

The

Collector's Digest



A
Happy
Christmas
and a
Prosperous
New Year
to each and
everyone ~

TWO SUPERB NEW SPORTS YARNS
IN THIS NUMBER!



OUT ON SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 26.
BE SURE YOU GET IT!



THE COLLECTORS DIGEST

Vol.1. No.12

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A HAPPY CHRISTMAS AND A PROSPEROUS NEW YEAR
TO EACH AND EVERY ONE

YOUR EDITOR IN REMINISCENT MOOD:

This is the end of Volume One. When, just over a year ago the first number of "The Collectors Digest" appeared, I little thought I should be saying this so soon, for the intention then - of course, was to publish every two months. The interval, however, as you all know was very soon reduced. Anyhow, here is a milestone, so let me take the opportunity to look back.

I well remember that November Sunday afternoon, when, thanks to our good friends of the type-writing agency working overtime, I went along to pick up the parcel containing the copies of the

then unknown C.D., how, when I got home, I tore open that parcel, seized a copy, - anxiously scrutinized it, and how a little thrill of satisfaction and relief ran through me for it seemed to be all we had hoped for.

Then, after a meal, a list of hoped for subscribers (many of the names then unknown to me) and a pile of wrappers before me, I set to work. A day or two of anxious waiting - what would the verdict be? I need have had no fear. First a call from Maurice in far off Cardiff, and his voice saying jubilantly "It's wizard! Cheers!". Then next morning, quite a pile of letters awaiting me Heart in Mouth. I opened them. From one after another a postal order was revealed and a letter in congratulatory terms. Oh, happy day!

Yes, we were proud, and still are, with that now modest looking No.1.

Well, quite a lot has happened since then. Sketches, illustrated and coloured covers, several additional pages; once a month despite all kinds of difficulties; contributions from a host of staunch, splendidly helpful supporters, of whom many were entirely unknown to us that November day a year ago. There are dozens of others, too, both at home and overseas, who, though they have not actually contributed articles, have become some of our most regular and interesting correspondents.

Then, just when the C. D. had settled down came whispers of a mysterious "Lady of Leicester" who was telling of a wonderful hoard of popular papers Investigations, and the sure fact that we were on the track of a trickster. Then came on the scene too that other spiv-like character with the string of aristocratic names and an old oak chest loaded with "Magnets" and "Gems". The story of those exposures including that fruitless and hazardous journey through the blizzard by Roger Jenkins, make dramatic reading to browse over in Vol. One in after years. How well I remember when, morning after morning, I received a letter from someone who had heard from the crooks

and how, when opportunity offered, I instantly rammed in a plug to issue warning with a long distance call. What exciting days; with finally a protest to the Leicester police. Well, Pearson is spending a lot of time in a prison cell, and the C.D. can claim some of the credit for putting him there. Perhaps it is a pity he never had any "Magnets", if he had, and he had read them, he would, maybe, never have become one of His Majesty's guests.

Yes, of a truth it has been a memorable year. It has meant much hard work & many headaches, but I am sure my colleague joins with me when I say we bless the day we decided to start the C.D. And we are richer by the experience, not in coin of the realm, but by the finding of a host of friends, and the knowledge that we have given a little pleasure in these austerity days. And now, on with Vol. No. 2

A final word or two about the Annual. We are hoping to be able to despatch at the same time as this issue, but, if this is not possible we shall do our utmost to get it to the hands of our British readers in good time for Christmas. Since our last number we have received the design for the cover. If you have to wait a little time to see it, we will just say it is a real work of art. If we have any qualms at all it is that when you set your eyes on it you will expect the contents to live up to the high standard set. Still, we feel pretty confident your verdict will be "Good, from cover to cover!"

And, let me add, there certainly will be a lot between those covers, probably nearer 100 pages than the 60 first contemplated. Well, when we at the beginning fixed the price we cut it very, very fine, consequently we shall be well on the wrong side of the ledger. If, however, when you have examined our efforts you say "Well, it's sure worth much more" and help to reduce the loss that way, we shall not be ungrateful. But it's entirely optional.

COMING SOON: "Frank Pettingell Looks Back"-
Don't miss it!

Here is something of interest to all Nelson Lee enthusiasts. Mr. Robert Blythe, authority on that library, and the only collector possessing a complete set of all series, has kindly volunteered to answer any questions concerning the stories. We propose, therefore, to start a Nelson Lee column. So send your questions along as soon as you like. Mr. Blythe is also planning a series of articles. Lee-ites, you're in for a good time!

Yours sincerely,

H. Leckenby

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Small Advertisements - 1d per word (name and address inserted free of charge).

I SEE THE HOME OF FRANK RICHARDS

b y
Robert Whiter

The Isle of Thanet has always been my usual holiday resort, but little did I know until comparatively recently that it was also the home of Frank Richards, my favourite author.

This year saw my wife and I once again at Cliftonville for a week, and on the Wednesday in Kingsgate - our destination, the house of the immortal man who had gripped my interest since the age of eight with his marvellous tales of those schoolboy characters, whose fame has encircled the globe.

