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Vol. 11 No. 118

Price 1s. 6d.

OCTOBER, 1956

Editor, HERBERT LOCKENBY,
c/o YORK DUPLICATING SERVICES,
7, The Shambles, York

FROM THE EDITOR'S CHAIR

IN LONDON AGAIN! On September 22nd I returned from another hectic perfect week in London Town, my second this year and my tenth visit since I started the C.D.

Len Packman was unable to meet me as of yore, so Bill Lofts acted in his place. There was a slip-up over the first engagement; Bill had arranged for me to go and see Derek Adley at Harrow in the evening of my arrival. Owing to another appointment I had made myself we had to go somewhat earlier. Derek, not expecting us so soon, had not got in so we had to return. Sorry Derek. Apart from that everything went off with remarkable smoothness. All appointments were kept dead on time, even when there were three or four in one day in widespread districts. Once again I had the pleasure of visiting all my homes from home; Len Packman's, Bill Lofts', Jim Swan's, Bob Whiter's, John Shaw's, Eric Fayne's and Bob Blythe's new one at Neasden. Needless to say I was happy at each and every one.

Then on the Sunday there was once again the journey to Brighton for the meeting. Ben Whiter will be telling you all about that but I must say that it was the best yet with an excellent attendance and I should never forgive myself if I did not personally express my fervent appreciation for the wonderful hospitality of Gladys and Bill Jardine. I know Bill won't mind me putting his good lady first in view of the enormous amount of baking she had done. She must have thought she was catering for a lot of Bunters.

And here's an example of how the stars seem to work in our favour. One evening before I left York Stanley Smith was at my home and as he was also visiting London on the Tuesday we arranged that he meet Len and myself in Leicester Square Gardens at 4-30. Earlier

that day Len and I had lunch with Marcus Johnson (another 'must' for me whilst in town) and when we left him we had a stroll then made for Leicester Square. Dead on time Stanley was seen approaching. Unknown to Stan I had arranged for us to go on after leaving Len to Edgware Road to meet Bill Lofts and then for the three of us to go out to Frank Lay's home at Harrow. As real good luck would have it, Stanley had fixed up accommodation for the night within easy distance, whereas he might have done so right at the other side of London. Yes, it's really astonishing how kind the fates are at such times and needless to say a good time was had by all browsing over Frank's fine collection.

Then there were those other regular appointments to look forward to: Eric Landy and Jimmy Stewart Hunter at Liverpool Street, George Mall at Waterloo and Charles Vennimore on the Embankment by Cleopatra's Needle.

A great thrill came near the finish before leaving for home. I had written to Mr. Howard Baker, editor of the S.B.L., asking if he would see me for a few minutes. No news came until the Thursday evening. The reason was that Mr. Baker had been away. The moment he saw my letter he attempted to get in touch with me to cordially agree. He succeeded after more than one attempt to get in touch with Len Packman. Len was unaware where I was to be that evening but he made desperate efforts to find me. Then it so happened that Bill Lofts rang him and was able to set Len's mind at rest by telling him that at that moment I was on my way to his home to meet another Baker - Anthony. So all was happily fixed up for me to be at Fleetway House next morning. My amazing luck again!

My familiar instrument, the 'phone, helped me to get in touch with others I could not get along to see, including Frank Pettingell and Bill Martin. Bill is greatly handicapped these days through shortage of staff in his main business, but he gave me a cordial invitation to go out and see him next time.

And so the hours rushed away once again. I am fascinated by the contrasts of the Great City - Whitehall and the Waterloo Road; Shaftesbury Avenue and Surbiton, Piccadilly and Paddington; the scarlet buses and the roar of the trains in the Underground. For they are all linked up with a section of the Brotherhood of Happy Hours. God willing, I'll be there again soon.

* * * * *

CHANGE OF ADDRESS: Please note all of you who owe so much to the industrious secretary of the London O.B.B.C., Ben Whiter: From October 5th his address is 36 NEWCOURT HOUSE, HORWOOD ESTATE, BETHNAL GREEN, LONDON, E. 2.

* * * * *

THE ANNUAL: Since my last reference to our big event, there's come to hand Geoff. Hockley's "The Man Who Lived Adventure" written in that breezy style now so popular; Roger Jenkins' "Magnets of the Roaring 'Twenties", you know what you can expect from him; Gerry Allison's "Cousin Ethel and George Figgins", it will appeal not only to Gemites; and Bill Hubbard and Bernard Thorne's big offering for Lee fans "Sports Mad at St. Franks." Your appetites are being whetted aren't they?

Well, time is speeding on. I shall soon have to get down to addressing the envelopes. Have you yet given me the word to address yours? If not, do so without delay and relieve me of anxieties near the finish.

* * * * *

THAT JUBILEE: May I remind you that next month St. Jim's must be well in the picture. I could still do with a few more of your recollections of its wonderful history. Do send them along as soon as possible.

Yours sincerely,

HERBERT LECKENBY

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Write c/o Editor, C.D.

* * * * *

O B I T U A R Y

For the second month in succession it is my melancholy task to report the passing of two more members of our circle. King Death has indeed struck hard of late. His call on Percy North came just as we went to press last month and a few days before I left for London I heard, to my grief, of the death of George Grainger of Redruth, Cornwall.

George was one of the few remaining of my generation. Although we never met, I looked upon him as a real friend for we had corresponded for about 30 years, and at one time did quite a lot of exchanging.

At the moment I know nothing of the circumstances of his death for I heard the news from a firm of auctioneers who are disposing of his effects. He had a huge collection of Victorian and early 20th century papers. It may be that I may be able to tell you what is to be done with them a little later.

