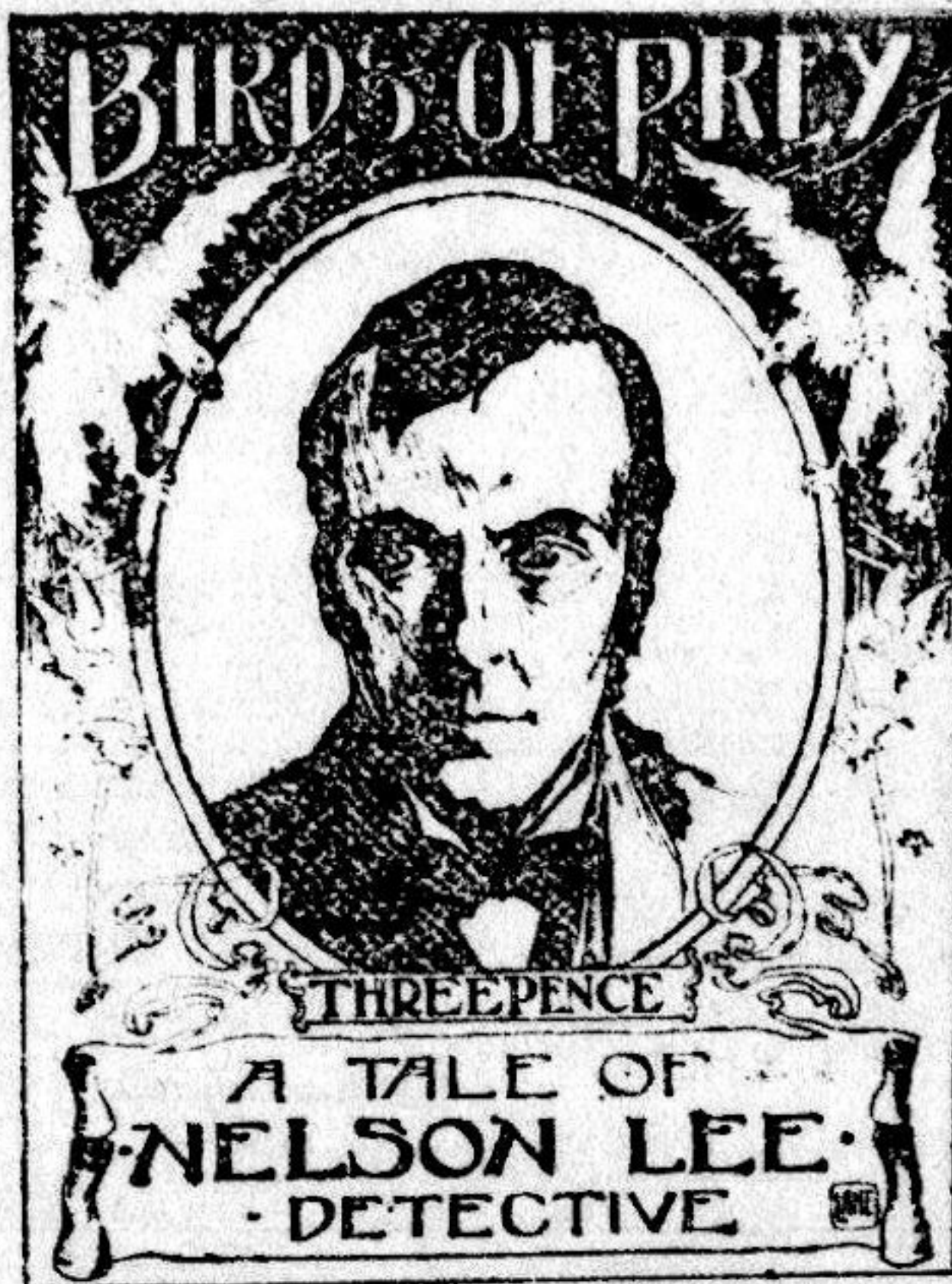


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VOLUME 11, NUMBER 128.

PRICE 1s.6d.

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—THE COLLECTORS' DIGEST—

Vol. 11 No. 128

Price 1s.6d.

AUGUST, 1957

Editor: HERBERT LECKENBY,
12 Herbert Street,
Hull Road, York.

or

c/o YORK DUPLICATING SERVICES,
12A The Shambles, York.

FROM THE EDITOR'S CHAIR

THE LIVING PAST. On July 2nd Bill Williamson paid me a visit. The great York Festival was on and the sun shone from a clear sky on the lovely flower bedecked old city. In the evening we joined a giant queue outside the world renowned Castle Museum. Eventually we descended into the remarkable old cobbled street which is part of the Museum. We were just in time to see two boys clad in masculine garb of a Victorian day, rolling about in the gutter punching away at each other. A man in a smock separated them and lifted them on to the two front seats of what had once been a stage coach. Then the two lads, tousle-headed, they might have been Tinker and Nipper in their ragamuffin days, hands clasped between their knees began to sing - "I'll be your Sweetheart". The boys had lovely voices, and on the invitation of the ostler the big crowd in the street joined in. Then the ostler himself led off. He too had a splendid voice and sang song after song of the days when songs had melodies, "Just a Song at Twilight"; "Dolly Gray"; "Soldiers of the Queen" rang out. Grey haired men and women sang lustily accompanied by the strains from a fiddle played by a poorly clad old man, as a background there were the small paned curved windows of the shops of another day. There was the barrel-organ, the full sized hansom-cab complete with horse and driver, the street sellers gaily dressed. Yes, it was a stirring scene, one to tug at the heart-strings especially for those in the evening of

their days. For a while they were back in their youth. As we came away Bill exclaimed, though he is not as old as some who were there, "My word! that was a thrill, I could have stayed for hours."

Why have I described all that here? Well, don't you think it is appropriate? For isn't there something akin to our hobby? Many of us are middle-aged or more, yet we love to pick up a volume with a date of long ago, turn the pages and travel back down to the days when the boys journey to school along quiet country lanes in a horse-drawn coach, without a motor car in sight; or of the clip-clop, clipperty-clop of the horses hooves and the jingle of harness as the hansom-cabs cantor down the Strand, with the gas lamps throwing dim rays on the passing throng. As you read you can almost fancy you can hear some care-free errand boy whistling "Goodbye my Bluebell" or "Lily of Laguna".

Scoffers may say "You can't live in the past", maybe not, but in these days when they try to scare smokers of the perils of lung cancer, when pound notes vanish in a few minutes, when crossing the road becomes a nightmare, it feels good to dwell there, in fancy, just for a while.

* * * *

THE ANNUAL. I am pleased to say there has been a most gratifying response to my appeal for early ordering. At the moment of writing we are well in advance of any other year. I have as a consequence, been able to get a good start on compiling the "Who's Who". Keep it up, won't you?

* * * *

CONFERENCE IN CHESTERFIELD.

JULY 14th, 1957

Last year there were four of us, this year seventeen, next year, ah well, that's in the lap of the gods.

For me it meant a bus journey from York to Leeds to meet the Leeds contingent. We caught the 9.47 and at Sheffield Jack Wood joined us. We arrived at Chesterfield before noon and a few minutes later the Birmingham train steamed in. Quick introductions were made and then on to the Portland Hotel where we found Stanley Smith and Margaret Jackson, who had travelled by car, awaiting us. A Derbyshire member, Larry Morley also dropped in. A substantial lunch disposed of, we wended our way to the Y.M.C.A. where, thanks to the persistent efforts of Gerry Allison (he had previously tried four other places)

a room had been engaged for two hours.

