

The
**COLLECTOR'S
DIGEST**

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74 Thrillers (includ. 1st 26 issues) 4d each; 34 Boys Mags. 4d each; 25 Nelson Lees (3rd New Ser. complete) 9d each; 12 Black Bess Lib. (Newnes 2d) 9d each; 20 Dick Turpin Lib. (Newnes 3d) 1/- each; 5 Robin Hood (Aldine) 1/3 each; 11 Robin Hood (Amal. Press) 1/- each; 7 Boys Friend 4d Lib. 1/6 each; 5 Nugget Weekly 9d each; 3 Det. Lib. 9d each; 50 Sexton Blake Lib. current series, some early, 3d each; 1 Tom Merry Annual 1949 5/-; 50 Aldine Robin Hoods (reprints about 1920) bound in 2 brand new vols. of 25 each. Minus coloured covers, 26/- per vol; 183 Bullseye, complete set, comprising 4 bound vols. of 30 each vol, and the remainder (63) loose, newly bound, £12; Harrison's Black Bess, or Knight of the Road, complete set except for 5 sectional Nos. 15/-; C. Wright, 12 Ashburnham Place, Greenwich, London, S.E.12.

RESULT OF VOTING COMPETITION No. 1

There were a very large No. of entries and the interest and support given were gratifying in the extreme. Every vote was registered and checked by the Ed. and his assist. adjudicator. Following is the final placing of the items according to the popular vote:- 1. A. Barrington-Stories; 2. I. Serious Character Stories; 3. F. Comedy stories featuring Bunter; 4. D. Summer Holiday stories; 5. G. Travel Stories; 6. G. Comedy Stories featuring Coker; 7. E. Schoolboy Crackmen stories; 8. B. Thriller stories; 9. H. Adventure stories of St. Frank's type.

The amount of the prize has been increased, and the Ed. has pleasure in announcing the prize awards as follows:- 15/- to Stanley Knight, 50 Browning St. Bradford; 5/- to George H. Roberts, 31 Ardenlee Drive, Belfast; 3/6 to Harold Ogden, 11 Brayside Road, Manchester.

These competitors sent in entries which most nearly co-incided with the popular vote and the prizes are awards in order of merit. Postal Orders for the amount won have been despatched.



Vol. 4. No: 48 Post Free

1s. 1d.

DECEMBER 1950

To all our Readers at home and Overseas
A Very Happy Christmas and
Prosperous New Year.

FROM THE EDITOR'S CHAIR.

Still another milestone. Here I am again sitting down to write an end of a volume chat. It only seems like yesterday when I was doing it last, but Oh! how much has really happened in the interval. For, looking back I think it must have been the most eventful year of all. Just let's recall some of the highlights.

First there was that memorable write-up in 'Leader Magazine' although that publication no longer leads we still get recruits to our ranks as a result of that article.

Then came that epoch making event, the forming of the Northern Section of the Old Boys' Book Club, followed by it's Dinner and the Exhibition at the Leeds Public Library, and I've just heard of the probable forming of a club in Australia of which more anon.

Other happy and stirring memories - Len Packman's northern tour, the amazing coincidence of Harry Hartley and my own little thrill - the broadcast from the Leeds studio, and then, of course, later in the year, the greatest holiday of my life.

As for the C.D. it's once again been a year of progress. In Leeds and elsewhere I have now scores of good friends of whose existence I was completely unaware a year ago. Another fact I think of with pride is that of those to whom I sent No. 1. just four years' ago, all but a very few still welcome it each month, no mean achievement. I am sure you will all agree; and to all of you who have given my colleague and myself such loyal support, and have said so many kind things about our efforts, my most heartfelt thanks.

During the year I have had quite 2,000 letters. If I haven't answered all those which required an answer very promptly or maybe not at all, I am sure I shall be forgiven.

and now on to volume five.

Great Doings in Australia:- Thanks to the enterprise of Ernest Carter employed in Telephone Accounts, G.P.O., Sydney, there's a good prospect of an 'Old Boys' Book Club' being formed 'down under'. He put a small advert. in the Sydney Morning Herald to feel the way, and my word! hasn't he had an exciting time since.



First he heard was that the General Manager of the P.O. wanted to see him. Feeling a little uneasy he obeyed the order. He needn't have had any qualms, for to his surprise and delight, he found that the "boss" had seen the advert., had been a reader of the 'Gem' and 'Magnet' and simply wanted to talk about old times. They talked man to man for quite a long time. It gets you, doesn't it? What's more, the clerk who showed him in had nothing to say too.

That's not all, not by a long way. Next came a reporter on The Sunday Herald, had a long chat, saw Ernie's collection, then went back to his office and did a terrific write-up, nearly a whole page of it, with reproductions from the 'Magnet' and 'Union Jack' and a lot of Ernie.

He started the article off thus:- "It wasn't a very big advertisement - just five lines in type that printers call five and a half point - but what a flood of nostalgia brought to a lot of us.

Very nice work. Congrats! Ernie. I hope you have some jolly good meetings and I wonder if Len Packman, Bob Lythe, Bob and Ben Whiter and Co., guessed a fraction of what they were starting when they met at Archdale Road, and started the Old Boys' Book Club that Sunday afternoon, and so very long ago.

The Last Lap. Despite all sorts of little worries it goes well with the Annual. It's going to be a race against time but unless something unforeseen occurs, I am confident all copies will be mailed before Christmas. I only wish it could be arranged that our many friends overseas could have their's in time for the festive season, I am afraid that is not possible.

