

The COLLECTORS'
DIGEST



VOLUME 13

FEBRUARY 1959

NUMBER 146

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THE COLLECTORS' DIGEST

Vol. 13 No. 146

Price 1s. 6d.

FEBRUARY, 1959.

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

o r

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

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From the Editor's Chair

THE ANNUAL: There has been some bitterly cold weather lately, but every morning my heart was warmed as I opened letter after letter containing glowing tributes to the Annual. There was not a discontented note and it seemed to be the general opinion that it was the best varied of all the twelve. Without exception every article has been praised.

Well, that's the bright side, but yes alas! I have to say sadly that there are quite a number I have not yet heard from with their subscriptions. What a pity that I have to say this year after year. However, those of you who have a guilty feeling just slip a p.o. or cheque into an envelope and I'll forgive you.

And now on to the baker's dozen.

A MEMBER DIES: Since our last number I have heard, with deep regret, of the death of Charles E. Freeman Vennimore of 25 Byron Avenue, West Hounslow, Middlesex. He died on November 10th as the result of a heart attack.

Charles Vennimore was well known to many of our members through that remarkable collection of his, which apart from old boys' books, contained tens of thousands of copies of the more adult papers like Answers, John Bulls, Tit Bits, Pearson's Weeklies and others too numerous to mention. Charles was in his sixties, and for many years had been employed in a branch of the War Office.

MISHAP: The Annual off my hands and the holidays over, I was getting along nicely dealing with a mass of correspondence which required answering when I had a heavy fall on an icy road. I got a real shake up and bruised my right arm rather badly, and found writing an ordeal in consequence. However, I am managing to get along with this February number and I'll reply to all letters as quickly as possible.

Yours sincerely,

HERBERT LECKENBY

WANTED: Magnets 771, 773, 774, 799. S.O.L's 60, 65, 68.
 1/2. Gems 16, 23, 29, 37. Gems 279, 359, 364, 433. B.F. Library 237
 King Cricket; 334 The Jungle Patrol; 383 After Lights Out; 497
 Adventure Creek.
 DR. ROBERT WILSON, 100 BROOMFIELD ROAD, GLASGOW, N.1.

SALE: (Postage extra) Single copies, excellent condition - "Collectors' Digest" Nos. 39-80 1/3 each; 81-137 1/- each. "C.D. Annual" 1957-56-55 9/- each; 1954-53-52 11/6 each; 1951-50 14/- each. "Bunter's Barring Out"; "Bunter's Banknote" 5/- each. OFFERS INVITED, (no reply, regret sold). "Holiday Annual", reasonable condition with sound bindings. ("x" indicates "covers loose, easily repairable") 1934 (x), 1935, 1936 (x), 1937, 1938 (x), 1940. The following are not first-class collectors' material, but, although well-worn, all are entirely readable with pages and covers complete and intact. "Magnet" 1937 (4 issues); 1938 (21); 1939 (20); 1940 (12). "Gem" 1934 (1); 1935 (16); 1936 (7); 1937 (8); 1938 (12); 1937 (7).
 VICTOR GILES, 6 ST. PAUL'S ROAD, BARKING, ESSEX.

SEXTON BLAKE. Still needed to complete run of New-Lock issues - Nos. 384, 388, 403.
 REX DOLPHIN, 13 MEADOW WAY, HYDE HEATH, AMERSHAM, BUCKS.

Wanted certain Magnets, Boys Friend 3d. Library No. 319 and Picture Show No. 1. YOUR Prices Paid. Sent lists to
 DAVID STACEY, WICKFORD, ESSEX.

GERALD ALLISON is now settled in his new home - 3 BINGLEY ROAD, MENSTON, ILLKEY, YORKSHIRE and his phone number is: MENSTON 2402.

Change of Address: WALTER FLEMING has moved to 16 KIMBERLEY WAY, CHINGFORD, LONDON, E.4.

Blakiana

conducted by JOSEPHINE PACKMAN

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

I am sure that Bette Pate will be pleased to know I have received several letters in which the writer pays tribute to her article, part two of which appears in this issue.

As I am Vice-Chairman of the Sexton Blake Circle I take this opportunity of expressing my appreciation of Mr. W. Howard Baker's nice write-up on the Circle in one of the January issues of the Sexton Blake Library. Len has already received a number of enquiries, in relation to which a meeting of London members is to be held very shortly. A report of the meeting will subsequently appear in Blakiana.

Walter Webb's series of articles entitled "Century-Makers" will commence in April. I already have the first four instalments, and everyone of them is packed with interesting facts and figures.

Other material in hand is by Bill Lofts and Margaret Cooke, so that there is no question of my being short of copy this year!

JOSIE PACKMAN

* * *

THE HANDS OF TIME

By Elizabeth (Bette) J. Pate

PART TWO

As the hansom cab, which has been waging a losing battle since the turn of the century, bows gracefully from the stage the new marvels of the Georgian era, the motor and the aeroplane enter the scene at Baker Street. Always one to move with the times Sexton Blake had invested in one of the daring horseless carriages and had found it a priceless weapon in his relentless war against crime. An open tourer Rolls-Royce he named it The Grey Panther and each succeeding model carried the same name....so closely were Blake and Tinker identified with their car that in time it became almost as famous as Pedro and at times seemed to have a personality all its own.

And what of Blake himself? Still the tall lean figure, his shrewd clever face was still pale and unemotional. Quietly dressed, the old-fashioned wing collar had given way to a stiff white one and his clothes bore the unmistakable stamp of Saville Row. Although still the aesthetic he had grown more natural and human, he had come down from

the Olympian heights.....whilst not quite the man next door, we have come to know him now as a man whereas before he was simply THE famous detective, aloof, austere and distant to all but his most intimate friends.