Stanley Smith took the chair. He was in sparkling form and after some very appropriate remarks threw the meeting open for a general discussion, an invitation eagerly seized upon. A suggestion was made that now two of the Clubs had got together in real earnest, why not on some future occasion all four. It was recognised that there were difficulties, such as suitable day and place, but they could be surmounted. Well, how about it London and Merseyside? Why not in north one year the south the next? Numerous other topics were debated. Unfortunately space forbids details, and a couple of games were also worked in. A well spent two hours indeed.

Back to the Portland Hotel for tea, and then reluctantly our steps took us to the station. Northern saw Midland away, made a dash back through the subway, and five minutes later were entrained for Leeds, all except the York quartette who were returning by car. At 7 o'clock they passed by the Crooked Spire and were bowling along the rain-swept countryside towards the twin towers of the Minster of ancient York.

Once again everything had gone according to plan, and another outstanding event goes into the records of the Brotherhood. A lucky star must guide its destinies!

Members present: From Midland: Tom Porter, Beryl Russell, Harry Broster, Miss Partridge, Ted Davey, Norman Gregory and Jack Bellfield. Unattached, Larry Morley, Alfreton. From Northern: Gerry Allison, Mrs. Allison, Molly Allison, Stanley Smith, Margaret Jackson, Jack Wood, Bill Williamson, Bill Harrison and

Yours sincerely,

HERBERT LECKENBY.

Postscript: The increases in post-office charges have just been announced. Phew! I write over 2,000 letter a year! However, where printed paper rates are concerned it would appear that a normal sized issue will just get through without an increase in cost. Whether or no, here's four extra pages this time.

WANTED: Old Picture Show and Picturegoer weeklies and Annuals. Other Film Guides etc.

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* * * * *

By W. O. G. LoftsGILBERT CHESTER

As stated before in the C.D. columns Chester's real name was H. H. Clifford Gibbons. Chester, as we will call him, was undoubtedly the most versatile writer of Blake stories that ever lived. Apart from his skill in the writing field, he was a qualified engineer, and not long after leaving school (he was an old Pauline - that is went to St. Pauls School) trained to be a dentist - as he did have a brother who was an L.D.S. Remember U.J. No. 979 "The Case of the Bond Street Dentist"? (This was a case of Chester "Ghosting" for Andrew Murray - as explained later).

He was also a very clever musician - and conducted an orchestra at one time which toured all over England - being related to the late Carroll Gibbons the famous band leader, may have given him this gift. He did once mention his more famous relative in a story, Detective Weekly No. 10 "Paupers Island". There is no doubt that his stories with a musical theme were 100% authentic.

Later on in his career he studied Astrology and Spiritualism to give him more intimate inside details in writing these type of stories. So keenly did he become interested in these subjects - that he became a real devotee and follower to these sort of activities. As many of the followers of the "Confederation" stories in the U.J. now know, he wrote quite a few, although they were published under Robert Murray's name - so much like Murray's style that readers today fail to spot the difference. He also has claimed to have written many stories for Andrew Murray - another popular writer in the early days.

Chester wrote his last Blake yarn in 1952, and despite his versatility is sad to say, today in very poor circumstances somewhere in Sussex.

MODERN BLAKE NEWS

Jonathan Burke one of the new names in the S.B.L., is very well known in the realms of Science Fiction - he has done a lot of work for the Bloomsbury Press. Pictures of Authors are to appear in the issues of the Library shortly - similar in a way to the days of the Union Jack. An unconfirmed report from Fleet Street, says that Tinker is killed off in a September issue of the Library by Desmond Reid.

William Arthur is not a pen-name of Anthony Parsons - although it uses his characters Superintendent Venner and Sergeant Belford -

nor is it a combination of William Howard Baker and Arthur Maclean - a joint effort so to speak.

THE FILM FUN, AND ANOTHER WAKEFIELD

Many readers who delighted in the drawings of the late George William Wakefield - especially his drawings of Rookwood and Laurel and Hardy in the Film Fun - will be interested to know that Wakefield's son Timothy is also an artist, and at present illustrates the same set of cartoon characters in the current issues of the "Film Fun".

The similarity in style is most remarkable - although Wakefield Junior does not portray his characters with the cherub faces so closely as his father. For data concerned readers, the first set of cartoons featuring Laurel and Hardy appeared in issue No. 564 dated November 8th, 1930, although at that time not featured on the front page.

STOP PRESS NEWS. WARWICK REYNOLDS FANS.

Recently down Fleet Street way I met Basil Reynolds, nephew of the late famous Warwick Reynolds. Basil is an artist like his Uncle and was very interested to hear that so many people still get much pleasure out of his late Uncle's drawings. There will be more about this in the September C.D.

(Editor's note: The persistent and disturbing rumour about Tinker's demise in September is denied by Fleetway House. The rumour is ascribed to "loose talk in Fleet-street taverns." - H.L.)

I offer mint condition Summer Double Number "PUCK" (year 1914) and Easter Number "CHUCKLES" (year 1915), in exchange for a XMAS Number of "JESTER" for any year between 1914 and 1917.

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WRITE - LOFTS, 56 SHERINGHAM HOUSE, LONDON N.W. 1.

BROTHERS OF BORDENby Harry Broster

Many school stories have been written over the years by various authors and quite a good proportion have had amongst their themes a bent towards emphasising the Spirit of Comradeship. Comradeship is a thing which is largely developed in a person's school life. Friendships which start in schooldays generally hold for years, after schooldays are done and in a lot of instances all through life. For our purpose we are principally dealing with what we will call public schools where a friendship starting in the first and second forms has a better chance of consolidation inasmuch as the so-called schooldays last till the age of eighteen or nineteen as against the ordinary schools where friends drift apart or have more chance of so doing, at the point of school leaving at an earlier age. As we read our beloved school stories by our own favourite authors we are able to pin-point many instances of this "getting together" and forming little bands of chums. Frank Richards gives us the Famous Five, the Terrible Three and the four from Study Six, the Fistical Four, Figgins and Co., the Colonial Trio and going to the opposite, Ponsonby and his little gang and Adolphus Smythe and his "Nuts" of Rookwood. Nelson Lee fans can produce their little bands of comrades in Handforth and Co., - Nipper and his circle of friends. There are so many, all good chums, loyal to one another and all bound by that queer set of rules - "the Schoolboys Code of Honour". Many stories feature at times a rift in the friendship, the clan is divided amongst themselves but generally the spirit of good fellowship is manifest. They share alike in most things, pocket-money and tuck is pooled, holidays are not holidays unless spent together, and so the spirit of good comradeship holds all through schooldays and mostly after that. So the authors have made the most of it.