As for Percy North - when I received the news of his death from Ben Whiter, I was, by a sad coincidence, just starting to check the proofs of his article for the Annual. I had to put it down for I had not the heart to look at it. I have done it since with misty eyes. I could not help thinking of the days he must have spent over it and the map which accompanies it.

Since, I have also seen the exercise books packed with notes from various stories in his neat handwriting. They amazed me. There must be some magic in this hobby of ours to make a man go to such a vast amount of trouble.

HERBERT LECKENBY

And now here's a few sincere words from one who had met him.

PERCY NORTH: A TRIBUTE by W.O.G. Lofts

When I said good-bye to Percy a few weeks ago after spending a most enjoyable day, little did I dream that I had met him for the first and last time. I had corresponded with him for a considerable period and had always been impressed by his vast knowledge of Hamilton lore.

I had passed through Easingstoke on several occasions on my way to the south coast and had wished I could break my journey but time prevented it. However, came this occasion when I managed it, and how glad I am now that I did. Percy, kindly soul, gave me a real hearty welcome. He proudly introduced me to his collection all neatly laid

out for my special benefit on tressle tables. It was plain to see that he was a very sick man but he told me that to talk about his beloved hobby helped a lot to relieve the pain.

He also said he was looking forward to meeting our editor when he travelled south again in September. As soon as I got home I wrote to Herbert saying a visit to Basingstoke simply had to be a 'must' on his programme to which he cordially agreed. Alas! When the time came for him to make the journey, Percy North - one of the most genuine, kindest members of our circle - was resting in his grave. May the soil lay lightly there.

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Blakiana.....

Conducted by JOSEPHINE PACKMAN

27, Archdale Road, East Dulwich, London S.E. 22.

How splendidly you have rallied round with your "candid comments"! During the past few weeks the postman has been very busy delivering at "No. 27" and although each letter has been or will shortly be answered individually I do want to express my grateful thanks and appreciation through this column of mine.

I now have quite a file of correspondence on the "new Blake set-up" so when I have the pleasure of meeting Mr. Baker I shall certainly be armed with plenty of ammunition. In all fairness to the Editor, however, I must say that whilst the majority of readers express their disapproval (strong disapproval) there are quite a few who are in favour of the new set-up. It would require several whole C.D.'s to publish all the letters I have received on the subject; in a number of cases, too, my correspondents have also written to the Editor personally. These communications, I should add, have been replied to by Mr. Baker. Thus, there is only one thing to do and that is to publish one or two extracts and two articles, the combination of which more or less covers the opinions of you all. My own feeling about it is, that only time and the A.P. "returns" will show whether or not the "modern" S.B.L.'s are a success. I think this would be more assured if some of our favourite authors do write some of the stories and more prominence is given to Tinker. Mr. Baker has already promised both these things and I have every confidence that, while catering for the masses in general, he will keep his word and see that his "old faithfuls", who number more than he probably realises, are catered for. Finally, if Mr. Baker feels he would like to say a few words on the subject through the medium of Blakiana (and perhaps thereby ease the weight of his post-bag), I shall be very pleased to hear from him.

JOSIE PACKMAN.

EXTRACTS FROM LETTERS

"..... I have been so disgusted with the present 'Blakes' that I

feel that my contribution would make so little difference to the general opinion which I am sure must prevail among the readers of the C.D. - the opinion that the S.B.L.'s being published now aren't worthy of the name.....I am glad that some of the old authors are coming back, but why the devil do they have to put in the picture of models? Oh, for a Blake story as they used to be. I agree that Blake has to move with the times, but crime hasn't really changed all that much that they have to alter it so that it reads like a film script. I have bought this month's books but I just cannot read them. I've tried. Thank Heaven we can always fall back on the old stories."

JAMES W. COOK,
Watford.

".....I was very disappointed at the absence of Tinker, and the prominence given to Paula Dane, and I imagine, in common with the majority of older readers who have followed S. Blake for a number of years, the changes are not for the better. In actual fact of course, this is probably caused by nostalgia and an attempt to recapture our younger days, so we may be a little prejudiced about all this. In fairness to Fleetway House, I suppose we must remember that they are in business, and that the S.B.L. must show a profit. So if it is necessary that these changes must take place, then so be it. It is better for half a loaf than no bread at all. I am very glad, though, that Tinker's absence is only temporary, and I will be very glad to see some of the older characters back, even if in modern form."

WALTER FLEMING,
Chingford.

".....What Mr. Baker said about Blake remaining behind the times since the 'twenties was very true, and he had no alternative but to make drastic changes in order to attract more readers, the covers in particular sorely needed the modern touch. After all, it is the modern reader who supplies the life-blood which stimulates the circulation of any periodical, so, naturally, in order that Blake should be kept alive a transfusion was necessary to jolt him out of the stupor into which he had sunk. Some object to Paula Dane, but what on earth for? To me, she seems to be an attractive girl attractively characterised, and possessing a genuine affection for Blake.....nor do I object to Tinker having a girl friend, if by doing so he is brought back into the limelight, and Marion Lang seems to fill the bill very well....."

then it would only need a come-back by Mrs. Bardell to make an ideal little gathering, for Miss Pringle who has displaced her is, I think, a quite unnecessary addition. I am also pleased that Coutts has been retained - the other Yard characters do not matter so much."

WALTER WEBB,
Birmingham.

".....We must all face up to the fact that the "Old Order Changeth", yielding to the new.....the Editor has the best interests of Blake at heart.....I have nothing but praise for the format and production in general of the new-style Blake libraries.....whilst the addition of an attractive female assistant is definitely an advantage; to overload the menage with three members of the opposite sex seems to be over-doing things a little.....However, if Blake is to survive, he must adapt himself, and Mr. Howard Baker seems to be a person of initiative.....My own verdict is that whilst I cannot approve wholly of the renovations and alterations, the proof of the pudding must always lie in the eating thereof, and Mr. Baker has my best wishes."