Getting off the 'bus we walked but fifty yards when I gripped my wife's arm and pointed to a

road on our left which bore the legend, Percy Ave. Getting very excited I led the way with the name of "Rose Lawn" on my lips, you see I'd forgotten the number. Very disappointed we reached the sea front and the end of the Avenue without seeing our object. Leaving my wife on the front, I made my way back up the long Avenue, a 'phone box half way down catching my eye; here I would find the number surely. Before long, however, I stood outside the master's home and saw the front gate was open and realised why we hadn't seen the name. Lost in thought I gazed fascinated until I noticed a lady looking at me from the window, presently she spoke. "Did you want anything?". Begging her pardon, I stepped into the garden and told her the object of my presence and asked whether it was possible to see Mr. Richards. She explained that this was not possible owing to the fact that so many people called and if Mr. Richards saw one he would have to see all. Five hundred she estimated, had called that season. I was naturally disappointed, but fully understood. Miss Wood, which I later found to be the lady's name, proved to be a very pleasant person, and I enjoyed the short talk I had with her. I finished the conversation by asking permission to snap the house which was readily granted. So wishing my kind friend a very good morning, I rejoined my wife and after taking photo's of the esteemed residence, took my leave, taking with me ever lasting memories of my grand visit to the abode of the King of Schoolboy Writers.



A CHRISTMAS DOUBLE NUMBER OF THE GOLDEN AGE

by

Herbert Leckenby

'Tis the month of Christmas! Um! In this year of grace, 1947, I can hear someone saying, sardonically, "Huh! A Grippsian Christmas! The only touch of Christmas will be if there's snow on the ground. Well, there's no room for politics in the pages of the C.D., but I can venture to say that so far as the bookstalls are concerned papers with a youthful flavour will look as meagre as the present bacon ration. This being the Christmas number of the C.D. let us, then, take a dose of nostalgia and travel back through the years to the golden days when there WERE Christmas numbers, in fact Christmas DOUBLE numbers! Some members of our clan, Messrs. Lawson, Steele, Daniel and others, can recall Christmasses made memorable in the 80's and 90's, but I will pause at 1901, which was just after the start of my "purple period". I have selected from my collection of "Boy's Friends" (my first love) the Christmas Double number for that year. Even now it gives me a thrill as I look at it. I can remember when it first appeared as though it were but yesterday afternoon.

I was a boy of twelve then, the eldest of a small family. When this double number was announced, No.26 of the penny series, December 7th, 1901, the very first twopenny number for boys issued by what was known later as the Amalgamated Press, I was set a problem. My income then was one penny per week (some times less), therefore I had at least to double it. I recall how I got into the good graces of my mother by cheerfully taking the youngest member of the family for a long ride in his pram (or was it mail-cart), cleaning the knives, forks and spoons, going a few errands, and then, at long last being rewarded by two of the large size copper coins of the realm. My wealth clutched in moist palm, I set off hot foot to the nearest newsagent and

asked eagerly for "The Boy's Friend", please. "Twopence to-day my lad" said the man behind the counter. "Yes, I know", I replied plonking down the necessary amount. He handed the paper over with a gruff "See him chucking his money about. Twopence for a kid's paper. Don't know what things are coming to." Heedlessly I went out, walking on air, my eyes glued to the gorgeous coloured cover. Yea! How well I remember it now, over 40 years on, as I turn the pages over again. Let me describe it to you.

There were 28 pages, $10\frac{3}{4}$ " x $14\frac{1}{2}$ " plus a fine coloured cover in red and green. This had a large border of holly surrounding an almost full page picture drawn by A.H. Clarke of a scene from "Grindley's Ghost Hunt" the first long complete story. Alongside the title "Boy's Friend" (this in vivid red) was a small sketch of a boy with a cricket bat defending a wicket composed of a snow man. There was no mistaking the price - 2d - for it was displayed in a circle two inches in diameter. "Grindley's Ghost Hunt" (how suitable for Christmas) was written by Henry St. John, star school story writer of the time. It occupied four pages. Then came "Your Editor's Xmas Chat" with the familiar picture of the great man himself. One of the paragraphs had the heading "The Boy's Friend at the Front" - the Front being the Boer War then still in progress. This was the only reference to the campaign in the whole issue. Right across the bottom of the page ran a greeting in the editor's own handwriting "A Merry Christmas to all my boys and girls" - Your Editor. On the next page came the conclusion of one Nelson Lee story by Maxwell Scott, "Birds of Prey" and the starting of a new one "The Silver Dwarf". What a grand story that proved to be. It too, was illustrated by A.H. Clarke, the best of all the Nelson Lee artists (it was he, of course, who, in later years, was to be the first to make Billy Bunter familiar, and who actually died whilst making a sketch for the "Magnet"). "The Silver Dwarf" ran over three pages. Next came a short complete story,

by a reader of the "Boy's Friend". This proved to be Thomas E. Knowles, and in connection with this there is an interesting reference to Mr. R. A. H. Good-year who had also got his first start in fiction some years earlier in "The Boy's Friend", the same Mr. Goodyear whose delightful reminiscences have appeared in the pages of this magazine.

Next, the first story of a series "The Gallant 44" which concerned the war with Spain in 1739. A page for this (artist Vincent Daniel). Followed a page of Christmas tricks, then three pages of a serial by Allen Blair, "Pluck Will Tell" another grand yarn I gloried in. Once again A. H. Clarke was the artist.