8/- Each offered for any of the following Munster Libraries in reasonable condition:- 14, 16, 17, 19. W. H. Goodhead, 50 Porter Road, Derby.

Competitions: At the moment the closing date of the Writing Competition hasn't arrived, but it's safe to say it has been a real success, and unless there's a change in the last few days, the type of story coming out first is going to be a surprise, to me at any rate.

More competitions on similar lines will be coming in the new year, and in connection with these there is an important point. We have now a considerable number of readers overseas, and we think it only fair they should be able to take part. To make it possible we propose to extend the closing date, so that even those in Australia and New Zealand can take part if they enter by Air Mail. More of this anon.

Meanwhile, you will see another competition announced lower down on this page - It's a different type, and one of no little importance.

Here let me add we've some generous fellows in our circle and to whom are due the heartfelt thanks of

Yours sincerely,

HERBERT LECKENBY.

WE WANT A NAME!

AND THERE'S A PRIZE FOR SUPPLYING IT.

Most hobbies have a name by which they are recognised; the stamp collector is a philatelist, the cigarette card collector a cartophilist. But the hobby to which we are attached hasn't one.

Isn't it about time it had? Some of us have tried to grapple with it for years, but we've failed.

WANTED: Union Jacks (in good condition) issues during years 1920-1924 inclusive. Josephine Packman, 27 Archdale Road, East Dulwich, S.E.22.

Well! our numbers have grown rapidly of late, so among the lot of us, someone may be inspired. To help you use your grey matter, Reg. Hudson Chairman of the Northern Section Old Boys' Book Club, has generously offered a prize of £1 for what is considered the best and most apt effort.

The name can consist of one word, or a phrase, if a phrase, it should be a short one. Philatelist, on the face of it, gives no clue to stamp collecting, maybe whoever coined it went to the French for inspiration. But where we are concerned, try to get something which leaves no doubts as to what we collect. It isn't easy, still, it may come to you in a flash.

Send your effort along to the editor on a plain piece of paper, with your name and address. You can make as many efforts as you like, but each should be accompanied by a 2d. stamp.

A small committee will be formed to judge the entries, and it is to be hoped we find an idea good enough to adopt as our official name.

We have now quite a number of readers overseas, and we think it is only fair they should have the chance to enter our competition. So in this instance, we propose to make closing date February the 6th 1951. (Overseas readers should send entry by Air Mail, and in their case they need not trouble about entry fee.

So now 'have a go'!

PHANTASY BY GASLIGHT.

By James Walsh

It was, near enough, thirty years' ago, a few days to Christmas.

Two schoolboys, my friend and I, had donned overcoats and mufflers preparatory to leaving the cosy warmth of the house, for outside the night was cold, dark and snowy (there were, I recollect, only a few flurries, but that entitled me to say it was "snowy".).

But on the threshold we paused; for we had a problem. The spirit of the season was in the air and appropriate literature would, we decided, give the fireside added charm. But - there was a snag; the choice was large and our financial resources in inverse ratio thereto! Which raised the additional problem - new or old? I will elaborate.

On one side of the nearby main street was the local newsagents, where, in the brightly-lit windows reposed tantalisingly, the latest Christmas issues of our favourite books. On the other - well you have seen Aladdin's Cave (pantomime version of course), you would not, then imagine it as a dim and dingy gas-lit junk shop. But, you will remember, it was the contents - not the cave which dazzled Aladdin's two-struck eyes.

And so it was in this - the fabulous "M.M." Edmondson's. Mr Edmondson herself was a lady of ample proportions and, shall we say, mature vintage. Dressed in black she sat there majestically - a kind of female Paul Prut; and her oft-expressed opinion - in hearty endorsement of a certain William Gelling - left us in no doubt as to what should be the fate of all boys at birth!

I can realise now that the good lady - God rest her soul - had some cause for it. Picture us there, in the large part of the shop not reserved for old clothes and shoes; a group of sniffing schoolboys, as we pawed the stacks - yes! the mountains! - of every paper that ever delighted the youthful eye and mind.

There were green stacks, blue stacks, pink stacks and multi-coloured stacks!

Even after all these years, I get their musty smell in my nostrils; and, though I do not profess to have a phenomenal memory, many of the covers are still vivid in my mind though I have never set eyes on them since.

For instance, I remember a Popular in which Billy Bunter, in bathing costume, was diving into an enclosure - nothing remarkable in that save that the enclosure had a tiled floor and no water! I often wondered what made him do it!

Then the Loos; a mysterious old house, fellows peering through the gate of the high wall (and one falling off it!) or gazing into the hold (with dirty things - n there!) of a sinister tramp-steamer or being rowed out (gagged and bound) to another.

What atmosphere they invoked!

Then there were those fascinating little sketches at the head of the Boy's Friend serials; the buccaner of Skull Island and the ivy climbing juniors of the "Sports of St. Clives".

Many titles were equally vivid, some, like those of the Boys' Reels, had the impact of leather on boot, bat or flesh - Blake of the Blue Crusaders - The Carver Champions - Frank Chopping-Black's Champion and many more.

Talking of the Reels, I wonder if this was the year I bought the Xmas issue containing a story called (if my memory serves me right) "The Mystery of Grandmère Grange" (I have a vague recollection it concerned Handforth & Co.).

There is a little story attached to this. You see, my friend and I were not satisfied with merely reading school stories; we actually invented our school & own stories about them. The plots and characters were, of course, merely carbon copies of what we read; (you know - the Hen, this and Potty that). The point is, my friend borrowed the name "Grandmère" for his school and for long, I felt a sense of pique at not having done so first.