W. GOODHEAD,
Derby.

".....I dislike this present preoccupation with Sex matters intensely. In my opinion it is not modern. I think that if they are honest, everybody will admit to a period when they themselves were curious about such things, but the interest soon died in normal people. I cannot make up my mind whether the authors are so preoccupied and are satisfying their interest by writing the present slush and foisting it on to unwilling readers - or whether they are 'writing down' to what they imagine modern readers want....."

MARGARET A. COOKE,
Manchester, 20.

BLAKE IS DEAD! LONG LIVE BLAKE!

by F. Vernon Lay.

The present controversy over the Sexton Blake Library is only the return of the spotlight to an earlier grouse of we so-called "old-timers". We have been grouching ever since the start of the 3rd series and some from the cessation of the Union Jack. Things have steadily worsened - the metamorphosis of Tinker into "Mr. Carter", the gradual

disappearance of Pedro, Mrs. Bardell and the many famous and infamous protagonists, until at last we have Blake Investigations with its concomitant glamorous secretary. I suppose, in the best Chandler cum Hadley Chase cum Peter Cheney style we shall next read of Blake opening his desk or filing cabinet for a good swig from the ever-present bottle of bourbon (no self-respecting shamus uses a glass these days) or arriving back at his Berkeley Square penthouse full of liquor after being beaten up by the 'hoodlums' and pouring a bottle of eau de cologne over himself in the best 'Slim Callaghan' style.

After each loss we used to cry "Blake is Dead. Long Live Blake" and continue to pay our 6d., 7d., 8d., 9d. and 10d., to help keep what little was left of the old tradition alive, and even now a few of us will continue to do so even if the only link with that tradition is the name Sexton Blake Library on the cover. The next logical step will be the dropping of Blake altogether and the renaming of the Library. It's happened before. Remember the Detective Weekly.

We are not complaining of the stories. As always, they vary - some good, some indifferent and some just terrible, but we've always been prepared to put up with the bad for the sake of the good and would cheerfully do the same now. What needles us is that there is no Blake left. Each and every yarn could be about a different detective without any detriment to the story.

We want Blake as he was at the height of his powers, and if this means 'forcing ourselves to wade through a lot of outdated cliches in order to provide us with doses of nostalgia' well, then that's what we want.

Speaking for myself, I'd sooner Blake finish than see him gradually deteriorate into a whisky-sodden, "Broad"-chasing imitation American private eye - a type that is now, unless I'm very much mistaken, going out of fashion. It's been done to death, and unless the new S.B.L. editor mends his ways he will soon be sounding the death knell of Blake so far as current publications are concerned; but to we "old 'uns" it will always be a case of "Blake is Dead. Long Live Blake."

WHITHER SEXTON BLAKE - AND WHY

by H.W. Twymen

(Former Editor of Union Jack and Detective Weekly)

Time Marches On - and the public prints must march with it or die by the wayside.

In the present situation of Sexton Blake's extinction in the style to which we have become accustomed - a near disaster to the 'Old Faithful' among his admirers - it is well to try and keep a sense of perspective; to prevent one's nostalgia and the glamour of the past overriding recognition of a perhaps disagreeable fact. And, as I am the person who, during a period of twelve years, was most intimately concerned with the Blake we knew, I would like to add my six penn'orth to the debate now going on, with particular reference to what may be termed the technical or inside angle. Also, I would like to comment on several misleading statements in the 'Modern Blake' article (September DIGEST), by Leonard Packman, quoting Mr. W.H. Baker, the present custodian and sponsor of the transmogrified Blake.

There are two ways of keeping a periodical from lagging too far behind Time's steady stride - the gradual and the sudden. Different cases need different treatment, and in my time I have used both. Each has its advantages and both are somewhat of a gamble.

The A.P. director in ultimate control of Sexton Blake's destinies in 1922, when I took over the Union Jack from Walter Shute, was Mr. W.H. Back. His initials, by a somewhat ironic coincidence, are the same as those of Mr. Baker; for William H. Back was a believer in gradualism and Mr. Baker likes his evolution revved up.

"Don't do anything drastic" was his order when he confided the paper to my care. "Keep the thing as it is."

I didn't wilfully disregard his instruction, but nevertheless it couldn't be done. No periodical anywhere ever has, or can, mark time on one spot indefinitely. Each issue is like the next cog on a revolving wheel in a clock that ticks time away. Unnoticed perhaps, but inevitably, successive issues later reveal the evolution of that periodical.

It may be an upward evolution towards the peak of its progress; it may be part of a general downward trend leading to ultimate stopping of the clock. There are of course peaks and valleys on the way, but the rule remains. The history of Fleet Street is sprinkled thick with the proofs of this, and despite the modifying influences of policy variations, editorial changes or other expedients, students of such matters will find examples galore. As regards this one in particular, collectors who have UNION JACK copies running on from the month of February, 1922 may be interested to trace this evolution proceeding through the years and into the DETECTIVE WEEKLY.

And all the while Sexton Blake as a detective remained ahead of

the pack.

Union Jack was a paper whose slogan was 'For Readers of All Ages', a claim that was proved to be amply justified when reader-research showed the age-range to extend from eleven-year-olds to octogenarians (and even one nonogenarian) and to reach a peak at 16 years. Therefore in the stories a balance had to be struck between the recent past and the day after tomorrow.

How effectively this was done is well shown by the volumes of the period - and incidentally by the fact that Pluck and The Marvel, Union Jack's companion papers and designed for a similar readership, went down with all hands 16 years* and 18 years respectively before the allegedly outdated Blake also succumbed in 1940. Also, be it noted, it took a World War to kill Sexton Blake and Tinker (in what had by then become the Detective Weekly); the mere shortage of enough paper to continue printing their adventures. In fact, they died in a general massacre.

