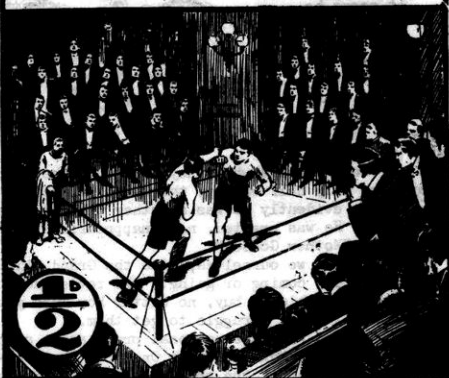


COLLECTORS' DIGEST

THE SPORTS LIBRARY

The Popular Thursday Athletic Paper for Boys and Young Men.



THE "SCRAP" OF HIS LIFE!

A TALE OF 'GET-THERE' GUNTER.
BY HENRY T. JOHNSON

No. 227, Vol. 19
November 1965
Price 2/-

Collectors' Digest

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Vol. 19

No. 227

NOVEMBER 1965

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THE GRAND OLD DUKE OF YORK

WRITE TO ME ABOUT IT.



It seems he had ten thousand men. He marched them up the hill, and he marched them down again. It further appears that when they were

up they were up, and when they were down they were down. And when they were only half way up, they were neither up nor down.

Quite evidently he was a rather undecided and vacillating old Duke of York. He was created, not inappropriately, for a version of the pantomime "Mother Goose."

Sometimes we ourselves, like the Grand Old Duke, do not know whether we are coming or going. We review new books which you probably won't be able to buy, no matter how much you and your newsagent and bookseller may struggle to get them.

We joined with the national press and a score of other periodicals in shouting Magnet Number One from the roof-tops. We were delighted to hear of the printing of 50,000 copies - a number which was bumped up to 90,000 and finally went to 130,000. It seemed that, as the result of the success of Magnet No. 1, we were to get Billy Bunter's Holiday Book. One of our correspondents who saw a rough proof of it told us what excellent value for money it would be with its stories of the three Hamilton schools, its coloured pictures, its poems and odds and ends. Further we learned that a new kind of Magnet was to be published at the rate of two issues a month, reprinting the old stories. We were sad to learn that the first two stories selected were not by Charles Hamilton at all, but were by J. N. Pentelov and another author

named Cook. Someone who regretted the fact was told that it was too late to do anything about it as the works were already at the printers.

Now we are told that Magnet No. 1 was not a success after all. We understood first of all that both the Holiday Book and the New Magnet were cancelled. Now we learn that they are "postponed" till the Spring. Are books likely to sell better in April or May than in the couple of months before Christmas? We only ask.

And as we reach the bottom of the hill again we learn that Armada, who had decided to do no more Hamilton Armadas, have now decided to do some more. 'Bout turn. Up the hill again. Just check, corporal, to make sure whether we've got 10,000 men or 130,000. A minor detail, of course. You might let a thousand fall out and try to buy the Sexton Blake Library.

Another little announcement now. Something which, we suspect, comes at this time as the result of all the publicity given to Magnet No. 1. Read on - and keep your fingers crossed.

THE FRANK RICHARDS L.P. RECORD

The L.P. record, made by Charles Hamilton just before his death, is to be issued by Columbia in December. Press Editorial Services, who have heard the record played, tell us that it is the most fascinating treat in the world. It runs for nearly an hour. It starts and ends with the singing of a Greyfriars song composed by Charles Hamilton. The vocalists are the boys' choir from a Kent school. The author goes on to tell how he came to create many of his characters, and, it seems, discloses many details about his life which were not mentioned in his Autobiography. On the reverse side of the record, he answers questions, and his comments, amusing, nostalgic, and informative, are delightful.

The record will be on sale at 35/-. Press Editorial Services, of 82 Girdwood Rd, Putney, S.W.15, tell us that they will be in a position to supply the record, post free, to anyone who cares to order from them and thus avoid the possibility of disappointment in the shops.

We can only hope that the Grand Old Duke will have no finger in this delicious pie.

ADVERTISING

Commencing with our next issue, small advertisements in this magazine will cost 2d per word. Collectors' Digest is the greatest medium in the world for the buying and selling of the old papers, and its selling power is bigger today than it has ever been.

Please, please, when sending advertisements for insertion, make sure to include your name and address. A very large number of

played a biggish part in this one.

I like a story to make sense. "The Remove Eleven on Tour" didn't make sense. The Head arranged for the Remove team to tour the south coast playing football matches against council schools and others, at 6d a time admission towards Christmas comforts for soldiers. As if any Headmaster would make such an arrangement. I thought it quite preposterous. Besides, half a dozen football matches don't make a story. Not for me they don't.

I enjoyed the next one, "The Conjuror's Capture," which introduced Kipps. It also brought back the German, Falke, who was trying to disgrace the wealthy Johnny Bull. It was through Kipps that the German did not succeed.

In the last tale of the month, Skinner inserted a false ad in a newspaper, as though Mr. Quelch was advertising for a wife. Doug read it and went all toffee-nosed, saying it was in rather bad taste, but I just laughed and laughed when I read it. It was called "The Jape of the Season," and I thought it the funniest yarn of the year.

We all spent a week-end at Aldershot with my aunt and uncle and my cousin, Robin. We went by train to Waterloo, and then on by train from there, but we had to change at Guildford. On the way down, I had the new issue of the Nelson Lee Library to read in the train. It was a ghost story, all about Nelson Lee and Nipper, and was called "The Terror of Troone Towers." I enjoyed it very much.

At Aldershot we went to the Hippodrome on the Saturday night, and there were a lot of soldiers in the audience. Gertie Gitana sang "Nellie Dean" and a man called Bransby Williams did a lot of impersonations. It was quite a good show. The soldiers yelled a lot when a comedian called Neil McKay sang a song about "Mademoiselle from Armentieres."

We went home on the Sunday evening, and Robin gave me a new copy of the Firefly to read in the train. That is a very nice halfpenny comic with Syd Chaplin on the front page. Syd Chaplin is Charlie's half-brother, and he makes Keystone comedies for Mack Sennett.

In the Boys' Friend there is a new series of stories about Dan, Bob, and Darkey, two negroes and an English fellow, by S. Clarke Hook. They remind me of the Jack, Sam, and Pete tales.

All the Rookwood tales this month have been about Jimmy Silver's Uncle John. John Silver is a bit of a rascal. He asked Jimmy to meet him at a low pub called "The Ship," and Jimmy had to get £5 for him. Jimmy's friends saw that he had a secret, and learned that he had gone to the pub, so they quarrelled. Then some money was stolen from the sports fund, of which Newcome is the treasurer. Jimmy was suspected, but Oswald helped him, and they found out that the thief was really Townsend. The stories were called "A Shattered Friendship," "Put to the Test," "Jimmy Silver's Downfall" and "Shoulder to Shoulder." But the series isn't finished yet. It goes on next month.

In the Gem there is a new serial called "Cousin Ethel's Schooldays." Cousin Ethel goes to St. Freda's, and Tom Merry & Co. come into the story. Doug has read it before, as it once appeared in the Empire Library, a paper which is now dephunked. I like this serial quite a lot.

