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Collectors Digest

DECEMBER 1961

GRAND
CHRISTMAS
NUMBER



COLLECTORS' DIGEST

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EDITORIAL



FRANK NUGENT
Editor



VERNON SMITH
Editor



ARTHUR WINTON
Editor



ROBERT CHERRY
Editor



FRANK LEWIS
Editor

SO MANY FRIENDS. A very Merry Christmas to all my friends the whole world over. May this coming Yuletide bring happiness to your homes, and may 1962 bring health to the ailing, hope to the weary, peace of mind to the sad and the distressed. God bless you all.

It is at Christmas time that we think of old friends. We should, of course, think of them more often, and not just at this one season of the year. It's a human failing, the result of this rush and tear of the mid-twentieth century, to lose contact with old friends simply and solely because our lives are so full and so crowded. But at Christmas time we remember - and old friends remember us.

The greatest blessing of my life might be good health or a peaceful and happy home. But I feel that it is to be found in the great number of friends I have always had. As a schoolmaster I have known so many people - so many boys - so many girls - so many parents. At Christmas time, at least, they remember me, and their greetings rain upon me, bringing me joy and happiness, and, perhaps, a little heart-ache - for pleasure can be near to pain in this life of ours.

But in the past two years, my number of friends has increased by many hundredfold. As an editor I now have friends in every corner of the earth. People who are so sincere, so kindly, so helpful, so very worth while. In all my life, I have never before been so happy and blessed in the friends I possess.

And so, while I wish you the old, old wish for Christmas and a

New Year, I say, to all my readers the world over - Thank you for your friendship and loyalty.

YOUR EDITOR IN THE NORTH. On November 11th, I played truant from my desk and went a long, long way to attend the club meeting of our Northern friends at Leeds. It was worth every moment away from my desk and every inch of the way. Northerners are famed for their friendliness and kindness, and nobody now knows better than I how deserving they are of their reputation. If I went a stranger, I was greeted and welcomed as an old friend. Every single member present went out of his or her way to make me feel at home - and I know that I have left part of my roots up there in that jolly, comfortable club-room at Leeds. Among so many happy memories, one in particular I shall never forget - dear Dorothy Robinson, smiling and happy, telling me of her favourite old boys' story, "Figgings' Fig-Pudding." It was a long, long time ago that Figgings made that famous pudding, but Dorothy has never forgotten. And neither shall I.

THE ANNUAL. Soon, now, the 1961 Collectors' Digest Annual will be with you. I hope and believe that it is the greatest Annual of all time. The final verdict will be yours.

THE EDITOR.

* * * * *

FOR SALE: C.D. Annuals 1956-58-59 7/6 each. C.D. Years 1950-51-52-53-54-55-56-57-58-59-60. 8/- per year. Tom Merry Cold Hawk, 11 books 7/-. S.O.L. St. Frank's 212, 282, 279, 336, 372, 375, 378, 381, 384, 387, 390, 393, 396, 399, 402, 405, 408, 411. 2/6 each. B.F. Lib. by C.H. Jungle Patrol Adventure. Bound 4/- each, plus postage. G. McROBERTS, 31 ARDENLEE DRIVE, CREGAGH, BELFAST.

THE EASTER "OBSCON" Convention H.Q. will be the Queen's Head Hotel, Matlock, Mine Host JOHN GUNN, A.M.H.C.I. There are twin and treble rooms now available. Tariff is 23/6d. Bed and Breakfast. Other meals available as required, Lunch 7/6, Dinner 8/6. Three or four day bookings only.

FOR SALE: 41 copies "Union Jack" between No. 1010 to 1272 - 2/- each. 14 copies between Nos. 1097 to 1117 - 1/3d. each. Three lack covers but story is complete. W. WESTWATER, 4 BUCKLEY STREET, GLASGOW, N.2.

WANTED - WANTED - WANTED !!! HOLIDAY ANNUALS. Reply giving price and date to JOHN GUNN, QUEEN'S HEAD HOTEL, MATLOCK.

FOR SALE or EXCHANGE: Nelson Lees Old Series and First and Second New Series. 2/6 and 1/6 each. 65, BENTHAM STREET, BELFAST.

OFFERS INVITED for C.D. Nos. 13-144. C.D. Annuals 1 - 12. Captains Vols. 13, 27, 28. Chums 1925. Mell, 49 Gracefield Gardens, STREATHAM, S.W.16.

HAMILTONIANA

GRAND CHRISTMAS NUMBER.

The feud between Tom Merry and Cardew is still at fever heat!

A Splendid Christmas
Yarn This, Boys!



DARCY'S CHRISTMAS PARTY!

Ralph Reckness Cardew cannot sink his animosity towards Tom Merry even though they are guests of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy at Eastwood House. A Grand Christmas Story of Tom Merry & Co. of St. Jim's. By popular

MARTIN CLIFFORD.

FAMOUS SERIES, No. 14

This story appeared in the middle of the series in which Cardew ousted Tom Merry from the junior captaincy of St. Jim's. The series commenced in the autumn term, related the development of the feud in the Christmas vacation at Eastwood House, and was played out to a conclusion in the spring term. A tip-top yarn. The artist - R. J. Macdonald - Christmas 1923.

FRANK RICHARDS DEFLATES "BICYCLE-PUMP" CRITIC

The following letter from Frank Richards will be full of interest for all our readers:

I was specially interested in Brian Doyle's article giving quotations from a book by a Miss Fisher, which caused me to open my venerable eyes very wide. Referring to one of my recent books, the excellent lady said - "Nostalgia alone can carry you through this sort of thing."

Apparently Miss Fisher is under the impression that the readers of the Bunter books belong wholly to a pre-war nostalgic generation. But can anyone be so utterly unreflecting as to suppose that any writer could live by writing only for the survivors of a generation that has long passed away?

I am very pleased, and very proud, to know that ten per cent of my present readers are of the old brigade, and I value them very highly and am grateful for their kind and affectionate recollection of the old "Magnet" and its author. But numerous as they are, their numbers would never suffice to keep an author alive who depends on his writing for his livelihood. Ninety per cent of my present readers were not born till after the old Ma net had ceased to exist. So where does the "nostalgia" come in, which Miss Fisher fancies they need to carry them through?

I love to think of the old "Magnetites" reading the books I am writing now: and I am happy to know that I have a multitude of readers in their twenties and thirties and forties. But the bulk of readers of school stories, are, and must necessarily be, teenagers. Most of them have never seen a Magnet; very large numbers of them do not even know that there ever was such a magazine at all. To the vast majority, Bunter and Co. are wholly post-war.

The other day I had a letter from a little girl who told me that she had all the Bunter books excepting one that was out of print, and that she was going to write to the Publishers and ask them to reprint it! This dear little kid was thirteen, so was not born till eight years after the Magnet went West. Not much "nostalgia" there, I imagine!

I conclude that Miss F. must belong to the class of persons alluded to by Prior, who should be kept from paper, pen and ink, so that they cease to write and learn to think.

Now a spot of news that may interest you. I have been asked to make a long-player record, talking about myself as usual, and have written a special "Greyfriars School Song" in Latin to be included therein. The record will be on the market sometime next year, perhaps in the spring. So any old friends who have never had the pleasure - or otherwise! - of hearing by dulcet tones, will then be able to listen-in to the same!

LET'S BE CONTROVERSIAL

NO. 54. A STAR IS BORN

White Christmas - the year, 1910. On the eve of Christmas the lanky, dark-haired lad slogged his way through the driving snow. As he opened the door of the village newsagent's shop, the bell over-head

sent out its loud ping. Inside it was warm, the air impregnated with the smell of paraffin. A paraffin heater was burning on the far side of the counter; from the ceiling swung a paraffin lamp, already lighted, for the early dusk had fallen.

The boy exchanged his penny for a Gem - one of the series which told of Tom Merry destitute in London. — That evening, in his village home in the Cotswolds, the boy read the story - his first Gem.

Not a story, perhaps, to stand comparison with the Gem's greatest but a sincere, touching story, eminently readable, with poignant pictures of the slums of London in the Christmastide of 1910. The boy was never to forget his first Gem. It impressed him deeply, because, perhaps, it was the first story of its type that he ever read. For no logical reason at all, Tom Merry would be his favourite character for all time, and nothing would change it.

Another white Christmas. The year, 1914. Another snowy Christmas Eve. A war is raging now, and a world is changing. Another boy buys another Gem in another shop in another neighbourhood - a suburb near London. Martial tunes are being played on the barrel-organs. Flaring naphtha lamps turn night into day in a market nearby. There are no shortages - yet. The Gem is a double number - there is plenty of paper available for the printers - so far. The Gem has a blue cover - there is no lack of the blue dye - at present.

That evening, before the blazing fire in his suburban home, the boy reads his first Gem. It is called "Talbot's Christmas".

This boy, too, will never forget his first Gem. The Gem will ever be his favourite paper, for it is the first of its type that he has possessed. For no logical reason at all, Talbot will be his favourite character for all time, and nothing can change it.

Another white Christmas - a Christmas made lively by the jazz tunes played over the wireless by the Savoy Orpheans. Another boy reads, hardly noticing the roar of the sea as it breaks over the rocks near his Cornish home. It is the year 1924, and the boy reads the Christmas story of the series in which Harry Wharton, as a rebel, became estranged from all his friends. For this boy, there will never be any paper to compare with the Magnet. For no logical reason at all, Harry Wharton will ever be his favourite character, and nothing will change it.