Amongst the outstanding series of school stories one author has, in my mind, laid more emphasis on this spirit of comradeship than any other. There comes to me the picture of a band of schoolfriends, not quite all the same age and ~~all the same age and~~ not all British born, all brought together by a common appreciation of each others' pluck in times of strife and trouble, peril and adventure and bound by the band's motto "each for all and all for each". This little Club consisting of prefects and fags alike, all have their little faults and argue and bicker. All have their full complement of mischief and

play pranks on each other but in time of battle, and my particular author brings plenty of scrapping into his yarns, they line up shoulder to shoulder. "The Brothers of Borden" perhaps twenty or more of them all told, but we are mostly concerned with sixteen, all from various houses in a famous public school in the south of England, have their headquarters in a little shooting box in the woods near the school. The leader or shall we say the chairman, of the Club is an Australian lad, Harry Merry, destined to be a great test cricketer in the years to come, school cricket captain and a genius with race-horses. Perhaps like most Colonials a trifle cynical and in no way soft-hearted but a great leader. Jack Jackson, son of a famous explorer, is a fine example of English youth. Then Donald Macdonald, the "wise-head" of the Brothers, as canny as all Scots but steadfast as a rock. A cricketer of merit but mostly famous as the Schools' right-back and long distance champion. Paddy O'Hara there is no need to describe except that a finer representative of a fighting race never left Ireland. David Davies, "Taffy" to all, was perhaps the most loved boy in all the school, even his enemies, if he had any, respected him for his fine character. The Indian prince, Beiran Sinjhi, a relative of the great cricketer Ranji was indeed a real prince. If he had any faults in his make-up, it might be that he was too quiet. When he did speak, all listened as, with Donald and Taffy and one other he supplied all the brains the club needed. These fellows all came to the school on the same day and instantly formed a friendship that never failed. Then we come to four other lads who were a little clique before the Brothers of Borden came into being. In friendly rivalry with the first six named at the start of the series of stories, they become all firm friends and were the original ten "Brothers". Of these particular four Charles Horace Harris was the oldest and biggest but what a character! At first a trifle overbearing and at times inclined to be brutal but later his character mellowed and so much so that he became Captain of the School and one of the best that famous School ever had. Wicks, his closest friend, was a typical long legged curly haired English boy, great at all sports and a mighty fighting man. The other two were Percival Porson, amiable and fat but to be relied on for his share in sport or war and Arthur Saunders who was a worthy backer-up of Harris, Saunders with big ears and the clever wise head, the smallest in size of the Brothers. These ten fellows we meet in the earliest stories of the series, but later on we meet the four from the School House. Bob Merritt was a scholarship boy and had a rough time at first, but his sterling qualities which were instantly

recognised and appreciated by the "Brothers" from Williams House, soon won over the bad element in School House and Tom Blencowe, inclined to be something of a bully at first, became Bob's staunch comrade. It took a little longer for Conway and Charlie Cartwright to become friends but when they did, the School House four were a power to be reckoned with, in the field and when trouble was afoot. It was through Bob Merritt that the "Brothers of Borden" became a club. Reggie Hardy, from Morant's House, was one of the first to be friends with Jackson and Co. He was there when they arrived and though not of their House was never left out of any adventure. There was Harry Crosswell, older than the rest of the clan. Son of a famous soldier, Crosswell was a fine type of English gentleman and came into the stories primarily as a staunch champion of Bob Merritt in his time of trouble. There's the principal sixteen characters of these school stories, the nucleus of the Club known as the "Brothers of Borden". There were a few others, lads of different ages and from other Houses but these I have mentioned are the backbone of the Club. A band of brothers in arms, comrades drawn from the seven Houses of this great seat of learning, lads of different ages and certainly different natures, some of other races but English, but all bound together by ties of fellow-sportsmanship, love of fair-play and a mutual liking for each other. Many were the stories woven round the "brotherhood". How Jackson was ever in danger from an unknown enemy who sought to take his life. How Beiram Sinjhi's enemies from far-off India conspired to eliminate him and how they were thwarted by the "Brothers".

We read of tyrannical masters and unscrupulous school-fellows. Fights and raggings, realistic footer matches and cricket games for the various cups put up for competition at the School. We are especially intrigued by the antagonism of Arthur Dangerfield against the "Brothers". What a complex character is Dangerfield. He would have made a worthy "Brother of Borden", he had greatness and many sterling qualities but he chose the wrong path. A sad note in the series was when he died - but he died like a man with his hand in that of Harris who he hated most in his bad days. A fine series of school yarns, those that involved the "Brothers of Borden". Perhaps by now you may have guessed the name of the author. Who else but John Nix Pentelow (Jack North), that much criticised man, who in many minds, was the finest writer of school tales of them all. Certainly unsurpassed for his description of cricket and footer matches. Who else but Pentelow could have woven such tales round so large a band of comrades, not three, four or six but "sixteen of

them", everyone a character in his own right, everyone a true type of British sportsman, some a trifle grey maybe, but not one of them black. Yes, worthy representatives of a great public school. The School, well, what others than Wycliffe?

Bring to mind the words of the chorus of the Wycliffe School song and it aptly described all and each of the "Brothers of Borden".

"She made him a gentleman frank and free"

"She made him an athlete good to see"

"She made him a scholar as he should be"

"For such is the Wycliffe Trinity"

Chorus:- "Gentleman, athlete and scholar he,

"For such is the Wycliffe Trinity."

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CHANGE OF ADDRESS: Charles H. Churchill has moved from 123 Pinhoe Road, Exeter, to 103 SIDWELL STREET, EXETER.

Blakiana....

Conducted by JOSEPHINE PACKMAN

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

Next month's Blakiana will contain, among other things, the first of a new series by Walter Webb, entitled "ON TOUR WITH SEXTON BLAKE". I do not have to tell you it is excellent, for Walter's work always is!

Several readers have asked for me to name my own "twelve favourite U.J. stories", and for their benefit - and any others who may be interested - the list will also appear next month.

Finally, I would like to make known the fact that, thanks to Granville T. Waine, I am now the possessor of a Sexton Blake Bust. I may say that this was Granville's own copy, and I just cannot find words sufficient to express my gratitude and appreciation at such an act of kindness and generosity - for he presented it to me as a gift!

JOSIE PACKMAN

* * *

SEXTON BLAKE - THE MAN

By F. Vernon Lay

One advantage of the size of the Sexton Blake Saga is the huge variety provided. There are straightforward detective stories, adventure yarns galore, travels in practically every part of the globe and occasionally stories of exceptional human interest, and he must be a difficult chap indeed who cannot find a congenial and favourite author among the many who have contributed their share to the Saga. G. H. Teed, Anthony Skene, Gwyn Evans, E. S. Brooks etc., etc., they all have their fans.

G. H. Teed's "The Black Abbot of Cheng-Tu" is perhaps the most popular Blake yarn ever written, containing as it does, detection, thrills, travel, mystery and that unexplainable "atmosphere" that is the hall-mark of the master of the craft of storytelling. To me, another such is Lewis Jackson's "Sexton Blake's Secret" (Detective Weekly Nos. 1, 2, 4, and 13). Whilst I acknowledge that not everyone would agree with me, after once more reading the series for the

umpteenth time, my opinion is firmer than ever, and I was pleased to see that our Aussie friend Mr. E. V. Copeman included it in his stories he would use to introduce Blake to a stranger. I have on several occasions successfully used this series for that very purpose and only disagree with regard to his reference to Leon Kestrel. The Master Mummer only appears to any extent in No. 13 and this story is really only part of the series in that it deals with the death of Nigel Blake and the recovery of the lost Manual. As a Kestrel yarn it is way behind many previous tales and would not, I think, induce the new reader to search for earlier Kestrel stories.