We have now reached half-way. Starting on the right-hand centre page was another new serial - "Through Trackless Tibet" by Sidney Drew in which Ferrers Lord, Ching Lung, Rupert Thurston and the merry crew of the "Lord of the Deep" were re-introduced. Pictures by H. M. Lewis. Then a page of comics, they look very much like Tom Brown's, a famous artist of the day. Next we find a page article "How to Make a Line of Battleships". Following this came another long complete story "A Traitor to His King", a tale of Charles II by Arthur S. Hardy, pictures by Vincent Daniel. This occupied three pages. We have now reached an instalment of one of the most famous stories ever to appear in "The Boy's Friend" - "Charles Gordon's Schooldays" by Henry St. John, artist T. W. Holmes. This gives me a real touch of nostalgia. I recall how my school chums John and Sid used to gravely discuss with me the tribulations of Charlie at the hands of the rascally master Collier. John now holds a good post on the L.N.E.R., Sid, when I last heard of him, was a draughtsman with a famous chocolate firm. I wonder if they still remember that story.

Well, we've nearly reached the end. Another page of articles, the concluding instalment of - "Beyond the Eternal Ice", another of Sidney Drew's Ferrers Lord stories, adverts on the back cover and

that is the lot.

Verily, what a lot for twopence, what a galaxy of talent of the day, Henry St. John, Maxwell Scott, Allen Blair, Sidney Drew, Arthur Hardy, Arthur Clarke, H.M. Lewis, T.W. Holmes, and Vincent Daniel. The only fly in the ointment was it was published three weeks before Christmas and had all been read long before the festive day. No wonder we treasure with affection the story papers of our youth and talk of the golden days.

EXCHANGE: 40 Magnets and Gems, also 30 early Schoolboys Owns for Magnets 1910 to 1913. Send titles and numbers to J. Shepherd, 3 Priory Place, Sheffield, 7.

FOR SALE: 50 Populars, 1921-24, 53 Marvels, 1921-22. 75 Young Britain, 1923-24. 124 Nelson Lees, 1927-29. 63 Gems, 1938-39. All good condition. Stamp for List. W.H. Neate, Wenlock, Burnham, Bucks.

WANTED: Boys Friend Libraries by Charles Hamilton, and Martin Clifford; also early Magnets. For SALE, Boys Own Paper and Comrades, dated 1892-3. What offers? S.F. Bryan, 6 City Road, Peterborough, Northants.

WANTED: Nelson Lees and Schoolboys Owns; would buy or exchange for Magnets or exchange for Modern Sets of Stamps; also Holiday Annuals wanted. H.A. Smith, 13 New Road, Scole, Diss, Norfolk.

WANTED: Early issues of Gem, Magnet, Pluck, Dreadnought, early 1914 and 1915. Eric Payne, 23 Grove Road, Surbiton.

WANTED: Magnets in perfect condition, to complete volumes for binding. Nos. 1223, 1225, 1226, 1228, 1230 to 1233, 1242, 1245, 1250, 1268, 1287 to 1290, 1295, 1383-4, 1577. Roy W. Sudborough, 27 Milton Street, Higham Ferrars, Northants.

WANTED: Nelson Lees, Magnets, Gems. Good condition only required. Please state price. Robert Blythe, 81 Alsen Road, Holloway, London, N.7.



Letter Box

17th November, 1947.

Dear Herbert Leckenby,

Thank you for the ever-welcome and ever-interesting C.D. and your letter therewith. It is very good of you to promise me Robert Whiter's sketch, which I shall be very glad to have, and which will in due course adorn my study wall, next to the photograph of a delightful little kid with a gorgeous smile which came from a Birmingham reader. I note on your cover that Robert hasn't disremembered about Bunter's checks as our artist did!

I must thank you specially for your extremely pleasant and gratifying article headed "The Event of the Season". The last paragraph caused me to lean back and think. As a rule my thoughts turn to the future, not the past: I don't know why, unless because I am a born optimist. But this time I couldn't help running over in my mind the intervening years between the first number of the Magnet and the first Greyfriars book - thirty-nine years in all! What has - or rather what has not - happened in that space of time? Two big wars, and a few little ones: and a world so changed and unstable, that hardly anything seems as it used to be except Billy Bunter! It hardly seems possible now that Frank Richards, when the spirit moved him, could pack a bag and a typewriter, and catch a train or a boat - writing a few Magnet chapters in Paris, a few more in Lausanne, and finishing the

story in Venice, - no permits or visas, not always even bothering about a passport! I hear people now sometimes speaking of the "bad old days", but I can't help thinking that the world went very well then. And think of newsprint at £10 a ton, and as much as you wanted! They were jolly old days when the Magnet and Frank Richards were both young. Actually, I had been writing for less than twenty years when the first Magnet came out. Curiously enough, I don't feel a day older while sitting at the typewriter - though when I get up, I am reminded at once that Time has marched on!

I liked Eric Fayne's article too. I had an idea that it was going to be critical: but if this be criticism, it is a very agreeable medicine: and the patient can "take it", and even ask for more! Mr. Fayne as a critic reminds me of Byron's pirate chief - "He was the very mildest-mannered man that ever scuttled ship" Only on one point I demur - Mr. Richards DID feel that it was a great occasion - for him it was a tremendous occasion. Mr. Richards was feeling, when he wrote that story. like a schoolboy just let out of detention into the fresh air and sunshine, But no schoolboy was ever so glad to get off for a holiday, as Mr. Richards was to get back to Greyfriars.

John Shaw puts his finger on this in the following article, John is, as Alan Breck used to say, a gentleman of much penetration, One or two passages in his article really made me wonder whether he is a mind reader.

I was glad to see the mention of Thomas Johnson's "Greyfriars Suite". This really is one of the greatest compliments I have ever received. You can guess with what pleasure I heard this played over. It is good stuff from the first bar to the last; and the first movement especially brought pictures before my mind almost like a film. I have tried over several of Mr. Johnson's published works, and I like the "greyfriars Suite" best so far.

