

STORY PAPER
COLLECTORS' DIGEST

VOL. 27 N° 322

OCTOBER 1973



15p

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Autumn is a good season of the year for renewing your acquaintance with Greyfriars, Rookwood, and St. Jim's, and if you can't manage to attend the meetings of the London Club then the postal service is specially tailored to meet your requirements.

In these inflationary days it is pleasant to record that there is one item, at least, that is cheaper than it was a year ago, and that is the Hamiltonian Library's postal service. By changing from registered post to Compensation Fee post, we have reduced the price of a parcel of two dozen Magnets to 61p.

If you do not have a copy of our green catalogue issued a few years ago, there are still a few left. Just send me 10p in stamps. I shall be happy to answer any queries.

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STORY PAPER COLLECTORS' DIGEST

STORY PAPER COLLECTOR*

Founded in 1941 by
W. H. GANDER

COLLECTORS' DIGEST

Founded in 1946 by
HERBERT LECKENBY

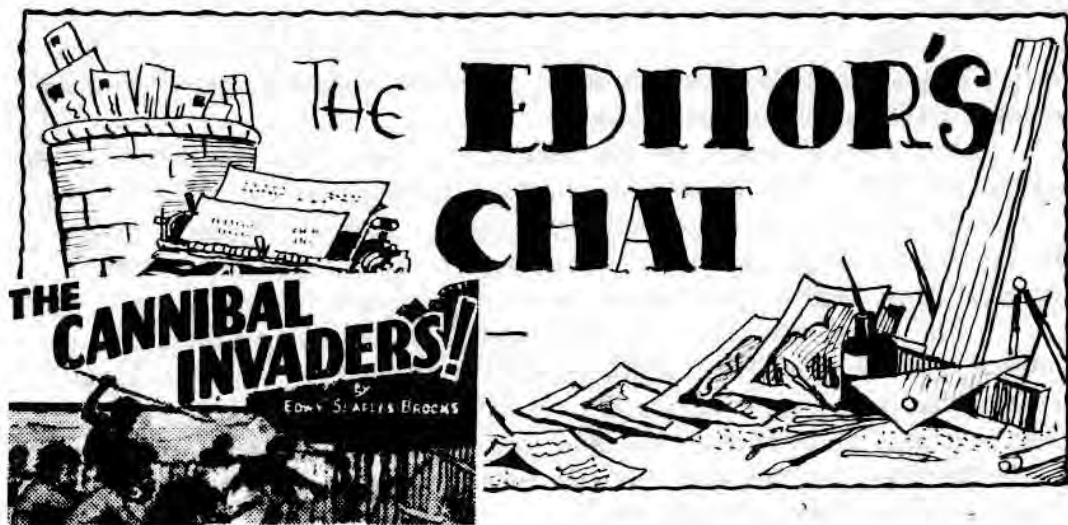
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A MATTER OF COLOUR

Last month, one of our reviewers, Mr. Deryck Harvey, looking at a new book on the market, observed that the author of the book quoted from Charles Hamilton's autobiography, and found nothing more

controversial than that Hurree Singh was introduced to "rid the youthful mind of colour prejudice."

I imagine that Mr. Harvey took a dim view of such a claim, and so do I. If Hamilton actually made the claim in his autobiography, I fancy he was writing with tongue in cheek. There was no prejudice against people of colour in this country when Hurree Singh was created, or for long after.

There were small pockets of prejudice from time to time. Religion was one subject of prejudice, and in 1915 there was a rather ugly patch here and there of feeling against people with German-sounding names. But colour prejudice, among the rank and file, was surely almost unknown in the country before 1945. In fact, most people in those days went out of their way to be kindly and polite to "gentlemen of colour." This was due to the novelty. It was when the novelty disappeared that prejudice reared its ugly head.

Usually, in the old stories, the very dark were presented in a very pleasant light, but not because the authors wished to influence their readers on behalf of coloured folk,

Pete, in the Jack, Sam and Pete yarns; Coosha in the Pollie Green tales; Pompom, Mlle. Julie's black attendant in the Sexton Blake novels; and Hurree Singh were not created to combat a colour prejudice which did not exist. They were introduced simply as novelties in the story-writers' craft, and for their potentials as character studies.

The old stories are, to some extent, historical documents, reflecting social conditions of the periods in which they were published, even though the pictures they offer are at times exaggerated for the sake of drama or comedy. Reading now some of those tales of as late as the thirties, we inevitably get the impression that we are reading of a world which is gone beyond recall.

But I believe that some of us expect too much when we claim to see the author's own social comment in the tales. Authors, of course, occasionally allowed a personal opinion to show, and Hamilton certainly popped in a delicious piece of propaganda now and then; but, mainly, what we often like to regard as social comment was merely an author using existing circumstances, and sometimes exaggerating them, as grist for his own mill - a mill which had to produce hundreds of

thousands of words every year if he was to eat cake with his bread and jam.

THE 1973 ANNUAL

Charles Hamilton told me that, during the years of the Hitler war, he used his spare time in writing stories of "Jack of All Trades," and that he had something between two and three hundred "Jack" stories stacked in the drawers in his study. Clearly, he believed then that he had finished with Harry Wharton and Tom Merry. Only a small handful of the Jack tales ever saw print, those which were printed seemed to have been selected without discrimination by the author, and what happened to the rest of them is a matter of conjecture. At any rate, Jack did not win much popularity.

In the new Annual, Harold Truscott makes a fascinating examination of the few Jack tales which were published, sums up the characterisation the tales contain, and arrives at some intriguing conclusions.

Josie Packman is probably the greatest living expert on Sexton Blake lore. Readers often bemoan the fact that we do not persuade her to write articles for us more frequently. Therefore we are delighted to announce that a splendid article in the Annual comes from her pen. In great style she analyses the character and career of that sinister (but much loved) old scamp, Dr. Huxton Rymer, the creation of G. H. Teed.

J. Randolph Cox, who has a keen affection for the old English papers, tells us, in charming fashion, of what one American - himself - thinks of Sexton Blake. His title tells its own tale: "My Friend, Sexton Blake."

Roger Jenkins, who is our top ace on Greyfriars, and who is always so immensely readable, contributes what I, personally, consider one of his finest articles. He looks at Mark Linley, the Lancashire lad, and Mr. Jenkins's findings will provide food for thought for many years to come.

Mary Cadogan, whose offerings need no blurb to make the reader anxious to sample them, is at her most amusing and informative in an article, tantalisingly entitled "Charles Hamilton and Women's Lib." John Geal looks at the rivalry between the Amalgamated Press and the

Thomson Papers in their fight to domineer the boys' paper market between 1919 and 1940. An article which is as valuable as it is entrancing.