The story is, in some ways, a poignant one for me because this boyhood friend was killed in the blitz within a stone's throw of the scene of this story.

Other memories are likewise elusive; for instance, in the Boys' Friend fourpennies, I read some yarns about a quartette who, at the time, captivated me more than the Famous Five or the Terrible Three. They were known as Jack Jackson & Co., and also as the four-something-or-others (as Bob Cherry would say) due to the fact that they each hailed from a different country of the British Isles. I have a dim recollection that one cover showed them each in national costume.

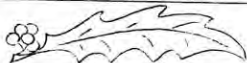
The large stock of Buffalo Bills periodically captured our allegiance; in these I was often fortunate, for, as it was a form of juvenile literature, the old man did not object to reading himself (he had actually met the real Buffalo Bill in person and described his shooting feats to me). I could often teach him for an extra tuppence to purchase mine.

But there was no type of literature I would not have thought of bringing into the house that a Russian would think of walking into the Kremlin with a Daily Mail under his arm.

I refer to the Sixteen Blakes.

I think much of this parental antipathy had its origin in a certain episode whereby myself and young friend decided it would be quite a joke to give father a bit of a fright; to this end we waylaid him one dark night as he was coming up the path and, having donned black masks, suddenly confronted him with a request to "stick 'em up!" The rear portion of my anatomy still tingles at the recollection of what followed!

Little more welcome were Mr. Blake's rivals in the science of detection - Dixon Hawke (a great favourite at that time) Tubby Hoig, Peter Flint, Nick Carter and various lesser lights.



Well! we have thumbed through quite a pile, this cold wintry night; are we going to make our final choice from that little pile we have sorted out, or shall we slip across the road, before it is too late, to the brightly-lit newsagents and grab one or two of these new issues?

The decision is made for us; a hand reaches up, the gas-tap turns; the mantle turns red, then black and the pale, anemic light flickers out like some reluctant ghost.

It has been out now these many years.

A neon tube has taken it's place.

And so, Dear Friends, the gas-light's

gone;

But still the memory lingers on;

Progress, now, the light refines,

But NOT the books in which it shines!

(Note. Ever since James Walsh's first article appeared a few months ago, we have had numerous requests for more articles from him. Well, he has now responded with a couple, and they are both so delightfully Christmasy, that they simply had to both go first this number; one here and the other in the Hamiltonia section).

WANTED URGENTLY Gams Nos. 819 and 946 Josephine Peckham, 27 Archdale Road, East Dulwich, London, S.E. 22.

WANTED Early Novelettes; pre St. Franks Nelson Lees, "dines" early comics, including American. E. V. Hughes, "Caswell" 25 Hillsboro Road, Bognor Regis, Sussex.

OLD BOYS' BOOK CLUB (London).GREENWICH MEETING, November 19th

The right place for Sexton Blake enthusiasts to gather is, without a doubt, genial Charlie Wright's. Despite the great counter attraction at this meeting, the interesting debate between St. Franks and Grayfriars, the bust of the famous Baker Street Slough smiled contentedly at the many of his supporters present including H. Price of Margate. This member possesses all the Sexton Blake libraries bar five, so he was the centre of attraction amongst the fans of the detective including of course, Harry Homer of the big smile. Friend Maurice of Blakings, would have loved to have been present, especially when his step Olive brought out the Welsh baked ones.

The usual club formalities when so amiably dealt with by chairman Len. The sound financial position was warmly greeted and treasurer Bob was unanimously thanked for the able way in which he had prepared the report.

A hearty welcome was given to Douglas Robinson, who is well known as "Carrow the Cad". Genial Harry Homer had brought him along and it was grand to see him enjoying the old books from which he took his clues.

An exhibition is to be held in south London early next year and is to be organised by chairman Len. Full details will appear in these columns.

Now came one of the highlights of the meeting, the discussion between the rival merits of St. Franks and Grayfriars, Len Packman upholding the former and Roger Jenkins the latter. Both gave sparkling speeches full of wit and gay repartee, and the listeners followed them with very keen interest. Being impartial myself, I leave it to the other members to say which of the two were the better.

In the absence of several Nelson Lee supporters, it was not surprising that Greyfriars were hands down. The next discussion will be between St. Jims and Rockwood with the Whiter brothers becoming friendly rivals.

A twenty question quiz was ably won by Ron Crollie, Ben Whiter being second, Eleanor Packman third, and Bob Blythe a good fourth. Len Packman very graciously stood down on this occasion to give some of the others a chance.

On a motion by the Chairman, it was unanimously agreed to invite Edwy Scarlus Brooks to become a vice-president of the club.

Next two meetings are:-

Hume House, 136 Lordship Lane, East Dulwich, London, S.E. 22 on Sunday, December 17th.

Annual General Meeting at 706, Lordship Lane, W. 8 Green, London, N.22. on Sunday, January 21st. 1951. The election of officers will take place at this meeting.

Attendance - M. Jacobs, Ian Whitmore, A. Blunden, John Gool, J. Harrall, Roger Jenkins, Ron Crollie, Arthur Lawson, E. Reynolds, H. Flatman, R. Brown, Ron and Martin Deane, Len, Jessie and Eleanor Packman, Bob and Ben Whiter, Charlie and Olive Wright, Harry Hagar, Douglas (Cardew the Cad) Robinson, Jim Perrottand, E.P.K. Millett.

Benjamin G. Whiter,

OLD BOYS' BOOK CLUB

Northern Section

The monthly meeting was held at 239 Hyde Park Road, October 28th 1950. There was a gratifying attendance.