On the whole, I think this is the best C.D. though perhaps this view may be founded upon the circumstances that it is so agreeable to me personally. It is always good, Long may it wave!

With kind regards,

Yours sincerely,

Frank Richards.

FOR SALE: Books by Goodyear, Richard Bird, Hayens, Gilson, etc. Chums 1925, fiction by Oppenheim, Leacock, Wallace, etc. L.M.Allen 3 Montgomery Drive, Sheffield, 7.

WANTED: Odd copies of Magnets, Boys Friend Libs., Greyfriars Annual, Dreadnought, complete. Henry J.H.Bartlett, Peas Hill, Shipton Gorge, Bridport, Dorset.

GOOD PRICES offered for Bound Volumes of early Magnets, also loose Magnets between 1908 and 1929. Eric Fayne, 23 Grove Road, Surbiton.

IF ITS MAGNETS AND GEMS you're after, send your numbers required along to William Martin, 93 Hillside, Stonebridge Park, London, N.W.10. 'Phone, Willesden 4474. Always a large selection in stock, both early and late numbers. Prices upon application. If I have not got what you want, names put on waiting list. Strict rotation. Satisfaction assured.

WANTED: Sexton Blake Libs., Union Jack, and Detective Weeklies. W.Colcombe, 256 South Avenue, Southend on Sea, Essex.

MAGNETS WANTED, urgently, between 1922 and 1930. Good price paid. Have Magnets 1936 to 1940 for exchange. Corbett, 49 Glyn Farm Road, Quinton, Birmingham, 32.

* * *

Here is a graphic account of how the Bunter Book appeared to one reader. This is Mr. Snell's first contribution to our pages. We hope it won't be the last. (Ed.)

SATURDAY MORNING - 25TH OCTOBER, 1947.

b y
Frank Snell

The day of days! The joy of joys! The long awaited, blessed day of great events.

What's all this about? You might say, that is, if you are interested. "Somebody's birthday? A great historical event like 1066 and all that, or the opening lines of a new play?"

"No, my friend, it is not. Something far superior, but then of course, you wouldn't know would you, unless I explained the whole thing from the very beginning. The answer in a few words would convey nothing to you at all, so let me tell you just what happened on that particular morning".

I awoke as usual about 8 a.m. It was a cold, crisp morning, in fact, the coldest of the autumn as yet. Hopping out of bed, I lost very little time in reaching the bathroom. I carefully placed the plug in the wash-basin, turned the cold water tap, but nothing happened. I tried the hot water tap; still nothing doing. Then, I suddenly remembered that the water had been turned off the previous evening.

"Oh, blow!" I said to myself. "This means trotting down and getting hot water."

My landlady must have heard me tripping down the stairs, for when I arrived in the kitchen, she was in the act of filling a jug with hot water.

"Sorry about the water" she said, passing me the jug, "but it should be on any moment now".

"Oh, that's quite alright" I replied, "it should be through by the time I've finished shaving."

I eventually got through that delightful business and then tried the tap once more. Not a solitary drop. "Heavens!" I said to myself. "I shall have to be content with a lick and a promise this morning, just like old Bunter! Funny I should be thinking about that fat porpoise on a morning like this. I quickly completed the task of washing in true Bunter fashion; slipped into the bedroom and put on the rest of my clothes.

Breakfast was laid as usual. Two or three letters and a small parcel. I opened the letters. Nothing very startling, I picked up the parcel. Now what's this, I wonder! Feels like a book! A BOOK! Why, surely, it's....it's.....BUNTER!!

Usually, I am very careful with string, especially in these hard times, but to-day, I simply couldn't be bothered to untie the knots. In less time than it takes time to tell, I caught up a knife, dashed the string, and opened the parcel.

My intuition about Bunter was correct. There, staring at me from the front cover, was our old familiar friend, Bunter! He hadn't changed a bit. Same old figure; same old glasses; same old expression, and in the same spot of bother. And Quelch, too! The same, tall, scholastic, gentleman, complete with gown and mortar board. Angular features; acid expression; gimlet-eyes boring through the portly substance that was Bunter's.

Don't ask me what I had for breakfast. I remember I endeavoured to pour out a second cup of tea as I thought, but there was only a leak left. I'd had a second sup of tea alright, but hadn't the faintest recollection of drinking it. My library book lay unheeded., for here was I, simply devouring "Billy Bunter of Greyfriars School".

I turned over the cover, and there on the fly-leaf, was James Agate's query, "Who is Billy Bunter?" What's the man talking about for goodness sake - asking who Billy Bunter was - Education sadly neglected, I should say. Now, what's this?

Ah, yes! Some of the Remove gathered around the Notice Board ... A "notiss" by Bunter ... and there's Bunter, well to the front as usual ... Inky, too! ... But where's the rest of the Famous Five? I eagerly scanned the remaining faces, but apart from Bunter and Inky, I was completely whacked.

Over on the other page, were the long awaited words - "Billy Bunter of Greyfriars School" by Frank Richards; illustrated by R.J. Macdonald. Turning over once more - First Published 1947 (10,000). A quick run through the contents - Bunter Knows: Jam for Bunter; Where is Bunter? - Quelch: Coker's Hammer (Good old fathead, Coker); Six for Smithy (The jolly old Bounder in for six this time with a vengeance). One more chapter dealing with Quelch, and the remainder all about Bunter. And so on to Chapter 1 ... "Bunter Knows".