All the stories in the Gem have been good this month. First was "Gussy and the Girl" which was amusing. Gussy falls in love with Dorothy Fane who is the new lady porter at Blankley's Stories.

"Skimpole's Windfall" was very good indeed. Skimpole has been writing articles on aviation and sending them to "The Flying Times." To everybody's surprise, Skimpole won £50 for an article, and started spending it in connection with his 'isms.' He sang the song "Come and Kiss Me, Honey," dressed as a nigger minstrel. After he had spent the £50, it turned out there had been a mistake, and he was told to return the money.

The next story "The Last Hope" told how Tom Merry & Co tried out all sorts of dodges to raise money in order that Skimpole could pay his debt. A fine couple of tales.

Last Gem of the month was the Christmas Double Number with a coloured cover. Funny how the Gem always has its Christmas No. so early. The story was "A Stolen Holiday" and it was good, even though I have read better Christmas St. Jim's tales. Figgins & Co, who were really the chief characters in it, were ordered to stay at St. Jim's over the Christmas vac as a punishment, but they disobeyed orders, and slipped away to the ancestral home of Sir Pulteney Vane, where Tom Merry and his friends were staying. They managed to capture a German spy who was signalling to a German zeppelin, so the Head forgave them for their misdeeds. It was an exciting story.

I saw my first zepp this month. One dropped a bomb on our golf-links. Mum said that we ought to go and see how old Mrs. Forbes was, so we rushed out of our house, with the zepp picked out in searchlights overhead. We left our front door open as we rushed, and two ladies were coming up the road. One said to the other: "Let's go in here, Daisy," and they both rushed into our house as we rushed out. It was all very thrilling. After the zepp had gone, we went back home, but the ladies had gone, so we never found out who they were. What larks!

SEXTON BLAKE REVIEW

THE STRANGE FACE OF MURDER (3/6)

W. A. Ballinger

To the list of the numerous detectives whose adventures you have read about, add one more name. Graham Sykes. To their various assistants, jot down the name of Johnny Hammond. This novel relates their first - and, I hope, their last - case in the Library, with Sykes on the stage for practically the whole time. Occasionally, other characters share it with him. There's Charles Upjohn, who tells Sykes that his beautiful wife, Carol, is plotting to kill him. There's Freddie, their chauffeur, so feminine, with his long, curly hair; Helen Lobe, the owner of a marriage bureau in Bond Street; Marceau, a French crook, and several other weird specimens. Oh, and there's a man named Blake - Sexton Blake - another private investigator, who looks after Sykes with commendable devotion, making brief appearances when the latter's inexperience lands him in dire trouble. The author describes one of his characters as a "layabout." Come to think of it, this description might be applied to Blake. After all, it's a long time since he walked through a case merely to indulge in the mopping up operations at the end of it.

Let's be honest about this book. As a paperback, it is of average good fare but it is not good Blake. No Tinker, a meagre ration of Blake, just a mention of Pedro lifting his head lazily from the hearthrug, and Mrs. Bardell entering with refreshments, and that's your lot. No; this is not good enough. My view is that every book should feature Blake in such manner that when it is proffered to a likely new reader that reader should be impressed by his character. This sort of novel does nothing to inspire such feeling. Walter Webb

B L A K I A N A

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

IN AND AROUND
BAKER STREET (9)

By Walter Webb

Views On The Modern Blake

To have read in the correspondence columns of TIT-BITS that the penetration of his favourite character into the pages of that paper had the approval of four out of five of its reading clientele must have been very reassuring to the Blake historian. It suggested a popular move on the part of the editorial department, and indicated that Blake's stay would be a long and successful one. To find him dropped the following week was a somewhat shattering blow. Obviously, if a feature is liked by four-fifths of a paper's circulation of readers that feature is going to be retained, and no editor, unless he be a complete ass, is going to jeopardise the success of the paper he



The above is a reduced print of Next Week's attractive cover illustration. It depicts Sexton Blake as a Mandarin, walking through the streets of Canton.

runs by pandering to the minority. The inference is that Blake was not the success hoped for, and evidence of this is to be found in the "Dear Sir" feature during Blake's ten week run in the paper.

During that period 146 extracts from letters sent in by readers were published. Of that number, only 6 mentioned Sexton Blake at all. Of these, 4 were in favour of his retention, 2 being against. The letters of appreciation are quite interesting, but it is those of criticism which are the more enlightening. "A bore" says one. "So old-fashioned." "How much longer do we have to stand him?" "Old Sexton Blake won't do. He is slow and sluggish, with no zest for living or loving. Compared with James Bond, Harry Palmer (of The Ipress File) and Boysie Oakes (The Liquidator) and their like, he's a non-starter."

These comments are significant because they represent the opinion of readers who have come upon Blake for the first time, whereas the four in favour were obviously from old admirers of the character, whose views may possibly have been aired during a mild attack of nostalgia. Of course, it would be very pleasant to go back to the old days when the Blake stories were of a purely adventurous nature, and, as an old reader, I would welcome them; but what point is there in publishing tales of adventure for a generation from which the spirit of it disappeared long ago? The hazards of publishers are many in these times, and their difficulties must be appreciated to understand the present trend in the S.B.L. novel. The letters of criticism in TIT-BITS give some indication of what the modern reader expects of Blake. If he is thought an old-fashioned bore in a story reprinted from only as far back as 1963, what is the modern reaction going to be if or when a story of 1923 vintage or thereabouts is published? Personally, I do not think the publishers dare risk reprinting any of the old Blake stories in their original form, though by bringing them up to date with a corresponding revving up of the action and dialogue might prove fruitful and well worth a trial.

Regarding the criticism of Blake being slow and sluggish, this is absurd, for he is more dynamic these days than in any era previously. As for his lack of zest for loving, who wants to read of Blake chasing women, anyway. A little sex is permissible in these days, but once allow a loosening of Blake's high moral code and the element of it will surely grow, and the high standard of the present novel will decrease in like proportion. I hope the quality of the S.B.L. will always be the major consideration of the publishers, with Blake continuing to command the admiration and respect of a following that has

revered him through many decades. All I would add here is that I can respect the views of any Blake fan for not wanting any sex element at all in the stories, but can feel no such regard for a reader who wants a sex novel with a Blake element. Of the two the former is infinitely the more preferable, and should the tales ever fall to the level of the second, I would wish to see Blake killed off altogether before his image became forever destroyed in my memory.

The Emergence Of G. H. Teed

"He was a big man, with an air - given to wide-brimmed black hats and even, at times, a cloak. He did everything in a big way, and in appearance and manner really made one think more of the popular idea of the old actor -- Greetings, laddie! -- sort of thing."

This thumbnail sketch of G. H. Teed was given to me by one of his colleagues a little while ago, when I was exploring that little patch of blue from whence he emerged to become one of the best and most consistent Sexton Blake writers of all time - the same patch of blue, incidentally, into which Michael Storm disappeared. What connection was there between Storm and Teed? Was Storm's disappearance arranged to make Teed's "out of the blue" arrival possible? Was it by chance that Teed's literary style resembled Storm's to the extent that it was not at first possible to detect one author's work from the other's? The pall of mystery created by the dramatic emergence of the one following so soon upon the peculiar exit of the other gives rise to the suspicion that it may have been prearranged for the mutual benefit of the parties concerned.

