoscope' complete with a travel library of views. Stan's surprised but happy acceptance of this gift left members in no doubt whatsoever that the choice had been a happy one.

The meeting was thrown open for discussions and after each overseas letter was read by the secretary members were able to air their views on a wide range of subjects.

Of interest to all was a copy of the 'Transcona News' received from Bill Gander. A three colour spread gave a well-deserved write-up to Bill and his activities with the S.P.C. Two photos of Bill surrounded by his collection and printing press supported this article.

The ever-welcome 'Newsletters' from Harry Broster brought news and views from the Midland Club. Members were extremely interested to read the announcement therein re the proposal to reprint the older 'Magnet' yarns in 'Look and Learn' and are eagerly looking forward to further news on this subject.

Ron Hodgson kept us informed of the activities of the Northern Club. The secretary was most pleased to learn that Ron shares her enthusiasm for the 'Slide' stories and also that he has extended a friendly hand to our new member Don Harkness who shares Ron's fondness for the Captain Justice stories in the Modern Boy.

It won't be long before Jim Cook will be on his way to New Zealand and it is good to know that he will have a contact established since he and Jack Hurtagh, both ardent Leetles, have been exchanging letters regularly. It is hoped that there will be a member of the hobby circle to bid Jim welcome at each port of call in Australia with a full size meeting here in Sydney if time permits.

From Rev. Jack Hughes of Brisbane came his usual friendly letter reviving pleasant memories of Jack's memorable visit with us in March this year. Re and Harry Curtis of Ipswich hold the fort for the hobby in that part of the world and it is to be hoped that one day there will be sufficient enthusiasts there to permit the formation of a club there.

Victorian collector Mr. A.G. Davidson's letter was then passed around for the members to read. From this letter it would appear that information given to club members at the July meeting, although in good faith, was incorrect. Mr. Davidson tells us that Sheila Stevens, who was such a vital personality in the earlier OBBC in Melbourne is still alive. We would like to tender our sincere apology for any hurt occasioned by this incorrect statement contained in the club report for the August C.D.

The remainder of the evening was spent discussing Charles Hamilton's ability in relationship to his characterisation of English schoolboys as opposed to the foreign element always present in his various schools. General opinion was that he was excellent in his portrayals of the former whereas the latter were always larger than life. This topic made for stimulating discussion.

Before the meeting closed for the usual pleasant half hour at the nearby coffe inn, Stan Nicholls announced that he had been able to make arrangements for the Christmas party and details of this happy event will be finalised at the November meeting.

B. PATE Hon. Sec.

NORTHERNMeeting Saturday, 12th October, 1964:

There was an excellent attendance of twenty members for our October meeting, including four members of the fair sex, which enabled Geoffrey Wilde to remark how nice it was to be able to open the meeting with the usual 'Ladies and Gentlemen,' instead of 'Gentlemen,' as happened last month.

Formal business was soon dealt with, and then Gerry Allison dealt with events and correspondence received, and informed us that two new postal members were enrolled. He followed with an account of the meeting held at Maidstone, which had been most enjoyable, with the added pleasure of meeting old and new friends, and was favoured with very fine weather.

Jack Wood gave us his news of the month, which included a reference to 'Look and Lea' and the Greyfriars story it has chosen for re-printing, which seems to be an indifferant substitute effort, and harked about at that. Jack also mentioned the latest Bunter book, 'Just like Bunter,' and offered an interesting theory as to who finished off the story.

The next item was a quiz 'People and Places' by Frank Hancock, dealing with old boys books and comic papers. Some of the clues, presented in cryptic fashion, puzzled many members, and produced some answers not foreseen by the compiler. Still, it was good fun, and Geoffrey Wilde ran out the winner, with Gerry Allison second and Neville Vear and Molly Allison joint third.

A general discussion was the next item on the programme, and the subject, 'Was Eowyn Searles Brookes a Plagiarist?' was a topical one in view of the recent controversy as to the respective merits of Brooks and Hamilton in the columns of the 'C.D.' Some very interesting views were advanced, and the general conclusion was that all writers plagiarise to some extent at some period of their careers as they cannot always avoid being influenced by what has gone before.

The birthday of our President, P. C. Wodehouse, was only a few days ahead, and so, after refreshments had been served, the second half of our programme was devoted to a reading of his works by Geoffrey Wilde. Geoff. rendered one of the stories from 'Young Men in Spats' in his usual effective fashion, and at 9.15 we all dispersed in high good humour.

P. HANCOCK Hon. Sec.

Next meeting, 9th November.