These cameos mean little. They have no beginning, and they need have no end. The things we learned when we were first old enough to understand are the things which act as our anchor in the storms of life - or possibly, the cancer which may eat away our moral fibre with

the passing of time.

In the same way, I have little doubt that our favourite character in fiction is, more often than not, the one that we loved first of all when we were children.

In a letter printed in last month's Yours Sincerely, Kenneth Kirby refers to the superb character of Harry Wharton, and gives the opinion that, in comparison with Wharton, Tom Merry is a colourless conventional schoolboy.

That Harry Wharton is overwhelmingly the favourite of the majority of Digest readers was proved in the recent Popularity Contest. Was it entirely on account of characterisation that Digest readers voted him first? Chiefly for this reason, I think, but not entirely. One could read hundreds of Greyfriars stories in which nothing particularly outstanding is shown in the characterisation of Harry Wharton.

The last great character series with Wharton in the lead was the Stacey series which appeared in the summer of 1935. The thousands of Magnet readers who joined Greyfriars after that date must have found Wharton the conventional schoolboy leader.

True, most Digest readers have probably read some of the earlier Wharton series now. They read as adults, and they appreciate the splendid study of imperfect boyhood which Wharton presents in the finest yarns in which he starred. Few would deny that Harry Wharton is the greatest character study in Hamiltoniana, but, because sentiment plays its part with most of us, this does not mean that Wharton is, of necessity, our favourite character.

Mr. Kirby finds Tom Merry conventional and colourless in comparison with Wharton. But just how wide is Mr. Kirby's acquaintance with Tom Merry? The Gem hero was played down considerably between 1915 and 1920. Even in the twenties, the only series which really gave character studies of Tom Merry were the Christmas Barring Out series, the Cardew as Captain series, and the Victor Cleeve series. The first two did not present particularly sympathetic studies; the Cleeve series was by far the best, so far as characterisation went, but it appeared in the midst of a glut of substitute material, and it is not particularly well known. I think that to be able to pass an opinion on Tom Merry one needs to have a very comprehensive knowledge of the Gem from the earliest blue cover days.

Did characterisation count for so much in that Contest of ours? It did - for the greatest character study came an easy first. But is it not likely that many voters plumped for Harry as much for the memory of one or two great series in which he starred?

I like the Gem because it was the first paper with which I became acquainted. Tom Merry was my first star, during a child's most impressionable years; so mere sentiment plays its part. Is it not certain that it plays a part with most of us in determining our favourites? Does not our heart often guide us more than our head?

One circumstance strikes me. Say we accept Mr. Kirby's contention, as we probably must, that Harry Wharton was a great piece of character work, and Tom Merry was conventional and colourless. Yet, today, the Greyfriars stories are not the Harry Wharton books; they are the Bunter books. Unfair, of course, but a fact.

The post-war stories of St. Jim's are not the St. Jim's books, they are not the Gussy books - they are the Tom Merry books. We had the Bunter Annual - and the Tom Merry Annual. The manager of the book department in Bentall's of Kingston-on-Thames told me, not so long ago, that the Spring Books sold like hot cakes when the name of Tom Merry was in the title of the story.

So today, sadly enough, the great character study is eclipsed. But the conventional, colourless star who was born in 1907, shines even as brightly today, when he is given the chance.

I agree with Mr. Kirby. Probably Tom Merry is conventional and colourless. If so, that's just how I like him.

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

* * * * *

CONTROVERSIAL ECHOES

No. 53. THE TAIL AND THE DOG.

BILL LOFTS: If, say, roughly, the Magnet office had a thousand letters a week from readers, and the circulation was in a peak of 200,000 readers, this would mean that only 1/2% troubled to air their views. Regarding "Mailbag", I have seen dozens of letters piled on the editor's desk, nearly all requesting 'wants' in back numbers. That is the main reason why this feature was dropped. Maybe there was some excuse for Hinton and Pentelow early editors of the Magnet, in making up letters themselves, as they found they were not receiving letters interesting enough to print. As you say, the bulk of letters did not give a general opinion of readers' views.

With regard to Mr. Brooks, I can only quote information supplied to me to the effect that it was the editor who supplied the basis of the plots and ideas for stories. After all, there was an editor of Nelson Lee Library.

(The odd point about the Hinton letters was that they were not of the type that the average editor would like to receive. He was clearly aiming for sympathy or sensation. What Mr. Brooks meant, perhaps we do not know. The quotation was merely what he said.E.F.)

COLIN WYATT: I feel very strongly about this question of taking too much notice of readers' letters. I work for a children's publication, and we keep what is known as a

popularity chart. This is supposed to tell us which character in the paper is most popular. When a character stays consistently at the bottom, the set that he appears in may be changed or dropped from the comic altogether.

My point is this. "Jack and Jill" sells approximately 650,000 issues a week, and yet every week only about 200 readers write in to the office. What sort of percentage is that? Not nearly enough to warrant the dropping of a character, surely. This sort of thing must have happened with the Magnet, Gem, Nelson Lee and others.

DON WEBSTER: I don't think sufficient readers' letters would be reviewed in the editorial office to "sway" any editor. Persistence may have had some effect, as in the case of yourself and the Gem years ago. I don't think a single letter from me would have resulted in the "Caterpillar" receiving more prominence for I think he was a good character neglected. Also, I detested Tales of Fishy, Alonzo, Trimble and Skimpole, but, had I written, stating my opinion, I doubt if it would have made any difference. Only, possibly, in the case of Talbot did the tail wag the dog in my opinion.

GEORGE SELLARS: I do not agree with you about Lumley-Lumley and Talbot being overplayed. The Outsider was no more in the limelight than Vernon-Smith, and, of course, the same applies to Bunter. I do not think that any of these were overplayed, for they were all popular characters. Talbot certainly was overplayed, but only by the substitute writers, which helped to dim the popularity of this splendid character with some readers. I think Skimpole was a better drawn character than Alonzo Todd, who, in my opinion, was much larger than life.

FRANK LAY: You overstate your case. A sudden increase in the number of letters to the editor means that something of sufficient interest has occurred to make more readers write. Hundreds of letters in praise of "A Very Callant Gentleman" and, presumably, very few in denigration must mean that the story was generally very popular. It is precisely the spontaneous increase that proves the point, as opposed to those increases which are directly inspired by very active minorities acting in concert, as perhaps some of the correspondence in the Sexton Blake Library recently.

As regards your quotation from Mr. Brooks, I feel that it proves nothing. Requests and suggestions for stories are one thing; criticism is another. You quote yourself as a persistent reader having an affect on editorial policy. That is no doubt correct, but it is obvious that the editor considered your criticisms and suggestions had merit and has nothing to do with the volume of letters on a subject.

The prime examples of characters being overplayed are in my opinion those of Bunter and Handforth - two of the most detestable characters ever conceived.

(Why should we presume that there were very few letters in denigration? So far as Mr. Brooks is concerned, he stated plainly that he had been influenced by readers' letters, and, in consequence, had written stories not entirely pleasing to the majority, if that proves nothing, it can only mean that E.S.B. was writing his column at random. So far as Bunter and Handforth are concerned I have a feeling that our Controversial Echoer, in his turn, overstates his case. - E.F.)

EDITOR'S NOTE: STANLEY KNIGHT of Cheltenham has received a letter from the Editor of Knockout with the following comment: "I regret having disappointed you by dropping the Rockwood School story from the pages of Knockout. My reason for doing this was that despite a protracted run it did not prove popular with my young readers, and they, after all, must be my prime consideration."

Mr. Knight says: "How they arrive at the conclusion that the stories did not prove successful with the younger readers I fail to see." So do we, but as Knockout is now almost entirely a paper of stories in pictures, the editor seems to have come to the conclusion that young readers do not wish to read at all.

The severely abridged stories of Rockwood were obviously at a disadvantage. Also, it is doubtful whether a comic paper is really a suitable vehicle to carry school stories of this type. It's difficult to think of any modern paper, in fact, which could carry them satisfactorily. The B.O.P., undoubtedly could - but that comes from another stable.

GENS OF HAMILTONIANA

"I wegard a tailah, Dig, as one of the most necessary, one of the most intelligent, and one of the most admiable members of society. Anybody might be a doctah, or a lawyah, or an architect, or a schoolmastah, but a man wequiahz vewy uncommon gifts to be a good tailah."

"We shall see Gussy editing the 'Tailor and Cutter' some day," said Herries.

"Bal jove! I am afraid that such a posish is beyond a fellah's dreams," said Arthur Augustus. "That wequiahz weal genius."

(From the post-war story; "Talbot's Secret.")

Sent in by Peter Hanger, Northampton. A book souvenir is awarded for every item found suitable for publication in this column.

CHRISTMAS COMPETITION

Make a brief story (just a sentence or two), introducing titles or sub-titles of articles used in Collectors' Digest during 1961. You may use a few words of your own to link the title together. Under-line the titles. For instance:

The man with the brush met Sexton Blake today and asked him why the school friend failed. It was the last day at the Oval, and Sexton Blake, the Eternal, replied with a few musings on progress.

Write your effort on a card or a sheet of paper, and send to the editor. Closing date December 16th.