It has already been related in these columns that Teed met the widow of Michael Storm when she was making a world cruise following his death, and helped the famous Blake writer obtain a foothold as chronicler of the detective's adventures. There is such a nice touch of the romantic about this that one would like to believe it true; but the Blake statistician-is bound to enquire how it came about that the widow of a man committed to writing stories for a living could have had the wherewithal to afford such a cruise and why she should have embarked upon it.

The emergence of G. H. Teed is truly remarkable. The only known early facts about him are that he left home at the age of 16 - which would have been in 1902 - first ran a sheep station in Australia, was overseer of a banana plantation in Costa Rica, and manager of a jute plantation on the Malabar Coast of India. Then, according to what has been written here, in the 1912-13 period he met Mrs. Storm on the

vessel which was taking them both to England, she introduced him to the character of Sexton Blake, and he immediately began work on the Yvonne stories, which were such a resounding success that, as far as Blake was concerned, Teed became famous overnight. The rapidity of all this leaves me extremely sceptical and suspicious. Here was a man visiting England for the first time, and, with no known writing experience behind him, sitting down and writing a long series of yarns with all the knowledge of a native; in fact, if ever an author appeared to know London as well as the back of his hand G. H. Teed did at that particular time. And not only of London, but of Paris, too.

I just cannot believe this, and my view is that Teed did not set foot on English soil upon disembarkation, but on French. Much of the old campaigner's life was spent in France, and in the early days he lived in the Latin Quarter of Paris. I believe Teed's actual contact with Sexton Blake occurred in 1908, and that he met Michael Storm in France when that author was chronicling the exploits of the character. What little is known of the two writers suggests they were well matched; Teed who made the money fly when he had it, nearly always "broke" and one jump ahead of his creditors, and the soi-disant Michael Storm who wrote from fields afar to escape his. That Storm, too, lived many years in France is obvious from his writings, with their command of the French language, passages of which he was fond of introducing into his Blake stories. He was without doubt the only qualified writer of his day to write about the character, being a genuine crime journalist, whereas the rest, apart from W. Shaw Rae, were little more than second-rate contributors of the juvenile school and adventure type of story.

It is easy to visualize two writers with so much in common teaming up, with the more experienced passing on the benefit of his knowledge to the younger and lesser experienced, for Teed obviously served his apprenticeship at some stage between leaving New Brunswick and setting foot on French or English soil, and the most logical explanation is that he met the Storms when they were resident in France and began his Blake career by collaborating with them in the writing of the character.

Certainly Teed's work suggests this possibility, for his early manuscripts were endorsed with the stamps of hesitance, crudity, and repetition, all symbolic of the raw recruit, but with prolificacy such stamps were soon erased, to be replaced by those of confidence, fertility, and smoothness, and such was the speed of his improvement,

during and immediately following the first Yvonne series that I cannot help feeling he had the benefit of a good tutor during his apprenticeship, and Storm could have been that man.

For a time Teed was actually thought to have been Storm in the flesh, until Willie Back persuaded him to sit down at a typewriter in the office and write out a couple of chapters of a Blake yarn, after which his credentials were no longer in doubt. Prior to this, Teed's work was handled by the woman known as Mrs. Storm, and the Yvonne stories were, at first, thought to have been the work of the man believed to be her husband. Who the so-called Mrs. Storm was has not yet been verified, but she is thought to have been Mrs. Duncan Sempill, who, at that time had been widowed for several years, and was a sister-in-law of John Sempill, Duncan's elder brother.

Another Milestone

Another milestone was reached by the S.B.L. in August, when it was enlarged, and its price adjusted to 3/6 a copy. Obviously rising costs have contributed to the increase, though it has brought compensations, not the least being the recall of the correspondence columns. A touch of nostalgia was added to the 13th issue, for it contained a letter written by Mrs. Ursula Blake, widow of the former Blake writer, Stacey Blake.

The novel in the same number is bang up-to-date, and its theme the controversial one of the death penalty and its abolition. Blake's views, as expressed through his authors past and present, have left his admirers in no doubt about his feelings on this matter. Where the cold-blooded killer is concerned, Blake is no abolitionist. But, when a man is reeling under the weight of heavy tax demands as Blake is today, the temptation to intervene on the side of law and order under suasion of a fat fee from a well-known daily newspaper, even whilst having a sneaking sympathy for the motivations of the other side, is strong, and, albeit, with somewhat guilty feelings, he accepts the commission. Feelings have run high on the question of capital punishment, and there will be many who will follow Blake's investigations here and be entirely out of sympathy with his efforts to track down the self-styled executioner of the modern murderer, and the real hero in their eyes will be the man who plays the title role. The story? Well, it's topical, and it's original; but, in the merging, obscurity has resulted, particularly in the dénouement, which is sketchy and not very convincing.

HAMILTONIANA . . .

GLOOM OVER GREYFRIARS

By John Trovell

When November fog shrouds the land in gloom, disruption, and despondency, Greyfriars enthusiasts will be reminded that fog was responsible for some hilarious and exciting incidents in the old school. The narrow escape of no less a personage than Dr. Locke, the Headmaster, and the unexpected and unpleasant experiences of two members of his staff are recalled when November had reduced visibility to a minimum at Greyfriars.

Peter Todd and the Famous Five had many anxious moments in Magnet 1136, when fog was responsible for poor inoffensive Monsieur Charpentier, the French Master, receiving the contents of a bottle of marking ink, intended for Walker of the Sixth. Horace Coker, in attempting to track down the culprits in his own inimitable manner, just escaped expulsion after the good natured Mosso pleaded for leniency on behalf of all concerned in the affair.

Mr. Prout, portly Master of the Fifth, had reason to regret his excursion in the fog when he collected a beautiful black eye from that most troublesome member of his Form, Horace Coker, in a case of mistaken identity. That eye caused such comment throughout the school that Prout was content to hide his usually prominent person from public view, much to the relief of Masters' Common Room, whose members revelled in the absence of Prout's fruity boom, and his long-winded orations. But when a week later poor Prout had his remaining good eye blackened by a tramp, this time in broad daylight, his feelings can be imagined, and he was reluctantly compelled to relinquish his post in order to recover. Handled in the best Frank Richards style, the humorous situations caused by Prout's lovely black eyes make Magnets 1187 and 1188, delightful reading.

The temporary absence of Mr. Quelch and the high-handed methods of Loder of the Sixth, when placed in charge of the Remove, lead to a series of eventful happenings in Magnet 1342. Vernon-Smith, who had received well deserved punishment from Dr. Locke for having cigarettes in his possession, persuaded Harry Wharton & Co. to agree to up-end Loder, under cover of a thick fog, and administer 'six' in return for the treatment they had received in the Form Room. The Bounder, in a bitter revengeful mood, aware that the Head was on his way to the

school library, duped the Co. into thinking it was Loder, and only Billy Bunter groping his way along the same path, and colliding with Dr. Locke, averted a scandal that would have rocked Greyfriars to its foundations. Fortunately for Smithy, the Headmaster remained in ignorance of his narrow escape, but the Bounder received just retribution from the Remove for his cunning scheming.