Does this indicate that Sexton Blake was dated (as Mr. Baker in his October S.B. Library, and in his statement to Leonard Packman, suggests), or that from the 1920's he had remained many years behind the times, and the style of the stories likewise? On the contrary, he was ageless, modern, topical as the latest newspaper sensations, and even ahead of them most of the time.

As for Tinker - why, he grew up from being a cheeky young ex-ragamuffin to become a responsible youth who wore, at appropriate times, a dinner jacket, as we can see on U.J. cover No. 1149. But now we have seen his progress and personality overwhelmed by the sexier lure of The Girls; he was evidently not thought to be the sort of nightingale to sing in Berkeley Square. But mercifully Mr. Baker seems to have had afterthoughts and he is soon to be given his cue to come on stage again - a little less sure of himself, perhaps.

Mr. Baker's current presentment of 'the great detective' in his chromium environment (an Americanised Blake with strong Raymond Chandlerian undertones) may or may not prove to be welcome to readers of today and tomorrow. The man from Baker Street, W.I., may even survive another forty years and be sought after by collectors now unborn. A lot will depend on Mr. Baker's luck in finding authors like Teed, Graydon and the rest. But in an age when the term 'reader' is itself getting outdated and the 'viewer's' effort is exhausted

*The original Pluck finished in 1916. The new series commenced in 1922 and ceased in 1924 (J. PACKMAN)

after skimming through a picture-strip, anything can happen.

All in all, the situation must be accepted with a good grace. Time must march on and youth must be served. Face-lifted Sexton Blake, discovered with wry distaste by his old admirers, confronts a new generation with his old imperturbability. All we can do is to wish him good luck and hope he pulls through. He always did, anyway.

AT LAST

By Herbert Leckenby.

Ever since Fleetway House was built, and that's a long time ago, I have longed to get inside. At last, thanks to the editor of the S.B.L. (as you will have learned from my chat) my wish has been granted.

It was on the morning of September 21st that I passed through its portals, was whisked up to the sixth floor, escorted along a maze of corridors and into the sanctum of the editor, Mr. W. Howard Baker. Followed an engrossing chat lasting well over an hour. There was I, who was reading Blake stories long before Mr. Baker was born; I, who over 30 years ago had walked along Farringdon Street, paused at the entrance of Fleetway House and wished I had the nerve to enter and ask to see the editor of the Union Jack to discuss my favourite characters. Here now I was listening to the new editor putting his case for the new regime, butting in now and again with my point of view. So good a case did he make out that - I'll make no bones about it - I bid good-bye to him convinced that the change of policy was inevitable. So I feel sure would any of you old faithfuls had you been there.

Anyway, I propose to say more about this in the Annual. Here I'll just add a tip. Next year about this time there'll be, if plans mature, a new annual - or rather the revival of an old one - "The Sexton Blake Case Book." I had the privilege of seeing the proposed design for the cover and it looked jolly good.

STILL ANOTHER DEATH:— Just as we go to press the news reaches us of the death, on September 27th, of Mr. Ernest E. Eriscoe, the artist whose work is known to all of us. A tribute will appear next month.

NELSON LEE COLUMN

by JACK WOOD
 "NOSTAW," 328 Stockton Lane,
 YORK.

* * * * *

Before proceeding to the main content of this month's Nelson Lee Column, I think it would be appropriate if I first said a few words about the death of Percy North which was briefly noted in last month's C.D.

I did not know him personally, but I had corresponded with him about the pre-St. Frank's history of Nelson Lee and Nipper. The magnificent article he produced for the next Annual is the result. It deals with life at St. Ninian's, and it is illustrated by one of the most carefully drawn maps I have been fortunate to see. When I opened the envelope from Percy enclosing the article and map, I was amazed at the vast amount of detail included in the map of St. Ninian's and district. Such meticulous care could only be shown by someone with an immense love of his subject and an infinite capacity for taking pains. In his carefully typed article and in his beautifully drawn map, Percy showed both those qualities to perfection, and his death will leave a great gap in our circle.

Secondly, I would like to apologise to correspondents for a delay in replying to their letters. I have been swamped with work since returning from holiday, and am only just beginning to see daylight. I will, however, reply as soon as possible, and in the meantime I crave the indulgence of those who must be wondering if Dorrie has spirited me away into outer space in Sir Hobart Manners's latest invention.

Thirdly, to our main content, which is an interesting and unusual memory test from James Cook. Answers next month, but how near can you get to the full and complete identification of the various quotations?

1. The Head rose to his feet. "I will go to the gymnasium" he

exclaimed grimly. "And you will come with me, Pitt. If I find you have been telling me a cock-and-bull story I shall flog you with the utmost severity. Will you please come with us, Mr. Lee?"

2. "I-I didn't touch him, sir" interrupted Donnell truthfully. "There'll be terrific trouble over this, sir. When Dr. Stafford learns that Yorke is dead---"

3. "When I went out at eight o'clock to go over the College House" said Starke, "I didn't get any further than the centre of the Triangle. About six forms sprang upon me there, bowled me over and pulled a sack over my head - after gagging me. And those six forms belonged to Nipper and his set."

4. "Dear fellow, to tell the truth, I'm rather puzzled about him," said Tregellis-West. "He seems a frightful duffer, but he isn't! Begad! I've got a kind of idea that D'Albert will surprise everybody before long."

5. "My dear kids, I intend to have this study for myself, and I don't care what it costs me" declared the Hon. Douglas. "It's not my way to haggle over a quid or two; it's not worth the bally bore. I'm willing to make it £7 10. 0. if you give up all rights to this room!"