A brand new book for your library will be presented to each of the two readers who submit what are, in the editor's opinion, the best efforts.

KNOCKOUT ANNUAL 1961

In the review of the new Knockout Annual, published in our last issue, we omitted to make mention of a most important attraction. On page 144 of this Annual you will find "Pistols - Past and Present", a fascinating look at firearms down the years. Beautifully drawn, it is the work of Collectors' Digest own brilliant artist, Robert Whiter. Congratulations, Bob.

YE OLDE CYNIQUE INN

Out of the mouths of babes come words father should never have said in their hearing.

When a man reaches middle age, it isn't the age that matters as much as the middle.

BLAKIANA

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

In last December's Blakiana Eric Fayne kindly reproduced the front cover of the U.J. Xmas No. for 1932, "The Masked Carollers". Accompanying it were a few words about the story, and as an incidental I mentioned that Mrs. Bardell was featured in that issue as No. 4 of the U.J. Portrait Gallery. This in fact was referred to in "Mrs. Bardell's Own Round Table" at the back of that number. Space precluded me from reprinting this delightful piece at that time, but now, a year later, I am able to do so. I am sure you will all agree that my adjective is not misplaced!

For the benefit of John Steele (who recently visited me and is now in Nigeria) and others, here are the 'start' and 'finish' dates of the Sexton Blake Library: 1st series - September 1915 to May 1925; 2nd series - June 1925 to May 1941; 3rd series - June 1941 still running.

And so, once again, I thank all my contributors for their support throughout the past year, and wish all readers of Blakiana a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.

JOSIE PACKMAN.

* * * * *

MODERN BLAKE

By Syd Perry

I feel I must disagree with Julius Lennard. I prefer the modern Sexton Blake. The old stories were good—very good and I loved reading them, but to read them today one feels they are definitely dated! In those days the popular detective was based on Sherlock Holmes - pipe smoking, sitting in his favourite chair in a tattered dressing gown. Most of them followed the same lines: "Sexton Blake & Tinker", "Nelson Lee & Nipper" - they all had a boy assistant, Dixon Hawke had "Tommy Burke", and Martin Dale in the early CHUMS had "Jimmy". Even the "modern" detectives like "Panther Crayle in THE CHAMPION and "Carson Holt" in PLUCK had "Dusty" and "Cinders". We all loved

reading about them, but they have all gone - not because of shortage of paper but, I suppose, because they are now old-fashioned!

Sexton Blake kept going because of the qualities of the various authors; but from time to time he has been "modernised". Just look at Arthur Jones's Sexton Blake and then at Eric Parker's.

Just imagine what Gwyn Evans could do with the present set-up; his Christmas stories if he was here to write them now, with Paula, Marion, Louise, Coutts and Mrs. Bardell would, I am sure, satisfy both old and new readers.

Look what G.H. Teed could do with "Tony", Blake and Paula - a touch of Romance for the teenage readers. I am sure that if he was willing, Edwy Searles Brooks would do wonders with Tinker and Marion Lang.

Imagine Robert Murray and the Confederation versus modern Blake Investigations - "Dr. Satira" too, would have had a wonderful time. Look what possibilities "Gilbert Chester" would have found!

Personally, I think that Mr. Howard Baker has kept "Sexton Blake" alive, and if only his publishers could get interested enough the UNION JACK could be revived today very successfully at, say, perhaps 6d. per copy. There is still room amongst boys for the 'written story' - as witness ADVENTURE, ROVER and the WIZARD, and I am sure that Sexton Blake stories written weekly by such authors as Jack Trevor Story, Arthur McLean, Rex Dolphin, Martin Thomas, etc., would go down well with "readers of all ages."

There is only one fault with the modern Blake. and that lies with the publishers - I don't think they are really interested. A short time ago George Marsden Plummer was featured in a smashing story - but was he advertised? Well, I suppose he was, but only in the companion copy of the SEXTON BLAKE LIBRARY. What was wrong with a full size poster: "RETURN OF G.M. PLUMMER"! "Old" boys would have bought it, some boys would have been given it, and old readers would have been delighted to find that Sexton Blake stories were still available - all the old readers do not have the COLLECTORS' DIGEST you know.

Splash him about! Advertise the stories which are now "as good as ever"! But cut out the sexy bits - that does not suit "readers of all ages", only, in my humble opinion, the wrong sort of readers. We like to read that Paula and Marion are beautiful - and everyone knows they have legs, etc.!!

Incidentally, a few months - or was it years - ago, Mr. Howard Baker told us that it was a critical time for the SEXTON BLAKE LIBRARY, and it was up to us to keep him alive!! We never heard the result of that, but it seems we managed it. I wonder also what happened to the

Popularity Contest - no results yet!

I am sorry that I have rambled on so, but I feel a little indignant that the reader is expected to keep a paper alive. After all, publishing is a business, and all publishers should cater for their readers.

Thank you, Mr. Lennard, for your article, but I prefer the "Modern" Blake. After all, it is not his fault that most of his authors have passed on!

* * * * *

MRS. BARDELL'S OWN ROUND TABLE

(Reprinted from UNION JACK Christmas Number (No. 1521) for 1932)

Mrs. Martha Bardell, housekeeper to the celebrated Sexton Blake, has a cosy Christmastide conversation over a cup of tea in the basement kitchen at Baker Street with her sister, Mrs. Mary Ann Cluppins.

"Well, I must say as 'ow I'm glad you've called round, Mary Ann Cluppins. I've got a lot of inflammation for you, apart from the fact that it's the Restive Season and I would wish to thank you for that nice card you sent and wish you a Happy Christmas. I won't wish you a Preposterous New Year, because I shall see you before than if we're all spared. But, my dear, your sediments are heartily dissimulated; in other words: 'The same to you.'

"I'm afraid you've took me a bit by surprise, and I haven't had time to go out and get you a nice card as I fully contended so to do. You know 'ow it is, my dear - all the extra work with Christmas comin' on, and me all of a fluster running up and down stairs all day, with the front door bell ringing all the time with visitors, and shopping to do, though I've got me a turkey in, and if I do say it meself, there'll be a Christmas dinner for Mr. B. and Master Tinker which the finest hotel in the land couldn't approve on.

"And, talking of visitors, my dear, who do you think came into this very kitchen the other day? Why, Mr. Richards, our milkman. And he brought with him the most curious thing. A negg, my dear. Or rather a negg-shell. It had writing all over it, but the words were obfuscated and you couldn't read 'em.

"Mr. Richards had found the hegg-shell in an empty milk bottle, which seemed rather bazaar to me, and as Mr. B. always likes things to have a bazaar aspic - his own words, my dear - I 'anded it over to him so he could paralyse the writing in his idolatry. What he 'as done, as I suspected he would, and what's more he solved the whole history and they're printing the story just as it all happened, with

the conversation I 'ad with Mr. Richards and everything. I declare, Mary Ann Cluppins, I'm getting quite calibrated in my old age!

"And that's not the only visitor I've 'ad lately. An even more extinguished came last week. A nice young man named Barker, I believe 'e said. Ernest Barker, that was it - a nartist come to take my likeness for the Creditor of the UNION JACK. I sat in this very self-same chair where I'm sitting now, and he made a painting of me. He said, says he, that the Creditor of the UNION JACK wanted to print it in the paper because so many of his customers were always asking after me.

"Yes, my dear, a very pleasant young man was this Mr. Barker, telling me all sorts of antidotes and stories while he was painting my liniments - nothing in the least improper, you understand, but all very interesting and confusing. Well, believe it or not, Mary Ann Cluppins, but his talk was so calm and soothing that I dropped right off to sleep.

"He acted on me just like a hullabaloo on a baby, and when I awoke up he had finished and gone. I suppose he didn't want to perturb me. I 'ope he made a good job of the likeness; I'd rather have a true likeness than one that was too pretty or smattering, because, after all, at my age, I haven't got the face of one of them high-kicking dancers in a cabby-rank; no, nor the figure neither.*

"But what I do find smattering to my sense of profanity - going back to the Creditor of the UNION JACK and his customers - is that he has paid me the condiment to ask me to send them all a message for his Christmas number. What's more, he has sent me a lot of their co-respondents to answer at the Round Table, though what he means by that I don't know no more than fly, my dear. I suppose he meant this round table, talking it over with you, but 'ow he knew it was round is beyond my condensation.

"But a nod's as good as a blink to a blind horse, and I'm always willing to be obligin' so long as I have my 'ealth and strength, as I told Mr. B. himself, the other day when he ups and asks me to rescue that old dressing-gown out of the rag-bag where I had thrown it, being so old and torn that you'd 'ardly believe.

"Well, Mary Ann Cluppins, you can never say your sister Martha isn't depreciated in her old age. Just listen to this; it's out of a letter from the co-respondents:

"I must mention the lady of 'U.J.' fame the noble Mrs. Bardell, who never fails to delight us with her quaint English. Sexton Blake's housekeeper will always live in our minds as a truly wonderful woman without whom his domestic affairs would not run so smoothly."