OFFERS INVITED FOR: Union Jack, 1923. Complete in 2 volumes. Nos.1004/1029 & 1030/1059. Binding worn but good. Contents in mint condition. J.Hepburn, 1 Sixth Avenue, Blyth, Northumberland.

Chairman Reg. Hudson opened with a hearty welcome to several new members. He said that in the atmosphere of the Old Boys' Bock Club, invariably strangers became friends in very quick time.

He went on to say that in contrast to what he had just said, he had unfortunately, some unpleasant news to announce for the meeting was being held without a secretary present. Concisely and frankly, he explained why. For some time, the secretary had shown an inexplicable and objectionable antagonism towards the London Club. This reached a climax at the last meeting when Mr. Sawyer in a deplorable outburst, said if any Londoner dared to show his face at one of our meetings, he, the secretary, would walk out. This had caused a lot of resentment for many of our members had friends in the London Club, and some had received hospitality there. As the secretary had also, on several occasions, threatened to resign if we did not completely break away from the London Club, it was felt imperative that something had to be done. The officials of the Club had had a meeting and as a result, he had written a letter to Mr. Sawyer.

Our Chairman then read a copy of his letter. It was written quite courteously. It asked if the Secretary intended carrying out his oft repeated threat to resign after the exhibition. If he didn't, it was stated he would have to be asked to do so, as it was evident he was at variance with the rest of the members. It was hoped, however, that he would continue as an ordinary member, and to give the club the benefit of his undoubted organising abilities. Tribute was paid for the work he had put in.

To this letter, the Secretary replied that he had founded the Club, that he had not the slightest intention of resigning, and that he had cancelled the meeting for the following Saturday.

Our Chairman then went on to explain how thanks, to some quick thinking on the part of Gerald Allison, the attempt to cancel the meeting was frustrated.

I then explained how the Club actually came to be formed following the success of the London one. I also pointed out that although we were linked with the parent body, it did not, in any way attempt to interfere with us, on the contrary, it was anxious to help. Moreover, London and Northern was only a beginning. I had just heard that some of our Australian friends, fired by our example, were starting a Club there, and there was no reason why soon there shouldn't be a Scottish Club, an Irish one, and others in various parts of England.

Our Chairman then asked for a vote. The result was the officials action was endorsed - unanimously.

The meeting then passed to happier matters. The secretaries (Gerald Allison acting) treasurers, and librarians reports were read showing a healthy state of affairs.

The next meeting was fixed for November 25th same place.

Refreshments were then taken. Followed a talk by our lady member, Miss Vera Cortes. Vera is as enthusiastic as any of the men, and she recalled her own particular favourites, "The School Friend", "Schoolgirl", Magnet, and Union Jack. Her talk was much enjoyed and it is hoped she will soon have another turn. The Speaker for the next meeting is Tom Puckrin of Middlesbrough.

The meeting then got down to an 'all in' discussion. A pleasing part of this was the way in which new members now evidently completely at home, joined in. It was agreed that this 'I remember when' was the best we have had yet.

SALE: "Claude Duval" by Henry Downes Miles; published 1861 (459 pages) in original binding. Perfect condition. Also 23 "Boys Friends" 1919-1921. Offers. Honersett, 65 Orchard Road, St. Annes, Lancashire.

Members present:- Reg. A. Hudson, Gerald Allison, Vera Coates, Stanley, Mrs. and Keith Knight, W. Harrison, C. Topham, T. F. Roach, Ernest Hubbard, Clive Simpson, Horace Twinham, Harry Barlow, W. H. Williamson and Herbert Leckenby, Northern Section Correspondent.

(A personal note: I think it should be put on record that our Chairman handled the regrettable business of the resignation with admirable ability and tact. - H.L.).

BROADCAST ON 2.G.B. SYDNEY, AUSTRALIA, 2.11.50.

By E. C. Carter.

(OLD BOYS' BOOK CLUB.

The function of the Old Boys' Book Club is to be similar to those of the Old Boy's Book Clubs of London and Yorkshire, which formed for all those interested in the subject, to assist fellow collectors in obtaining certain numbers, exchanging copies, and discussing the old stories we loved so much in bygone years.

We have the famous Magnet stories featuring the immortal Billy Bunter, Ripper and the Boys of St. Franks in the Nelson Lee Library and Sexton Blake and Tinker in the Union Jack and Sexton Blake Library and many others.

New discoveries about Sexton Blake and Nelson Lee are passed on by reader to reader. Long concealed identities hidden behind pen names are revealed. Research is made into the origin of certain books. Sometimes a quiz is featured. Our hobby is spreading rapidly in New Zealand, Great Britain and the United States.

Those interested in our hobby at all, I feel sure would bring back a flood of memories with these familiar words of Billy Bunter which we used to hear so long ago.

"I say you fellows, wait for me"

"Alright Billy, we will".

A REMARKABLE COLLECTION.

by Herbert Lockenby.

Whilst I was in London I saw just a fraction of what must be one of the most unique collections of periodicals in existence, from some points of view possibly only second to that of John Madcrafts.

It differs from most by the fact that there are no bound copies, every single one being loose. Despite this they are in as immaculate a condition as the day they came off the machines; that's the striking thing about this collection. They must have been stored away with the greatest care for there's not a trace of dust at the edges or rusty wiring.

In short they are a feast for the eyes. There's thousands of copies almost every boys paper published since the early years of the century including the comics. What's more, there are numerous No: 1's, including the Magnet, Gem, Empire Library Thriller, Merry and Bright Fun and Fiction, Firefly, to mention some at random.