6. "Sense!" echoed Mr. Crowell, rising to his feet and striding up and down the study. "Good heavens! Can I make sense of them! I will tell you the truth, Nipper, at once. Within twenty-four hours from now - that is to say at nightfall tomorrow - a messenger will arrive on earth from Mars!"

7. "I-I don't understand!" he said, "you-you are English!.. I can see it! What does it mean? What are you doing here- in this place, thousands of miles from civilisation? I-I must be dreaming!"

"I think you are Colonel Kerrigan?" said Nelson Lee quietly.

8. "I warn you there is a conspiracy in the school to close your cinema."

9. "There you are, Mr. Trenton" said Nelson Lee smoothly. "This is just a little test for you. If I have placed two drops of mouth-wash into this water, it cannot harm you, as you will admit. Drink - you ought to have no fear."

10. "You're mad!" shouted Handforth. "Poor old Nipper's gone off his

rocker —"

"That's what I thought!" I yelled. "But it's true - I'll swear to it! I couldn't see visions like that. That's an aeroplane——"

"Hush, my boy, hush!" exclaimed Nelson Lee gently. "Your imagination has got the better of you. No aeroplane could possibly be flying in these regions— such a thing is absolutely out of the question——"

11. Archie swayed dizzily to and fro. Through a blue kind of haze he could see Alf. Alf Huggins was bending over the fire-place, holding up a bloater on the end of a piece of stick. The bloater was smoking, and large blobs of liquid fat were oozing down, and dropping from the smoking fish.

12. "I say, old man, what's the trouble?" inquired Percy Bray from the next bed.

"I'm handcuffed to the top rail!" shouted Buster.

"You're what?"

"Can't you see, you idiot?" snapped J.E.B. "Look at this!..."

13. "The circle must be complete" said De Valerie solemnly. "If our hands do not touch, there can be no results. And do not speak. Sit still, and concentrate. Think of Beal. Our object is to obtain some sign from the spirit of the moon god. If we persevere he will answer."

14. Mr. Smith lost his good humour. "Cut that out, you young mutt!" he shouted - "Say, what do you think I am? - a dumb bell? You've got no chance, my lad; as soon as I send my men forward they'll smash through, and there'll be an end to this durned business."

15. "Smithson, your neck is dirty" said Mr. Creepe.

"Yes, sir." faltered Smithson, with a catch in his voice.

"Your face is ugly, and your figure is distorted" went on Mr. Creepe pleasantly. "In fact, Smithson, you are a most repulsive boy in every way. Don't you think you should have been smothered years ago, Smithson?"

"Yes, sir," said Smithson feebly.

Mr. Creepe smiled. "You see, Watson?" he asked. "That is what I call politeness. One of these days you will do the same."

16. "The form-room is haunted, sir!" panted Mr. Pycraft.

"Good heavens, haunted?"

"It sounds absurd, but it is, nevertheless, the truth" went on

the Form master, pulling himself together.

"Really, Dr. Stafford, the most grotesque things have just happened!"

Score one mark for series; two marks for correct story within the series; and two marks for page number. Five marks in all - and no cheating!

FOR SALE: C.D.'s 93 to 117, also 12 odd copies - 25/-. SCHOOL CAP, set of 10 copies - 2/6d. S.P.C. Nos. 44 to 59 - 12/-. SILVER JACKET Nos. 1 to 27 (2 vols. bound) - 15/-. C.D. ANNUALS 1954/55 - 15/-. All in mint condition. The lot £3 5s. Od.

DEREK THOMSON, 14 BONALY ROAD, MERCHISTON, EDINBURGH, 11.

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HAROLD OGDEN, 11 BRAYSIDE ROAD, MANCHESTER, 19.

OLD BOYS' BOOK CLUB

OLD BOYS' BOOK CLUB - LONDON SECTION

Fortunate are the London brethren as they have the Greyfriars, St. Jim's, Rookwood and St. Frank's countryside on their doorsteps, so to speak. Thus with our Herbert coming down south for his annual visit, off we went to Belton and Bannington for our usual autumn meeting, that is to say a gathering with the genial and hospitable Jardines at Woodingdean, Brighton. Eighteen members attended and with the three Jardine bairns a good time was had by all. The "Cwl" had to appear as copies of "The Banishing of Billy Bunter" were distributed to those who required them. Three good quizzes were conducted; Herbert gave his now famous talk on how the "C.D." started and its progress over the years. Furthermore, there were other good talks and good progress reports by both the club librarians. Good grub, good weather and good companionship made this ninth annual visit to Brighton right up to the high standard of all its predecessors.

Next meeting at 27 Archdale Road, East Dulwich, London, S.E.22, on Sunday, 21st, when our globe trotter, Alan Stewart, hopes to be present after his last cruise to the Northern Capitals.

UNCLE BENJAMIN.

NORTHERN SECTION MEETING, SEPT. 8th, 1956.

There was an excellent attendance which included Leslie Hall and Edgar Creek who had not been with us for some time.

Chairman, Breeze Bentley, said it was to be another ladies' night for the personality to be dealt with in Gerry Allison's talk was "Cousin Ethel" together with, of course, George Figgins.

Gerry, starting off, reminded his listeners that the late George Orwell had once stated sex was never mentioned in the Gem and Magnet stories. That was not quite true; there was a touch of romance in the stories now and again but it was of the kind to which not even a Victorian parent could object.

Gerry dealt deftly with the several occasions when charming Cousin Ethel appeared at St. Jim's causing the heart of Piggy to beat more quickly. He also read extracts from the serial in which

she played the leading role "Cousin Ethel's Schooldays". Evidently it was all to the liking of his audience.