"That's from Gerald Jones, he signs himself, and all the way

from Jamaica. Bless 'is 'eart; I'm sure he's a nice young man. And if you think I made it up, Mary Ann Cluppins, here's the whole letter to prove I didn't. See this bit where he writes about Jamaica, which seems to be one of them topical places on the inflator, judging by what he says:

"Under the blue sky and the blazing sunshine of sunny Jamaica, Sexton Blake is as well loved and respected as in any other part of the world, and I venture to say that the youths of Jamaica would vote for him just as much as those of Western Australia or anywhere else."

"And so they would, my dear. Mr. B. may be contested like poison by crooks and rogues because of his dooties as a criminal instigator, but everybody else loves him.

"And, talking of past years, my dear, there is another letter I 'ave 'ere, from a Mr. James Godley. His address is Moor Lane, Strensall, York, and he seems to be an old follower. He says:

"By the way, in the early days, I think Mrs. Bardell was the landlady and she let rooms to Blake. Evidently, since then, Blake has taken the house over, for she is now his housekeeper."

"It's surprising, my dear, to see how these indivisibles who read Mr. B's adventures have got such good memories as to remember even our domestic derangements at Baker Street. There was a time - just after pore dear Bardell was took with his complaints and transferred to a 'eavenly spear - that I had the ostensibility of being the landlady in possession of these premises, and Mr. B. was my first floor. But since them days he has had the posterity he deserves; and as Mr. Godley remarks, he is now the owner of the leasehole.

"It's a treat to have all these letters from my admirers - even if I do say myself, Mary Ann Cluppins, they are admirers, as you can see with half a neye. I could go on talking about 'em all night, and 'ow I am going to purvey my sediments to all of 'em I can't think. And I'm afraid there's not time to now, anyway, for Mr. B. and that young limb, Tinker, will be in soon, wanting their late dinner.

"Well, well, it's been very pleasant 'aving this tater-tater talk on the subject. All I can say is that I 'opes every reader of the UNION JACK has a real good time this Christmas. I should like to see 'em all trooping into this kitchen one by one so that I could give 'em the condiments of the Season.

"Bless their hearts, one and all; you don't know 'ow it makes me feel, my dear - all funny-like inside as if my pore heart was a-going to burst - when I think of all them people all over the world, following the doings of Mr. Blake and young Tinker and their loyalty

and commotion to the Old Paper.

"Bless their hearts, I says. And I wish 'em all they wish themselves this Christmas and every Christmas!"

MARTHA BARDELL.

(* Mr. Eric Parker's likeness referred to by Mrs. Bardell appeared on page 19 of that issue. J.P.)

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SEXTON BLAKE LIBRARY TITLES AND AUTHORS (2nd series)
(Concluded)

No. 724	The Riddle of the Greek Financier.....	(R. Purvale).....	J. G. Brandon
No. 725	The Mystery of the German Prisoner.....		P. A. Clarke
No. 726	The Consulting Room Mystery.....	Original Author	J. W. Bobin
	(Reprint of 2nd series No. 327).....	Rewritten by	W. J. Bayfield
No. 727	On Ticket of Leave.....	(R. Purvale).....	J. G. Brandon
No. 728	The Case of the Jack of Clubs.....		C. A. Evans
	(Reprint of 2nd series No. 164)		
No. 729	The Case of the Missing Major.....		A. Parsons
No. 730	The Mysterious Mr. Maynard.....		A. J. Hunter
No. 731	The Secret of the Evacuees.....		L. Black
No. 732	Twenty Years of Hate.....		G. Verner
No. 733	The Observer Corps Mystery.....		R. Hardinge
No. 734	The Riddle of Dead Man's Bay.....	Original Author	J. W. Bobin
	(Reprint of 2nd series No. 358).....	Rewritten by	J. G. Brandon
No. 735	The Case of the Murdered Caretaker.....		C. Gates
No. 736	The Amazing Affair of the Shipyard Cottage.....		W.E. Stanton-Hope
No. 737	The Man From Fleet Street.....		J. Creasey
No. 738	The Riddle of the Yukon.....		L.C. Douthwaite
	(Reprint of 2nd series No. 344)		
No. 739	Under Secret Orders.....	(R. Purvale).....	J. G. Brandon
No. 740	Doomed Men.....	Original Author	F. Warwick
	(Reprint of 2nd series No. 335).....	Rewritten by	W. J. Bayfield
No. 741	The Mystery of the Free Frenchmen.....		A. Parsons
No. 742	The House of Darkness.....		A. J. Hunter
No. 743	The Case of the Man on Leave.....		H.H.C. Gibbons
No. 744	In the Night Watch.....	(R. Waldo).....	E. S. Brooks
	(Reprint of 2nd series No. 374)		

(End of Second Series)

SEXTON BLAKE LIBRARY TITLES AND AUTHORS (3rd series)

No. 1	Raiders Passed	A. J. Hunter
No. 2	On the Stroke of Nine	A. Parsons
No. 3	The Mystery of the Rush-Rush Factory	H.H.C. Gibbons
No. 4	The Red Stiletto	G. N. Phillips
No. 5	The Case of the Shot Looter	P. A. Clarke
No. 6	The Riddle of the Boy on the Road	E. S. Brooks
No. 7	The Crime of Corporal Sherwood	H.H.C. Gibbons
No. 8	The Man from Occupied France	A. Parsons

- No. 9 The Secret of the Grave
 No. 10 (The Haunted Hotel Mystery
 (The Case of the Mystery Parachutist
 No. 11 The Riddle of the Missing Firewatcher
 No. 12 The Clue of the Stolen Rupees

A. J. Hunter
 C.W. Phillips
 H. E. Hill
 H.H.C. Gibbons
 A. Parsons

THE VICTORIA PALACE SHOW

The London Club's party to the theatre to see "Billy Bunter Shipwrecked" takes place on Saturday afternoon, January 13th. A large block of seats is already booked, and we shall be happy if we can make it our largest party ever. Seats are 15/- each. Please join the party with your friends if you can. Seats can be booked through the editor of Collectors' Digest.

The opening scene is set in the "Sanny" at Greyfriars, and there are countless hilarious moments. Fun waxes fast and furious when The Co, Quelch and Bunter reach an island in the Mediterranean.

An added attraction this year will be Ted Osborne at the piano, playing and singing the Bunter songs composed by Eric Fayne.

SPECIAL REQUEST

Owing to the Christmas Holidays it is requested that our contributors and advertisers send in their material for the January issue as early as possible in December.

RESULT OF OUR NOVEMBER COMPETITION

Our quaint little contest in November proved immensely popular with readers, many of whom have written in to say that they spent many pleasant hours trying to solve the problem.

The following is the correct solution:

CHUCKLES, DREADNOUGHT, PILOT, JESTER, MONSTER, BUBBLES,
 PLUCK, SKIPPER, PUCK.

Only one competitor sent in an entirely correct solution, and he is R. J. GODSAVE, 35 Woodhouse Road, Leytonstone. A volume for his library is being sent to Mr. Godsava. We consider his achievement quite remarkable, and congratulate him. The second book award goes to ARTHUR HOLLAND, 68 Thornton Street, Wellington, Australia, whose entry was next in order of merit.

COMING

No. 4 Golden Hours Magazine. Articles by Vic Colby (1st series Penny Popular Sexton Blake reprints) and E. C. Snow (Formulae of Genius). Special W.O.G. Gifts feature. Money order for 4/- to S. Smyth, 1, Brandon Street, Clovelly, N.S.W. Australia.

NELSON LEE COLUMN

(Conducted by JACK WOOD)

Well, it's here again! Christmas, of course, and it hardly seems a year since we were celebrating in the good old-fashioned way. How time does fly! However, here's a sincere wish that all members of our happy band, and Leeites in particular, will have the best of all possible times over the holiday season, and health and prosperity in the many years ahead.

Many thanks to all my correspondents who have kept the Column going in 1961; may they rally round to ensure continuance in the months ahead. And who better at a time of especial nostalgia than one of our most knowledgeable hobbyists to revive happy memories?

RANBLINGS ON 'THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY'

By. W. O. G. Lofts

When a collector wrote to me some time ago, suggesting 'that I was perhaps biased against Nelson Lee, Nipper, and Handforth & Co.' because I never wrote about the characters in articles, I felt rather amused.

It is perfectly true, of course, that the above characters have featured very little, if at all, in my articles, but it is very hard indeed to write anything authentic, or on the 'inside' as it were, on the NELSON LEE LIBRARY.

There are also probably hundreds of collectors who are far more qualified than myself to write about the famous school of St. Frank's, many if not all who remember it in their youth. Alas, I only started reading in 1933 when the NELSON LEE LIBRARY ceased. In penning articles regarding Sexton Blake, or any other character that was written by a host of writers, the task is obviously much easier. With Blake still going strong today, and a total of probably now over 200 odd authors who have penned his adventures since 1893, I can never see information about him drying up, whilst Nelson Lee to the sorrow of many died in 1933.

I recently read the first Ezra Quirke series in the Library, and thought the story and mystery set-up first class. Regarding also the story 'The Boy Who Could Not Lie' featuring a Larry Scott, who was more truthful than George Washington, surely this type of a character was

not to be found in any of the Hamilton schools?

The splendid reproduction in the September C.D. of the very first NELSON LEE LIBRARY cover, brings me to the burning question of Who did actually write it? Although many suggestions regarding the actual authorship have been brought forward through the years, nothing to my knowledge, has been brought to light on an authentic basis. A perusal through early Collectors' Digests suggests that it could have been written by G.H. Teed/Maxwell Scott/W. Murray Graydon/Andrew Murray/Andrew Gray/ or in fact any other principal detective writer in the 1915 period. The only fact which seems conclusive is that E.S. Brooks did not write it - and that is agreed by all collectors.