In addition, adult papers, like John Bull, Topical Times, John O' Londons Weekly, John Blunt, T.P.'s Weekly, Answers Library and many more.

This astonishing collection, I may say, belongs to one of our circle, Charles Vennimore of Hounslow, and there's an interesting story to account for its existence. Years ago, Charles's relatives had a number of newsagents shops scattered over London. Someone had the inspiration to store carefully away, copies of the papers as they were published, and a goodly proportion remain until this day. What a grand idea!

Anyway, I know I gazed on copies of papers I had myself bought forty or more years ago, and they were more spic and span than my own copies a day after I had bought them.

Yes! a remarkable collection.

"Hamiltonia"

Conducted by Herbert Leckenby

Here's a laugh! Where do you think Billy Bunter has got to now? You'd never guess in a month of Sundays, for it's a staid learned journal of the Medical Professional which gives him a paragraph. The production is impressively described as "Clinical Excerpts" - A Journal of Modern Therapeutics. What are they doing with Bunter there say you "Carving him up?". Not exactly. They deal with him in an article called "A Feast of Fat Things" - Obesity through the Ages. After dealing with other famous stout ones it says...

"Some readers may remember the gluttonous, mendacious, and obtuse Billy Bunter, for many years one of the principal characters in a popular weekly for boys. Detesting any form of physical exertion he made an impressive foil for the athletic "heroes" of these school stories."

A little pompous perhaps, but at least one of the writer's colleagues did, and does read the Magnet, for the journal was sent to me by our Dr. Wilson of Glasgow, who says good humouredly "I have a feeling that the rather lofty and superior tone adopted by the writer in speaking of Bunter rings false. I think he'll read the Magnet on the quiet".

Anyway, it's something of an achievement, I wonder where the Owl will wander to next, "Vogue", maybe!

THE PICK OF THE SERIES. NO. 1.

The Bob Cherry Kidnapping Series. by Eric Frync.

Mr. Hamilton was always particularly attractive when writing about kidnapping, secret passages, ancient vaults, and the like. The reader never had any doubt as to the identity of the kidnapper. The villain was always obvious, and yet, so skilfully did the writer manage things that the reader had a thrilling glee in waiting to see whether his detective powers had stood him in good stead.

The Bob Cherry kidnapping series appeared in January and February 1934. There were five stories to the series, which told of the machinations of an old boy, Franz Kranz, and were pleasantly interesting tales, with sound characterisation, though the denouement lacked an original twist.

Undoubtedly, a better series, on the same theme was the Tom Merry kidnapping which occurred in the Gem, commencing May 1922. There were five tales to this series, too, but the plot developed in more thrilling style, and the finale was a masterpiece of suspense.

Very much akin to the Bob Cherry series was the Rockwood taste of kidnapping, inasmuch as the kidnapper was an old boy of the school whose name was

Lagden, and the victims were hidden in the vaults under Rockwood, just as Bob was hidden in the vaults under Greyfriars. It was one of the best of the Rockwood series.

Similar in idea was "The Mystery of the Painted Room" which appeared in the Gem Xmas Number of 1913. It was a taut and excellent story, and was probably the first of the kidnapping tales.

In conclusion, one cannot leave this subject without recalling the kidnapping of Mr. Quelch, the account of which was given in the later days of the Magnet, running from before Xmas 1939, till Easter 1940. It was a fine and suspenseful series, but far too long.

A CHRISTMAS PROBLEM

By James Walsh

I heaved a sigh such as might be expected from a general who has successfully waged a long and arduous campaign.

The seasonal orgy of hunting and buying, giving and sending was over and the chaos of Christmas Eve had given way to the comparative calm of the great day itself.

The Christmas fare had been dealt with in a manner not unworthy of a Bunster I reflected, as I thoughtfully fastened up a button previously loosened at the dictates of prudence.

The culinary department had taken over to repair the ravages consequent upon this assault on the said fare, and said dept.; being female, I was excused on the grounds of being neither useful nor ornamental.

Some interesting comments on Greyfriars, in which Professor Denis Brogan played a part, appeared in "Glasgow Herald" for two days in succession. See January C.D.

This period was pleasantly occupied in instructing sonny in the use of his new train set (the ungrateful little brat! "Can I play with them now" says he).

It was now evening; with a little tact - and not a little cunning ("the fire's lit in the front room" I tell the older folks - "the Christmas tree's lit" I tell the younger ones - "Why don't you gather round them?") family and friends are inveigled into going into one place - and staying there.

To the sound of juvenile chatter and feminine gossip and the intermittent crack of crackers and nuts, I steal, like the Arab, silently away to pass the next couple of hours in the highly congenial manner as shall presently transpire.

So here I am, at last, ensconced in the arm-chair in the "second-best" room. Having donned carpet slippers, I poke the fire to a roaring blaze and turn on the radio to provide some soft background music.

At my side is a little table on which reposes a bottle and glass containing, for this once, something a little stronger than water and some light refreshments (quite a Gatts-Bunter combination what?). Lighting the annual cigar, I settle down to the literary occupation which is the subject of this article (what! so it's not solely concerned with the petty potterings of this Walsh fellow? All right! an author's got to create atmosphere hasn't he?)

Now, if I were an Englishman of the old school, it would be the time to reach down from the shelf, the well-thumbed copy of the Christmas Carol and read to my assembled and admiring family, none of the well-loved passages therein.

Now, I am all for tradition, above all, at this season of the year and that is what I might have done - but for the advent of a certain Mr. Richards.