We wound up with a lively game compiled by the same Gerry.

Next meeting October 13th when I shall have something to say on "The Papers from 1900 to 1910!" There will be plenty of material to work on at any rate.

H. LECKENBY

Northern Section Correspondent.

MIDLAND SECTION MEETING, AUGUST 27th

There was quite a good attendance at this meeting, although apologies for absence were received from our Chairman and Mrs. Corbett, and also from Mrs. Brown; all away on holiday despite this superchronic and unspeakable summer. Mr. Jack Ingram was duly elected to the chair, and proceeded to deal with the unusually full agenda of business.

One important matter for discussion was the election of a new Secretary consequent upon the retirement of the present writer from this office. As I stated at the meeting, it is with very real regret that I am compelled to relinquish the job; one which has been very rewarding in some ways although extremely demanding in others. I much appreciate the very kind remarks made by Mr. Ingram and others after I had announced my decision.

Returning to the chronicle of the meeting, be it recorded that Mr. Harry Broster undertook the post (after a little gentle coaxing!). Miss Beryl Russell very kindly volunteered to act as Assistant Secretary.

Despite our lengthy agenda of business, it was still only refreshment time (or should I say "Half Time?") so that we were able to tackle a very intriguing quiz prepared by our new Secretary, and also to hear another fine talk by Tom Porter on "Nelson Lee."

During the discussion which followed, several speakers drew attention to sensational finishes etc., in real life Sport which have occurred in recent years, so that fiction is not so overdrawn afterall!

In concluding what must be my last report of a meeting - incidentally the last of fifty odd - I would like to record how much I have enjoyed doing these.

EDWARD DAVEY

MERSEYSIDE SECTION - SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 9th

After the summer holidays it was a pleasure to see a large gathering of members for the first of the winter meetings. After the minutes of the August meeting had been read, the rules of the club were thoroughly discussed and minor changes made. Voting for the branch officers was then carried out and Don Webster was re-elected Chairman; Jim Walsh was elected Vice-Chairman; and the writer of these notes Secretary. A hearty vote of thanks was given by all to Don for the hard work he has put in for our branch during the last year. All members then contributed to an informal discussion of future programmes, and some novel ideas were brought up which should make our winter meetings more varied and interesting.

After tea and biscuits, a two-part quiz was presented by Don Webster entitled "Classical Quotations." This was won, ably by Mr. Burke, followed closely by Mr. Walsh and Mr. Morgan. Library business followed and the Secretary was pleased to note the increasing interest shown in the Nelson Lee Series. A varied Library is all to the good of the Club.

Next meeting - October 14th, commencing 7 p.m.

NORMAN FRAGNELL

Secretary, Merseyside Branch.

MAGNETS: 1443-1440-1445-1449-1451-1535-6-7-8-9-1540-1580-1582-1591-1601-ALSO COMPLETE FILE 1613-1629.

GEMS: 1308-1436-1438 - EXCHANGE OR SELL, PART OR WHOLE.
Interested in MAGNETS, GEMS, POPULARS, BOYS MAG, BULLSEYE, S.O.L.'s etc.

R. GREENWOOD, 63 GRIFFITHS DRIVE, ASHMORE ESTATE,
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WANTED: Boys Magazines Number 332 onwards.

FOR SALE: 9 (Goldhawk) Tom Merry Books, 6d. each. Also books by Gilson, Cleaver, Avery, Hadath. "Talbot's Secret" by Martin Clifford.

W. DARWIN, 76 WESTERN ROAD, EAST DENE, ROTHERHAM, YORKS.

HAMILTONIANA

Compiled by HERBERT LECKENBY

Once again there's been quite a lot of publicity concerning Greyfriars with Bunter inevitably in the lead. For instance, "Victor Thompson's Personal Piece" in the "Daily Herald," September, was devoted entirely to Hamiltoniana. It was so good that I thought it was well worth reproducing in full. Here it is:

I watched the clamorous kids around Dan Dare at the Boys' and Girls' Exhibition.

"It used to be Dan the Sanitary Man, not Planetary," said a voice that has launched a thousand quips, and there behind me was my old Herald confederate, that great artist Gilbert Wilkinson.

"It used to be Billy Bunter and the Famous Five of Greyfriars," I corrected. At which a father alongside me gave the immortal Bunter cry of "Yaroooh!" and his friend intoned the correct response, "Cave, Quelchie!"

There is, you see, a more or less secret society perhaps a million strong in this country - the vast balding brotherhood of old Greyfriars boys. If we who used to devour the Magnet magazine stories in our boyhood ever united for any political purpose, we could take over the country tomorrow. AND run it, for we have all the talents. Men as different as Noel Coward, Herbert Morrison, Stanley Matthews and Gilbert Harding have declared their membership to me.

We grown men in the Parents' Oasis at Olympia, anachronisms among the space ships, began to remember. . . .

Besides Harry Wharton and Billy Bunter, there was Bob Cherry, the hearty hero whose conversation was practically confined to "Hullo, hullo, hullo!" And Inky the Indian boy - Burree Janset Ram Singh in full - whose idea of English was to say, "The sweetfulness of these jam-iferous tarts is terrific." And monocled Arthur Augustus D'Arcy who thought everybody was weally a wotter. And Fisher T. Fish, and Frank Nugent and Bulstrode - can anybody not initiated in childhood understand their magic?

Certainly, Wilkinson pointed out, females can't. Sisters Are

Soppy was a cardinal rule of our boyhood, and the poor things were excluded from all our male pursuits as soon as we were old enough to escape the shame of playing Mothers and Fathers.

There was general agreement, too, that the Magnet (and its rival, the Gem, with Tom Merry & Co. of St. Jim's) shaped our growing minds almost as much in their way as H. G. Wells and Bernard Shaw did a little later.

