

PICTURES AND PICTUREBOOKS
Vol. XVII. No. 306

DECEMBER 27, 1919.

Published at the City
Price Two pence
Post-free, 2½d

Pictures

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MARY PICKFORD.

CHRISTMAS, 1919

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own breezy style by a mature, responsible and highly intelligent Tinker fully emancipated from Blake's influence but retaining all his old loyalty and affection for him despite his anger over Blake's apparent indifference to his own imminent death as a traitor.

Fast moving action, excellent characterisation, great suspense caused by the clever use of climax and anti-climax, tension and near comedy; a soundly constructed plot; a high literary standard and good dialogue make this the best S.B.L. of the year. The novel also gives a detailed history of the man called Craille and shows yet another aspect of this popular character. This story of the theft of an important document from the depths of the National Security Archives by a secret service agent, the ingenious murder of a young cabaret artiste, espionage and counter-espionage, crisis and suspicion grips the imagination and holds the interest of the reader from the first to the last lines.

HUNT THE LADY (No. 490)

DESMOND REID

"As long as there are bad men" said Sexton Blake "there will always be someone gullible enough to believe they're not really bad men at all" and Deputy-Commander Grimwald found himself flushing.

This story tells of an escape from Dartmoor, a missing heiress, Kirby - crime reporter extraordinary with a nose for news, Deputy-Commander Grimwald of New Scotland Yard wishing to suppress the news; a beautiful woman; and a crook who managed to hood-wink everybody until Sexton Blake began to investigate the disappearance of the young heiress and the activities of the dope-ring.

A very well planned story. Not as fast moving as its companion, this novel contains good dialogue and good characterisation, and a surprise ending. Worthy to take its place in a long line of Christmas S.B.L.'s.

Both books have well drawn and well designed covers, with good strong lettering for the titles, particularly Stefan Barany's cover for 'Keep it Secret'. I like his clever use of the white page as a background.

BILLY BUNTER SHIPWRECKED

There is not much sign of any shipwreck in the new show at the Victoria Palace, but what's in a name? The show provides two solid hours of grand, exciting, swift-moving entertainment for the young and not-so-young. Undoubtedly our friends have another great "hit" to chalk up to their growing list of successes.

It is very much the mixture as before. A hidden Bunter, disappearing food, a ghost or two, a bunch of crooks, the most unlikely member of the cast turning out to be a detective, a series of "double takes", and Bunter planting the custard pies in the crooks' faces to ring down the final curtain. To add to the hilarity, Mr. Quelch loses his trousers.

The scenery is fine. The "Sanny" at Greyfriars provides a novel opening scene, with a view of the football field through the window. The second scene, played before the drop-curtain in previous

productions, is performed this year before an excellent back-cloth depicting the side of a ship. It is a vast improvement. The Crusader's Castle is a most attractive piece of construction.

Lighting is far superior to that of previous years.

The first half is brilliant. There is not a dull moment and action is so swift and fun so fast and furious that one almost loses track of the story. For the real Greyfriars fan, the second half does not quite reach the same high standard. The pantomime absurdities run a little wild. But one does not go to a Christmas show to carp, and the kids yell with delight.

Again for the inveterate Greyfriars fan, a show is judged on the Boys. This year, it must be confessed, it is the adults who steal the thunder. That splendid actor, Michael Anthony, is a real asset to all these productions. He enters heart and soul into every minute he is on the stage. Geoffrey Rose gives a fine restrained performance as a sailor who served his apprenticeship on the Woolwich Ferry. Paddy Ward as a most alarming Arab overacts and capers around with an energy which has to be seen to be believed. The most delicious moment in the show is when this bloodthirsty Arab sits smoking his hookah, swaying in his enjoyment. Bunter sits beside him and sways as he enjoys a bottle of pop. When Bunter transfers the tube of the hookah to his pop bottle, he brings down the house with a vengeance, and brings down the curtain on the first half to thunderous applause.

Peter Bridgmont is lithe and active as Billy Bunter, darting hither and thither like a plump feather. His performance is a triumph. Though his voice is not altogether pleasing for Bunter, his lines are comparatively few, so voice does not matter a lot.

The Famous Five display a never-failing energy and verve. On the island they are presented most attractively in smart coloured shorts and bright coloured shirts. The young fellow who plays Harry Wharton is a trifle too mature for the part. Both Harry Wharton and Bob Cherry wear finger-rings which glint incongruously under the lights. The smart producer should have had them doffed.

Robert Lankesheer once again plays Mr. Quelch, and, even as a pantomime Quelch, he is remarkably good.

The mixture as before? Indubitably! But it's a WOW! This critic intends to enjoy it several times more before the end of the run.

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