"Bunter!" Mr. Quelch's voice was not loud, but deep. It was heard distinctly by all ears in the Remove form-room at Greyfriars School; excepting, apparently, one pair of very fat ears. Billy Bunter did not answer ... I indulged in a sip of tea now and again, and had a bite or two of .. well, whatever it was, I simply can't remember. I was too engrossed. I read on ... "BUNTER!" .. This was the fifth time, and now Quelch simply roared .. "Still Bunter did not reply. Still he did not stir. But, as if in answer to his form-master, a sound came from Bunter. Snore!

I felt the years slip away from me. I was back once more in the happy days of care-free youth with no cares or worries, no wars; no restrictions. Frank Richards was here again practically in the flesh, so with eyes firmly fixed, I was again travelling the corridors of the dim and misty past.

I flipped over another page. Bunter is still snoring. Now Skinner pops into the arena and awakens our fat friend in the only way we naturally associate with Skinner. Ingredients - a finger and thumb - a very fat ear, and then a sudden twist. It certainly

woke Bunter. "Yaroooh! Ow! Leggo my ear, you beast" ... Ah, yes. The old, old Bunter. Listening to every word ... "The Royal Oak?" ... "Oh, yes, sir! Certainly" ... "My father wouldn't like it...I've never been near it, sir, except to pass it". Mr. Quelch gazed at him. "Bunter! Is this intended for impertinence, or what? Answer me at once - what is the Royal Oak?"

"It's a pub, sir". And so I read on to the end of the chapter.

I sat back and breathed a sigh of contented relief. Although the clock had made hundreds and hundreds of revolutions, the lapse of time had made no difference. Frank Richards was still the same. And Quelch as acid as ever. No, the many years of the turning of the clock had made no difference and ... "Good heavens! The clock! What time is it?" Looking at my watch, I was horrified to discover that it was 9 a.m. at which time I was due to open up the office. Hurredly placing away my precious possession, I raced away to the office and, thanks to the fates that be, found that I was the first on the scene after all.

I had a very busy morning. Saturday mornings usually are, but to-day was more so, at least, it appeared to me. I think this was probably due to 5 exciting words "Many hands make light work" which commenced the reading of Chapter 2. "Oh, dear!" I thought, "if only I had a few more hands, then, perhaps, I should get through this tedious work a jolly sight quicker."

After a long, long time, 1 o'clock duly arrived. Packing away my books, I soon made for home, quickly got through the business of feeding, and was once more deeply immersed in the thrilling adventures of the one and only Billy Bunter.

Was I right when I said it was the day of days? For me, at any rate, it was the joy of joys, and the long awaited, blessed day of great events.

Sitting in a nice comfortable armchair; warmed by the glow of a cheery fire, and wafted away into the exciting moments of my long-lost youth, I was at peace with the world.

I read on and on. Fleeting glimpses of old, but not forgotten characters - Coker; Mauly; Smithy; Fishy; Skimmer; Snoop; Scott; Wingate; Loder; Gwynne; Gosling; Uncle Clegg; - a few of the familiar places Friardale Lane; Little Side; Cross Keys ... and so I entered into a world apart. Suddenly, I came to with a start. A cold, wet nose rubbed against my hand. I looked down and gazed into an appealing pair of brown eyes. It was Timo, my rough-haired terrier. He had come to remind me that it was time to go out. "Alright, Timo, old boy!" I said, stroking his head. "Don't worry, I'll take you out. If Frank Richards could only see you now, I'm sure he'll forgive the discourtesy in casting him aside." Timo has his walk and enjoyed himself in his usual doggy way, whilst I, with my mind full of old and fragrant memories, hastened round the Park, up the river bank, past the football field, with no eyes for the match in progress, completed the round and landed home again in almost record time.

"Sorry, Timo, old scout, but it's all for a good cause!" With this apology of appeasement, I re-occupied my chair, and was quickly whisked away into the scenes of long ago ...

Yes, I am glad to say I completed the "master-piece" that very same day, but on page opposite the end I found the first snag - "Charles Skilton Ltd. have great pleasure in announcing that Mr. Frank Richards has in preparation another Billy Bunter Story". A very pleasant announcement, no doubt, but nevertheless a very definite snag. Considering the long wait we have had for this present book, how long will it be before the next instalment sees the light of day? And so, for the present I must be content with things as they are, hoping against hope, I am afraid, that the Government in their present

obscure policy, will make a mistake and issue paper and lib.

Thanks a lot, Mr. Hamilton, for a very pleasant day. A day which will certainly be added to my list of dates and duly noted as 25TH OCTOBER, 1947.

* * *

Extract from Letter:

Bunter - the Invincible: I have read the Bunter Book with all the feelings expressed by my fellow contributors in the Digest. I would like to add a few lines reminiscent of a great Statesman, namely - Never in the history of schoolboy literature was so much owed by so many Bunter fans to one Bunter writer.

Jack Corbett, Birmingham, 32.

POETS CORNER

Stephanie - The Old Boy's Tune:

Sweet music that can never pall on me,
Soft strains that like Spring-blossoms fall on me!
Fragrant and fresh, recalling happy days,
Seen now through wistful Mem'ry's golden haze!
"Stephanie", sweet accompaniment of Christmas-time,
When book or journal, magazine or rhyme
Came all as one to eager boyish eyes,
To which aught granted print was e'er a prize!