In 1933 the circulation of the Union Jack was seriously declining and it was decided to give it a shot in the arm. The sudden transition to the Detective Weekly was the result. For a time at least the new venture was a marvellous success - sales of the early numbers climbing to record heights, only to fall back later when the early promise was not maintained, and in spite of various attempts from time to time to give it new life it finally limped to its inglorious and unlamented demise in 1939. The decision to dispense with coloured covers is hard to understand and although the larger size gave the artists more scope (E. R. Parker in particular turned in some very fine efforts) the horrible drab cover gave the magazine a most unprepossessing appearance. Owing to the later policy of reprinting earlier stories from the Union Jack and The Thriller (many without Sexton Blake at all) only the first 60 or 70 numbers are regarded as of interest in the Blake Saga and of these I place "Sexton Blake's Secret" as standing head and shoulders above the rest.

Besides providing sidelights on many hitherto unknown aspects of Blake's family history it presents a never-to-be-forgotten picture of Blake as a human being. Gone is the icy-cold keen sleuth-hound and in his place we have Blake the man, prey to intense anxiety, fighting with his back to the wall to save the family name and the happiness of his sister-in-law and nephew, defying authority even to the extent of being arrested, charged with burglarious entry on enclosed premises and spending the night in custody! Only to be saved by the loyalty of his devoted Tinker, whose heart is breaking because his beloved Guv'nor had not seen fit to trust him. Can anyone read those immortal lines of Blake's return to Baker Street and remain unmoved:

"Never in all his life had disaster seemed so inevitable. But by a brilliant coup, the faithful Tinker had saved him - the lad in whom he had failed to confide. His conscience smote him badly. The lad's rather pale, drawn face showed signs of the tension of the last

few hours when Blake entered his apartments. But he sprang up to greet his master with a bright smile of relief. "Guv'nor this is great!" he said while the detective wrung his hand in silence. As he did so Blake caught sight of the lad's hat and coat flung over a packed suitcase upon the floor. He frowned quickly, "Tinker, what's this?" "Guv'nor", the light had faded from the boyish face; it had become pale and despondent. "I - I'm going". "Going?" Blake stared at him in alarm. "Where?" "Well" the lad smiled in a crooked way which stabbed Blake to the heart. "It doesn't seem that you trust me any more. I - I couldn't stay under those conditions - I couldn't really. It's not going to be easy after all these years but..." "Tinker! my dear boy!" Blake's voice was husky "You mustn't talk like that. Lord knows I need you more now than ever I did. Let's talk" He took him by the arm, and there was a mute appeal in his eyes as he thrust Tinker back into the chair, which warmed the lad's heart as nothing else could have done."

Sentimental? Well yes, but how true to life and expressive of the father and son relationship so steadily built up over those years of companionship since Blake first rescued the Cockney waif from the gutters of the metropolis, and guided and moulded his characters as if he had in truth been his own flesh and blood.

The stories abound in those little touches that are so precious to the clan, the Bardellisms of Martha - "Excuse me Mr. B." "Yes Mrs. Bardell?" "If I ain't interpreting sir, what would you say this was? Here on my chin, sir?" Blake rose and inspected it smiling. "Just a mole, Mrs. B." he assured her. "You wouldn't call it a furuncle?" "Oh no!" he laughed. "Did somebody tell you it was a furuncle?" "Mrs. Platt did - from Dr. Argent's" the old lady said in a tone of relief. "She put the wind up me rather as the saying is. She says a furuncle is a carbuncle with fur on, and that they sometimes grow to the size of your 'ead." Blake smiled reassuringly as he resumed his seat on the chair. "I'm afraid Mrs. Platt was making a mountain out of a mole-hill." Again: "I hope you're instigating the crime Mr. B" and: "Uniform or civilian garbage it's all the same as far as I can see. Risking their lives for next to nothing in the way of celery and mixing with criminals of all conscriptions." Other typical touches are: a few uric acid crystals in the old lady's toe-joint that morning were giving her "beans" and the sight of her master in the faded dressing gown which he had worn for so many years gave her another pain almost as acute. Exactly four years ago on Christmas Eve she had with her hard-earned savings purchased him a new one - a

warm and resplendent garment of a sober pattern which the detective had received with every evidence of gratitude. Yet on every possible occasion he left it in the wardrobe and put on his old one which looked as if it had been subject to the ravages not merely of moths and tobacco ash, but rats and mildew. "It don't give a woman no 'heart" said Mrs. B. as she slapped down a fish-knife.

Towards the end of the meal the door swung open and Tinker entered, pouncing into the vacant chair at the table and snatching up the dish-cover. "Fish!" he said, in disgust. "I thought I smelled sausages!"

I do not propose in this article to spoil the enjoyment of those who haven't read the series but at a later date I hope to expatiate further upon the tales of Blake the Man as opposed to Blake the man-hunting machine.

* * * *

HOW'S YOUR MEMORY (No. 7)

By E. V. Copeman

Those who have read the story which included the scene quoted in this article won't forget the incident itself, but can you remember the title of the yarns and its author?

Here is the extract. Some clues will be given later.

Darkness enveloped Blake, pitch-black impenetrable darkness. He was hedged in by barriers of blackness. His head was aching and he was finding it difficult to breathe. Where was he? As if from a long way off there came to his ears the sound of a muffled voice. He was being moved backwards and forwards with a slow swaying swing, almost as if he were in a boat at sea. He tried to move but his limbs refused to respond to the commands of his brain. With difficulty he scrabbled with his fingers. He felt them touch something on which he was lying - something which was very cold. He became aware at the same moment of a curious odour of decay which seemed to fill that space within which he was confined.

The swaying movement violently increased and then steadied for a moment. The next instant he had the sensation of descending in a very slow-moving lift. There was a slight bump and then silence. He clenched his teeth fiercely in a frenzied attempt to make his brain act. What was happening to him? Where was he? Vaguely there rose before him a vision of himself in one of the sitting-rooms at the Thorns ... then the undertakers had asked to see him, they wanted to be sure that

all the arrangements for the funeral of John Reppington were satisfactory... he remembered it all in a flash now. He had been gassed... those men had not been real undertakers...

There was a sudden rattle just above his head, like soil falling from a height on some wooden covering. With a feeling of overwhelming panic, Sexton Blake realised where he was and what had happened to him. He was in the coffin with the remains of John Reppington! The funeral service was actually going on. He had been lowered into the grave. The last symbolic rite had been performed: "Earth to earth and ashes to ashes..."

Remember it?

CLUES

1. The author contributed (under two different names) a total of 22 stories to the S.B.L. He wrote a series of 8 in the U.J. which featured a central criminal character never mentioned before or after. He also contributed to the ill-fated Detective Weekly.
2. In 1955, both Derek Ford and Victor Colby mentioned this particular story in the pages of the Collector's Digest.
3. Though the yarn is good, Blake himself is not at his brightest and remains consistently baffled throughout. He also adopts a rather blatant disguise for a time; a very pointed beard and moustache and a wig to match, together with a suit of plus fours. In this disguise he comes under close scrutiny from even the police themselves and in broad daylight without anyone being any the wiser.

Now who wrote the story and what is its title?

* * * * *

ANSWER TO TEASER NO. 6 (JULY, 1957 C.D.)

The story in which Blake appeared briefly as a doctor (just for one evening) was written by MARK OSBORNE, well-known for his stories featuring criminal George Marsden Plummer. Title for our 'Teaser' story was firstly "THE CONSULTING ROOM CRIME" (S.B.L. 327, March 1932) and then "THE CONSULTING ROOM MYSTERY" (S.B.L. 726, August 1940). Blake's Scotland Yard friend, as in most Osborne stories, was the bearded Detective-Inspector Martin. The actual words "The Consulting Room" were quoted in the second excerpt from the story in last month's article.