LONDON

Despite inclement weather, there was a good gathering at Leytonstone on Sunday, October 20th. Hosts were Reuben and Mrs. Godsave. Satisfactory library reports were given by the two librarians, Roger Jenkins and Bob Blythe. The sales of the Nelson Lee catalogue have been very good, a recent advert in the 'C.D.' helping the sales considerably. Sexton Blake catalogue makes good progress, Bill Lofts mentioning the fantastic discoveries re the authors writing for the "Union Jack."

Bill Lofts was the first victim of the 'Solo Quiz' and he acquitted himself quite well. The two Packmans, Len and Josie had a private go at the quiz and did exceedingly well.

Bill Lofts read out an article about Bill Gander from the "Transcona News." Bill also paid tribute to Bill for his fine work in editing, printing, publishing and mailing the quarterly issues of the "Story Paper Collector." The thanks of all those present were afforded to both Bill Gander and Bill Lofts. Quite a good feature this reading and greatly enjoyed by the company. A debate followed, subject "Was Quelch a Just Beast?". Bob Blythe read a paper from Bill Norris, who was unavoidably absent from the meeting. Bill Norris disagreed and thought that Quelch was unjust at times. But after comments from Messrs. Lofts, Sutton, Bush, Blythe, Packman, Wright and Hopkins, plus remarks from Winifred Morris and Millicent Lyle, the motion was carried that Quelch was a 'Just Beast.' A good story feed followed.

Next meeting at Bob Blythe's abode at 40, Ellesmere Road, Dollis Hill, London, N.W.10, on Sunday, November 17th. Kindly inform Bob if attending and bring mug or cup. Phone GLA.8991.

UNCLE BENJAMIN

WEDDING BELLS: Eleanor Packman, only child of Mr and Mrs. Leonard Packman of Blakiana Farm, has been associated with our London Club ever since it was formed. Members have watched her grow from a bonny little girl into a charming young woman, and rejoiced to

hear the echo of wedding bells in late October.

The lucky young man who has carried off the brightest jewel from the Blakiana crown is Mr. Bill Hickman. Collectors' Digest wishes this grand couple long life and supreme happiness always.

Bill and Eleanor are spending their honeymoon in Devon and Cornwall.

MERSEYSIDE

Meeting, Sunday October 13th:

This was our A.G.M. and the attendance was good.

After the Chairman had dealt with the correspondence he informed us that he had managed to acquire 3 Holiday Annuals in excellent condition at a very reasonable price. The rules of the club were then read over, minor adjustments made and finally passed for another year. The election of officers resulted as follows: Chairman and Treasurer - Norman Pragnell; Secretary - Bill Windsor; Librarian - Jack Morgan. It was then unanimously decided to invite Eric Fayne to become our President in succession to the late Charles Hamilton, and also to invite Frank Case and Dob Webster to be Vice-Presidents.

The business part over, Norman Pragnell introduced a quiz based on Characters and their Creators which was won by George Riley. (We will have to consider handicapping George; he wins too often.)

We spent the rest of the time discussing future programmes and decided that for the November meeting we should have a Brains Trust; the 'brains' (?) selected being the three elected officers of the club. By means of drawing out of the hat Bert Hamblett was given the honour of preparing the next quiz (or whatever else he may care to inflict upon us).

We were sorry to hear that Frank Unwin had been unable to attend the meetings because of ill-health. We all hope that he will soon be fit again and will once more join the happy band.

Next meeting, Sunday, November 10th.

BILL WINDSOR

JOHN WEFNHAM (Maidstone): It has been my privilege to examine Frank Richards' library, and I know that he was an exceptionally well-read man, gifted in the study of languages and above the average in the literary field. Henry Ward Beecher once remarked that it made very little difference how one acquired an education, whether it be in the classic shades of old Oxford or Harvard, or by the fireplace in a lonely cabin on the frontier. The frontier is a good place to get truth. There is

Yours Sincerely

Interesting Items from
the Editor's Letter-Bag

no one there to bother you.

A. M. DAVIDSON (Muchalls): I love Collectors' Digest even though I don't possess a single Magnet or Gem - or indeed anything apart from my treasured volume of Jack, Sam and Pete. I think it is good to keep in touch with the things of one's youth and to experience a pleasant nostalgia for those far-off days. Just as a stray whiff of a certain perfume, or a snatch of an old melody can instantly re-create some cherished moment of long ago, so do these old school yarns. Why worry about who wrote which? It was all pure gold to us boys then, and it remains untarnished now.

HARRY MATTHEWS (South Australia): I thought the old Sexton Blake much better than the new, but in order to sell anything these days, one must move with the times - or must not. Apparently neither the old nor the new Blake was acceptable to the public, but I am not really surprised. Books and magazines that sell to-day have to be full of sex and dirt, to interest the masses. Many people are concerned about the rubbish which is coming into Australia, a lot of it from the U.S.A. The editorial on old hymn tunes and old stories was a delight.