The first editor of THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY was a Mr. A.H.S. May, better known as Harold May. Educated I believe at Dulwich, he was a newspaper reporter of great merit during the period just before the first world war. Quiet, and very unassuming, he had a fairly easy task as editor, especially when the St. Frank's stories commenced from No. 112, and the manuscripts received by E.S. Brooks who practically wrote all the stories, were so well written and beautifully typed, that they needed very little revision or subbing. This can be confirmed by H.W. Twyman editor of the 'Union Jack' in relation to Mr. Brooks' Sexton Blake yarns. With stories well in hand (unlike the Magnet office) Harold May probably considered himself most fortunate in having E.S. Brooks as his sole and star author.

With a healthy circulation in the early 1920s, it has been very difficult to discover why its readers should drop off with such alarming proportions about 1927. Maybe the great slump had something to do with it, but according to collectors I have met, who read St. Frank's, they assure me that the quality of the stories at that period was never better.

I have read with great interest the account by E. S. Brooks on the reason for the actual decline of the Nelson Lee Library. This was related in 'Collectors' Digest' as far back as issue No. 35, whilst later readers may have read the same version related by Ernie Carter in the 1959 C.D. Annual. Although I have not the slightest doubt that Mr. Brooks was giving an honest opinion, and that he was speaking in good faith, I feel it should be pointed out that there are always two sides to every question. Most unfortunately, Harold May just cannot be traced today, and probably if he is still in the land of the living, some very interesting information can be brought to light. I have, however, succeeded in tracing the later three editor of the 'Nelson Lee Library' with somewhat mixed results. Before proceeding any further on

this subject, in fairness to Ernie Carter, who only named three editors altogether in his article in the 1959 C.D. Annual, I should like to point out that at that period I, too, assumed that Ernie's statement was correct. It has only just recently come to light that another editor was in charge in its dying days.

I have been rather puzzled by Mr. Brook's statement that Harold May retired in 1928 as he was only a young man then. If alive, today, I doubt if he would be older than his early 70s. Incidentally, Mr. May was a writer himself of sorts, and stories by him will be found in 'Young Britain.' It has always astonished me by the reaction of editors at Fleetway Publications when I have questioned them on Alfred Edgar's connection with the 'Nelson Lee Library', many of them who were personal friends of his insist that he had nothing to do with it all! But my own opinion is that I cannot help but accept Mr. Brooks' statement on the matter that Alfred Edgar succeeded Harold May in 1928.

It may be true that Alfred Edgar was according to Brooks, 'A man with big ideas' but in fairness to Edgar he obviously had to experiment with some new set up, to boost a declining circulation. Statements by former members of boys' paper staff at that period, suggest that whatever Edgar did it would have been no use, or, to put it more boldly, in 1929 the Nelson Lee Library was considered to be already a dead duck, and it was practically shunned by editors like the plague.

Although Edgar may have failed with the Nelson Lee Library, he most certainly could claim to have succeeded later in life. Today in Hollywood under the name of Barrie Lyndon he earns so I'm told over £75,000 a year in script writing, and he has many successful films to his credit. In communication with him, he would rather 'let sleeping dogs lie' as it were - and 'he can see no point in digging old sores up' - so Edgar's connection with the Library rests.

Probably to succeed Edgar was a H.T.T. Cauldwell - whom several editors can remember working on the 'Nelson Lee Library' in a corner of one of the other offices. It seems that in 1930 this famous Library was deprived of having an office to itself. Mr. Cauldwell wrote me several very friendly letters some time ago, but his memory was somewhat hazy of events nearly 30 years ago. Later he thought up the idea of "Modern Wonder" which the A.P. rejected, and sold the idea to Odham's Press of which he was editor. At a later date he also became editor of "Micky Mouse Weekly." A point I should mention here is that Mr. Cauldwell was an artist, and an editor insisted that he took over from May in 1928. The curious remark by Brooks of author/artist in relation to Edgar seems to give some slight support to this - more so when

Edgar's close friends say that he could not draw a straight line!

In late 1932, the 'unwanted' Nelson Lee Library was handed to Mr. C. M. Down's department, when probably it had already been decided to amalgamate it with one of the other papers in this section in time. Mr. Down put a R.C. Hewitt in charge, and he has turned out to be a most informative correspondent. Starting as a sub-editor on the 'Boys' Realm' Mr. Hewitt has also worked on the 'Holiday Annual', 'Schoolboys Own Library' - and was the actual last editor on the 'Gem' some very interesting information has come to light on the Gem reprints - but this will be given in a later article.

Ernie Carter in his most interesting article in the 1960 C.D. Annual asks the question of "what actually happened to all those enthusiastic members of the St. Frank's League" and that will be the theme of my next article on St. Frank's - when some highly interesting facts will come to light.

(As a member of the League, I await Bill Lofts' next article with interest. - J.P.W.)

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TO SAVE MY DAUGHTER'S SANITY can someone supply 1279/8 of Gem? She must know how the story finishes! Would purchase or loan would be appreciated.
YORKE ROBINSON, "CLIFFE PAVILION", HERNE BAY, KENT.

NEED "Magnets" 808, 826, 899, 960-963, 970, 1011, 1013, 1027, 1028, 1033, 1035, 1072, 111, 1120, 1139. Schoolboys Owns 169, 228, 258. For Exchange Magnets 248-251, 275, 279, 280, 283, 294, 297, 316, 330, 360, 362, 365. Double numbers 288, 357. 343, 354, 363 No covers. 308 rough. THOMPSON, 53 WALLASEY PARK, BELFAST, 14.

CAN ANY GOOD SMARITAN HELP? Only one copy of MODERN BOY is needed to complete an entire set from No. 1 to the end. ONLY 239 is needed. If you can help, please write to: DR. R. WILSON, 100 BROOMFIELD ROAD, GLASGOW, N.1.

WANTED: Single copies or bound volumes of the following:

"Champion" No. 260 to 341

"Pluck" (last series) No. 78 to 97

"Triumph Annual" 1938

"Champion Annuals" for years 1936, 1937 and 1939.

"The last volume of Boys' Friend"

"Triumph" No. 1 to 190

"Rocket" Nos. 78 to 87

"Champion No. 176 -

I will pay £1 for single copy of this number. Please write Air Mail stating prices wanted to: MR. R. J. MCCARTHY, WETLANDS, AUGATHELLA, QUEENSLAND, AUSTRALIA.

WANTED: Sexton Blake Libraries 1st series Nos. 11, 17, 37, 105, 109, 111, 198, 201, 219, 2nd series Nos. 293, 296, 306, 422, 474, 485, 520, 667. Union Jacks 689, 691, 693, 702, 704, 711, 725, 736, 740, 785, 786, 788, 793, 798, 800, 802, 803, 809, 811, 813, 814, 818, 1041, 1064, 1096, 1390.

MRS. J. PACKMAN, 27 ARCHDALE ROAD, E/ST DULWICH, LONDON, S.E.22.

MY "FAVOURITE" CHRISTMAS NUMBER



My mother, like most mothers, did not view with a kindly eye the "saving up" of the old papers. Piles of old periodicals took up space, and gathered dust, in a small home. I often tried to keep them, and regarded the accumulating heap with pride. But, when my back was turned, my mother would make a swoop - and the papers would go to that place to which my mother considered all litter should go.

In consequence, only one copy has been in my possession for nearly as long ago as I can remember. Somehow it missed the maternal broom. Exactly when this copy of the Favourite Comic dated Christmas 1916, came into my possession I do not know, but I was very small at the time, and I always loved it.

A contemporary of such popular comics as "Merry & Bright", "The Butterfly" and "The Funny Wonder" - and coming from the same stable - the Favorite was very similar in format, though I doubt whether it was ever quite so popular. It

was printed on a fawny-pink coloured paper, though that is a vague description. Like "Merry & Bright" the "Favorite" was born way back in 1910, but how long it ran after this Christmas Number of 1916 I do not know.

The comic characters were not memorable. On the cover was K.N. Pepper, King of

K-Nuts; on the back page was Tommy Tippit, the Terror of the Town; on the centre spread appeared Sally Cinders, the Slavey; Flossie and Phyllis, our fascinating flappers; and a gentleman who must have been a little outdated by 1916, Ragtime Rex.

The drawings strike me as excellent. In the front page pictures, one is struck by the robin watching from his twig in the third picture; the rabbit chasing the squirrel in the fourth; the mouse looking on at the love scene in the ancestral hall, in the final picture. I wonder whether our reproduction is good enough for you to pick them out.

There were two serials, each with an adult flavour; "London" and "In the Shadows" In addition there were two weekly series: Victor Brand, Detective (this week Victor Brand's Christmas Adventure") and Popular Proverbs (this week "Christmas Comes but Once a Year.") Special added attractions in this Double Number were four complete stories, and one, "The Tragedy of the Train" has ever remained in my memory. A woman sees from a train what she believes to be a murder by a man of his wife in the room of a house. Four years later she recognizes the man.