* * * * *

MY TWELVE FAVOURITE U.J. (BLAKE) STORIES(As selected by Len Packman)

1. Dirk Dolland's Redemption.....	(No. 791)
2. The Case of the Bogus Judge.....	(No. 886)
3. The Thousandth Chance.....	(No. 1000)
4. Lord of the Ape Men.....	(No. 1206)
5. Tinker's Secret.....	(No. 1149)
6. The Black Cloud.....	(No. 1265)
7. The Crime of the Christmas Tree.....	(No. 1313)
8. They Shall Repay.....	(No. 1378)
9. The Dog Detective.....	(No. 887)
10. The Sacred Sphere.....	(No. 529)
11. The Golden Reef.....	(No. 752)
12. The Voodoo Curse.....	(No. 984)

NELSON LEE COLUMN

by JACK WOOD

Nostaw, 328 Stockton Lane, York.

Phone: 25795

* * * * *

To avoid editorial scissors, my remarks this month will be brief. Herewith the rest of Norman Pragnell's story of Nerki the Sorcerer, followed by Jim Cook's study of Larry Scott.

Nerki the Sorcerer - continued from last month.

It was an extraordinary phenomenon - a thing which scared the boys more than anything that had gone before. It was un-natural - it was weird in the extreme."

Or perhaps for a final example - the thrashing of Umlosi. "Wau! Who art thou?" demanded Umlosi ominously, as he advanced, "speak, or thou wilt feel the strength of my great arms." The next moment a terrific struggle was taking place, and the mighty Kutana found himself picked up like a feather, and the grip upon him was unbelievable. He was picked up again, and even as Nelson Lee and Lord Derrimore ran

Umlosi was pitched through the air with awful violence. He crashed to the floor with a force that shook the house.

"Ye gods and little fishes" ejaculated Dorrie aghast.

The lights had revealed Umlosi, and the mighty Kutana was sprawling on his back, blood oozing from his mouth. Umlosi's shoulders, and his arms were smothered with terrible bruises. He had been in the grip of something so strong that he had been unable to defend himself. And for the first time, Lord Derrimore felt - and looked uncertain."

To what strength had Nerki struck when even Dorrimore almost confessed his belief in ghosts. These are just a few of the dozens of exciting episodes in this series, and all of them defied explanation, at least until they were all solved by Nelson Lee.

This therefore was the story of Professor Nerki, one of the best series that appeared in the Second New Series, particularly when compared with some of the others that were appearing in the years 1930-1933. Despite our words earlier on in this article may we suggest something to the readers of this article. If you have read the story before, then read it again, you will be surprised how fresh and enjoyable it is. If you have not - then borrow the series and read it. You may then realize in a small way why we admirers of St. Frank's believe that Brooks had that something extra that Hamilton did not possess.

The fourth and final article in this series will deal with that remarkable story "Island Above the Clouds", in which Brooks showed that during all the years he wrote for the Nelson Lee Library he never lost the magic touch for writing about "Lost Worlds". But more of that in a month or two.

* * * * *

A STRANGE NEW BOY

"The truth is a sharp spear which flies home and misses not."
King Solomon's Mines.

There were many strange boys at St. Frank's - strange in that they were different from the usual type of schoolboy we associate with youth. I leave the reader to choose his own particular set of oddities that appeared in the pages of the "Nelson Lee Library" while I mention one, Lawrence Scott.

It was a dark and stormy evening, just over a week before Christmas in 1922, that Scott descended on St. Frank's. Archie Glen-thorne, who was returning to the school after an unsuccessful trip to

his barber pulled Scott from beneath a fallen tree and carried him a considerable way across a sodden, spongy mess of awful mud which had once been a meadow.

He had see a light from a bungalow and when they finally reached it the door was opened by Simon Kenmore of the Sixth Form at St. Frank's. Scott had collapsed and Archie just about to drop but he could see he had gate-crashed a champagne party.

They were reluctantly admitted and when Scott's injuries and Archie's exhausted condition were realised they were given all the help possible to make them comfortable.

They were not to know that Scott himself was on his way to join St. Frank's, and he in turn was unaware he was among St. Frank's boys, since they were not wearing Etons. Thus they never extracted from him a promise not to sneak on them as they did from Archie. And that was fatal! Because when Lee questions Larry Scott about the party at the bungalow, Larry can only tell the truth! He just can't help it!

The following extracts from the "Boy who couldn't Lie" will show what I mean:

Handforth planted himself in front of Scott; "Who the dickens do you think you are?" he demanded.

"My name is Lawrence Scott" replied the new boy.

"A new fellow here?"

"Yes."

"What's the idea of coming here so near the end of term?" put in De Valerie. "It's not usual."

"No, I don't think it is. But my people have gone abroad and so they sent me to St. Frank's straightaway. I suppose I shall spend the Xmas holidays here."

"Poor chap" said Pitt sympathetically.

After describing Handforth's fist as one befitting a navy Handy's catechism of Scott continues.

"Where were you before you came here?"

"At Barrowcliffe School, Hampshire."

"Why did you leave?"

"Because I had a fight with the school captain, and knocked him out."

"What!" shouted the others.

"Do you mean to say you were expelled?" demanded Handy.

"No, but there was some unpleasantness and my father decided to take me away. The school captain was a cad, and I had to fight him."

The juniors regarded Scott in surprise.

They were rather astounded that he should be so frank about his reasons for leaving his previous school. It wasn't very creditable to explain that he had been expelled - or practically expelled.

"I don't know whether you're spoofing, but you don't look much like a boxer to me" said Handforth bluntly, "do you think you could whack me?" he added.

"Yes"

"What?" roared Handforth violently.

"Yes, I do think I could whack you" said Scott calmly.

"Why, you cheeky young ass!" snorted Handy, "I could wipe the floor with you!" "I could use you as a broom."

"It's alright Scott, don't take too much notice of him!" said Nipper coming forward, "It's just his little way. He can't help it you know. He's a decent chap in the main."

"Yes, so I thought" said Scott, "I rather like him"

"I'm flattered" sneered Handforth heavily.

"Like him?" grinned Pitt, "in spite of his ugliness?"

"Yes" said Scott.

Handforth went red all over.

"If you think I am going to stand this you've made a bloomer!" he roared. "This new kid said that I'm ugly --"

Larry Scott smiled.

"I don't like to offend you but I think you're very ugly indeed!" he replied frankly, "I've never met a fellow quite so ugly before."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"So now you've got it, old man" chuckled Pitt.

"I haven't got a quarter of what this chap's going to get in two seconds" bellowed Handy. "Great Pip! A new chap has the nerve to say that I'm ugly! What else do you think about me?" he demanded furiously.

"By what I have seen I should judge you to be quite good-natured in the main, but very aggressive, and with a highly inflated opinion of yourself" replied Scott thoughtfully.

"Well! that's more than flesh and blood can stand!" breathed Handforth huskily.

Handforth proceeds to pull up his sleeves and slaughter Scott, but is seized by half a dozen fellows and dragged back.

"W. can't have any fighting in the lobby" said Nipper severely. "Look here, Scott, it's all very well to be frank, but it's rather risky. You're a new kid, and I must say you've got a bit of a nerve."

If I were you I should apologise to Handforth."

"Certainly not!" said Scott, "What I said was true."

"There you are, listen to him!" howled Handforth wildly.

"What's the idea?" said Nipper, looking at the new boy curiously,

"Do you always tell the truth like that?"