These are but a few of the happenings at Greyfriars, when fog hung heavy over the Quad, and enfolded the old school in a blanket of gloom, and for those who choose to venture out at such times in the company of the cheery chums of the Remove, the fun and excitement provide adequate compensation for the dreary fogs of November.

LET'S BE CONTROVERSIAL

No. 93: THE EXCEPTION THAT BECAME THE RULE

As I said not long ago in this column, there was really no reason in the heyday of the blue Gems and red Magnets why any reader should have concluded that Martin Clifford and Frank Richards were one and the same. But by the Spring of 1915 the stories of Greyfriars, St. Jim's, and Rookwood were becoming so linked with one another that any perceptive reader should have known that they were coming from a common typewriter. I think that many readers put two and two together at that period.

Maybe the most interesting feature of Danny's Diary in recent months has been the way, during the Spring of 1915, he suddenly decided that St. Jim's and Greyfriars had a common source, and then, very soon after, that different writers were contributing certain stories in both the Gem and the Magnet.

We ourselves may idly have wondered when the substitute problem, as we loosely call it to-day, first became evident. I think we may safely assume that it was in July 1915.

There had been, of course, a number of substitute stories long before that, but they had passed undetected - or almost undetected - in the flood of first-class tales which was flowing from the creator. This was especially so in the Magnet, for some of the red Magnet stories were a hotch-potch, in any case.

An intelligent reader sensed that there was something wrong, even with the better type of substitute tale, like "Misunderstood" and "Tom Merry's Promise," but things were back to normal by the following week so they passed almost unnoticed. Nevertheless, one wonders

at the effect of an appalling tale like that which appeared in Gem No. 100. Could any reader in his senses have believed that such an ill-written oddity came from the man they knew and loved as Martin Clifford? It seems impossible. It stood out like a sore thumb.

I have in my collection a shocking original St. Jim's tale, a bound copy of a Boys' Friend Library entitled "The Silent Three," published about 1909. It is in brand-new condition, probably because it is almost unreadable. I retain it because it provides such a puzzle. What on earth possessed any editor to accept it and to publish it?

It is, of course, a rarity. I should be interested to know how many readers own a copy. I might be tempted to part with mine for £5, but as nobody is likely to make such an offer, it will certainly remain in my collection till the end of my days.

So the early substitute stories passed, if not entirely undetected, at least without causing a ripple on Gem and Magnet history up till the middle of 1915. And then, suddenly, in mid-summer 1915, Substitution raised its head as a problem child. From passing unnoticed, Substitution suddenly became a cause of fierce annoyance for the many who, as Roger Jenkins has so shrewdly put it, could tell Stork from butter. The minor pimple became a painful boil when substitute stories became the rule instead of the exception.

It is, in fact, astounding that this did not occur before mid-1915. When war broke out in August 1914, Charles Hamilton was in Austria with his sister and his brother-in-law. It must have been a time of intense anxiety for the author. Money ran out for the simple reason that postal services were disrupted. He can have had no time - or, at least, no inclination - to sit at his machine and tap out Tom Merry and Greyfriars. He had other things to think about. A possible internment camp must have loomed ominously in his imagination.

When Authority called in the person of an Austrian army officer to ask questions and to make a search, all went well till the eye of Authority lighted on the word "zeppelin" in a bunch of manuscript. Then Authority became suspicious. It took the author some time to convince Authority that it was merely a school story, written before the war started, in which Tom Merry & Co were carried away in a zeppelin which had landed near St. Jim's. That story was eventually entitled "The St. Jim's Airmen," and it was published in the Gem the following October. More of it anon.

Meanwhile, Charles Hamilton and his party managed to get away from Austria, enduring a good deal of worry and hardship on their

journey. They reached Switzerland, from whence they went to Paris. They seem to have stayed in Paris for a while, contemplating a journey to Boulogne which might not be uneventful, for at that time the Germans were invading France. Finally they reached London in October.

It would not have been surprising had the substitute problem hit the Gem and Magnet during August, September, and October of 1914. The surprising factor is that it did not. As we know, the flow of Talbot stories was going strong in the late-summer and autumn of 1914, delighting a large number of readers and irritating others who did not care to see St. Jim's taken over by a new character. It seems evident that Charles Hamilton was well ahead with his work. They must have had plenty of his stories in hand at the A.P.

The story "The Airmen of St. Jim's" appeared in the Gem in October.

It was a curious tale to be published when Britain had been at war for over two months. The huge airship, in the tale, actually landed on the playing fields of St. Jim's. That, possibly, could have happened in peace time. But it is quite incredible that in time of war a zeppelin could have landed in Sussex, and got away again with a number of kidnapped schoolboys. The boys seem unconscious that their country is at war at all. Later, in Europe, they escape from the Germans, and pass through Austria into Italy. On the way they hear various rumours of different countries declaring war on others.

It would seem that the opening chapters were written before war broke out, and then Charles Hamilton wrote, or re-wrote the remaining chapters, introducing some of the flavour of the adventures he himself had experienced. Generally speaking, it was an odd, unsatisfactory story.

Yet, in spite of all he went through between July and October 1914, Charles Hamilton showed little of it in his programme in the Gem and Magnet. The age of substitution did not dawn till mid-summer 1915.

When the exception became the rule, it was not due to the war with Germany. It was due to Rookwood. The Rookwood tales in the Boys' Friend - and Charles Hamilton was writing them all - were quite long at that time. They were, in fact, as long as the Gem stories were to become with the passing of time.

It is impossible to decide just why Hamilton neglected Greyfriars and St. Jim's in 1915, and concentrated on Rookwood. It seems a strange thing for him to do, but he certainly did it. Possibly it was the wish of editor Hinton whose aim just then seemed the building

up of the Boys' Friend.

The year 1915 is one which presents a number of puzzles for the historian of the Companion Papers. The months during which it was decided to publish "Tom Merry's Weekly," followed by the sudden decision to issue "The Greyfriars Herald" instead, was something which might have been due to several reasons. But in spite of this, the cream of Hamiltonian work was still going into the Gem, right up till the end of 1915, just as it had done throughout the era of the blue covers. Generally speaking, the quality of the Greyfriars stories deteriorated considerably during the year. The Gem kept pretty well up to its normal standard. This makes the obvious editorial preference for Greyfriars all the more surprising. It seems likely that, had the creator of the schools had his way, the histories of the Gem and Magnet might subsequently have been vastly different from what they were.

Finally, that astonishing competition in which readers were invited to submit Greyfriars stories of 30,000 words. Clearly the aim was to find new substitute writers. The war must surely have been responsible for this, and Charles Hamilton can hardly have been unaware that such a competition was in progress. With compulsory military service just round the corner, it seemed likely that Hinton would lose, not only his existing sub writers, but his main author as well. If Charles Hamilton were called up for military service, he would probably still be able to write a few stories of his famous schools, but a large or regular supply would be almost impossible. I think it is reasonable to assume that Hinton and Hamilton talked it all over. It must have been clear to both that unless a supply of stories, whatever the quality, was maintained, the papers would come to a stop.

It may well have been that Charles Hamilton agreed to concentrate on Rookwood, at the same time leaving it to subs to see how they could cope with the Magnet in the second half of 1915. He kept the Gem still mainly in his own hands because, at the time, he still regarded the Gem as the more important of his two major papers.