For example, despite a wonderful talent for innocent-faced lying, which practically guaranteed me immunity from punishment, I used priggishly to own up to my crimes in class - because that was the way of Harry Wharton.

Why the Magnet and Gem were forbidden by so many parents and teachers we could not understand, for the stories preached only the noblest rules of conduct. However, the Magnet was all the better for being read secretly under bedclothes by the light of a failing electric torch. It was seventh heaven to be simultaneously a Decent Chap and a lawbreaker. . . .

Now it wasn't so long ago (I told my envious hearers) that I talked about these things with the creator of Greyfriars School himself - now a little old man in a skull-cap living in a quiet road at Kingsgate-on-Sea, Kent.

At 84, spry Frank Richards (real name, Charles Hamilton) still works every day, adding to the awful total of 75million words he has poured out in his lifetime. He works, he said frankly, because he still must if he wants to eat. He earned handsome money when he was the Pied Piper of the Board Schools, but he spent it as it came - sometimes (but don't tell Harry Wharton) at the Monte Carlo gaming tables.

What puzzled and faintly grieved him was that over the years Billy Bunter, the Owl of the Remove, the greedy, cowardly, deceitful scrounger he had planned to be despised, had gradually become the most enduring and successful of all the Greyfriars tribe.

Around the transatlantic stand at the Exhibition, some boys were shoving one another, and one was thumped and said a distinct "Yaroooh!" Not "Eek!" or "Glurp!" or any other transatlantic comic strip term, but a good old Greyfriars "Yaroooh!"

The little old skull-capped Merlin in Kent will be glad to know that some of his influence on English schoolboy language is still alive.

Then following the first instalment of the new TV series, the "Yorkshire Evening Post" had this to say:

THE NEW TERM at Greyfriars opened with a typical frolic and I must confess to an inordinate liking for the Bunter series, now happily resumed. The liking amounts to a mixture of nostalgia and habit, with quite a lot of admiration thrown in. One thing is certain - the simple, noisy adventures of the roistering Owl of the Remove are bound to have an amusement value for more than one generation.

When one reflects that the G.O.M. of boys' story-tellers, Frank Richards, is still writing these episodes at turned 80, it is not really surprising that the years are so easily spanned. It is, after all, the same imagination which beguiled our own schooldays which now endears itself to our children.

The formula is very simple when it comes to television presentation. It consists of outrageous caricatures, so far as Bunter and Quelch are concerned, and how well they exaggerate their respective roles.

Further on September 23rd, the "Sunday Express" had a most amusing piece when David Clayton interviewed Gerald Campion, thus:

I'M NOT REALLY FAT, SAYS BUNTER

"Of course," said Gerald Campion, "most of this down here is padding. Masses of it."

He passed his hand over the ample stomach beneath the Billy Bunter blazer. And sighed.

"I'm not as fat as viewers think I am," he said. He looked me right between the eyes as he said it, and dared me to disagree.

It is now 5½ years (weary years to Campion) since the B.B.C. first fitted him into those tight check trousers, the padded blazer, and the pinpoint Greyfriars School cap, and put him on the air to play the best-known figure in English fiction next to Peter Pan and Sherlock Holmes. The "responsefulness," after a shaky start was, as Hurree Singh (now there's MY favourite of all Frank Richards's characters) would say, "terrific."

Since then Harry Whartons, Bob Cherrys, Frank Nugents and Johnny Bulls have said their "I say chaps" and departed, some to Her Majesty's Forces, some even into matrimony. There have been two "impot" bestowing Mr. Quelches and the current Coker is a better bad-

hat than those who have gone before.

Only Campion as the lying, thieving, cheating Bunter remains to tempt viewers to look on Children's Television. And adults will be doing it by the thousands this afternoon between 5.0 and 6.0. There is now a Bunter cult which bluffs nobody. Adults say, of course, and nobody is fooled, that they do it strictly in the line of duty. To see, as in my case, whether the adventures I read long ago under the school desks ("Cave, chaps!") or under the bed-clothes by the light of my Boys' Wonder-send-no-money-satisfaction-guaranteed-giant-shilling-flashlight are suitable television fare in this rockin', rollin' age.

They are, and everybody is happy. Everybody that is, except Gerald Campion, who fears that he is stuck with Billy Bunter, his jam tarts, his "yarroos" and his "leggos" for the rest of his natural life. He has been an actor since the age of 14, and now at 32, the father of two, he would like to do something else. Although he confesses that at school he had enough flesh on his bones to warrant being called "Fatty," he trots out the figures on his weight with all the vehemence of a starlet issuing more vital statistics.

"Eleven stone twelve, and five feet five high," he intones. Then, of course, he goes on: "And it's not all fat. Squash and tennis see to that."

But, apparently, Bunter addicts refuse to believe it.

There are always diet charts in his fan mail. He still tries to force a weak smile when he asks for a steak in a restaurant and a convulsed waiter, glancing at his waistline, and recognising him from the "tele," suggests jam tarts instead.

At his home in Battersea his two children, Anthony and Anthea, are not amused that their father's fame is built on a foundation of solid flesh. And in the club in the West End which he has run for the last six years ("You can't live off Bunter") members tend unnecessarily to count their change twice.

He has one consolation. Letters from Frank Richards, who at 86 has written 60,000,000 words about Greyfriars, indicate that he is well pleased with Campion as Bunter. There is talk too of making a film in which he will star.

"You've filmed a lot, of course?" I asked.

"I have," said Campion, "Spivs, and doormen and furtive parts like that. And, of course, as the fat boy in Pickwick Papers."

"I remember that," I said.

"Everybody does," said Campion. "Seems I'll go on playing 'fatties' for ever.