R. J. Godsave, Lee expert supreme, looks at some early Christmas Settings of the Nelson Lee Library. J. F. Bellfield considers "The Brain Wave of Bunter Court," in a gorgeous item which will tickle the memory buds.

Next month I hope to find the space to tell you of some more of the treats in store for you in Collectors' Digest Annual for 1973. Have you ordered your copy yet? Mid-December isn't so far away, is it?

PRODUCED BY MACK SENNETT

Only a State industry could manage to turn last year's profit into this year's loss of £60,000,000. (I may not have the figures right, but what's a million between friends, these days?) With the help of our diddling decimals, they have been able now to land us with a big increase in postal charges. To add to the fun, in the local post-office today I was told that they had not a 3½p or a ½p stamp in the place. As good as a Keystone Comedy!

THE EDITOR

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DANNY'S DIARY

OCTOBER 1923

Although it is now October, Tom Merry & Co. are still on their summer holiday on the Thames in the Gem, and, in the month's opening story, there were "Ructions on the River" when the floating chums met up with Figgins & Co. of the New House. Then, in the tale to wind up the series, "Just Like Gussy," Gussy goes on his dignity and decides to go home when a boating old gentleman is made to think that Gussy is potty. But all comes well, and the chums carry on with their holiday. A mighty fine series, thank you.

Then followed two stories about Talbot and his old friends. John Rivers is spending a holiday near St. Jim's, and the sinister figure

of Jim Dawlish is in the background. Talbot and Marie Rivers set out to find John Rivers and to unravel the plot and the reason he vanished. Not so bad, if you like that sort of thing. The titles were "The Spectre of the Past" and "The Professor's Peril."

This month there is another really magnificent tale of Granite Grant and Mlle. Julie in the Sexton Blake Library. It is entitled "The Lost Expedition," and much of the plot takes place in British Guiana. Grand reading for the longer evenings.

Germany is suffering from a thing named Inflation. It must be heavy work going shopping in Berlin, for there are 19 thousand million marks to the pound nowadays.

But, over here, the price of a large loaf has gone down from 9d. to 8d.

First tale in the Magnet this month was "Condemned by the School." It brings in a chap named Snaith who was once expelled from Greyfriars, and, through him, Bolsover becomes captain of the Remove and Harry Wharton is expelled. But it all works out at the finish.

Then came "Disgraced by his Father." Russell has always been fairly poor, but Mr. Russell turns up at the school in a big car and looking wealthy. The fellows ask where the money has come from, and eventually Mr. Russell is arrested, much to his son's dismay. There is a hint of treason, and Sexton Blake plays a part in the tale. But it's rather heavy-going, I found. Then the start of what promises to be a good new series (to celebrate the start of a new football competition. They are using the covers of the Magnet to advertise the competition, which I think is a shame.) "Mick the Outcast" is a gipsy boy who rescues Sir Hilton Popper from a watery end. Sir Hilton promises the gipsy a reward - and Mick asks to go to Greyfriars.

Next "The Gipsy Schoolboy," with Mick at Greyfriars. A villainous gipsy tries to get Mick away from Greyfriars, but unsuccessfully so far. The villainous gipsy is Barendro - a name I have come across before in the Greyfriars stories. And the fellows are struck by the fact that Mick, the new boy, is very much like Aubrey Angel of the Fourth. It makes Angel hate Mick. Lovely tales.

There have been over a thousand cases of smallpox in the country in three months, so I have been vaccinated. I wear a red band

round my arm to keep people off, but it seems to make them bump into me all the more.

There have been terrific gales off and on during the month, and in the middle of the month it rained solidly for sixteen hours in London. Soon they will be asking us to save water.

The Pall Mall Gazette, after running for sixty years, has been amalgamated with the Evening Standard.

In the Nelson Lee Library, lent to me by a chap at school, the bullying new boy, Buster Boots, forces himself into the Captaincy, and knocks out Nipper in a boxing context. The story is "The Battle for the Captaincy." Next tale was "A Rod of Iron," in which Boots set himself up as a Dictator in the Remove. His chums call themselves the Faithful Five. But Nipper and his friends are not yet defeated, as we see in the next tale "The Despot of the Remove" or "The Ku Klux Klan at St. Frank's."

Final of the month and of the series is "The Die Hards of the Remove" in which St. Frank's, with a civil war going on in the school, sees Nipper win the day over the bumptious John Busterfield Boots. All exciting, and very original stories. I expect that Boots will make another effort to get his own way.

The Nelson Lee is also running a serial entitled "The Missing Heir" which my friend says appeared long ago in the Boys' Friend, he thinks. It's a good serial, though I don't much like serials.

The Karsino, at Hampton Court, which was set up by Fred Karno as a night club, has gone broke, and is up for sale. And poor Mr. Karno, who discovered Charlie Chaplin, is in trouble.

I had a Union Jack which contained "The Case of the Golden Pebble." This is rather an odd tale, for it tells of the early days of Mlle. Yvonne in Australia, and how she became to be known as Yvonne the Adventuress. It goes back to the time when Yvonne first found out that Sexton Blake was her ideal man. I wonder if this is an old story brought out again.

This was followed by "The Living Mask," a very good tale about Zenith the Albino.

At the pictures we have seen Richard Barthelmess and Dorothy Gish in "Fury"; Wesley Barry in "Rags to Riches"; Charles Ray in

"The Girl I Loved"; Betty Compson in "To Have and To Hold"; and Wallace Reid and Bebe Daniels in "Nice People", the story of the Jazz life that some silly people lead in this modern world. In some towns the cinemas have double-feature programmes, but I prefer the system in our town cinemas with one big picture plus a serial, a comedy, and the News.

Rookwood in Canada, in the Boy's Friend - tip-top as usual. In "Trouble on the Ranch", a theatrical company brought Shakespeare's plays to the little town of Windy River. (Fancy cowhands liking Hamlet.) Pete Peters, the ranch boss, horsewhips Orlando Fitzroy, the star, and, in revenge, Orlando turns up at the ranch dressed as a lady and pretending to be Mrs. Peters. And poor Pete a bachelor.

Then a grand 3-story series concerning a stolen diamond worth a hundred-thousand dollars. One of the thieves conceals it by making a horse, Black Prince, swallow it. And then the thieves, the mounties, and Jimmy Silver & Co., all set off in search of the horse with the rich tummy. But, in the end, the horse escapes. I'm off to Canada to search for the horse. I don't want the diamond, but I'd love the horse. The stories were "The Hundred Thousand Dollar Trail," "Trailing the Horse Thief," and "The Hunting of Black Prince."