"Boys of the Empire", "Scraps" and "Little Folks",
"Fun", "Punch", and "Judy", packed with pictured
"Boys Leader" "Schoolboys Own" & "Union Jack" jokes,
Of healthy thrills they seldom had a lack.
"Pluck" "Magnet" "Gen" "Young Britain" & "Boys Friend"
It seemed their charms for us would never end!
"Sloper's Half-Holiday", "Tootsie", "Dook" & "Bob"
All Ally's giddy, frivol-loving mob!

"Boys Own" the book to place on Christmas tables
(Dear T. Baines Reed & chatty Gordon Stables);
"Young Folks" (since "Old & Young") & bold Tim Pippin

Thrice welcome one & all - we thought you ripping!
 And later, "Ching Ching's Own" and "Handsome Harry".
 The best of books for schoolboy bags to carry!
 Dear days of old (thrice-happy boyish lot!)
 You bring them back, sweet "Stephanie Gavotte".

THOSE WERE THE DAYS

by
F.W. Webb

I have recently received a copy of the old half-penny Boys Friend, dated 1898, from a fellow enthusiast, and it brought back to me with a rush, the happy days when a carefree little boy, I bought its very first number, which contained the serial - "The Boys of Swishall School". I continued an ardent reader of this fine paper for many years. In the above number the Editor is full of apologies, as usual, to various complainants of queries and letters unanswered either in the paper or by post. That was also my own experience of the Editor. In a fit of enthusiasm I was induced to forward sixpence to become a member of The League of Boy Friends, for which sum I should receive a handsome certificate worthy to frame and hang on one wall. Said cash dispatched I waited with boyish impatience for the work of art?

I waited a week or more for the certificate - none arrived - weeks passed, I wrote to our dear Editor (whose benign countenance adorned his page every week) twice. No reply or acknowledgement in his columns. Nothing daunted I determined to beard the lion in his den. I trudged to the office in a side street off Fleet Street, no palatial offices in those days; up three flights of dimly lit stairs; on a door; Boys Friend. There was a card on the door - gone to lunch. Several times I made the same journey. He was either at lunch or would be back in half an hour. I never succeeded in my object. He didn't intend to refund my sixpence. Fully a year afterwards the long sought certificate arrived, a dingy washed

out thing which I had at one time longed to frame. My elder brother, looking over my shoulder, jeered at the sentiment expressed thereon. There was an unholy scuffle, the work of art was torn to shreds and I was once more in disgrace through my love of these bloods as my folks insisted on calling them.

My mother was the daughter of a Wesleyan Minister, and the conditions at home were not too bright for a lively boy. She was bent on my being a Minister whereas myself, I yearned to be a Pirate or a Highwayman at least. I visited Dick Turpin's Cave in Epping Forest - decidedly damp I found it. I hope Dick didn't get rheumatism or bronchitis when he sojourned there, but it was wet. I was discouraged at every turn and had to make a den in the old summerhouse at the bottom of the garden, a sequestered spot, festooned with virginian creeper and grape vine. It was an ideal spot away from the parental eye. Here I could indulge in reading my favourite ha'penny Marvel, Deadwood Dick, Springheeled Jack or anything of that nature I could lay my hands on, and there were some sticky ones being published about that time. Sweeny Todd, Charles Race, Jack Sheppard, Duvals and Turpins were in full spate, and I bought, borrowed or exchanged everything of the kind I could get hold of.

Many of our old collectors bemoan the fact that the old stories of their boyhood no longer grip as they used to, and find more interest in the illustrations. There is more than one reason for that. The mind is mature, there is no mystery in anything, but they also forget the conditions and surroundings under which these old things were read. Myself, when my parents happened to be out on a winter's night, I could read my favourite by the glow of the kitchen fire, or by the soft lamplight. The rest of the room beyond the circle of light in deep shadow.

There by the fire, alone with Sweeny Todd, I could imagine he was waiting in the shadows to polish me off. Perhaps I heard a sound, it was only a

mouse scratching in the wainscot, or the wind blowing the ivy across the window, or the stairs creaking after someone had gone up, but it was enough to make my little heart beat faster and I would stir up the fire and the wind would rumble in the old chimney.

My Mother would never have gas, although most of the neighbours had a penny in the slot:

"Talk about the people in their mansions
We're as proud as any, grand,
We have got the gas laid on -
Five hours a penny."

No, my Mother stuck to the old lamps as long as she lived. Lamplight, that is the atmosphere in which to read an old ha'penny book. Solitude, a roaring fire, and the wind rumbling in the chimney as the sparks fly upwards.

To-day, glaring cold electric light, flooding every corner of the room; a neighbour's blaring wireless; planes overhead; motors rushing by. That's it. The atmosphere is all wrong. We want to put the clock back 50 years.

Yes, those were the days.