For I'm not such an old fogey that I object to my tradition being, as it were, a little streamlined. Had it been necessary to travel for my Christmas holidays and had I been offered the use of any form of transport, past or present, I ought, in the best romantic tradition, to have chosen one of Mr. Dickens stage-coaches. And had I been travelling, for instance, across the desolate moors to York perched, in the face of an icy-cold blast, on top of the said stage-coach, I would no doubt, have muttered "This is the real thing!" (On the other hand, there might have been a "blast" of a different kind!).

But if, alternatively, I had been offered the use of one of Mauly's roamy saloon cars to take me to the Towers would I, sunk in the soft cushions, prefer the jingle of the horse's harness to the soft purr of the engine and the faint crunch of the crisp snow under the speeding wheels? Would I - ?

Well! talking of Mauly brings me back to earth, at least the fireside, and also the little problem that has to be decided. For, spread round my feet, are quite a number of brightly-covered periodicals - they are mostly Magnets, and all Christmas numbers.

The Magnets date from 1926 as I haven't been able to acquire any earlier copies (I just can't resist the lure of a free advt.) but they will provide enough food for thought.

You see, each year at this season I read, or, to be more exact, re-read several of these Xmas numbers, but this year I just can't make up my mind. So, to make the problem easier, let us consider the essential ingredients of an ideal Xmas series. There must, of course, be snow - lashings of it! and, personally, I always feel highly disappointed with any cover in which the snow is not, at least, dribbling all over the title letters!

Look at the Magnet issues for Xmas 1928 - how depressing! (a grim series this, featuring the villainous Soames - lacking the typical "F.R." humorous interludes). There must then, be a nice contrast of fun and frivolity and hair-raising excitement.

The action must not be too confined; we must have the blazing logs on the wide old hearth casting ruddy reflections on the dark old panelling and, perhaps, a suit of armour. But we must have also, dark, wintry nights the icy wind whirling the snowflakes into eyes of the muffled-up juniors as they wend their way to investigate the comic happenings in the ancient, ruined old priory, standing alone and deserted in the snow-laden countryside.

And, to read such a yarn, turn up "The Phantom of the Moat House". Ah! a very old and rare Magnet! In, my dear friends! the last Xmas series of all and "the master" writing at the height of his powers.

And, speaking of phantoms, they are a sine qua non, though it is not essential that the ghostly visitors be, or appear to be, from another and less substantial world. This pattern tended to fall out of fashion in more recent years; after all, it was always an anti-climax to discover the "ghost" was simply a piece of gauze on a stick as in an early Nelson Lee I read.

So it is accepted that we prefer in our Xmas stories some sinister and mysterious visitant who can, apparently, vanish through solid walls and panels. This, of course, provides ample scope for the reasonable occupation of exploring mouldy vaults and secret passages!

Well! it seems I have but just set down when information is conveyed by special messenger from the next room that preparations for the next onslaught on the family larder are about to be set on foot.

So, taking a quick nibble at the turkey's leg and another gulp of Wh-ar - limejuice and soda, let us resist the temptation to linger among the respective delights of Wharton Lodge and Mauleverer Towers and make our decision.

I have had mine - unhesitatingly; Christmas, this year, I am spending at a semi-ruined old mansion on the wild Devon coast, to wit, Polpolly.

Add to the excitement which such a location would offer to such high-spirited youths as we have with us - the Farnus Five, Smithy and Redwing, of course, our prize surprise - the quest for a 1st treasure of doubloons from a sunken Armada galleon in the nearby cove and the thrills will suffice even if you spend every other Xmas vacation at your maiden aunts!

And "The Spectre of Polpolly" - a Don from the Armada - is as near the authentic article as any I've met with!

And then there's - "All right, dear, I'm coming!"

Sorry chaps, I must leave you - but you will join me there, w'n't you?

WANTED - Nelson Lees, Old Series, Nos: 5, 141, 166, 169, 227, 230, 232, 233, 234, 236, 244, 246, 2/- each. Third Series, 50, 58, 70, 152, 1/6d each. Also Nugget and Boys Friend LBS with St. Franks Stories. -

Garden Thompson, 85 Deerpark Road, Belfast, Northern Ireland.



Nelson Lee Column

Conducted by Robert Blythe

(All communications temporarily to Leonard Packman
27 Archdale Road, East Dulwich, London S.E. 22.)

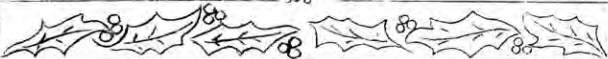
Well, folks, I'm sorry to report that the St. Frank's versus Greyfriars debate resulted in a unanimous win for Greyfriars! I put up a good show and pulled out all the stops, but sheer weight of numbers proved the key point.

Mind you, I do not consider this a true verdict because, with all due respect to all those who were present, it was too much to expect them to be completely unbiased in their vote. Nevertheless, to be quite honest, had more St. Franks supporters been present, the result would probably have been the same - but by a much smaller margin.

Unfortunately, time would not permit either friend Roger or myself to deal with each other's various points, but at some future date, I hope to battle this out at much greater length. Still, it was all very enjoyable and well received by the company.

The A.G. Meeting to be held at Wood Green in January, will be a real "Star D". Firstly, I am given to believe that, (D.V.) good old Bob Blythe will be with us - and that in itself calls for a great reception and fine attendance which will undoubtedly welcome him. Secondly, the debate will be Nelson Lee versus Sexton Blake. Here, once again, we shall have E. S. Brooks and the Nelson Lee to the front, but as my wife is taking up the cudgels on behalf of Sexton Blake, perhaps I had better leave it at that!