There has just started in the Boys' Friend a series of tales of St. Katie's by Michael Poole. I think these are new stories, though they might be the ones which ran in the Gem a year or two ago.

* * * * *

J. R. R. TOLKIEN

Never since that Christmas Season when the death of Charles Hamilton was announced, have I been so saddened, when, returning from the happy joint meeting of the London and Cambridge Clubs, I switched on the wireless and heard the news of the death of John Ronald Ruell Tolkien.

There was a resemblance between both these writers. Each lived to a ripe age, and, each, in his own way, made his name primarily with a great fantasy.

Frank Richards schools were like no real public schools, but he made them a world of their own, peopled with finely-drawn characters.

Like Frank Richards, Tolkien who wrote magnificent fantasy, creating a whole new world of his own, peopled with Habbets, Erts, Dwarfs, Elves, Wizards, Trolls and Orcs.

Slow at first to catch on, the paperback edition is now selling a million copies a year in the U. S. A. and in England.

Just as Richards created two great characters in Harry Wharton and Billy Bunter, so did Tolkien in Frodo and Gundolf.

We can ill spare writers of the calibre of Hamilton and Tolkien.

W. THURBON

* * * * *

A LETTER FROM ST. FRANK'S

by Jim Cook

Many and varied were the devastating changes that occurred at St. Frank's from time to time, but an incident in the school's history is still talked about today and, no doubt, will be a subject for discussion in the years to come.

New headmasters, new ideas seemed to be the formula for changes and each alteration in the method set by Dr. Malcolm Stafford created reasons for rebellion or other ways to return to the status quo.

During a temporary absence of Dr. Stafford, a Dr. Morrison Nicholls is appointed to rule over the destinies of the boys at St. Frank's and the new head arrives with a belief that he was sent with a divine mission to break all established rules of conduct by urging the boys to sneak.

His convictions were announced in Big Hall.

He refers to the changes as minor changes. That he is there to control, not to destroy. Moulding of character being of the utmost importance. Many ideas assimilated by the boys between the ages of twelve and twenty are false - many positively harmful. And so on.

His main point in what the boys called a lecture was the 'crime of sneaking,' and Dr. Nicholls referred it to a most insidious idea rife in all Public Schools.

Because a boy informs regarding the misdemeanours of his school-fellows he is labelled a sneak. His is persecuted. Ostracised.

Such was the atmosphere Dr. Nicholls created on his being appointed headmaster of St. Frank's.

That he was determined to abolish the old order and promote sneaking in order the culprits were justifiably punished was evident in the days that followed.

Acting in full agreement with the St. Frank's Governors, the new Head set himself up to 'put things right' as many another has done, only to see his theories thin out to fantasies.

His mistake lay in the fact that he based his arguments upon a totally wrong assumption.

He took it for granted that all offenders against the school rules got off scot free, unless they were caught red-handed by a master.

The school's very decency kept it in order. The majority of the fellows always backed the side of law and order. "From now onwards, matters are to be different" emphasised Dr. Nicholls. "As I have told you, this new regime cannot be a success unless you all agree to help me. If any of you are persecuted, report to your own masters, or to me. If you know of breaches of the regulations, it is your duty to report them. You will not be sneaking. You will be helping to maintain law and order."

Well, this new code appealed to the cads and to those who can see a little further than the next it will be obvious the theory didn't work.

But this one change brought about others during the appointment of Dr. Morrison Nicholls.

It afforded an opportunity for Gore-Pearce to become skipper of the Remove. It gave this upstart son of a parvenu father his one ambition. To become captain of the Remove. And by currying favour with the new head and creating a Reform Party a power in the Remove is the result.

And in the days to follow Gore-Pearce passes from triumph to triumph. His dreams become possibilities - he can call himself boss of the Remove.

I am not quite sure if one can put a label on the character of Claude Gore-Pearce. His type are not classified. He has so many bad

traits that even Bernard Forrest avoids his company,

But Claude has money. His only real possession for buying the company of his doubtful friends.

Nipper, who has chronicled the history of St. Frank's, never really managed to probe the depths of Gore-Pearce villainy. It has often been remarked that those on the outside see more than those inside. Readers of the St. Frank's saga may readily assess a character much better than the chronicler.

Since the world will always have its share of villains a place will always be found for Claude.

The one obvious reaction to the new head's New Order at St. Frank's was taking advantage of his offer to listen to the sneaks reporting trifles, although he never bargained for so many trifling incidents.

He was inundated with minor grievances and infantile acts of some of the juniors.

But it is a time for Gore-Pearce to come out of his shell. By a trick he positions Nipper to a point where Gore-Pearce is voted captain of the Remove. And the crafty Gore-Pearce almost contrives to get Nipper sacked.

Reading this part of St. Frank's history one rainy afternoon I felt I was looking into the future when all sorts of theories such as those attempted by Dr. Morrison Nicholls might be thrust on an unsuspecting world in the interests of the do-gooders.

Looking at these St. Frank's fellows and their individual characters there is nothing to place them in a separate cosmos from the world outside St. Frank's. For almost with certainty one could foretell the future of many of them.

Many of the events that have occurred at the old school have sharpened in greater detail the character of many of the boys; both junior and senior. Latent qualities, eccentricities and other features that go to make up an individual, sometimes are revealed during moments of stress or excitement.

The point has now been reached where it is not difficult to assess the distance most of these St. Frank's boys are to go and their ultimate destiny.

I have made a list which I think will show the positions in life of many St. Frank's College boys. It is an attempt to portray the boys when they have left St. Frank's; their various positions in life and a mixture of success and failure.

It will not be easy for those of you even though you are very familiar with the history of St. Frank's, should you be thinking of compiling a similar list. But it would be interesting if your list compared favourably with that of my own.

You will have noticed how Handforth changed from a comic relief in the old days to rather a more serious thinker later on, although he still provides light entertainment. So don't go listing Handy as a future clown.

CONFESSION OF A LEEITE

by R. J. Godsave

Since the Old Series of the Nelson Lee Library spanned a period of over ten years, it could be said that many readers during that period, were literally brought up with this series.

If they were of a conservative nature like myself, then the New Series with its format and style must have, to a certain extent, resented this change.