"Yes, of course."

But the atmosphere is not so jolly when Larry is asked if he ever did anything that he was ashamed of.

"Yes" replied Scott.

"Oh, what was that?"

"I struck my mother when I was in a temper one day" said Scott quietly.

Everybody was silent.

"I was a cad, and my father flogged me until he raised weals on my back" said Scott, "But I deserved the thrashing. Any fellow who strikes his mother, even in a temper, is a brute."

"You're not doing yourself any good by saying this!" said Nipper quietly.

"I was afraid so" replied Scott, "But I was asked the question and I had to answer."

"Well, hang it all!" exclaimed Pitt, "you're just about the limit. There's hardly any need to be so truthful as all that, Scott! By the way, what's your father by profession?"

"He is a retired sweet manufacturer."

"How did he start?" asked Pitt, with a wink at the other boys.

"He had a stall in Deptford Broadway" said the new boy quietly.

"What!" gasped Pitt, "but - but you needn't have told us that, you ass!"

"But I simply told you how my father started."

"And did he make all his money honestly?" asked Hubbard.

"I'm afraid not" replied Scott, "But that is business."

The arrival of Nelson Lee put a stop to the little meeting and he requested Scott to accompany him to Lee's study.

Larry follows Lee.

"I understand Scott, that the Headmaster has already put you through a short examination. Did you please Dr. Stafford?"

"Not particularly, Sir"

"Do you mean that you are rather backward?"

"Yes sir."

"Well, you will have to buckle to and see what you can make of

yourself" said Nelson Lee smoothly, "when the new term begins you will soon settle down into your stride. I hope you will like your new surroundings, my boy?"

"Very much, sir"

"I think you slept in a separate room" went on Lee, "to-night you will be accommodated in the dormitory. Did you sleep well?"

"Not very well, sir"

"I am sorry to hear that, my boy. What was the cause?"

"I was troubled by a flea, sir!"

"Good gracious," ejaculated Nelson Lee, "My dear lad! What on earth—"

"I think I must have picked it up in the train, sir" said the new boy. "Trains are very bad for that, sir, as perhaps you have discovered for yourself"

There's more to follow. More home truths and startling exposures from "The Boy Who Couldn't Lie."

This is one of those Lees you want both to read and to keep.

Larry Scott seems to me to be a very original character. Did he have a counterpart among the companion papers?

JAMES W. COOK

No. 393 "The Boy Who Couldn't Lie" - December 16th, 1922.

Bound Volumes "Magnet" complete years issue, 1936, 1937, 1938, 1939 £7-10-0 each.

Thirty very early "Magnets" £15. Forty 1934 "Magnets" £6-10-0

Sixty eight 1926-1930 "Magnets". Mostly clean file copies, all different. £30. "Magnets" 1403 - 1428 Bound £5.

25 - 1935 "Magnets" 60/-; "Chatterbox" Annuals 1920-26 6/- each.

Offers for beautifully bound volume "Girls Own Paper" 1888-89.

"Our Gazette" 1888 Bound. One dozen "Meccano" Magazines 1923-24 including Christmas numbers. "Shivers" "Panics" "Thrills" "Tales of Death" - published 1930's, out of print. 6/- each.

Postage extra on all books.

LAWRENSON, 44 BLEAKHILL ROAD, ST. HELEN'S, LANCS.

FOR SALE OR EXCHANGE A.P. Comics 1930-40, Chips, Comic Cuts, Film Fun, Funny Wonder, Joker. Wanted: Film Fun, Kinema Komic, Puck, Bubbles, Jester, Butterfly - period 1920 - 30.

ARNOLD KEENA, 11 PEARL AVENUE, EPPING, N.S.W. AUSTRALIA.

S.B.L. REVIEWSAugust, 1957Murder With Variety (No. 387)William Arthur

Nothing of any importance had ever happened at Foulness-on-Sea. But when Duke Karsonie, a theatrical agent, brings his own particular brand of foulness to the seaside resort, together with the Sunshine Follies of 1957, a very much below third-rate variety show, it begins to live up to the name bestowed upon it. For Karsonie is that loathsome type of individual, who cajoles stage-struck girls to take up posts, away from their families, in order to exploit them. In a foreign country, friendless and alone, realisation that they have been doped comes too late. In despair some commit suicide. Gloria Page is one. Jasmine, her sister, swears to be revenged on Karsonie and those of the Sunshine Follies who are aiding and abetting him in his pernicious trade. By sowing the seeds of suspicion among them - making each believe that one of the others is about to expose his or her activities to the authorities, Jasmine Page sits back to watch the success of her plan of revenge. Then she meets Tinker, and everything changes, for she falls in love with him. Too late.....

It's a lively story, and makes ideal Bank Holiday reading, with those two old favourites of the C.I.D., Scotland Yard, Superintendent Claudius Venner and Sergeant Belford, returning to the fold.

Rating.....Excellent

* * *

Act of Violence (No. 388)Peter Saxon

First of a series of novels dealing with Blake's wartime assignments, telling the inside story of Mussolini's treasure of Dongo. With the Fascist State crumbling before the onslaught of the Allies, Mussolini had made plans for a second State to be born out of the ruins of the old one. Having gathered money and documents to the value of fifty million sterling, the Duce had secreted the whole somewhere near Dongo, on Lake Como, distributing amongst five of his most valued lieutenants, part of the formula for the treasure's recovery. One, a renegade Englishman, named Michael Boland, a traitor to the land of his birth, had fought with the Fascists against the Allies. To the Sicilians he was known as Il Lupo (the Wolf).

They had given him this synonym because of his cruel treatment towards them when he had ruthlessly denied them collaboration with the Allied invaders.

A seething, impotent witness to the execution of Mussolini and his mistress, Clara Petacci, by the partisans, Il Lupo sees himself as the Duce's natural successor. Possession of the treasure of Dongo must be his, however.

But Sexton Blake, playing a lone hand, is also an interested participant. Amongst the enormous wealth are letters written by Allied politicians to Mussolini. Vital, they could be dangerous in the wrong hands..... A tough and thrilling novel.

Rating.....Very good.

WALTER WEBB

LETTER BOX

43 Mayfield Road,
Sanderstead,
Surrey.

Dear Editor,

Every right-thinking person should be grateful to Mr. Thurbon for drawing attention to the high prices scandal.

Come! Let us be frank about all this. How many collectors are really out to help other collectors? Not very many I'm afraid. But Sir, there has been a tendency in late years to sell "complete years" at unscrupulous prices. Suppose a person desired, say to obtain two Magnets in order to complete his collection for 1935. He would have to buy a complete year and pay several pounds for it which he could probably ill afford to do.

Yours sincerely,

BERNARD PRIME

* * *

(Note: Well Bernard has a right to his point of view, but honestly I don't see how one can expect a collector to split up a years run for

benefit of someone who wants one odd copy or two, and they aren't all offered at unscrupulous prices. There was an instance last month where it wasn't so and I know the majority were quickly snapped up.

This month Len Allen is offering some odd copies of Magnets, Gems etc. According to his price list they are very reasonable indeed. Inevitably there will be such a demand, of course, that some are bound to be disappointed, but how can you avoid that?

And may I remind those who can't afford to lay out substantial sums that all the four Clubs have now libraries from which papers can be borrowed for a month for a few coppers. (H.L.)