Now for some more good news. I think I can safely say that in January, Bob will be back 'in office' and the Column will once again be it's former self and not the shadow it has been for the past few months. Good luck, Bob! Press on St. Franks!



Nelson Lee Column cont.

To wind up, here is the usual batch of titles, (1st New Series).
 34, The Spectre of Handforth Tower, 35 Handforth's Ghost Hunt, 36, The Knights of Northestrie, 37, Handforth the Bold, 38, The Schoolboy Knight-errant; 39, Kassar's Armad; 40, The Schoolboy Slaves; 41, The St. Franks's Crusaders; 42, The Secret of the North; 43, Handy the Conqueror; 44, The Deluge at St. Franks; 45, The Marooned School; 46, St. Franks Adrift; 47, Handforth's Ark; 48, The Floating School; 49, The Schoolboy Barges; 50, Spring-cleaning at St. Franks; 51, The Funk of St. Franks; 52 Shunned by St. Franks; 53, The Haunted Schoolboy; 54, Handy Cures the Coward; 55, The Fresh Air Fiends; 56, St. Franks in Camp; 57 Roman Gold; 58, The Schoolboy Fire-fighters; 59, Farmers All; 60, The treasure of Tiberius.

LETTER BOX

Several Items of News Interest Frank Richards,
 November 6th 1950.

Dear Herbert Lockenby,

Many thanks for the C.D. and your letter both crammed with interest. My first proceeding after reading the latter was to despatch an order to my bookseller for "Clinical Excerpts". As you say in your footnote, that attractive writer Neville Cardus has been rather let down by his memory here and there "Drowned Dick in Pluck!" Oh, Mr. Cardus!



A RIGHT MERRY CHRISTMAS TO ALL OUR READERS.

Extract from "The Daily Radio"
Xmas Eve. 1925.

THE XMAS ROUND TABLE.

It is inevitable that we should once again turn to the work of the late Gwyn Evans at this time of the year and you will observe that I have used the greeting above which he used for the same purpose in his imaginary "Daily Radio" twenty five years ago. Twenty five years! It does not seem as long ago as that when I sat down on Christmas afternoon to read that wonderful story "The Mystery of Mrs. Birdell's Xmas Pudding". As I write this editorial for the Xmas 1950 issue of the C.D. I have the STICK SACK which contained that story in front of me. Turning to page 3 I once again see Eric R. Parker's brilliant character studies of Mrs. B and her sister-in-law, Mary Ann Cluppins. One buxon and one quite the oppo site. Those two sketches bring back all the old Tuletide atmosphere which I always associate with Baker Street and Sexton Blake. It would be difficult to surpass the wonderful spirit with which Gwyn Evans managed to convey the festive season and I am, as usual, determined to lose myself in his stories again on



December 25th. The heading of the first chapter of the 1925 Xmas story 'Santa Claus--Alvin Denton Blake' conveyed just that sort of thing one would expect from the great detective. The good and kindly man instead of the ruthless man hunter. In the Sign Evans Xmas stories Blake was as human as he has ever been in his long career. Families of imprisoned crooks knew a better Christmaside through his actions and it was his first thought at this time of the year then Sign's live. One can well wonder what has happened to all this sort of thing to-day. Not one iota of Xmas spirit can be found in the December issues. I blame the authors rather than the editor and only wish those words could be read by those responsible for present day chronicles of the law from Baker Street. Not of course ideas have changed and I doubt if the clums referred to by Sign are as prevalent to-day as they were in 1925. I will quote the "Daily Radio" again. "Splash" Page is writing:-

'No, the Xmas spirit is not dead, despite the cynicism and materialism of the present century with its machine-made hotel revels and artificial gaieties. Here, in the slums of the West End are a thousand families as poor as Bob Cratchit's but as truly happy. Xmas, to them, is that it was to the great master of Xmas, Charles Dickens---a good time, a kind, loving, merry time, when people think more charitably of each other, when the cares of the grey years are swept aside for a brief two days, and there is peace on earth to men of good-will'.

I think it true to say that, not since Charles Dickens himself has any author writing any kind of story, managed to impress his readers more than dear old Sign Evans. I say "dear old" when actually he was quite a young man when he passed away, but nevertheless he was one of the old band and definitely one of the greatest of Blake authors. After all these years his own idea of Blake stands out supreme. Let me conclude by wishing all Blake fans the benefit of happy Yuletides and may you be able to spend many happy hours in the company of the greatest fiction character of all time.

W. . Bond.

THE ALLISON reviews

THE SEXTON BLAKE LIBRARY. OCTOBER 1930.

No. 225. "THE CASE OF THE SPIV'S SECRET. by ANTHONY PATRONS.

Quite good. A baffling mystery which is satisfactorily explained.

Sexton Blake does not appear until page 33, but then he and Tinker handle the case very competently. The picture given of our English embryo gangster, the Spiv, is disturbingly real. Just one criticism. That hair on the safe door. Surely it would have been displaced when the butler discovered the theft, and yet Blake found it still there much later.

I chuckled over a 'printer's pie' on page 39; a missing line made the reading thus:-

"The Baker Street pair were well noon at the Yard headquarters, there for years they went up in the lift".

No. 226. "THE AFFAIR OF BARRY THE DIP. by WALTER TYLER.

Another adventure among the Spivs of London Town, a slightly different species this time, rather lower in the social scale.

Their leader, 'Mr. Big', a shyster lawyer, was the only unconvincing character. A cowardly valetudinarian would never have been able to awe such a gang of young thugs.