Over the years I have automatically borrowed the Old Series from the Club library, having borrowed few of the New Series. Perhaps I was unlucky in my selection of Lees of the Second New Series which had shortened St. Frank's stories which gave Brooks little chance to write a decent story.

Recently, I borrowed the Indian series - the Ameer of Rishnir - and the Jimmy Potts Bootboy series. I found that these two series were well up to the standard of the Old Series. Also I thought the cover drawings were extremely good and modernised.

The Indian series was full of thrills with Brooks at his best. I found the Jimmy Potts series fascinating from the unusual plot point of view, and the introduction of Vivian Travers.

Here is a character who makes an impact from the first moment, he being unlike any at St. Frank's. A mixture of good and not so good, Travers could be said to be a mixture of Willy Handforth, William Napoleon Brown and the Fullwood that was.

Owing to prejudice I find that I have denied myself the pleasure of reading the later Lees over the years.

The moral that can be drawn from this confession is that prejudice should not be allowed to dominate one's judgment.

* * * * *

BLAKIANA

Conducted by

JOSIE PACKMAN

"SEXTON BLAKE - VINTAGE - E. S. BROOKS" by Raymond Cure

It is an unpleasant experience to arrive home unexpectedly to find your mansion-like dwelling dark and foreboding, and empty!

It is still more an unpleasant experience to find three men digging a grave (by the light of a storm-lamp - and by the weak silvery rays of the moon peeping through a cloudbank) in your grounds. Furthermore it is an exceedingly unpleasant experience to have a bullet put through your temple. Yet all this was the experience of Sir James Charteris.

Now your interest is awakened perhaps you would like to know more about this unfortunate gentleman. Let me draw your attention to the story entitled Quivering Steel in Union Jack No. 1384, dated 26 April, 1930 (obtainable on loan from Josie Packman) and so earn your undying gratitude.

If you are not familiar with the works of Edwy Searles Brooks, apart from his St. Frank's stories, then let me explain that his custom was to catch your interest in the first chapter. Read the first chapter of any Sexton Blake tales, by Mr. Brooks, and I am sure you will stay with them to the end. The fate of the unfortunate Sir James Charteris is such an opening.

Not only authors, but showmen, trade on the opening. A showman friend of mine back in 1929, ran a cheap show with two ladies posing in tights, depicting about twelve tableaux, entrance fee 3d. To attract the crowd he dressed in a long flowing cloak, blew a whistle and made hypnotic passes before the eyes of one of the ladies while standing on a platform in front of his tent. Invariably the crowd gathered. He would then stop blowing his whistle and say "You all know a little nonsense on the outside is only to draw attention to what is in the inside."

The customers would then stream in. I used to marvel at the simplicity of it all.

The picture houses used the same gimmick with their short excerpts from the coming week's film, or take TV, how often I have watched the short excerpts from the week-end film, delivered as tasters only to be disappointed as the excerpts or trailers have been the most interesting part of the film or not even shown. Now Edwy Searles Brooks from the first chapter of any of his stories promises you something good and when you put your book down you know he had redeemed his promise. If his first chapter holds your interest you will be with him to the last chapter. Those of us who spent our youthful days with the boys of St. Frank's and also enjoyed a Brooks Sexton Blake story, had the best of both worlds. If my readers have wondered what their favourite school characters would be like as adults they have only to secure any Union Jack or Sexton Blake Library containing an E. S. Brooks tale or for that matter a Berkeley Gray or Victor Gunn tale, and often some of the characteristics of the St. Frank's boys come shining through the much older characters.

"Quivering Steel" co-stars with Sexton Blake one - Eustace Cavendish and behold we have an adult Archie Glenthorpe.

The traits of Nipper, Handforth and some of the other boys, including the bad lads, all come shining through in later detective and adventure stories.

Now I don't think the St. Jim's and Greyfriars fans have the same privilege. However, if you are a Sexton Blake fan and have enjoyed Blake as presented by Anthony Skene or Gwyn Evans or Gilbert Chester, why not try Sexton Blake - Edwy Searles Brooks vintage?

TOLD BY THE CHARACTERS

by S. Gordon Swan

Throughout the annals of the Sexton Blake Saga the majority of the stories have been written in the third person, which is, I suppose, the most common form of narrative. By this means the reader is enabled to follow the adventures of different sets of characters operating in various places at the same time.

But during the period of the Great War another method was

adopted by a number of authors. As far as I can trace, the medium of the first person was introduced at that time by the old-timer, W. Murray Graydon, and not by some newcomer to the scene. This happened in a story entitled "Their Great Adventure," which was published in No. 17 of the First Series of the Sexton Blake Library.

In this story the prologue was written in the third person, but the rest of the tale was presented in the words of Sexton Blake and Tinker alternately. Incidentally, this yarn marked the debut of the master-crook, Basil Wicketshaw.

Following in the footsteps of Murray Graydon, Andrew Murray wrote a number of episodes, generally featuring his creations, the Hon. John Lawless, Count Ivor Carlac and Professor Kew. Portions of these stories were written by Sexton Blake, Tinker and Lawless, and sometimes by another character in the tale. I can recollect one story, "The Burmese Dagger," that was written entirely in the words of Trouble Nantucket, the American detective.

Then, of course, there were numerous stories in the Union Jack by E. S. Brooks, many of them introducing Nelson Lee and Nipper. Sometimes these were narrated by Sexton Blake, sometimes by Tinker. Some were related by means of letters from Tinker to Nipper and vice versa. This latter was a rather cumbersome style which had certain disadvantages. Tinker would write a letter to Nipper recounting details of a case; in the next chapter Nipper would arrive on the scene before he had received Tinker's letter. Altogether this correspondence form of narrative was not too successful.

Gradually the first person method dropped out until Anthony Skene resuscitated it in the late 'twenties in a story called "The Broken Melody." (U. J. 1321.) This was narrated throughout by Sexton Blake. Again this method was abandoned, and I don't think it was revived until the advent of the "New Look" Blake, when several books were written in this manner.

Actually, one has to go back a long way in time to find what I believe to be the initial story of Sexton Blake, written in the first person. This appeared in $\frac{1}{2}$ d. U. J. No. 69, the publication date being the 15th of August, 1895. On the title page is the following:

NALDA THE NIHILIST; or SEXTON BLAKE IN RUSSIA
A story told in the Great Detective's Own Words

No author's name is attached, but I have an idea that this story is attributed to Herbert Maxwell. At this time Blake had not met Tinker and had no Mrs. Bardell to minister to his comforts. Apparently he "enjoyed" the services of a maidservant, as witness this extract:

"If you please, sir, there is a young lady below who wishes to see you at once on the most important business."