--A---ZENITH-
-FRED-U-E---OM
PAT-SPLASH-PA
-R-B-EUSTACE-
FOUR-R---L-D
I-NICOTINE--R
SHADOW---ISSUE
T--GUNS-H-W-S
S-DETECTIVE-S
-LAST-O-LAD-I
JHV-SHOT-LEON
BRIM--T--D--G
G-DON-STUART-

Solution
for:
Sexton
Blake
Cross-
word
No. 11

*a
Merry
Christmas
and
a Prosperous
New Year*



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THE CHRISTMAS ROUND TABLE

From a literary and artistic standpoint, three things combine to make my Christmas really enjoyable. Those three things are:- (a) the unforgettable Xmas stories by the late Gwyn Evans; (b) the inimitable seasonable drawings to illustrate those stories by Eric R. Parker; and (c) the memory of a human and understanding man, a man who, in the true traditions of Mr. Pickwick (even if he did not resemble him physically) always celebrated the Yuletide with gusto and who remembered those who were less fortunate than himself. I refer, of course, to the real, pre-war, old fashioned Sexton Blake of Baker Street. About the beginning of December each year I run through my collection of "Union Jacks" and select various Christmas Numbers. I must confess that these numbers usually range between 1923 and 1932 for it was during those ten years that I fully realised the fact that Blake was my very own favourite character. I studied each story, every week, and soon built up in my mind's eye a character who remains with me to this day despite the changes that have taken place in the fortunes of the dear old

U.J. and it's successor D.W. But every year it was the Gwyn Evans Xmas story that thrilled me most of all, and little wonder. What more could one ask that that one's favourite character, surrounded by subsidiary characters, should spend a happy, yet always mysterious Yuletide. That famous room in Baker Street, so well described by Mr. Evans and so well illustrated by Mr. Parker always seemed gay and homely on Christmas day, yet I and all the other readers knew that something would crop up to temporarily dampen the spirit of all those who sat round that other Round Table. Of course, everything all came right in the end and we, like Blake and his friends, could relax and enjoy our own Xmas fare knowing that right had once again overcome wrong and that our famous Baker Street investigator had added yet another to his list of successfully solved crimes. This year, the first Xmas of the C.D. I have taken ALL those Xmas "Union Jacks" from their usual place on the shelf and feel that I should briefly describe them to you. It was not until 1925 that Gwyn Evans came to the fore as the U.J. Xmas story writer, consequently the Xmas numbers of 1923 and 1924 were not quite so attractive to me as most of those that followed. In 1933, for instance, it was Edwy Searles Brooks who tried to bring us seasonable fare. Yes, you have guessed right, Waldo was in the story. Now I know that all my Nelson Lee fan friends will immediately say that Mr. Brooks was another past master in the art of writing the Yuletide story. They are right, he was, how well I know that from reading such stories as he used to write round the St. Franks boys in the N.L.L. Mr. Brooks had just returned from a lengthy stay in the U.S.A. when he wrote this 1923 Xmas number story "The Flaming Spectre of Cloome". What a peach of a yarn it was too, all the ingredients of thrills, eeriness and the usual Xmas spirit. Yes, our Xmas with Waldo was far from dull, and anyway it was E.R. Parker who illustrated this story even though he had not yet reached that maturity which we appreciated in after

years. 1924 saw George Hamilton Teed as the author of the Xmas yarn. Now Teed IS my favourite author, but somehow I cannot give him first place because of that fact. His story was unique and the spirit of the yarn was grand for it told how Sexton Blake and Yvonne made a temporary truce with that ace criminal Huxton Rymer and his attractive woman accomplice, Mary Trent. Another most enjoyable yarn and once again E.R.P. was to the fore as artist, this time his drawings more like those of the man who designed the S.B. Bust. On to 1925. Ah! Here was the first of a series that really breathed the spirit of the season. "The Mystery of Mrs. Bardell's Xmas Pudding", it was called, and as you have guessed, featured the lovable housekeeper to Sexton Blake. Mrs. B., together with her sister Mary Ann Cluppins, provided us with a most unique story, and there, around that table for the first time sat Blake, Tinker, Splash Page and Inspector Coutts, even Pedro having a place for the occasion. This yarn certainly whetted one's appetite for more and so it was grand in December 1926 to see once again the title "Mrs. Bardell's Xmas Eve". But it was the cover of U.J. No. 1210 containing that story that impressed me. It still does. Mr. Parker has never excelled himself as regards Christmassy drawings. Mrs. B. had the centre of the stage and I, for one, have never forgotten that cover, in fact I have it before me as I write and can still appreciate it. Like Xmas itself it comes up fresh each year. "Mrs. Bardell's Xmas Eve" was the story of the great Baker Street Hoax. Mrs. B. was kidnapped and what a jolly problem was set Sexton Blake in getting her back. If the cover of U.J. No. 1210 impressed me - DID impress me so very much, it did not have the effect of cutting down my enjoyment of the whole issue. It was to my mind the best of all the U.J. Xmas numbers. Eric R. Parker was at the top of his form. On page two he illustrated the Xmas Dinner at Baker Street with Blake raising his glass in a toast to Mrs. B. A masterly drawing which I hope one day to be able to reproduce. On page three was an inset "The Toast is: 'Sexton Blake' (see page 12)"

and on turning to page 12 we find the report of a speech made by Blake himself at a representative gathering of U.J. readers. The toast of "Sexton Blake" which Blake rises to reply after insistent demands from those present. Unfortunately I cannot reproduce his reply here but I can assure all of you who have not read this particular issue that that reply did more to make the detective a real character than hundreds of stories could have done. It was witty, topical and in every way just as we should have imagined the great man to speak. I must quote the closing sentences of Blake's speech though, for it is most fitting to the occasion of this issue of the C.D.

"My best thanks, then, for your toast. May your Christmasses now and to come, be everything that you can wish them; and if the periodical (The Union Jack) with which my name is unworthily associated can succeed in adding to your enjoyment of this festive season, I am honoured indeed".