WANTED: Union Jacks for 1917, also any of the following numbers:-
589, 726, 862, 1026, 1028, 1031, 1122, 1157, 1149, 1150, 1161, 1199,
1202, 1203, 1226, 1237, 1238, 1240, 1241, 1242, 1243, 1251, 1262,
1283, 1396, 1398, 1399.

S.B.Ls. 1st Series - any numbers.

2nd Series:- 8, 21, 25, 77, 89, 94, 102, 129, 132, 213, 236, 272, 297,
335, 489, 663, 667, 687, 693, 723, 740.

Boys' Friend 4d. Library 1st Series, No. 669. 2nd Series No. 79

Any reasonable price paid.

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

WANTED: Robin Hood Libraries (A.P.) Nos. 43, 46, 49, 50, 52, 53
also Prairie Libraries.

F. MACHIN, 38 ST. THOMAS'S ROAD, PRESTON.

FOR SALE: 61 Boys' Friend (Green 'uns) between No's 869 -1019
88 Nelson Lee (O.S.) between No's 112 - 358, 1919 complete - 187/238
10 Gems between No's 543 -629 also Bunter Books, Annuals, Tom Merry
Annuals. S.A.E. for list to:-

M. JOHNSON, 164 AMESBURY AVENUE, STREATHAM HILL, LONDON S.W.2.

ATTENTION:- Correction to my June advert. "Chums Annuals" wanted
are Volume No. 1 (1892/3). Volume No. 21 (1913) and No. 29 (1921)
also N.L.L. (3rd Ns) No. 20

JOHN GUNN, GUNNS HOTEL, STRATFORD SQUARE, NOTTINGHAM

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OLD BOYS BOOK CLUB

LONDON SECTION

The long voyage from Tokio over and made all the more enjoyable by the last Bunter book and "Magnets" borrowed from the Club library, Les Rowley turned up at the East Dulwich meeting on Sunday, July 21st. Meeting his club colleagues for the first time and enjoying a very fine programme. Also making his first attendance was H.V. de V. Roberts, he like Les knows his Hamiltonia. Major and Minor quiz by myself, a very fine Hidden Names one by Gerry Allison, a Classic Boy's Tales quiz by Len Packman, a superb talk on the artists by our artist, Bob Whiter, a St. Jim's Quiz by Bill Hubbard and a very fine talk on Rider Haggard by Frank Vernon-Lay. Future programme organisers were appointed and a discussion on Bernard Thorne's visit from Ontario, Canada, took place. It was agreed to hold the September meeting at Frank Keeling's Residence at 107, Dolphins Road, Folkestone, Kent, on Sunday, 15th. Excursion train from Charing Cross, fare 11/6 return, train departs 10 a.m. Return from Folkestone at 8.20 p.m. thus giving a fairly long day in the Greyfriars country. Frank Keeling is one of our oldest members and a hearty welcome awaits all members making the journey. September being the month when our Herbert comes south for his round of visits, what more can one ask but to meet him on the Folkestone trip and renew our old acquaintance with Frank Keeling!

Members will be notified as to the informal meeting arranged during August so as to meet Bernard Thorne.

UNCLE BENJAMIN

* * * *

NORTHERN SECTION MEETING - JULY 20th, 1957

Opening the meeting, Chairman Stan Smith, regretted that the bus strike had prevented some of our distant members being with us. He then made mention of the delightful get-together we had had last Sunday at Chesterfield with the Midland Club.

Treasurer, Gerry Allison, then gave his report, and this was followed by "News from C.D. Sources" by Herbert Leckenby.

Business over, we were then all attention when Herbert gave us a talk entitled "I preferred Wycliffe". This one one of the most enjoyable, and certainly the most controversial talk we have ever had.

The end coincided with the arrival of tea and refreshments, and we had to contain ourselves while these were disposed of.

Then the floodgates were opened! Everybody had something of interest to say. From discussing the rival merits of schools where the boys grew up with others where they did not, the discussion soon assumed a wider scope, and we debated as to how true to life were the various school stories in question. With both our present and ex-chairman present, both schoolmasters themselves, we had no lack of authoritative comment. All in all, the debate was the most enjoyable one we have had.

And to finish with, Herbert provided a brandnew game, which made us rack our brains for 15 minutes. The winner was Stanley Smith, who who has now to provide us with a contest himself as penalty for winning!

Next Meeting, August 10th: 'LADIES NIGHT'.

G. ALLISON

* * * *

MERSEYSIDE BRANCH O.B.B.C. - SUNDAY, 14th JULY.

The July meeting was opened by the Chairman giving us the financial report, which was agreed by all to be very sound. The question of the high prices that have to be paid to get books for the Library was then seriously discussed by all Club members, as also the point dealing with the availability of these books at all. Certain conclusions were arrived at and Frank Unwin on behalf of the branch, will implement these conclusions. On a lighter note the writers' quiz was then tackled by all and sundry. It followed the usual pattern, question and answer, with the emphasis on Nelson Lee and Sexton Blake lore. Don Webster was first, with Frank Unwin and Jack Morgan second and third. Prizes of Nelson Lees were given away.

After tea we tackled Frank Unwin's competition "Figures of Speech" which was something new to us all. We were split into three teams, and given the task of finishing off extracts from Magnets and Gems. The last few were as Frank calls the competition famous "Figures of Speech" Result:- Jack Morgan's team first with 16½ points. Next meeting, Sunday the 4th August, 7 p.m. As the writer will - he hopes - be sunning himself at Penmaenmaur on this date, these notes will be taken over for the month by Don Webster.

Special late note. As from and including the September meeting this year, all monthly meetings will be held on Saturday evenings and not

on Sundays.

NORMAN PRAGNELL,
Hon. Secretary.

* * *

MIDLAND SECTION

Report of meeting held June 24th, 1957
in Chambers of Commerce, Birmingham

The programme for the night was in the very capable hands of Miss Beryl Russell and Tom Porter. Beryl's contribution was four quizzes, two of them the usual "name" sort, but the remaining two had something a bit extra. Jack Corbett, our Chairman for the night, won the one where we had to indentify certain disguised periodicals and our "new boy" Syd Wise, won the hidden names quiz with a total of 23. Quite good for the short time allowed. The other two (ordinary type) quizzies were won by myself. My lucky night considering I won the library raffle too.

We had a fairly good attendance amongst which we were very pleased to see our old friend Jack Bellfield.

Tom Porter read an extract from S.O.L. No. 5 "The Greyfriars ~~Cab~~anners." An excellent pre-arranged programme to cover July to December has been drawn up by the Committee, mostly the work of Tom Porter.

Library success was further maintained, thanks mostly to Beryl (and the borrowers). The Chesterfield get-together was discussed and as most arrangements had been made by the two Secretaries, it was only left to get a definite list of probable starters. This was done and it was decided to book a reserved coach for the journey.

HARRY BROSTER,
Secretary.

Late Paro. Leslie Pwoley, late of Tokyo, gave me a very pleasant surprise when he called on me on July 22nd. We made the most of his two days stay. Jack Wood joined us for lunch on the second one. How the time sped! And Londoners, make a note of that special Club Meeting to welcome Bernard Thorne of Toronto. Attend if you possibly can.

H. L.

* * * *

HAMILTONIANA

compiled by HERBERT LECKENBY

S.O.S. I find I am running short of articles for this important section, an unusual state of affairs, but there it is. Many of you have already had your holidays, the nights are beginning to draw in, so how about it? I shan't be able to sleep if I anticipate grouses from Hamiltonians that they arn't getting their fair share of space.