* * * * *

CONTROVERSIAL ECHOES

No. 91. THE UBIQUITOUS BUNTER

ROGER JENKINS: I think you have hit the nail on the head when you state that those who can find nothing likeable at all in Bunter are just plain anti-Hamilton. Nevertheless, I can not agree with Laurie

Sutton that Bunter's character was never detestable. In early days he was just a harmless silly idiot, but during the late war years a most unpleasant change took place.

As an example of what I mean, I suggest that the Greyfriars story in the 1923 Holiday Annual be examined. A cricket week was in progress, and in order to spoil the atmosphere of harmony Bunter began picking pockets and getting the juniors from various schools to suspect one another. This is just plain villainy, as was his action in destroying the telegram in the first Wharton the rebel series. Even the famous Bunter Court series of 1925 shows him in a detestable light, but because the theme is an amusing one we are able to enjoy it without reservations. Still, his exit is ignominious.

In my opinion, the modern Bunter dates from the Whiffles Circus series of 1928. No longer is he a cunning plotter: instead, he is a fatuous youngster, taking advantage of lucky situations. Morally speaking, there might not be much to choose between renting Combermere Lodge knowing full well there was no money to pay for it, and impersonating Mr. Whiffles. But there was all the difference in the world in the treatment of the two themes. The reader hopes that Bunter will emerge from the Whiffles Circus series without retribution, and to a large extent he does. So I see three Bunters. Other readers may perhaps make further distinctions. But I am certain there is not just one Bunter.

H. CHAPMAN: I do not agree that "plenty of those who decry Bunter do so simply because they are anti-Hamilton" and that "they would decry any Hamilton character who won such phenomenal success." This is the trouble with Hamilton fans. One has only to offer a mild criticism of his work to be classed as anti-Hamilton. Some time ago I read the short "Ravenspur Grange" series, and I could hardly believe that it was a genuine Hamilton story. It was so different from any other story I have read by him. Four murders, and Bunter is not mentioned once.

On mentioning this to a Hamilton expert I was informed (apologetically, I thought) that it was written to order. There was no need to apologize. It was a pleasant change from the usual tale of Bunter's escapades. I enjoyed it.

DENNIS HILLIARD: In all my Greyfriars reading I have found the fat owl perfectly acceptable. The popular position he has gained over so many years has made it possible for the Greyfriars yarns to be introduced to a new world of readers. As a social worker (probation

officer) I have often considered the Bunter character from almost a professional point of view. I am convinced that this character, so complex and self-centred, brought out the wonder of Hamilton's more acceptable characterisations. I am always impressed by the tolerance of the Famous Five towards him, amazed at the courtesy of Mauly, and cheered by the long-suffering of all those wonderful figures. Bunter's success has ensured the future of the whole world of Charles Hamilton.

With all his shortcomings, and character defects, Bunter has joined the immortals, destined to please the youngsters of generations to come. We must indeed be grateful that this remarkable figure - fat, fatuous, and fuddle-headed - has preserved a wonderful literary heritage for us and for the children of 1975 and ages onward.

(A further selection of readers' views on this topic will be published next month. Readers' comments on the Controversial articles are warmly welcomed, but please keep them short and to the point. -ED.)

GEMS OF HAMILTONIA No. 25 (New Series)

Bunter was an imaginative fellow. Like most imaginative fellows, he lived in a little world of his own, that only approximated roughly to the real world. Ordinary life was not interesting enough for Bunter. Things that really happened interested him little. This gift of imagination might have made him, with a little more brains, a poet, an author, a journalist, or a politician - in fact, any kind of dealer in fiction.

Unfortunately, Bunter lacked brains. His powerful imagination had made him into nothing but a reckless fibber, whose fibs never carried conviction.

It was this curious trait in Bunter's character that caused the suburban villa where the Bunters lived to blossom forth, in Bunter's fertile fancy, into Bunter Court, and his father's old Ford into a Rolls Royce, and his relatives into members of the peerage.

Like many fellows who tell fibs over and over again, Bunter came to believe in them more or less himself - much more, at least, than anyone else believed in them.

Sometimes, going home for the holidays, he had quite a shock at seeing Bunter Court dwindle into a suburban villa and the Rolls Royce into a dusty, creaky Ford.

Greatly Bunter preferred his imaginary world to the real one.

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NELSON LEE LIBRARY

CONDUCTED BY JACK WOOD

CHRISTMAS THRILLSWith the Boys of St. Frank'sby William Lister

"The wind roared and buffeted, and the snowflakes flurried down in miniature whirlwinds. Overhead the sky was leaden and the whole countryside, in every direction, was crystal white in its wintry mantle. A very large amount of snow had fallen.

It was Christmas Eve, and there was not a doubt about the old fashioned nature of this Yuletide."

The opening words of "The Christmas Plotters" by Edwy Searles Brooks, way back in 1921, sets the stage for a load of Christmas thrills. In those days of our youth there was a magic about Yuletide that was captured and retained in those grand old school tales.

Every Christmas brought its excitement. We may or may not have got loads of expensive presents, but we wouldn't have been without the Yuletide tales of our favourite school for all the tea in China.

It may have been a "Barring Out" story as in "The Christmas Plotters" or sometimes a visit from our old friend, Ezra Quirke, as in "The Return of Ezra Quirke" (1928). And every St. Frank's fan knows that the name "Quirke" stands for all that is best in supernatural thrills, ghosts, owls weird noises, doors opened by unseen hands, and secret panels. Quirke could certainly make our hair stand on end, in the days when we had some.

By 1932 the wind still roared and the snow still flurried down as we settled to read such tales as "Archie's Xmas Party," "The Haunted House" and "Nerki the Sorcerer," a series in which poor Archie Glen-thorne's aunt falls under the spell of a fake sorcerer and ex-jail bird, and, if it had not been for the lads of St. Frank's, would have lost all her money.

Besides Nerki, we were introduced to the "little people," and did Handforth & Co. really see a witch flying overhead, riding a broomstick on a moonlight night, in the Christmas "Hols"?

Such tales as "The Rival Ghost" and "The Phantom of the Grange" could be bought for a mere twopence each in 1930 and set the atmosphere for a merry, (if ghostly) Christmas. In these stories we had a love

story in which old diehard, Sir Trevor Parkington, objected to his son marrying Beryl, because she was an ex-chorus girl. However, all ends happily at a Christmas Party in which Beryl rescues Sir Trevor when he falls through the ice while skating, and thus receives his blessing when she marries his son.

Of course, it did not always snow for us, even in those Christmases of long ago, and we often depended on the Christmas issues of our "Nelson Lee's" "Magnets" and "Gems" to set the Yuletide atmosphere, and Edwy Searles Brookes and Charles Hamilton never failed us; they provided all the snow we lacked, maybe all the parties we lacked, and certainly plenty of excitement that would never have come our way otherwise.

However, it is now nearly Yuletide 1965. Some people keep memories potted in their family album, or on a tape-recording, or in a wedding album. For us, our schoolboy memories are "potted" in the back numbers of our favourite magazines and to release them at Christmas is a good thing.

Let us pause in our festivities to remember Herbert Leckenby, who with his friends took steps to insure that such simple pleasures should not be lost.