Let the beautiful heroine tell the tale in her own words:

"I was alone in an express train rushing North, and we ran over a high embankment. Below there were small houses, with lights in their windows. One had the blind up, and in the moment that the train tore by, I just had time to see that man there, the man I might have married, seize a knife from the table and plunge it into the bosom of a beautiful woman in evening dress, who fell to the floor dead, I am sure."

A fantastic episode, of course. Years later I recall a Sexton Blake story in which someone saw something of the sort from a stationary train, which was much more feasible. When I read Agatha Christie's "4.50 from Paddington" (one of the less successful Christies, now made into a film called "Murder she said") I could not help wondering whether Agatha might once have read that old "Tragedy of the Train" in the 1916 Christmas Number of the Favorite.

So this old Christmas number has remained with me down the years. Like its owner, it is showing signs of the passing years, the ravages of time. Frayed and discoloured, and getting more and more fragile, it still has all the charm of a Christmas long gone.

What has the March of Time given the youngsters of today to improve on that "Favorite"? Progress must surely have produced something which is far ahead of that paper of forty-five years ago.

What, to put it boldly, have the present day comics got which was not possessed by that old, old Favorite? The answer is simple. Nothing!

WANTED: GEMS 407, most issues between 412 and 500; most issues between 772 and 842. 935, 953, 956, 980, 975, 984, 985, 986, 989, 990, 993, 992, 998, 1129, 1150. MAGNETS 45, 52, 134, 195, 205, 238, 239, 277, 318, 319, 344, 345, 346, 347, 357, 358, 400, 417, 422, 435, 439, 446, 469, 719, 752, 773, 809, most issues between 821 and 890, 900, 921, 924, 925, 936, 938, 940, 942, 943, 946, 949, 951, 965, 967, 988, 996. POPULARS 183, 190, 370, 385, 396, 452, 455, 466, 474.

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

WANTED: S.O.L.'S Nos. 60 and 68. Modern Boy No. 239, Magnet Nos. 829, 862 - 865, 867, 868, 869, 874, 879, 884, 896, 897, 900. DR. R. WILSON, 100 BROOMFIELD ROAD, GLASGOW, N.1.

WANTED: S.O.L.'s 42, 258. Nelson Lee No. 130 (old series). Your price paid plus postage. The advertiser has some S.O.L.'s, Nelson Lees, Gems and Magnets for exchange only.

BRIAN HOLT, BRITISH EMBASSY, REYKJAVIK, ICELAND.

YOURS SINCERELY

(Interesting items from the Editor's Letter-Bag.)

GEORGE BURGESS (Romsey): I greatly enjoyed C. Lowder's article "Cade of St. Frank's". Yes, indeed, this was a fine series in October, 1926. In those days I was working in the nice gardens of Norton Priory, Selsey, Sussex. I used to take my copy of the dear old Lee in my dinner-bag, and enjoy the troubles of Fullwood, in the summer house or under one of our lovely old trees. How long ago it all seems now, but what a happy world it then was! People were somehow happier with the simple things of life, which are, and always will be, the best. I still have those copies of the Nelson Lee. They have been with me all over the country.

(The Book Souvenir which is awarded every month for the Star Letter of the month goes to the sender of the above. - ED.)

EDWIN COLDWELL (Denby Dale): The Digest gets better with each issue. Especially I like the illustrations and the occasional articles that deal with a variety of papers, often bringing back memories of almost forgotten things. I think my favourite of the minor characters in the Sexton Blake stories was Captain James Dack, skipper of the "Mary Ann Trinder." Some years ago I came upon a book borrowed from the public library that described the adventures of this wily skipper. I cannot recall its title, or the name of the author which was not John Hunter. Has John Hunter written any Capt. Dack stories under another name, or has any other author written of this character?

DONALD STURGEON (Burnley): Thank you for a most enjoyable year's entertainment and food for thought. I just can't explain the feeling of happiness and contentment that I experience when perusing the mag. Many would probably say that it is a "wanting to go back into the past." This may be so (selected periods, of course), but I must say that the "trick cyclists" are making quite a mess of the present-day youths. Thank you for the work that you put into the Digest to make it so entertaining - yet so full of friendship.

CHARLES VAN RENEN (South Africa) The C.D. is a real treat. I am sure it would warm your heart to see the anticipative gleam in my eyes towards the end of the month. I like the Hamiltonians set-up particularly these days. I was delighted to see the return of Roger Jenkins' "Do You Remember?" - and, of course, Let's Be Controversial and its Echoes, and Gems of Hamiltonians are evergreen. I think Famous Series with those fascinating reproductions from the old favourites are a great innovation. The Popularity Contest was grand, and I welcome anything more in this line. You will be glad to hear that I am now as devoted to St. Jim's as I am to Grayfriars.

HERBERT HILTON (Oldham): Is it possible for you to publish at some future date an article about those wonderful fellows, that great array of anonymous artists, who drew week by week the joyful antics of the comic characters we all have loved in our time. From Tom Browne onwards there must have been hundreds of them, yet it is surprising how seldom they are mentioned. The creators of Constable Cuddlecreek, the Bruin Boys, Casey's Court, Dreamy Daniel and a hundred others must provide material for many delightful nostalgic articles.

BERT HOLMES (Barrow in Furness): Shades of the "Abracadabra" version of T.V. fame - what a grand competition! It has given me very great pleasure to "have a go". Believe me, only one M, one N and no F has made it very interesting.

R. MORTIMER (East Molesey): So Mr. Hughes of Bognor Regis wonders whether it is possible to arrange an exhibition somewhere in London. I think this would be a splendid idea in the New Year, and I am sure it would cause a great deal of interest. I should be only too willing to co-operate if it came to pass.

HOWARD SHARPE (Australia): The C.D. has matured and the result is mellow indeed. For my money, the Sexton Blake and Hamiltoniana items are what I like best. I read each issue cover to cover, but it is obvious that the great bulk of readers are Hamilton or Blake fans above all else, and for this reason I feel you can't go wrong in continuing to ladle out the "mixture as before." The proportion of articles on other subjects is in reasonable ratio to the interest in them - almost more so. The best articles that have ever been in the monthly or the Annual, in my judgement, have been Roger Jenkins' Annual articles on the Magnet, your corresponding ones on the Gem and Harry Homer's monograms on Blakiana - not necessarily in that order, as they dead-heat in my mind. These were all masterpieces and worthy of being published in booklet form. They are the cream of the C.D. classics to me.

(We hope that the entire "Story of the Magnet" and "The Story of the Gem" by Roger Jenkins and Eric Fayne respectively, will be published in booklet form during 1962, ED)

EDWARD THOMSON (Edinburgh): The November C.D. is excellent. All the articles are very good, and Mrs. Jack Trevor Story's "Miracle" first-class. Indeed a delightful, charming article, and how true of the modern generation.

BEN WHITER (London): In today's Sunday Telegraph there is a report of a postman delivering a letter to the wrong address. Thus a horse named Billy Bunter, trained by Walter Wharton, was unable to run at Catterick, much to the annoyance of Loder.

SYD SMYTH (Australia): The recent C.D.'s have been very high standard with most interesting contents. But last month's cover frightened me. I'm afraid that the Billy Bunter aspect, to say nothing of his postal-order, has lost all attractions as an eye-catcher for me. I think the reproductions of covers (any interesting cover) is definitely the right item for the Digest.

(We try to ring the changes, with a never-ending variety with our covers, and that policy seems to meet with general approval. We had plenty of letters in praise of Bob Whiter's picture. Next month's cover is the most surprising we have ever presented, I think. We keep our fingers crossed in case some readers may send in brickbats. But we hope for a few bouquets. - ED.)

PETER WALKER (Nottingham): My daughter, who is 16, simply adores the Gem, and loves stories dealing with Talbot, Cardew and Figgins. She also, when possible, reads old Magnets, and - this is the point - she is a member of the younger generation, with all the interests of the modern teenager, and considers the TV Greyfriars series poor. She maintains that the pictures of St. Jim's and Greyfriars she has built up in her own mind are far more satisfying than the B.B.C. can do it. I have not encouraged this view; it is her own conclusion. And, of course, to me, nothing can alter my own mental images.

CHAS. DAY (Keighley): I was sorry to see the discontinuance of Rockwood in Knockout, and I hope that in the near future the series may be resumed. I resented the changing of Putty Grace to Simon Simple, but nevertheless, enjoyed the stories.

Hillside 6490.

FOR SALE OR EXCHANGE

VERNON LAY,
52 OAKLEIGH GARDENS,
WHETSTONE,
LONDON, N.20.

Magnet Vols. 1481-1506, 1612-1637, 1651-76, 492-413, 414-435, 435-476. Popular 43-84 new series. Gem 642-706, 770-803. Sets of Maynards Greyfriars Cards (12). Set of Girls of Cliff House School (10). Original illustrations by Shields, Macdonald, Chapman, Reynolds (Warwick), H.M. Brock, Bennett, etc. Volumes of Scout, Chums, B.O.P. Captain, Big Budget. Volume of Champion Magazine, 1913. Many loose Magnets, Gems, Populars, Union Jacks, Nelson Lees, S.O.L.s, Sexton Blake Libraries, Champion Lib., etc., etc.