"A young lady?" I replied to the young person who smuggles away the choicest of my cigars to give to her "young man," who breaks my valuable bits of old Chelsea and maligns the cat, who condescends to receive my Christmas-boxes, in season and out of season, and who is supposed to attend to my needs and generally wait upon me - who is supposed to do so, but doesn't.

Another oddity about this tale lies in the illustration, which portrays Blake with a moustache, although the text does not indicate that he is in disguise.

To some people I have met, for reasons which I cannot fathom, the first person narrative is anathema, which seems a pity as it precludes enjoyment of such classics of adventure as "Treasure Island," "The 39 Steps" and others too numerous to mention. Its introduction into the Sexton Blake Saga provided that variety which is said to be the spice of life.

THE GREAT DISCOVERY

S--ixty five long years ago -
E--xcuse some sentimental woe -
X--marks the spot within my heart
T--hat brought a little boy such joy
O--ne ne'er forgotten Winter night,
N--ineteen hundred and, dear me, eight ...

B--eheld I, 'neath a stall's bright flare,
* L--arge piles of grubby UNION JACKS,
A--nd, straight into my eyes did stare
K--ing of our boyhood hero 'tects ...
E--heu fugaces!

* (Probably half a dozen! How memory magnifies things seen in childhood ... sometime ago I took my wife to what I recalled as wild spacious moorland where I had played nearly seventy years ago. It was there all right -- a patch of heather of about one hundred square feet. Did she laugh!... But I suddenly felt just a little sad.)

IN MEMORIAM

H--e lies forgotten, all but unknown,
A man whose genius coined a NAME,
R--ound the hearth a symbol grown,
R--ound the world eternal fame;
Y--oung and old bestow the crown.

B--LAKE!..The magic of its spell
L--ives on and on and ever on ..
Y--et sounds its ancient call,
T--hough sadly changed the Man.
H--eigh ho!.... But, aren't we all!

* * * * *

SOME HAMILTON SLIPS

by H. Truscott

Opinions have varied for years as to the merits of this or that MAGNET or GEM series, and mostly these opinions, interesting though they are, mean very little except that they present a particular person's predilection. Even with such things as the post-war Bunter books, very little that can be called a valid critical objection, as distinct from a personal opinion or preference, has been urged against them. Some stories here and there in the total Greyfriars or St. Jim's sagas are judged, probably rightly, to be weaker than others, some even rarer ones to be really far-fetched (I write, of course, of genuine Hamilton stories). But, leaving pure matters of opinion aside, it is very rare indeed that one finds Hamilton really slipping in a story, certainly in his maturity. I am not referring here to tiny factual mistakes, which do occur sometimes, but which have no effect on the story as such. There is one in the splendid soccer-rugby match in the story of the RIVAL EDITORS, where it is stated that at half time the Remove had five goals, and that in the second half they scored goal after goal, yet still at the end of the match they had only six goals. This kind of

slip shouldn't worry anybody. What I have in mind is the kind of miscalculation that does affect the balance of a story.

For many years I had, as the only two MAGNETS from my original collection which survived the war demands for paper, two of the Tracy series. One of these two, SAVED BY HIS ENEMY, No. 1605, had suggested certain inequalities. One is that it seems to me to be a mistake on Hamilton's part to involve Wharton in opposition to Mr. Quelch to the extent of almost beginning a third Wharton the Rebel story, when he already has Tracy in a strenuous fight with his Form-master. Not only does the one get in the way of the other, but it makes too much of the same sort of thing. Even the fact that it is from the height of the Wharton-Quelch opposition that Tracy's regeneration begins does not save it. It seems to be one of Hamilton's rare miscalculations.

Another is that, although the other four of the Famous Five knew not only that Wharton had begun to write the 500 lines awarded him for not giving Tracy's name to Mr. Quelch, but that he had written over 450 of them when they returned to the study, not one of them attempted to speak up when Mr. Quelch virtually accused Wharton of lying, in maintaining that he had written the lines. One might also wonder why Wharton did not spot this and take them to task for it, especially considering the mood Mr. Quelch left him in.

Finally, Mr. Quelch, for a man as keen and perceptive as he is usually, is peculiarly gullible in this story. When he finds Wharton's cap on the ground, and therefore believes that Wharton has been throwing turfs at him in the dusky quad, he had, if he troubled to think, a precedent to which to think back: the purple ink on Wharton's fingers in No. 1602, TRICKY TRACY - put on Wharton's pen so that the Form-captain's fingers alone would show this stain. Quelch knows that Tracy involved Wharton in that instance - why does he not think of the possibility of such trickery when Wharton tells him he does not know the point of Mr. Quelch's having his cap? It is no answer to say that Mr. Quelch is angry. He is also supposed to be just, and usually is, and he knows Wharton; with his past experience, and knowing that Wharton is not a liar, he should surely have been wary, at least; instead, he is, once more, grimly positive, and once more he is wrong.

He knows also how tricky Tracy can be by the number of times

the latter has attempted, successfully, to display his Form-master as mad to the rest of the school.

There are so many fine things in this series, but points like these spoil it - for me, at least. And they were not necessary. Hamilton, with his invention, could have done without any of them, and at the same time have made the story tauter and the more interesting because of it.

* * * * *

LET'S BE CONTROVERSIAL

No. 185. GOLD IN THEM THAR HILLS!

Talent will out. The gifted will rise to the top. Nevertheless, there is little doubt that luck does play its part in making a star in any walk of life.

One wonders whether Charles Hamilton would ever have become famous, had he not, by some stroke of fortune which may have come from his own or somebody else's initiative, struck on the formula of the Peter Pan schoolboys with his series of St. Jim's in the paper named Pluck.

We know that he started as a writer of tales of adventure. Whether those early tales of adventure were good I cannot say, for, though I possess some of them, I have never been moved to read them. So far as I know, and it is only a guess, his first move in the direction of the Wild West came in the early blue Gem, when Tom Merry, and a rather oddly-assorted little band of friends, went to North America. They were strikingly good yarns of their type, but they only formed a trailer of what was to come.

Hamilton wrote three main series of Westerns:-

1. The Cedar Creek stories which ran for four years, from 1917 till 1921, with the genuine Martin Clifford writing all but one of them.
2. The series of the Rookwood Fistical Four in the West of Canada, which ran for the best part of a year - so long that readers wondered whether Rookwood had been abandoned for ever.
3. The stories of the Rio Kid.