The tale was very well told. Blake and the Yard worked harmoniously together, but the Baker Street man was able to say 'I told you so' as usual at the end.

Yes, two enjoyable yarns this month.

.....

I've just taken a look at Mrs. B's larder. Some turkey my boy--a shoober. She made the Xmas pudding a week ago and the mince pies-----" He rolled his eyes eloquently.

Tinker - Xmas 1925.

THE NOVELS OF ANTHONY SKENE.

by A. Young.

Quite a few of the U.J. and S.M.L. authors are and were novelists in their own right. Donald Stuart (whose alias was, I think, Gerald Jernor) produced many detective novels. U. S. Brooks wrote at least one novel, and Oya Evans produced at least one, the central theme of which was the automotons he used in some of his U.J. stories.

Anthony Skene has produced four novels apart from his Amalgamated Press activities. As far back as 1929, the writer can recall having almost pressed Skene in correspondence to produce a novel. It was not until about 1935, however, or possibly 1936 that Skene's first novel "Five Dead Men" was published. Its central character was one Sutro, a secret service man who Skene used as the central figure in one or two of his old "Thriller" yarns. The novel was originally serialised in the UNION JACK. Its plot was novel and well worked out, and I think it sold quite well. On the fly leaf of my copy is a generous inscription by Mr. Skene to the effect that it is dedicated to the only man who thought he would one day write a novel.

The second book by Skene (published by Stanley Paul) was called "The Masks". I think the author once told me it was an expanded version of a rejected U.J. story. This too was a good yarn, written in Skene's inimitable style. Its plot shifted from the Welsh Mountains to America and its gangland, and Skene's character drawing of American racketeers and thugs were very fine and accurate. It was about a book which contained the names of highly placed American business men and police officials and judges who were implicated in the rackets. It gets out of the right hands and into Sutro's. The novel, therefore, was nothing if not exciting.

The third novel "Gallows Alley" was, in my opinion his most ambitious effort. Although it was a thriller Skene made an attempt to produce a pure novel also and his effort was successful. Its central characters including "Ludder" the killer were all very much "alive" and for about

the first time Skene produced a woman character (he also named "Lilive").

The fourth and, I think, last novel was, of course, Monsieur Zenith. It was published by Sampson Low and had for its central character, and many U.S. readers favourite character. Zenith sails through the book in his usual care-free manner. He is not so homicidal as he was in the U.S. yarns, but is, of course, still very much a crook and a hard-hitting one to boot. The U.S. character Oyani appears in the book, but of course Blake, being the exclusive property of the A.P. is very much absent. A thinly disguised Inspector Courtt appears, but under the name of Sergeant Henry. I see this book is still in the libraries so that probably it sold well. Anthony Skene told me, however, that he was disappointed with the way Sampson Low launched the publication of the novel, especially in regard to the wrapper. I have often thought that a nice situation would have resulted had Zenith caught on with the public like Bulldog Drummond did. Whereas in the case of Sapper's Bulldog Drummond this was his first appearance, if Zenith had "caught on" the readers of the novel could have been told that available for their enjoyment were dozens of shorter novels written around the character. Alas! the murderous Zenith does not seem to have acquired the popularity of Meriarty or Carl Peterson.

The last time I corresponded with Mr. Skene, he seemed rather gloomy on the subject of writing. He said it did not pay and that he could not write a further novel about Zenith. I hope he changes his mind.

FOR SALE: Many types of old Boys Books including nearly all Magnets 1934-1940 and many others back to 1927. Also hundreds of Gems, Schoolboys Own Libs., Union Jacks, Detective Weeklies, very early Championships, etc. etc. Prices reasonable. State requirements and enclose S.A.E. for particulars please. **WANTED:** Good prices offered for C.D. Annuals 1947, 1948, 1949, also for all Bunter Books (Skilton) and Tom Merry Books (Mandeville). **SPECIAL OFFER:** I offer 3 early Pink Union Jacks in exchange for each pre-1915 Magnet sent me. Old Boys Book Specialist, Gordon, 180, Bryn Rd., Brynmenyn, Near Bridgend, Glam.

THAT DINNER AT BAKER STREET.

It would need the magic pen of the great master of Christmas, Charles Dickens himself, to describe it.

Splash Page, apt coiner of phrases, confessed himself that not even with the new fountain pen Blake had given him for Xmas, could he do adequate justice to a description of the repast.

The Turkey, a magnificent bird, had done its duty nobly on the altar of Christmas; and there came a solemn, dramatic moment before the entry of the Christmas pudding.

Tinker fingered his collar a trifle ruefully and grinned at Splash Page.

"Gee! I hope I find room for it, Splash," he murmured, and he patted his immaculate dress waistcoat rather doubtfully.

Mrs. Bardell, flushed, triumphant, smiling, attired in a black silk dress in honour of the great occasion, entered at that moment with a platter bearing the pudding, a noble inspiring object crowned with a branch of holly, and adorned with delicious Jamaica rum.

.....

Think of that scene when you are enjoying your own Xmas fare. You will find that the spirit of Sexton Blake and his companions will enter into your Xmas.

Have a good time fellow Blakians.

H. R. Bond.

WANTED!!! Collectors Digest Annuals 1947, 48, 49, and monthly numbers 1 - 47. Bill Martin, 93 Hillside, Stonebridge Park, London, N.W.10.

ERIC FAYNE has received 60 letters of enquiry in connection with his announcement in the last issue of C.D., and regrets he has been unable to reply to everybody who has written. During the next few weeks he will endeavour to do so, and he apologizes for the unavoidable delay.