We can be sure of one thing, that whatever goes on around us, if we can grab an old paper (Xmas Number) and settle down in some odd corner, we won't come far short of a Happy Xmas, and by the way, whatever the weather, you can bet that "the wind will still be roaring, the snowflakes flurrying down, and the countryside will be crystal white in its wintry mantle."

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ODD MAN OUT

By R. J. Godsave

In the earlier numbers of the Old Series of the Nelson Lee Library it was customary - if there was space available - for the Editor to have a chat with his readers under the title of "To My Readers." This chat was mainly used for the purpose of giving a brief outline of the coming week's story, together with the title.

The Editor, in his chat in No. 242 "The Waster's Progress" states - Next week we shall follow the further adventures of the Hon. Douglas Singleton in London. The story will be called "The Schoolboy Gambler" and will be provided with plenty of colour and incident.

The title of the following issue No. 243 was "Singleton in London." Of the "Schoolboy Gambler" mentioned in the Editor's Chat in No. 242 there is no trace.

Another peculiarity of "Singleton in London" is that the coloured cover drawing is repeated in black and white in the usual centre page position. In contrast with the smooth and excellent cover drawings of the rest of this series, No. 243 is a harsh, and rather crude drawing. It would seem to be the work of another artist.

This London episode of the Singleton series which embraced Nos. 243 and 244 was not reprinted in the Monster Library.

It had always been the practice in the Nelson Lee for chapters to bear a heading. Even in this minor detail No. 243 had to depart from the usual by chapter six being without one.

Irregularities such as these must give rise to speculation as to what was happening in the Editorial Office at this particular time. It would be very interesting to know the truth.

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WANTED: Good loose copies or bound volumes containing any of the following: MAGNETS 52; 131 to 149 inclusive; 195; 205; 237; 238; 239; 277; 318; 319; 353; 386 to 400; 417; 422; 435; 752; 753; 762; 763; 773; 809. Most issues between 821 and 890; 900; 921; 924; 925; 936; 938; 940; 942; 943; 946; 951; 965; 967; 988; 996. GEMS: 493; Some issues between 801 and 832. Also Nos. 935; 953; 954; 956; 975; 980; 984; 985; 989; 990; 992; 993; 998. POPULARS: 452; 455; 466; 474. Early Penny Populars: Nos. 12, 13, 45, 47, 58.

ERIC FAYNE, EXCELSIOR HOUSE, GROVE RD., SURBITON, SURREY.

WANTED: GEMS up till No. 1379 then 1452, 1512, 1526, 1531. Write with price required to:-

LOFTS, 56, SHERINGHAM HOUSE, LONDON, N.W.1.

10/- each offered for GEMS 805, 807, 812, 813, 814, 816, 817, 818, 822, 826, 828, 829, 831, 841, 842, 844, 845, 846, 847, 852, 862, 863, 866, 951, 952, 970, 976, 980, 989 and 991. REASONABLE BINDING CONDITION.

AIR MAIL: CHARLES VAN RENEN, BOX 50, UITENHAGE, SOUTH AFRICA.

WANTED: ROBIN HOOD. Any Aldine Robin Hood Library or any copies of Boys' Friend Library dealing with Robin Hood or any unusual material on Robin Hood.

STRATFORD TREVERS, 45a, BELL STREET, REIGATE.

NEWS OF THE CLUBS

AUSTRALIA

A really gala occasion was celebrated on Wednesday, September 15th when members gathered to meet a most welcome visitor from England. Guest of honour was Mr. Ray Leckenby, son of our revered founder and it was with pleasure that the secretary bade him welcome on behalf of all the Australian collectors.

To give a pleasant beginning to the meeting, Don Harkness produced the prints taken of the July meeting at Cahill's Restaurant.

As usual we linked hands with our fellow enthusiasts here and overseas via their letters and a stimulating hour was spent discussing the interesting points touched upon by Bill Gander, Jack Murtagh, Harry Curtis, Arthur Holland and Ron Hodgson.

A copy of the reprint of Magnet No. 1 received by Air Mail, formed another highlight of the evening's entertainment as members debated its impact upon the present and future collecting market. General consensus of opinion was that the production far exceeded all expectations and members expressed the hope that this long awaited event will prove to be the forerunner of similar excellent productions of No. 1 in other fields.

The remainder of the evening was spent talking with Mr. Ray Leckenby who had settled into the hobby circle as though he had known us all for years. So, it was a very relaxed and sincerely interested circle of collectors who recalled their contacts and long friendships with Herbert Leckenby to whom we all owe a debt of great magnitude, a debt which we can never hope to repay for there is no currency which can equal the devotion and generosity Herbert brought to his friendships and also to the hobby. Ray was pleased to give us some intimate glimpses of his father and members enjoyed this colourful travel talk which took them wandering through "The Shambles" and the environs of York wherein the inimitable C.D. was born.

Mr. Leckenby plans to live permanently in Australia, and we were extremely pleased to be able to welcome him to our circle and we trust that the evidence of our enthusiasm and our appreciation of his father's inestimable contribution to our present enjoyment of our hobby will be one more factor to increase his already favourable impression of our country.

B. PATE Hon. Secretary.

MIDLANDMeeting held 28th September, 1965.

Nine members were present and the programme was quite informal, but several members provided items to enliven the proceedings. Ivan Webster, our chairman, presented each member with a copy of Magnet No. 1. This sparked off a discussion as to whether the souvenir copies were exact in every detail with the original. Jack Corbett thought some advertisements were missed out, but any collector could easily check this if he possessed a genuine No. 1.

As Tom Porter was absent Ivan Webster provided the Anniversary number and collector's piece for the month. These were Magnet No. 920 for Sept. 28th, 1935 "Fishy's Hair-raising Stunt," and Gem No. 1 "The Gathering of the Clans" published Feb. 15th, 1908.

The acting secretary provided an unusual quiz, "Who said it?" Extracts of conversation taken from the Hamilton stories were read out and members had to write down the name of the speaker by recognizing the characteristic idiom of his remarks. Ted Davey was the winner and was presented with a Boys' Friend Library - a Rio Kid Story.

Jack Corbett showed the meeting a number of letters he had received in answer to his recent advertisement for Old Boys' Books. While most of them were quite reasonable, these letters showed very clearly that there is a fringe element in our hobby who regard collectors as a set of gullible boobs who will pay anything for books they want.

Jack Corbett went on to give us one of his amusing quizzes based on puns. This really got members laughing. A typical example of the kind of question was: A monk of olden times who lived at Greyfriars was punished for his misdeeds by being boiled in oil. What was wrong with his punishment? Jack's answer was "He should have been fried, as he was a friar."

The evening's entertainment was concluded by a reading from the acting secretary taken from "The Hero of Sparshott," by Frank Richards. The Sparshott Series, a series of little books published at 1/- each immediately after the war have received scant attention from those who delight in the works of Charles Hamilton, but in the opinion of your correspondent they are little masterpieces in their way.

J. F. BELLFIELD

Correspondent.

NORTHERN

Meeting held on 9th October, 1965.

There was a good attendance for our October meeting, and Chairman, Geoffrey Wilde, had a special word of welcome for a new member, Alan Barker, of Keighley.