Moreover, let me remind you that February 15th, 1958 marks an outstanding event the 50th anniversary of the birth of the Magnet. We simply must celebrate that in a big way with a bumper number. We shall want plenty of articles on its amazing career. Well, you've been warned in plenty of time.

* * * *

Just as we were about to go to press, I received an advance copy of "Billy Bunter's Own" with a request from Mr H. M. Bayne-Powell of the Guildford Press, for a review in the C.D. Within half an hour it was in the capable hands of Jack Wood and here's what he thinks about it. It will be published September 1st, and distributed by the Hulton Press of Hulton House, Fleet Street.

BILLY BUNTER'S OWN - PUBLISHED BY THE OXONHOATH PRESS at 8s. 6d.

As one might expect, this is another Frank Richards - C. H. Chapman production which warms the heart as the Christmas Annual season comes round again. Frank has provided a number of stories, one more than half the length of the book, and other "shorts" about Greyfriars, Felgate and Cliff House, in his inimitable style. The main yarn, in fact, is a real old-timer with a perfect word picture of Friardale Wood under a heavy mantle of snow and of a disappearing Bunter, factors which provide a comedy and mystery in a finely blended mixture.

Chapman has added just the right touch with his well-defined drawings, and but for the unfortunate thinness of the volume we could well imagine the palmy days of the Holiday Annual returned. Cricket at Greyfriars, with Bunter saving the match; the "fifth" at Felgate; and Bessie putting her foot in it at Cliff House; give the spice to an enjoyable confection which leaves us like the equally immortal Oliver asking for more .. and more .. and more.

Something new about St. Jim's or Rookwood, more of the Jack of All Trades saga, would really "make" our Christmas — if we could keep from reading them as long as that!

* * *

And here's one of Frank Richards' always welcome letters:

July 6th, 1957.

Dear Herbert Leckenby,

Many thanks for the C.D., in which there is a spot of very special interest to me, in the shape of Gerry Allison's verses. I was not only interested, but I may add, very much moved, by such a tribute: not, of course, that Frank Richards deserves to be held in such estimation. But most of us like to be valued above our deserts: I confess that I do, and so, many thanks to Gerry from the old boy at Broadstairs.

I think I mentioned in my previous letter that I was engaged upon a new series for T.V. The first of these will appear on the screen on Saturday, the 20th, the others following on through August. And perhaps you have heard that Billy is now butting into I.T.V.

With kindest regards,
Always yours sincerely,
FRANK RICHARDS

* * *

Which do you prefer?

By Roger M. Jenkins

No 2 - The Floating Boarding House (Boys' Friends 1259-1267: Magnets
1312-16)

Billy Bunter and Tubby Muffin had one thing in common which distinguished them both from Baggy Trimble - they were likeable rogues. Only a likeable rogue could have invited a party of friends for a yachting holiday without telling them in advance they were expected to pay. Tubby Muffin's Uncle, Captain Muffin, charged four guineas a week for a trip on the Silver Cloud in 1925, whereas Bunter's cousin, Captain Cook, made it twenty-one guineas for the round trip on the Sea Nymph in 1933. No wonder Fisher T. Fish nearly had a heart attack when he stowed himself on board the Sea Nymph and then discovered he had landed himself with a bill to pay. Bunter and Muffin of course travelled free as a reward for introducing the paying guests.

Captain Cook had purchased the Sea Nymph from a distressed Sur-Tax payer, and had furnished a luxurious boat in the cheapest possible manner. There was a much more curious history to the Silver Cloud. Captain Muffin had bought it cheap at an auction, and it had formerly belonged to a gentleman cracksman whose stolen loot had never been recovered when he had been sent to gaol. As the yacht sailed round Wales up to the Isle of Man all sorts of queer incidents occurred, as a result of which Ponsonby and Co., left the boat at Douglas, whilst Smythe, Howard and Tracy departed in haste at Fleetwood. It need hardly be added that it was owing to Mornington that the mystery was eventually solved. The missing diamonds were discovered in the boat, and Captain Muffin received the reward. He bestowed upon his fat nephew Reginald a gold watch, and to the others he generously sent his kind regards.

Curiously enough, the Magnet series had no connecting link but merely comprised a sequence of unconnected incidents. It also throws some light on the geography around the school, for the Sea Nymph sailed from Pegg to Dover (where Fishy left hastily and Coker and Co. arrived) and then continued from Dover to Margate. The implication of this seems to be that Greyfriars is situated in the South of Kent and not on the East side as is often supposed. Be this as it may, however, the yacht then sailed to Gibraltar and the South of France where there were some amusing scenes in the casinos, though one would have to turn to the volume of Gems for the year 1910 to find the most enthralling account by Charles Hamilton of a trip to Nice and Monte Carlo - but that is another story.

Looking back at the two series in proper perspective, it is easy to see that the Magnet series was the more polished of the two, and contained some very good humorous patches which the Boys' Friend series to a great extent lacked. Nevertheless, there was much more excitement and continuity of story about the Rookwood series, and in addition they now seem to possess an aura of nostalgia in that they represent the last Summer holiday series to appear in the Boys' Friend. They also contained an unusual selection of schoolboys characters, and this odd mixture served to heighten the interest of the stories. On the whole, therefore, I consider the Rookwood version of the floating boarding-house to be the better of the two. Which do you prefer?

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LET'S BE CONTROVERSIAL

(In this series, Eric Fayne discusses certain topics of interest to

students of the Hamilton papers. He gives his own opinion superficially, and invites you to write to him with your views on the subject. He will summarise readers' letters on the topic in a future C.D.)

NO. 5. IS GUSSY TEDIOUS? A matter of personal taste, of course, but I myself love the one and only, and have never found him a bore.

In my view he is a superb piece of character painting, and he has always been much more consistently handled than some of the other characters. He suffered very much from being imitated. Even his creator used some of Gussy's characteristics in lesser characters, which other writers seem to have attempted to "Cash in" on the popularity of the Swell of St. Jim's. If I remember correctly, one of the most shameless imitations was Paula Creel of the Morcove stories.

But though Gussy, like Bunter, tended to appear hackneyed at times, owing to so much imitation, both characters are so skilfully written that they have lived on to attain immortal fame.

Mind you, I doubt whether Gussy is strong enough to monopolise the St. Jim's stage in the same way that Bunter has remained to monopolise the Greyfriars stories and overshadow the other characters.

Early in this Controversial Series, when I suggested that Talbot, as schoolboy cracksman, was overplayed, someone posed the question "Is Billy Bunter overplayed?" That, of course, was nothing to do with the subject under discussion then, but it makes an interesting comparison here. Bunter has been overplayed for many years, for obvious reasons. The public demand their Bunter, so they get him. I would not really have it otherwise, for Greyfriars without Bunter would be Hamlet without the prince. To-day, Greyfriars is Bunter.

But St. Jim's is not Gussy, though it is impossible to imagine the old school without him. Gussy, simple and lovable, impressionable and unsuspecting, the target for every type of fun, could never carry St. Jim's on his back in the way that Bunter has carried Greyfriars for a couple of decades. I think that the Goldhawk series might still be carrying on, if an attempt had not been made to make him do so.

For, I freely admit - too much Gussy could become tedious. That he has never done so, in my opinion, is due to the superlative skill of our wizard writer.

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

(My sincere apologies to Hamiltonians for short ration this month. I assure you it was unavoidable. However I'll make up for it next month. But don't forget the articles for later on. H. L.)