Without any question, the Rio Kid tales were the best Western adventures which Hamilton wrote. These were set in the States, and the movements of the Kid were against a geographically accurate kaleidoscope. In addition, the atmosphere of the tales was utterly convincing, and the musical prose of the stories of the first three years was a delight. The prose became harsher towards the end of the Kid's life in the Popular, but the quality was high throughout.

Without any question, too, the Cedar Creek tales were the most popular. Plenty of readers, no doubt, fondly imagined that they were reading of the school life of their favourite author, and that helped. But, in their own right, the tales were delightful, and it seems likely that they held their popularity right till the end. If so, the question might feasibly be asked, why did they stop when they did? Probably the answer is that Hamilton had decided, or had been persuaded, to give more attention once again to St. Jim's and, later on, to Greyfriars.

Whether the background of Cedar Creek was authentic is problematical. Certainly, with the advent of Hillcrest, the private school, the tales became more like St. Jim's transferred to a theatrical western backdrop. Most important, the tales were all well-written and delighted the readers. They were convincing for the simple reason that readers were easy to convince.

The "Windy River" stories concerning the Rookwood chums were so good that some readers may have been sorry when they came to a rather abrupt end, and the Fistical Four returned to Rookwood.

In addition to these three main series of Westerns, Hamilton strayed on a few other occasions into the West for brief periods which it is reasonable to believe he enjoyed.

The Dirk Power series of 1920 was saved from mediocrity by a couple of exceedingly well-written tales set in the Canadian North-West. In 1927, the Gem offered an 8-story series in which Tom Merry and Co. went to Canada as the guests of Wildrake. It was a series which had its moments, even though it never seems to have quite rung the bell. Perhaps it is little known owing to the fact that it appeared among a glut of sub tales which had caused the old faithfuls among readers to be less than faithful.

Few people ever speak very highly of the Magnet's Texas series

of 1938. Characterisation seemed harsh, and the schoolboys unbelievable in their western setting. The Rio Kid was an anachronism in this series with the Greyfriars boys, and his introduction makes one doubt whether the author really ever understood the true nature of his own creation.

The Kid was also an anachronism when he returned in 1937, to Modern Boy in stories concerning talking pictures and Hollywood. Outlaws of the Kid's type could not possibly have existed long beyond the turn of the century. The spread of the telegraph, better communications and roads, and greatly advanced law enforcement techniques ended the careers of those old outlaws like the Kid.

The Rio Kid stories were by far the best of the Hamilton westerns, but today they are almost certainly less popular than the others. Hamilton followers are mainly school story fans, who still enjoy the Cedar Creek school yarns, or those of the English schoolboys transferred temporarily to the wild west. But to enjoy the Kid, you have to be a lover of westerns. And there are not so many of those in our own tightly-knit little clan.

Among the general reading public, however, westerns have always been enormously popular, as any librarian can tell us. It has long amazed me why some enterprising publisher has not put out the Rio Kid stories in book form. I am certain they would win a following all their own.

In post-war years, Hamilton wrote quite a number of short Kid tales for various Annuals and for some obscure types of comic papers which appeared mushroom-like. All were indifferent. The author also had a shot at a full-length western "The Lone Texan," which was hackneyed stuff, cheaply printed.

Actually, his great western era ended when the Rio Kid left the Popular in the twenties. It had been a more than worth while era. The wonder is how Hamilton ever found the time to soak himself in western lore and atmosphere, without which he could never have produced the Kid.

That there was some hidden story behind the Rio Kid, I have always believed. But that Hamilton deeply loved the Kid, I have never doubted. His letters to me on the subject were ample proof of that.

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REVIEWS

GREYFRIARS HOLIDAY ANNUAL FOR 1974 (Howard Baker Press:
£2.75)

As this is the second Holiday Annual for 1974 it has been our pleasure to review in a few months, this type of revival would appear to be popular and a good seller. Deservedly so, too.

Star turn on an excellent variety bill is the 3-story 1931 Magnet series, concerning a Christmas at Mauleverer Towers, with Bunter well in the picture as a bilker and also a gate-crasher. The villainous Orris is fairly obvious from the start, but that does not matter at all. It is one of the best Christmases from the Golden Age of the Magnet. When reprinted in the S.O.L., pruning caused the tale to lose a salient point in the plot, and, as the S.O.L. was used for a reprint in the paperback a few years ago, the same error was repeated. Here we have the complete story in all its joyousness.

A red Magnet from 1912 tells of the Greyfriars summer holiday, though it is mainly about "Harry Wharton & Co's Bank Holiday" (the title) in which the chums, on holiday at Mauleverer's home - this time named Mauleverer Hall - spend the first Monday in August, at Blackpool. They meet a gentleman named Captain Pointer, who is possibly Captain Punter with his name changed by deed-poll. This is the fairly famous tale which contains the rather absurd sequence of Monsieur Charpentier singing saucy songs on the beach in an effort to make an honest penny. It takes some swallowing, but the Magnet is a nice period piece with its attractive cover, even though the colour is rather a shadow of the real thing.

St. Jim's is featured in a story from one of the later pre-war Holiday Annuals, a story originally entitled "Lord Eastwood's Christmas Party" in the Gem Christmas issue of 1921. A theatrical little bit, this, which will pass a pleasant hour while you suspend belief.

A sense of unreality comes to one with two items - a S.O.L. which is blown up and a Triumph which is shrunk down. The result is pleasantly large print in the former case, and a strain on the eye of the Old Boys in the latter case. The S.O.L. is "Trailing the Phantom" which was reprinted from the Boys' Friend Christmas Number of 1923.

This was the Fistical Four's first frolic after returning from their long spell in Canada, bringing back with them an American boy named Texas Lick. Not much more than a pot-boiler, this one, but it has its moments.

The Triumph is a slightly sad anti-climax, as it features a St. Jim's story after the Gem had been swallowed by the Triumph. What passed for St. Jim's tales in the Triumph were sequences taken from Gems, mainly of the 1914 war period, and often by sub writers. This little chunk of a story here seems to be genuine, though I can't place its origin at the moment. What can be said of including this sad Triumph is that it adds to the variety.

Altogether, a wonderful dish to set before a king.

ALONZO THE GREAT

Frank Richards
(Howard Baker: £2.75)

The main course in this beautifully-produced volume is the 5-story series concerning Alonzo Todd's amazing spell of great strength obtained by taking a drug supplied to him by his scientific friend, Professor Sparkinson. The story featured in the Magnet in the late autumn of 1933. This tale was produced in paperback some years back, when it suffered ruinous pruning.