Formal business having been got out of the way, Gerry Allison gave us the month's correspondence, which included a letter from the Mayfair Press stating that they would publish no more Armada books of Greyfriars stories, as the Fleetway Press were themselves going to publish them in a new form of Magnet. Thus, after many of us have been agitating for years trying to get Greyfriars into print again, two firms start publishing the stories simultaneously and queer each other's pitch! It is indeed a strange state of affairs.

Our artist member, Alf Hanson, sent us one of his drawings - an excellent illustration of a Greyfriars scene, to be offered as a prize, this month's meeting being a special 'quiz' night.

There was also the good news that a classic Blake story, by Pierre Quiroule, is to appear shortly in the S.B.L. - a reprint of one of the many fine yarns that delighted Blake fans in the old days - to be followed by many others, we hope.

Very shortly P. G. Wodehouse celebrates his 84th birthday, and members signed a birthday card to be sent to him.

The first quiz was a Greyfriars one, based on the recently-published 'Greyfriars Prospectus.' Alan Barker, getting off to a good start, won this one. Next was a Rookwood Quiz, Frank Hancock being the winner this time. Then followed an 'odd one out' quiz on various subjects for which several members tied. A break for refreshments, and then the fourth quiz, which was based on the names of Sexton Blake authors, won by Gerry Allison. Finally, poetry took the stage, and we had to supply the missing line in a verse, and also write the last line of a limerick. This proved rather confusing, but the results were hilarious.

Gerry Allison had kept the overall score, and the final winner was Ron Hodgson. The meeting terminated at 9.30 p.m.

F. HANCOCK, Hon. Sec.

Next meeting, Saturday, 13th November.

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MERSEYSIDE

10th October, 1965.

This, the A.G.M., was certainly a splendid meeting. With the exception of Bert Hamblett, unavoidably absent, every member turned up, including Bill Greenwood, who had been unable to get along for some time, and Frank Case, to whom a warm welcome was extended.

The chairman, Bill Windsor, dealt first with the business side, and in this respect everything was found satisfactory. A revision of library charges was approved, and it was also decided to dispense with the usual method of paying subscriptions monthly, in favour of a comprehensive annual subscription. This has the advantage of eliminating unnecessary book-keeping, and the accumulation of arrears entailed by non-attendances.

A varied number of topics were introduced by Bill, including the re-issue of the No. 1 Magnet, which has given such pleasure to all, and thanks were expressed by John Farrell, heartily endorsed by all present, to Frank Unwin on the re-introduction of the "Foghorn." Needless to say, with such a full attendance, there was much discussion taking place, and Jim Walsh, reading some very early meeting reports, gave some of the older members scope to indulge in recollections, amusing and otherwise, of our pioneer days at our first rendezvous, Waterloo House.

Following refreshments came a quiz submitted by Frank Unwin; this was most entertaining inasmuch as it took the form of a test of general knowledge of Merseyside lore, and a complete change from the usual hobby type of contest. The winner, Jack Morgan, was responsible for putting the Lee-ites further ahead; they now lead the Hamiltonians by eight points to four, and the latter will have to pull their socks up over the next few months.

Despite the full programme the meeting ended promptly at nine o'clock; undoubtedly the best get-together for a long time, and we look forward to a repeat on 14th November at the usual time: don't be late!

FRANK CASE

Note: Owing to the resignation of Norman Pragnell, will club secretaries and others please address communications to:
W. Windsor, 33 Sefton Road, Liverpool, 21.

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LONDON

The October meeting was held at the home of Reuben and Mrs. Godsave in Leytonstone. A nice autumn afternoon and a good attendance of a score.

After the usual preliminaries, Roger Jenkins, Hamiltonian librarian gave an excellent report on progress of his section of the club library. The club recorded its appreciation of the generous gifts to the Hamiltonian library by Dr. Davan Neill, the Rev. A. G. Pound and Tom Porter.

In the unavoidable absence of the Nelson Lee librarian, Bob Blythe, that other eminent Leeite, our host, Reuben Godsave, gave the report on the progress of this section of the library. And a very good report it was.

Len Packman gave an account of the progress of the Sexton Blake catalogue. The master copy was finished and the cover drawing amended by Ray Norton. Now it only remains for the duplicating and printing. It will probably be published early in the New year.

Laurie Sutton's quiz was won by Josie Packman. Don Webster was second and Nicholas Bennett was third.

Len Packman's Xmas Titles Quiz was won by Nicholas Bennett followed by Laurie Sutton in second place and Ben Whiter third.

The host conducted an Eliminator quiz and here Len Packman was first. Reuben's crossword caused great amusement and nearly everyone had the correct solution.

The Leeds club Rookwood quiz was won by Don Webster. Brian Doyle read the review of "Prospectus," "Bunter's Last Fling" and "Magnet" number reprint from an issue of "The Times" literary supplement.

A good meeting which was greatly enjoyed by B. A. Staples of Loughton, Essex, who was making his first attendance.

Next meeting at 40, Ellesmere Road, Dollis Hill, London, N.W.10, on Sunday, November 21st. Kindly inform host, Bob Blythe, if intending to be present.

UNCLE BENJAMIN.

"TWIN SERIES." Roger Jenkins magnificent article in

COLLECTORS' DIGEST ANNUAL FOR 1965.

* * * * *

SEXTON BLAKE REVIEWTHE SNIPER (3/6)Richard Williams

Had the picture at the back of the book been used for the front cover it would have been more appropriate, for the illustration of the good-looking girl, whilst giving some idea of what the story is about, strikes a false note. Actually, this is a detective story without a feminine character, apart from an over-plump flower seller, who meets a sticky end at the hands of The Sniper.

Who is The Sniper? I do not think his identity will prove very puzzling to the discerning reader, due to the fact that the author has not introduced any characters capable of drawing suspicion from him. On the face of it, the Sniper could only have been James Everard Neilson. This was apparent to everybody - bar ourselves, of course; for, had Neilson been the killer, there would have been no point to the story whatever, and it would never have been written. Neilson was a quick-tempered, aggressive type, whose demeanour left him wide open to suspicion of the major crime. Blake had been his commanding officer during the war, knew him for a brave soldier, and respected him. It was Blake who had taught him to shoot - to kill. Feeling himself in some measure to blame for Neilson's predicament, he takes up the cudgels on the unfortunate man's behalf.

An old friend - Coutts of the Yard - plays a part; but is a lustreless figure here by comparison to the bristling, dynamic character created by R. M. Graydon way back in 1916. There is something of the old-time flavour about this novel, which will appeal to older readers. Despite the rather too obvious ending, I enjoyed it as a thoroughly well-written and worthy addition to the Library.

Walter Webb

FOR SALE: CAPTAIN, Vols. 1-17 and Vols. 13, 25 and 33 - 5/- each.
BOYS' FRIEND FOOTBALL and SPORTS 42-120 in 4 volumes £6. 6 MARVELS
2/6 each. All plus postage.

WANTED: Diamond and Nugget Libs.

W. H. CLOUGH, 3 FONTHILL GROVE, SALE, CHESHIRE.

ANOTHER LONG COMPLETE STORY OF SLADE. "Mr. Buddle Meets the Magnet." In COLLECTORS' DIGEST ANNUAL FOR 1965.