Hard-cover books - school stories

R. A. H. Goodyear	The Boys of Castle Cliff School - 4/-
Walter C. Rhoades	Two Scapegraces ill. Copping fine - 5/-
Hylton Cleaver	Captains of Harley fine - 4/-
Hylton Cleaver	The Blaze of Baron's Royal - 4/-
Hylton Cleaver	Captains of Dukes - 3/-
P.G. Wodehouse	Tales of St. Austin's - 5/-
P.G. Wodehouse	Pothunters (rebound) - 5/-
P.G. Wodehouse	The Head of Kay's 1st ed. fair only - 5/-
R.A.H. Goodyear	The White House Boys - 3/-
Gunby Hadath	The Swinger - 3/-
Hector Halloran	St. Alkmund's, Donnisthorpe 1902, fine, scarce - 6/-
L. C. Douthwaite	Seconds Out - 4/6
John Finnemore	Teddy Lester's Chums, 1st fair - 4/-
John Finnemore	Teddy Lester's Chums Modern edition fine - 4/-
Alfred Edgar	The Abbeygate Cricket Club - 3/-
Bertram Mitford	Haviland's Chums scarce, rebound - 1903
Harold Avery	Through Thick and Thin - 3/-
Tom Holland	The Headmaster's Son, fine - 4/-
Michael Poole	The Duffer of Danby - 3/6
Anthony Buckridge	Our Friend Jennings - 3/-
Desmond Coke	The Bending of a Twig, fine - 4/-
Talbot Baines Reed	The Fifth Form at St. Dominic's fine - 3/-
Talbot Baines Reed	The Cock-House at Fellsarth - 4/-
Talbot Baines Reed	Tom, Dick and Harry - 3/6
E. F. Kelllett	Birds of a Feather, scarce, 1904 - 6/-
G. E. Rochester	The Freak of St. Freda's - 4/-

Mystery - adventure, etc.

Anthony Skene	Gallows Alley - 10/6
S. Walkey	Yo-Ho for the Spanish Main - 10/-
S. Walkey	For the sake of the Duchess - very scarce - 12/6
Capt. Shaw	Captain Lash - 4/-
Capt. Shaw	The Gay Sea Road - 4/-
Capt. Shaw	Life Owes Me Nothing, fair only - 2/6
Warren Bell	Jim Mortimer - 4/-
Coutts Brisbane	The Secret of the Desert - 4/-
G. E. Rochester	Pirates of the Air - 4/9
Hylton Cleaver	Dead Man's Tale - 4/-
John Hunter	West of Justice - 4/-
G. A. Henty	72 Titles in stock from 5/-.

POSTSCRIPT TO "PUCK"

"I always regarded 'PUCK' with some awe", wrote Bill Lofts in the September C.D. "PUCK" certainly was the comic paper of the Top Children of days gone by. We have already read in these pages of Stephen Potter of "Gamesmanship" fame boasting of having taken "Puck", One Penny, when he was a child. Now a further bit of evidence of the popularity of "PUCK" amongst the intelligentsia has come to light.

Early in 1918, the editor of "PUCK" invited any of his readers who wanted to see their names in print in the Val Fox stories, to write and tell him so.

Some weeks later, in Puck No. 724, June 8th, 1918, we read:

VAL FOX PRIZES

"The first two letters to be opened in this week's competition belonged to: Jennie Moore, 44 Church Street, Seaham Harbour, Co. Durham and Michael Redgrave, 9, Chapel Street, Belgrave Square, London, S.W."

And in the Val Fox story appears this: "Uncle Pat turned round and saw Jennie Moore and Michael Redgrave, two young friends of Val's, standing near by." There is also a picture of the scene, showing a pretty little girl, and a boy in Norfolk jacket and breeches - quite a sturdy little chap.

Now, Sir Michael Redgrave, the distinguished actor born in 1908, was living in London at the time. It seems quite likely therefore, that he may have been the Michael Redgrave who appeared in "PUCK" and who, incidentally, won a half-crown prize.

A letter has been sent to Sir Michael, asking if he was the young reader in question. His reply is awaited with much interest.

"CoMiCuS"

REVIEW by FRANK LAY

A study of the books and characters of
P.G. Wodehouse, across nearly sixty
years. Richard Osborne; Herbert
Jenkins. 21/-

"WODEHOUSE AT WORK"

To all admirers of P.G. Wodehouse this book is a must. Abounding with quotations from his various writings it makes clear his mastery of the English Language and his method of expression that surely is unique. The chapter on School and the School Stories is naturally of most interest to us and it is interesting to find in these stories traces and beginnings of those Wodehousian characteristics that give us so much pleasure in his later stories. If only Mr. Wodehouse could be persuaded to write a school-story today it could not fail to be a masterpiece in this, perhaps, the most difficult of all genres of story. As Mr. Wodehouse says in an essay on School Stories published in The Public School Magazine;

"The worst of school life, from the point of view of an author, is that nothing happens ... of course, if you are brazen enough to make your hero fall in love with the Doctor's daughter ... a time may come when a writer shall rise bold enough and independent enough to retell the speech of school as it really is, but that time is not yet. The cold grey eye of the public which holds the purse is upon us, and we are dumb. Rudyard Kipling went near to it ... a gallant pioneer of the Ideal; but even the

conversation of Stalkey & Co. leaves something unsaid; not much, it is true, but still something."

This book is a model of what such books should be and it is to be hoped in the fullness of time someone will do for Charles Hamilton what Richard Usborne has done for P.G. Wodehouse.

Old Boys' Book Club

MIDLAND

Meeting held October 31st, 1961

It was expected that our new member from Wallheath, Staffs, Patrick Hughes would make his first appearance, but we were disappointed. We also missed George Chatham and John Tomlinson, who were kept away by business obligations. With Joe Marston making the journey from Burton the attendance was nine. We had a full programme and got off to an early start.

We heard with great pleasure that Norman Gregory was making good progress, though still in hospital and confined to bed. There was no quiz tonight and Jack Corbett was able to give us his interesting talk. This was unusual in its way as the subject was - the simple everyday articles that Frank Richards could contrive to make the main themes of his various yarns. Amongst the few familiar things that Jack mentioned were - the never failing screen in a study behind which Bunter invariably heard the all important items of news he should not have heard - for that matter the second article - the familiar arm-chair has served the same purpose time and time again - the catch on the box room window - a ladder - the well known household bucket - a bike. A piece of paper such as a letter or a telegram, maybe a currency note. A suit of armour at Wharton Lodge or Eastwood House. Just a few instances, there are countless others, which would come to mind. All have been the central point round which Frank Richards has written so many enthralling stories. We were promised another of these talks in the New Year, same subject. This was followed by a talk on Cliff House and the School Friend, by the writer of these notes. This talk giving details of the personnel of Cliff House and comparing the famous girls school with the neighbouring one for boys at Friarsdale. The following points of discussion were put to the members. Why was Marjorie Hazeldene hitherto the leading character at Cliff House, shelved for Barbara Redfern when the School Friend started to record the adventures of the Cliff House girls? Would the stories in School Friend have had a longer life if Frank Richards had written all of them? Was there too much similarity to the Magnet stories for success? Why were not the Greyfriars boys featured in the School Friend occasionally? There were some interesting opinions given which lasted till refreshment time.

There were further readings from Ted Davy and Midge Corbett. To complete a full programme, also a very amusing reading from 1922 Holiday Annual, a St. Jim's story featuring Trimble and D'arcy - "Who did save the Miller's Daughter?" This was by Jack Bellfield. Tom Porter brought along a set of "Cedar Creek" B.F.L. for us to scan during refreshments.

HARRY BROSTER - Secretary.

MERSEYSIDEMeeting held November 12th, 1961

This meeting marked the tenth anniversary of the formation of the section, and it was hoped there would be an extra good attendance; this, unfortunately, was not the case, as three of our regular members were unable to be present, due to sickness. Frank Unwin, Norman Pragnell and John Farrell are rarely absent, and their company was greatly missed, and we look forward to their return at the next get-together, the last of the old year.

In view of the low attendance, our scheduled programme had to be revised, but quite a good time was had by all; discussions on a variety of topics passed the time very pleasantly, and a literary quiz presented by Frank Case (won easily by Jim Walsh) was given a good reception.

As always, nine-o'clock arrived all too quickly, and it was reluctantly that we had to leave the warm and comfortable atmosphere of Bill Windsor's house; how nice to be mine host on occasions like this, without the necessity of a homeward bound journey in the kind of damp and dismal weather we are experiencing at the moment.

Next meeting, 10th December at Frank Unwin's, 6 p.m. (subject to alteration in which case members will be advised by post.)

FRANK CASE.

NORTHERNMeeting, Saturday, 11th November, 1961.

This month's meeting was a very special occasion. We had a distinguished guest, Eric Fayne, editor of 'Collectors' Digest' who had travelled up from London especially to be present. The meeting commenced at 6.20 p.m., much earlier than usual, as a bumper programme had been arranged, and it was felt that an early start was advisable - and so it proved. The dense fog of the previous day had providentially cleared up, and so we had an attendance of 25, including two other welcome guests, Mr. and Mrs. J. Allison. One hesitates to prophesy how many of us would have been able to make the journey had the fog persisted!