Actually it has always been a great favourite of mine, but plenty of people have slammed it on the grounds that it is too farfetched. Personally, I can't see that it matters a bit whether it is farfetched or not, so long as it is well-written. And this one is splendidly written. I doubt whether it is all that farfetched, either, in these days when there are suspicions of Olympic sportsmen getting temporary strength by this and that from a bottle or a hyperdermic needle.

The main theme is really the unrelenting determination of the reformer when he finds himself able to improve people, as he sees it, by sheer force. Perhaps the fun and excitement fray slightly towards the end, when Bunter steals the power, but that is only a passing thought. Anyone who sees this one as nothing but a farfetched Greymfriars yarn has missed a great deal in thought-provoking enjoyment.

The main dish is preceded by a couple of Magnet singles of the same vintage - one a Wibley romp and the other a Guy Fawkes' Day rouser which should please everybody who hasn't forgotten what a

Roman candle is.

* * * * *

The Postman Called

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

W. O. G. LOFTS (London): I did not include Magnet No. 816 "Condemned By the School" in my 1962 C.D. Annual lists of substitute stories, because at that time I could not find any record of its authorship. Also at that period I was far from being expert in detecting genuine/substitute tales. In my view the story was a curious mixture of both. The character also of Cecil Snaith was extraordinary to say the least. Expelled from Greyfriars in 1916, in this story dated 1923 he was described as much older and taller! Harry Wharton & Co. of course must have had stunted growth!

Mr. C. M. Down, who was Magnet editor in 1923, would not commit himself to anything positive, but expressed the opinion it was probably an old Hamilton manuscript that had been rewritten by a substitute author. He thought he detected traces of Fred G. Cook's work. He explained further that some astonishing things were done by his predecessors Griffith/Hinton/and especially Pentelow during the war years. When he took over the Magnet/Gem 1921, he found some Hamilton manuscripts that had not been used. They were all incomplete with whole chapters missing. Rather than waste them, they were given to one or two writers to rewrite completely. Though why they were not returned to Mr. Hamilton to complete he did not wish to elucidate. Mr. F. G. Cook who was also in contact with me at the time, just could not remember anything about the story at all, or perhaps did not wish to know about it. Like myself he thought it absurd for anyone to try and rewrite an original story. However, at a later date, I found a record of the story at A.P. and it was paid to F. G. Cook! I then decided quite rightly to include it as a sub. and it did appear in the Howard Baker "Magnet Companion."

There is some evidence that Mr. Hamilton on occasions, submitted stories that were not strictly his own. Possibly the Wingate love series may have been some of these. A sub-editor told me that he one was ordered to send back a manuscript to Mr. Hamilton as it

obviously was not his writing, and he refused to comment on it further. Of course the proof of the pudding is in the eating - but legally the proof of the authorship of stories can only be obtained by who was actually paid for them.

C. G. PARTIS (Grimsby): I was amazed to see "Uncle Benjamin," in giving news of the London Club, refer to Horace Samuel Quelch on page 29 of the September Digest.

I was equally amazed that this had got by your editorial eye when checking the copy.

However we all slip up at times, and may I say how much I enjoy the "Digest," eagerly awaiting its arrival every month.

(EDITORIAL COMMENT: In the early Magnet, Hamilton himself gave Quelch's name as Horace, and there was one tale in which Miss Primrose, who thought Quelch was in lover with her, called him Horace. Quelch, of course, became Henry somewhere in the twenties, though some of the sub writers clung to Horace.)

BERT HAMBLETT (Hoylake): I meet with three other enthusiasts occasionally to chat about the old papers. I decided it would be a good idea to have a Merseyside get-together after a lapse of five years. I find that Bill Windsor died several months ago. Bill used to hold meetings in his house every month, and write to you to have details of the meeting published in C.D. Granada TV are doing a repeat of a programme on Frank Shaw, who died a couple of years ago. Frank Unwin, ex-member of the O. B. B. C., is now a successful disc jockey on Radio Merseyside. He presents a programme of music of the 1930's. It has been running for three years.

N. M. KADISH (Edgware): Philip Tierney's article on "I like St. Frank's, but: -" intrigued me as I am reading these old St. Frank's tales now. Of course such sentiments are always subjective. As for a boy or youth, whose imagination is much more acute than it will be when he is more matured, I doubt whether he would regard the St. Frank characters as being 'far-fetched.' Youth has a very resilient mind and imagination, and most boys will imagine themselves in the skins and personalities of these characters and naturally they would be, in such guises, the paragons of perfection - as cricketers - for example, supreme in the land like Jerry Dodd, as Handforth - a born and tough

fighter, as Dick Goodwin a real genius of invention, as Nipper - a synthesis of all youthful courage, wisdom and leadership.

Youth does not take kindly to sensitive subtleties - a juxtaposition of delicate tones, but strong distinctions between black and white, right and wrong, wisdom and stupidity - then he can enjoy and understand the fictional character.

Perhaps, in a way, some of Charles Hamilton's writing is too deeply perceptive of character for a boy to really understand.

W. J. RAYNER (Bury St. Edmunds): The Gainsborough Cinema, Sudbury, Suffolk, a 380-seat cinema, may be one of only two pre 1914-18 War cinemas still in use and West Suffolk County Council is putting a preservation order on it. The only other remaining cinema of this vintage is (closed) at Harwich, Essex.

Sudbury cinema was opened by the then Mayor, on 15th July, 1911, with slide shows and early Charlie Chaplin silent comedies.

The cinema was built for £600. Films are still shown there and an attempt by a gaming company to get a bingo licence failed.

"The Gainsborough" was the first local cinema to have "talkies" and then cinemascope.

A more modern rival was built in 1929 and called the "County," but this has long since become a supermarket.

(EDITORIAL COMMENT: A slight slip. There were no Chaplin comedies in 1911. Chaplin first reported for work at the Keystone studios in December 1913. The Coronation at Surbiton, opened in 1911, is still outwardly of the same appearance as it was in 1911, though it is now used for gaming.)

MAURICE KUTNER (London): I was interested in the correspondence re the Shoreditch Empire, known to me as the London Shoreditch. I went there regularly over a number of years, from 1917 onwards. It had a "sliding roof" and during warm weather it would be opened to allow some fresh air in during the interval.