(Interesting items from the
Editor's letter-bag)

The Postman Called

O. W. WADHAM (New Zealand): Seems a pity that the number and date of the Modern Boy shown on the cover of September C.D. cannot be deciphered. I have a copy of Modern Boy for Sept. 11th 1937, and I should think the one shown would be in the 1930 period, too, for both are priced at twopence. Real action stories were a feature of Modern Boy. There are 5 of them in my copy, plus a back-page picture strip, starring William Boyd, film star. At least Modern Boy had a longer life than the Popular, even if it did follow in the same "scrappy" type of story presentation.

(Modern Boy was always 2d. It ran from 1928 till 1939, eleven years. The Popular started as the Penny Popular in 1912, and, with a short break towards the end of the first world war, ran until 1931 - about 18 years. There was not much similarity between Modern Boy, which was ahead of its time in presentation, and the Pop which was mainly a reprint paper. Our picture showed M.B. No. 222, dated May 1932. - ED.)

JOHN UPTON (Southend-on-Sea); What a joy Collectors' Digest is these days! Better than ever, and worthily reproduced by the Lytho process. More power to its, and your, elbow!

ALAN STEWART (London): I do like "Danny's Diary." Makes me feel quite nostalgic. Well do I remember "The Clutching Hand." I suppose Danny had his dates right re "The Clutching Hand." I realise I must have been 5 years old when I saw it. Perhaps I was old for my years. I was in Edinburgh at the time and I remember my brother and I wended our way each Saturday to the cinema - admission was one penny or - wait for it - an empty jam jar. I can see my mother now, scraping out the jam into some receptacle. (Bunter would have been useful then.) The jar was made of earthenware so probably had some value. Happy days!

(Danny's criticisms of the stories he read long ago are probably immature. But we can be quite confident that the dates he entered for special events and for the pictures he saw are accurate. He certainly saw the start of the "Exploits of Elaine" serial towards the end of October 1915, near London. It is likely, however, that the serial was playing cinemas up and down the country for at least

a year after its initial release date. -ED.)

PATRICK CREIGHAN (Eire): My main interest is in the old comics, but these are harder and harder to come by. There is only one person who is able "to go to town" on an article about comics and that is W. O. G. Lofts. Congratulations on the fine appearance of the Digest during this year. For a magazine of its type, it outclasses many professional journals.

(No doubt Mr. Lofts will be spotlighting the comics again ere long. -ED.)

WALTER WEBB (Birmingham): Your remarks re the dilatory distribution of the S.B.L. are justified. Even in a big city like Birmingham they are difficult to obtain. I am still awaiting the October issues from my newsagent. He tells me he has rung up W. H. Smith's no less than four times already. The attitude of their employees seems to be of the "couldn't care less" variety, all too prevalent in these times, I fear.

(And our own experience. A copy of each October issue arrived on the 12th. Since then, up till the 19th, there has been no sign of the balance of the order. And, up till this date, Bentall's of Kingston, usually able to fill the gap, had received no copies at all. -ED.)

H. CHAPMAN (Barton-on-Humber): E. S. Turner, in "Boys Will Be Boys," states: "The St. Frank's boys were still around in 1939, drilling in uniform and getting ready for a smack at Hitler." Can any reader throw light on this? I am of the opinion that the last new St. Frank's story was published about 1935, and I do not remember any mention of Hitler or the coming war. Can some reader fortunate enough to possess the stories write an article on the series featuring Eileen Dare, Nelson Lee's lady assistant?

J. LENNARD (Winsford): It would be an empty world for we over-60's if there were no C.D.

"AN APPRECIATION OF JOHN WHEWAY" by Frank Vernon Lay.

Don't miss it in COLLECTORS' DIGEST ANNUAL FOR 1965.

THESE STORIES STAND OUT

By S. Gordon Swan

* * * * *

Some splendid stories appeared in the trio of boys' papers — The Boys' Friend, The Herald and the Realm — in the early part of the century. Three of the most memorable ran as serials in the Boys' Realm during 1904-5 and are still worth reading in this day and age.

The first of these is "Not Guilty," by Henry St. John. This is a prison story, an escape story and a murder mystery all in one. There must be enough material in it to furnish the substance of two or three modern thrillers, and the suspense is maintained to the end, when the real murderer is revealed. Well-written, as might be expected from the author, it seems to be more of adult than juvenile appeal, a remark that could be applied to several alleged boys' stories of this period.

Second on the list is "A Lancashire Lad," and the rather trite title is no indication of the calibre of the story. David Goodwin wrote it, and although my own preference is for his sea stories, I think this particular yarn stands out as his finest effort. It deals with a mysterious crook known as the Spider who is out to wreak havoc and destruction in a mill town. There is nothing old-fashioned in the style, which carries the story on at a rapid pace from incident to incident. What lends an extra thrill to the narrative is that the criminal has an unsuspected dual identity, a feature which must have been a novelty in those days of rather obvious villains. Readers of a later generation versed in the ingenuities of Edgar Wallace and Agatha Christie would no doubt penetrate this deception before the story ends, but at the time it must have been something of an innovation.

In passing, was it coincidence that, thirty years later, Lester Bidston wrote a Sexton Blake yarn, "The Mill of Fear," in which a crook called the Spider was sabotaging cotton mills?

The third and, perhaps, the most remarkable of these three stories is "A Boy's Cross Roads," which purports to describe the boyhood of Charles Peace. It seems to be purely fictional, as the early scenes are laid in Hampshire, whereas from other sources one gathers that Peace spent his formative years in the North of England. However, I am open to correction on this point. Nevertheless, fact

or fiction, this is a fascinating and powerful story, and one in which the interest never flags from start to finish. The inventive faculty of the author is something to arouse admiration in that the narrative holds a sustained level throughout. There are no falterings of the pen, no dull interludes, and this is noteworthy in a story that provides about nine hours reading!

From the early instalments the tale appears to be by an anonymous writer, but to later chapters the name of Ernest Treetin is appended, and one is glad that the authorship did not remain in obscurity.

Each of these stories is, in its way, a tour-de-force, and I count it as a privilege that, in obtaining some old volumes of the Boys' Realm, I have been enabled to read the work of three authors who are no longer with us but whose literary creations remain to give lustre to their names.

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URGENTLY WANTED: Magnets Nos. 773 and 850. Gem 493. £1 each offered for good copies, or liberal exchanges.

ERIC FAYNE, EXCELSIOR HOUSE, GROVE ROAD, SURBITON.

WANTED: Modern Boys, Dreadnoughts, Girls Crystals, School Friends (pre-war). Details to:-

K. ELLIOTT, 20 ST. JAMES STREET, MOONEE PONDS, VICTORIA, AUSTRALIA.

EXCHANGE

GEMS. 1230, 1357, 1358, 1359, 1403, 1515, 1516, 1518, 1521.

MAGNETS 356, 638, 643, 649, 890, 918, 1034, 1298, 1546. Six 'Red' (minus covers).

S.O.L. 193, 313, 331, 332, 334, 337, 340, 342, 345, 394.

WANTED URGENTLY: DIXON HAWKE LIBS.

McMAHON, 54, HOZIER CRES., TANNOCHSIDE, UDDINGSTON

URGENTLY WANTED: Magnet No. 52. £2 offered for good copy.

ERIC FAYNE, EXCELSIOR HOUSE, GROVE ROAD, SURBITON.

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