Note that comment about Bunter being the best known figure in English fiction next to Peter Pan and Sherlock Holmes. Note also that Victor Thompson has it that Frank Richards is 84; David Clayton gives it as 86. I wonder which is right, if either. Judging by the times I'm asked, quite a lot of people would like to know.

Still another reference came one night in "The Archers." Paul Johnson and Nelson Gabriel were about to have a scrap concerning the charming Christine. Said Paul, "Come on you cad." "Chuck it," retorted the son of Walter. "You're not at Greyfriars now."

Well, after all that, we'll have something from members of our own circle.

Do You Remember?

By Roger M. Jenkins

No. 20 - Magnet No. 1000

The occasion of the thousandth number of the Magnet (which was dated 16/4/27) was quite justifiably taken by the editor as an excuse for a good deal of self-congratulation. In No. 999 he had said: "I do not know how my youthful chums would get on without the chums of Greyfriars to keep them company every week. If any further proof be needed that the Magnet is indeed the centre of attraction, the proof will be supplied in that cheery number 'one thousand' which one will see on next Monday's cover. Isn't it just scrumptious? Doesn't it make the scoffers take a back seat, for what paper - unless it has popularity behind it - can endure the test of age?"

In the thousandth number half the centre page was devoted to further eulogies by the editor: "Many an editor has sighed wistfully for the day when he would see that formidable and eloquent number gracing the cover page of the paper he controls. But it doesn't fall to the lot of every editor to produce and maintain a paper with such a world-wide appeal, nor to cater for such a loyal and enthusiastic body of readers as it has been my pleasure to serve." The peroration ended with a wish that was not so fanciful as it may have seemed at the time: "You will not think it boastful of me if I, having seen to press one thousand issues of the Magnet, should raise an imaginary glass of foaming ginger-pop and say: 'Magnetites, you will honour me

by drinking to our two-thousandth issue."

The other half of the centre page was graced with a photograph of Charles Hamilton, and entitled 'Some reminiscences of Frank Richards'. This seems to have been the only occasion on which the author of the Greyfriars stories sent a personal message to his readers. The article dealt with his early attempt at writing, culminating with the sale of his first story, when still at school, for 15/-. "My father was a poet. The remuneration he received for his verses paid, I believe, for the ink he used, but not for the paper. This may help to account for my feeling no attraction towards poetry." There was also an amusing apocryphal anecdote about the way in which Frank Richards shewed Martin Clifford the first Greyfriars story, and was told that there was only one better writer, and that was Martin Clifford.'

Magnet No. 1,000, like Gem No. 1,000, contained reproductions of the covers of the first Magnet and the first penny Gem. The curious thing about the reproduction in both papers of the cover of the first Magnet is that it was not in fact taken from Magnet No. 1 but from the advertisement of Magnet No. 1 in the first penny Gem. It was apparently the original design for the cover of the first Magnet, which was then discarded in favour of a slightly different version, but it seems that it was decided not to carry the change through to the advertisement in the Gem. Hence the muddle.

As for the Greyfriars story in Magnet No. 1,000 - well, you must wait for the Annual for a comment on that.

SOLUTION OF CROSSWORD NO. 3.

ACROSS: 1. Modern Boy; 6. At; 8. Peach; 10. Leader; 14. Enter; 15. Lake; 16. Tie; 17. Ice caps; 20. Pane; 21. Sh!; 22. Arsenic; 23. Ado; 24. Chas; 27. Credit; 29. Kent; 31. Ta!; 32. Hid tuck; 33. East; 37. Cater. DOWN: 1. Mellish; 2. Drake; 3. Rye; 4. Open; 5. Yen Chin; 6. Ace in sleeve; 7. Three; 9. Attaché; 11. Each; 12. Decadent; 13. Rips; 18. A rod in pickle; 19. Seat; 23. Arid; 25. Ants; 26. Statue; 27. China; 28. Inca; 30. Chic; 34. Age; 36 (with 31) Tail.

The first correct solution came from Gerald Allison, Bramley, Leeds, 13 to whom a postal-order for 5/- has been sent.

REVIEWS OF

"THE BANISHING OF BILLY BUNTER" By Frank Richards. (Cassell 8/6d.)

This is a first-class school story, a joy for young readers and an ecstatic feast of nostalgia for those who are 'getting on.' Though the basic plot is familiar to old Magnet fans, the story has many novel twists which make it as fresh as a Spring morning. It is outstanding in giving us new pen pictures of Mr. Quelch and Mr. Prout, and Frank Richards is always at his brilliant best in the word-duels between the two masters. Coker plays his part without being in any way obtrusive; the development moves at a spanking pace and the restrained use of dialogue avoids anything which could be classed as padding. The story contains some charming whimsical passages, and, taken on the whole, this is one of the very best of the more recent Bunter books.

ERIC FAYNE.

This is the 19th in the growing series of Bunter novels and, apart from an over-repetitious reference to the "elephantine" movements of Paul Pontifex Prout, is well up to Frank Richard's pleasant standard.

The plot is familiar, but its presentation is enjoyable and eminently readable. For me, the story is especially welcome for it has Quelch and Prout at their most human. The scene where Quelch at long last tells Prout to mind his own business is excellently handled, and to all Greyfriars' men should be written in letters of flaming gold in the long-awaited "History."

Coker and Bunter play leading roles without unbalancing the comedy's casting, and C.H. Chapman is on top form with his illustrations to complete a welcome addition to Bunter lore. Long may the banishing of Billy Bunter be deferred!

JACK WOOD.

FOR SALE: Chums Vols. 1-4, 9-15, 1932-3, 1934-5. 10/- each.
38 ST. THOMAS'S ROAD, PRESTON, LANCS.

Have you ordered your Annual yet?