After extending a warm welcome to Eric Fayne, our chairman, Geoffrey Wilde, paid tribute to the previous editor and founder, the late Herbert Leckenby, this being especially appropriate on November 11th, Remembrance Day. In his reply Eric expressed pleasure at the warm welcome he had received, and offered us greetings from himself and the other members of the London Club. He too, paid tribute to Herbert, who, as he said, had founded the 'C.D.' and had been the inspiration of the Old Boys' Book Club movement, which had given so much pleasure to us all. He was delighted to be present, and concluded his short address with 'here's to the next time.'

Formal business was cut down to the minimum. Jack Wood's items of news this month concerned P.G. Wodehouse's autobiography. It appears that 'P.G.' in his early days, had work published under several other names.

Then we made a start on the programme proper. The first item, by Geoffrey Wilde, was a talk about that well-known, but rather neglected Greyfriars character, Claude Hoskins, the musical genius of the Shell. After a survey of the Magnet stories in which Hoskins appeared, and a shrewd estimate of his character, Geoff, concluded by giving us six variations on the piano of what he termed 'the Greyfriars theme,' being based on the notes G, E and A, from the word Greyfriars, as they might have been composed by Hoskins himself in the music room. They represented respectively (1) Billy Bunter, (2) The Famous Five, (3) Mr. Hacker, (4) Greyfriars boys and Cliff House girls boating on the Bark on a summer day, (5) Vernon-Smith and (6) an evening hymn in the school Chapel.

Very appropriate and musical they were - much more so than much of the stuff passing as music with which we are regaled nowadays on wireless and television!

The next item was a spelling competition devised by Gerry Allison, for which postal members had already completed their entries. A poem, properly spelt, had to be translated into the peculiar and distinctive spelling of the redoubtable Sebastian Ginger! Bill Williamson ran out a handsome winner, his prize being two Wodehouse 'Psmith' books.

Then came a contribution from another guest of the evening, Mr. Jack Allison - a Greyfriars story in Latin by Frank Richards, published in The Times Educational Supplement. Mr. Allison rendered the story very effectively, partly in Latin as written, and partly in English. Even those of us with no knowledge of Latin found that, with a printed copy before us, we could follow the story quite well. This was a most unusual and interesting item.

Eric Fayne had a competition for us after refreshments had been disposed of, this being a quiz 'Out of the Bag.' We were divided into two teams, captained by Geoff Wilde and Gerry Allison, and competitors had to answer a question drawn out of the bag, a correct answer winning one point. If the competitor could not answer, it was passed to the other team, a correct answer winning three points. After one round the score was a tie, but after a second round Geoff Wilde's team won a narrow victory. Eric provided a prize for each member of the winning team.

To conclude a very interesting evening, Breeze Bentley gave us a talk on the Companion Papers, all of which he had read and enjoyed. Whilst paying tribute to them all he believed that, on the whole, the Magnet was the pick, and gave us his reasons for so doing. A short debate followed, during which Breeze answered questions from members on various points.

Geoff Wilde suggested that we might have a similar programme on this theme in the near future, but on the lines of a general debate.

By now it was 9.40 p.m., and our very crowded but most enjoyable meeting was ended. We hope that, in the not too distant future, the editor of the 'C.D.' will be able to pay us another visit.

Annual Christmas Party - Saturday, December 9th, commencing at 4 p.m.

FRANK HANCOCK - Secretary.

LONDON

The penultimate meeting of 1961 was held at the residence of Reuben Godsavage, that eminent Nelson Lee enthusiast. Date, Sunday, Nov. 19th. Highlight of a very successful meeting was the playing of the Australian tape by Eric Fayne. It gave the greatest of pleasure to the 25 members present to listen to our Australian and New Zealand friends, even if we lost the 'Ashes' and had to warm ourselves with an electric fire. Reuben gave a very funny Nelson Lee reading, Don Webster obliged with a reading from an issue of 'Punch,' Brian Doyle rendered a good quiz and the 'Don' cooked up an old boys' papers quiz for us to puzzle our brains. A discussion about our 'Gem' catalogue took place and it was agreed to accept Horace Roberts' tender.

The Christmas meeting will be held at Brian Doyle's Garden Flat, 13, Northbourne Road, London, S.W.4. The phone number is MACaulay 7946. Those who intend to be present must let Brian know either by post or phone. Failing to do this will incur an imput.

A fine spread by Reuben and Mrs. Godsavage helped to make a very jolly meeting. Not forgetting Roger dispensing the Hamiltonian library items. Thus lock-up once again until Dec. 19th.

UNCLE BENJAMIN.

AUSTRALIA

Despite a sudden return to wintry conditions the members' enthusiasm wasn't dampened when they gathered for the November meeting at the Book Bargain Bazaar (an ideal

rendezvous if ever there was one), on Thursday 17th at 6 p.m. A good attendance set the pace for the evening and a bumper crop of mail made for a very pleasant hour's reading and discussion.

From near at hand came greetings from Jack Murtagh of New Zealand, extremely pleased to hear the news of the tape recording and from far afield the ever welcome "Foghorn" bringing further news of the tape's happy reception... We are blushing all over again, Frank, at this second crop of compliments which you have so generously published in your little newspaper. One and all we are looking forward to your tape which will be our New Year treat.

Absent members Bruce Fowler and Arthur Holland were both with us thanks to their interesting letters and their views on the future activities of the club were favourably received by those present.

Highlight of the evening was a generous gift from Ron Hodgson to whom we send our most sincere thanks. Ron wrote us a detailed account of the reunion at Chesterfield and completed the picture with a set of eight photos, all beautifully mounted and detailed to bring a little closer to us those folk whom we know so well by name in C.D. Can't remember when we've had so much pleasure at a meeting - each member finding there-in something of personal interest as they discovered the name of someone whose articles they had enjoyed or someone like Ron himself or Harry Broster who have done so much to spread abroad the spirit of the hobby.

When the excitement had simmered down the chairman Syd Smyth announced the latest plans for production of the G.H. magazine No. 4. Everything is lined up for production on Sunday 26th Nov. with the members lending their willing muscles to the printing and the secretary cast in the willing role of printer's devil - should be great fun producing our own magazine and we hope all you folk will join us in the enjoyment when you read it.

Details of the catering for the Xmas party were finalized and a programme decided on - each member will provide a short reading from their favourite Xmas story and the rest of the evening will be spent in out-buntering Bunter.

With the temperature chilly and the dampness without it was a very cosy little half hour which members enjoyed at the local coffee shop until the meeting closed at 9.15 p.m.

Last thought - wish you could all join us for our Xmas Party as we feel its going to be a terrific show - how about hopping aboard a jet to be with us?.... All most welcome!

B. PATE (Secretary).

Sexton Blake Today

Latest Sexton Blake Novels Reviewed by MARGARET COOKE

"DANGER'S CHILD"

JACK TREVOR STORY

A brilliant, sensitive piece of writing by Jack Trevor Story depicting Sexton Blake as a man experiencing all the human emotions - nostalgia, apprehension, anger, bewilderment, passion, tenderness and anxiety. The beauty of the language alone makes this book a 'must' for all collectors.

Called to St. Ives by a mysterious letter from an old love, Blake began his journey into Huntingdonshire emotionally disturbed by the memory of half-forgotten

people and places, anxious for the company of Tinker or Paula but convinced that he must face whatever the past had to reveal alone despite his reluctance to complete the journey. An odd mood for the usually assured Blake and one which vanished suddenly when the old-love's husband tried to murder him. More attempts to murder him, an interlude for love followed by a desperate fight for survival, good characterization and the usual J.T.S. twist to the ending make this a memorable and exciting book.

All the characters are well drawn but Basil Valentine Hubert Moss - husband of the old love, Charmian, deserves special praise. "A plump, bland, over-dressed man; over shaved and over groomed, who had never done anything except for cash reward; - whose father had to pay cash for every examination passed, every sporting achievement"; black-mailer, traitor, cheat and sadist, whom everybody hated but understood and to whom their hatred was important because he needed to be known - even to be cursed: - a man whose reputation for cheating was his safeguard against retribution.

A moving, sometimes amusing, action-packed novel.

Rating Excellent

BULLETS ARE TRUMPS

DESMOND REID

A tough story of bloodshed and violence, I.R.A. activities, and smuggling on a large scale in the Irish border country.

With Marion Lang as companion, Tinker went to Eire to investigate reports that Michael Boland was living near the border after his escape from an English jail.

"Find out what he is up to. Uncover the latest racket. Make the Irish duly grateful - they won't oppose extradition then" Blake had said adding "I'm giving you quite a job, Tinker."

"I can take it" Tinker had answered - and proved that he could. Tinker at his best, facing and defeating Blake's old enemy Michael Boland. A likeable, fast-moving Tinker not seen for a long time.

A well-planned, well-written book full of good characters, suspense and contrasts: - the ugliness of death by violence in a peaceful smiling countryside, - the urgency and danger of Tinker's task shown against the background of light relief provided by Bridget Moriarty's firm belief that Tinker's banter was a declaration of love for herself.

Rating - Very good



ANOTHER ARTICLE in Bill Hubbard's popular series of HARD COVER CLASSICS will appear in Collectors' Digest in the near future.

IT'S LATER THAN YOU THINK! The Annuals are coming off the printing machines. It is too late now to increase the number we are printing, and there will only be a very limited number for latecomers. If you have not yet ordered your 1961 Annual, do not delay or you may be disappointed. The Greatest Annual in the Wide, Wide World.

ORDER NOW!