One of my outstanding memories was the evening performance on Monday, 11th November, 1918, when Tom Costello (after singing his usual "Comrades") asked the audience not to throw anything at him and appeared as a defeated Kaiser. From my seat in the gallery he looked the real thing. I still remember the verse of his dirge:-

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News of the Clubs

CAMBRIDGE

Joint Meeting of Cambridge and London Clubs
Sunday, 2nd September, 1973

The Cambridge Club had the privilege and pleasure of entertaining the London Club to a joint meeting. On arrival the London members were met by Trevor Page and Bill Thurbon and conducted on a quick tour of Cambridge, visiting King's College Chapel, and then via the "Backs" to St. John's, where they saw among other things the "School of Pythagoras," the oldest stone house in Cambridge, now part of the College, and enjoyed

the privilege, not usually allowed to visitors, of crossing the Bridge of Sighs. It had been intended also to visit Jesus College but the premature arrival of London's coach precluded this. Everyone then proceeded to 3 Long Road, the home of Danny Posner, the Cambridge chairman.

After an exchange of greetings the formal meeting began with a welcome by the President (Bill Lofts) and the Chairman of the Cambridge Club, to which President John Wernham and Chairman Mary Cadogan of London replied. The theme of the programme arranged by Cambridge was East Anglian writers and characters. Jack Overhill began the proceedings with a talk on Dick Turpin, pointing out that Turpin was only a very minor highwayman, but he had been so written up that the legend persisted, and crowds of visitors still came to Turpin's birthplace at Hempstead. Vic. Hearn then charmed everybody with his delightful memories of a Cambridge childhood and the weekly purchase of "Puck." Harold Forecast followed with a talk on writing for the Thomson papers, this producing many questions from members. Deryck Harvey then spoke on the Brock Brothers as illustrators, and Bill Thurbon followed with a paper on G. A. Henty, who was born at Trumpington, on the outskirts of Cambridge. Trevor Page concluded the pre-tea part of the programme with a brilliantly argued talk on the education of Sherlock Holmes, proving conclusively that Holmes was a Cambridge man. Tea was then served by the Cambridge ladies and members strolled in Danny's delightful garden and took the opportunity to admire Danny's fine collection. Members gathered in the garden afterwards for a most enlightening talk on children's books by Derek Gibbons of Cambridge, who is an antiquarian bookseller, specialising in children's books. He summed up his advice by telling members "Do your homework before you go into the shop." The keen interest this talk aroused was evinced by the many questions asked. Bill Lofts talked about Jack Trevor Storey and Sexton Blake. A silent film of Sexton Blake was then shown, but unfortunately the projector broke down and so the mystery remained a mystery! Jack Overhill then played a recording of his talk on the Magnet and Gem, originally broadcast as a tribute to the memory of the immortal Charles Hamilton. A fitting ending to a memorable meeting. A birthday cake was triumphantly produced to celebrate Bill Loft's birthday, which he put to the strains of "Happy Birthday." Cheers and thanks for the Cambridge ladies, Mrs.

Posner, Mrs. Page and Mrs. Thurbon, who had prepared tea followed, and the meeting broke up with memories of a happy and successful occasion.

LONDON: Once again the annual Leytonstone meeting and quite appropriately a very fine St. Frank's competition given by the host, Reuben Godsave, and won by a surprise visitor from New Zealand, Jim Cook. Bob Blythe filled the second slot. Bill Lofts gave a fine treatise on "Letters to the Editor" with valuable information as to what the young correspondents wished to know and their character likes and dislikes. This talk was enjoyed by all present and the question time that followed it proved to be interesting. Another fine Basil Amps of the Reading Evening Post reading was given by Eric Lawrence and featured a vicar who was a P. G. Wodehouse fanatic. Two chapters from "The Terror of the Form" Magnet series by Winifred Morss and a Hidden Voice competition by Bob Blythe, (winner Mary Cadogan), all helped to the success of the gathering. Jim Cook took photographs to take back with him to the Antipodes and with votes of thanks to Reuben and Phyllis, another meeting terminated to go down into the book of happy memories. Next meeting at 46 Overbury Avenue, Beckenham, Kent, on Sunday, 21st October. Hosts Alex and Mary Cadogan. Kindly advise if attending.

UNCLE BENJAMIN

NORTHERN: Meeting on Saturday, 8th September. A stimulating - and unusual - talk was given by Ron Rhodes when he presented us with a short summary of his research on the members of the Remove. Ron began by asking who was in the Remove when Harry Wharton went to Greyfriars? No Kurree Singh, Johnny Bull, Tom Brown, Mauly, Peter Todd, or Vernon-Smith. An original number of fifteen boys in the Remove lived through (so to speak) from the beginning to the end. At the time when the Magnet ceased there were thirty-eight (though what happened to Alonzo Todd - he was there in 1933?). It may surprise us to know, said Ron, that over 100 boys were in the Remove at one time or another! Gaunt was a leading light in the Remove in Magnet 41 - but never appears again. In Magnet 11 we read about Herring - quite a lively sort of youngster. But, then, you couldn't really have a Fish and a Herring in the same form! Ron called our attention to some curious elements in the saga. Ninian Elliot remained at school until he left for Canada in Magnet 533, yet in Magnet 1411 he is stated to be in study 5 with Kipps. And how many studies were there? In Magnet 426 the two Williams brothers were put into study 17, so one must presume the existence of studies 15 and 16! There were at least 38 birds of passage (like Carboy) and it was interesting to note that 31 were Frank Richards' characters. A lively and entertaining study, the result of countless hours of reading and research. It will be a great pity if Ron cannot prepare something for publication. And then a quiz (from the archives) presented by Jack Allison. 'Could be a card-sharper or work at the abattoir' seems clearly to indicate a certain Skinner. But we were all well and truly foxed by the following: 'This industrious fellow probably spends a lot of time rummaging about in them.' We were looking in fiction, you see, and we should have been looking in fact! (No prize for the answer.)

SYDNEY, AUSTRALIA: At the meeting on 30th August, there was a complete roll-up of members and the Club also welcomed two visitors. The first of these, Nell Emmingham - originally from England, but now a 'fair-dinkum' Aussie - came along to see how the Club operates and is consequently now a potential member. The second visitor, Mervyn Branks of Dunedin, New Zealand, is a Hamilton fan and had spent most of his holiday in making contact with kindred spirits and combing Melbourne and Sydney bookshops for treasures (with rewarding results). After a pleasant meal the meeting settled down to its main purpose of listening to a fascinating lecture on Sherlock Holmes, given by Stan Nicholls. Members found this so interesting that it was suggested that it be submitted to Eric Fayne in manuscript form for possible reproduction in the Digest, and it is hoped that others will enjoy it as much as did the members.

MARION BROCKMAN - Secretary.