Actually U.J.No.1210 was not the 1926 Xmas number. This was No.1208, but as it appeared some three or four weeks before the great day one could not really appreciate it to the full. The real Christmas number for that year featured another Teed yarn, this time in the famous Tinker/Nirvana series. Illustrated by Parker yet again, it was a seasonable yarn and one which I have read over many times with undiminished enjoyment. I only wish I could reproduce some of the delightful little sketches and drawings in both these cherished 1926 U.J.'s. Yes, E.R.P. was and still is a master of his art.

The 1927 Evans/Parker story was in true Dickensian style. Not only did Mr.Evans feature the yarn in line with scenes from "Pickwick Papers" but Mr. Parker once again excelled himself and sketched some superb old English scenes, including a real old stage coach loaded with popular U.J. characters. I must quote from the paragraph underneath the drawing concerned. "None were too busy or pre-occupied to

to turn and smile and wave their hands as the coach rumbled by. Somewhere the kindly shade of Charles Dickens smiled down on the incarnation of his immortal dream children - Splash Page's Dickensian party, bound for the delights of Christmas at Ivyden Manor. In this story it was a delight to find all our favourites taking on the personalities of the famous Dickens characters. Splash Page as Alfred Jingle. Sexton Blake as Sidney Carton. Tinker as Sam Weller. Inspector Coutts as Tracy Tupman and Ruff Ramson as Bill Sykes (and who could have fitted the part better). Of course Mrs. Bardell had no need to change HER personality, although maybe we should not place her on quite the same plane as that scheming widow of Pickwick fame. Yes, in very truth Charles Dickens could have looked down and smiled for here indeed was something that was really worthy of the season. It was certainly a most worthy issue to adorn the Xmas bookstall.

In 1928 it was the turn of yet another famous old favourite to give Gwyn Evans ideas. Robin Hood. Yes, he created the "League of Robin Hood" and to make it sound all O.K. let me say that the old manor this year was called Huntingley Manor." All our favourites were there again.

The cover of U.J. No.1313 which was the Christmas number containing this story "The Crime of the Christmas Tree" was of a very pleasing nature. Once again Mr. Parker managed to convey the spirit of Christmas and the predominance of green was rather fitting to the character of Robin Hood on whom one of the central characters of the story was based. In fact his name was Robin. It must be stated here, however, that the inside drawings were not quite up to previous standards. Somehow there did not seem the same polish and finish as hitherto. In the light of subsequent happenings perhaps it is not surprising for the old U.J. was drawing ever closer to it's end, although none of us would have even dared to think of such a thing at the time.

1929 saw two topical Gwyn Evans stories instead of the usual one. This, of course was a very welcome innovation and we revelled in the second helping of Blake, Tinker, Coutts, Bardell, Page and League of Robin Hood. Yes, that modern band of "rob the rich and pay the poor" individuals was again in the limelight Xmas 1929. Once again Mrs. Bardell was kidnapped, or rather doped and abducted, coming to to find herself supposedly in mediaeval England, and dressed for the part too. Of course there was a logical explanation and all worked out well. Some grand chats between Mrs. B and Mary Ann Cluppings (who incidently was her sister) made us laugh when reading this story. The titles were "The Mistletoe-Milk Mystery" and "The Masque of Time". The second title rather well describes Mrs. Bardell's experiences, or rather alludes to them.

The 1930 Xmas story "The Man who Hated Christmas" was not in the same street as it's predecessors I am sorry to say. I think that at the time poor old Gwyn Evans was rather ill, for his story did not have the wit and did not satisfy to the same extent as his others. Not much effort was made to make the issue Christmassy either. Of course Parker was good, but once again there seemed to be something missing. I sighed for the older issues even then. Unfortunately we were to be even more disappointed for Xmas 1931. Gwyn Evans was missing altogether! An entirely new author came to the fore for the occasion, Wm. J. Elliott. His story "The Phantom of the Pantomime" was good but certainly did not satisfy. All those grand little Xmas sketches by Mr. Parker had faded away too.

Xmas 1932 saw the return of Gwyn Evans with "The Masked Carrollers". A good yarn this but somehow that old spirit was again missing. Once again I turned to 1925 and 1926 for solace. Actually three stories were featured this year, for on the two succeeding weeks we were offered Xmas fare by G. Malcolm Hincks and Donald Stuart. Even three such yarns

could not make up for that real Yuletide spirit.

From the above you will observe that I consider the earlier Xmas numbers of the 1923/1932 period by far the best. They were; I don't think anyone denies that, but despite that fact I cannot say that I was ever disappointed with a U.J. Xmas number. Would that we could walk into our newsagents this Xmas and pick up one of them for that modest two-pence which that newsagent mentioned in this issue by Mr. Leckenby considered excessive in 1901! We still have the S.B.L. with us and probably should be thankful for small mercies in such times as these. But nothing can ever take the place of those superb Xmas numbers of the past. It is in the pages of the old U.J. that Sexton Blake really lives. It is with great relief that I pick up my old copies and think to myself - "well, at least I can read a REAL Blake story when I feel like it."

In conclusion, may I express a hope that I have brought back a few memories with this Round Table chat and using the words of Sexton Blake himself, through the medium of the late Mr. Gwyn Evans, "My best thanks, then, for your co-operation. May your Christmasses now and to come, be everything that you can wish them; and if that section of an amateur magazine (The Collector's Digest) with which my name is unworthily associated, can succeed in adding to your enjoyment of this festive season, I am honoured indeed."

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A right Merry Xmas and a Happy and Prosperous New Year to all my Fellow Sexton Blake Lovers.

H. Bond