If there was one special trait in the character of the famous private detective it was his adaptability to circumstances....he seldom allowed anything to upset him or to jolt him out of his normal phlegmacy. Throughout the case histories there are countless examples of his iron self-control but his deep regard for Tinker is a dominant factor of his emotional makeup and often when his beloved assistant had been in danger we have seen that self-control give way under the stress of his feelings and a very human soul has shone through.

No longer interested in women merely on a spiritual plane Blake showed that he was capable of returning the passion of the lovely Yvonne who had fallen deeply in love with him....and here again we see his iron self-control as the essential man warred with the dedicated aesthetic.

Blake had always moved with exquisite "savoir faire" in the highest circles and through the years we have found him equally at home dining with Dukes and Earls or in the outposts of Empire as a "pukha sahib" upholding the best British traditions. Intensely patriotic he expressed his faith in a few simple words "I shall do my utmost, my lord" (to Earl Kitchener) the famous detective replied quietly - "for you and Britain!" Essentially a man of peace Blake was nevertheless always prepared to fight for what he believed in and physical danger or suffering was but a spur to his actions - quite often when his physical ability was at its lowest ebb his mental prowess would be heightened by the emergency and just when his enemies had written him off as finished he would strike back, with brains as well as brawn. With all his pride Blake was not a sentimentalist.....he saw clearly that he would be far more useful to society alive than dead and if a strategic withdrawal were possible then he executed this manoeuvre and lived to fight another day.

During these years Blake by reason of his personal charm and expert knowledge had become "persona grata" with Scotland Yard. Which doesn't mean that all was plain sailing in his relationship with this famous institution - his brilliant mind, backed by his unflinching tenacity had built for him a reputation not only with those in authority at the Yard but also with the man on the beat which showed the essential bigness of the detective. Long years in his laboratory working on a chemical analysis were often unrewarding but always he tried again and here was the secret of his phenomenal success - his

perseverance, which is the main ingredient of genius. And although at times his friends at the Yard might scoff at his scientific methods they were usually ready to accept his evidence whether it were in the field of ballistics, infra-red rays, micro-photography, or medical science, a field in which he had qualified in his career.

A loyal friend and mentor to Tinker during those formative years he had shown himself to be very human in the handling of their relationship and at times just as fallible as any other mortal - seldom one to show or express his emotions it was nevertheless very evident that he had a deep and abiding love for the fatherless lad. And whilst he was quite prepared to allow Tinker a certain independence of action he demanded and received implicit obedience to his instructions knowing that disobedience could bring death to both. Having shaped the clay he knew the vessel and into Tinker's receptive mind he fed his own knowledge knowing that wisdom would follow with maturity and impetuosity be curbed as the lad learnt to hasten slowly. Well aware that knowledge was man's sharpest weapon in the struggle for survival (and in the battle against crime) he made sure that Tinker was well equipped and Tinker, for his part, proved himself to be an apt pupil and loyal partner. And whilst he did not share his master's genius for scientific research Tinker had a very good working knowledge of chemistry which allied with his interest in radio and things mechanical gave him on many occasions an advantage over an adversary.

As the accent in the theatre swung from melodrama to a more natural presentation so too did we find that Blake, master of disguise, discarded the more obvious theatrical props and concentrated more and more on characterisation which would blend and merge naturally into the background. An apt pupil always, this was one part of their profession in which Tinker, a born actor, sided by his innate feeling for character, really excelled himself under Blake's tuition. Subtle skin-tonings, a different hair-parting, perhaps a faint accent as he assumed the personality to match the costume for the part and it was a vastly different person, even to the altered gait who left the Baker Street flat via the back door of Mrs. Bardell's kitchen.

Had we been able to visit the famous pair on the rare occasion when they were relaxing at home we might have seen them seated in front of the familiar fireplace, Blake, smoking that battered briar pipe which had become one of his dearest possessions, with his fine cleft chin sunk upon his breast and now and again the roseate glow of his pipe lighting up his wide set dreaming eyes. And at his feet the faithful Pedro dozing perhaps as he dreamed of past adventure of his puppy days or perhaps gazing mournfully up at his younger master who was elegantly

draped in an armchair deeply immersed in the latest aeronautical or motoring magazine.

And down in the hall the clock ticked on, steadily measuring out each minute of each hour in the life of this famous pair.....the clock ticks drearily into the 1930's and the pendulum dips and soars its tempo indicative of the unsettled times.

Leaving the hysterical gaiety of the Twenties behind, the Thirties ushered in stark reality. They were lean years and whilst in Europe the clouds were darkening, in England the ordinary man in the street was more concerned with his own struggle for economic survival - why should he be bothered by the antics of some crackpot house-painter with a new "ism" to peddle. Hyde Park, then as now, was filled with leather-lunged orators and often Blake and Tinker were to be seen mingling with the Sunday crowds. Tall and lean in his well cut tweeds Blake was a typical upper class Englishman and attracted little attention as he mixed with that cosmopolitan thong, pausing now and again to listen, sometimes with interest, oft-times with amusement to those soap-box saviours.

Anyone who had noticed him in passing would have seen a man in the prime of life, just six feet tall, with a spare, athletic figure and firm stride, indicating a fit, trained body. And if they had been introduced to the detective their immediate impression would have been of an acute intelligence allied with the bodily strength and will power held easily in control. The seriousness of his lean somewhat ascetic face was often belied by his quick spontaneous smile but his grey eyes were his most noticeable feature. Steady, level, dominating, piercing but with a hint of humour ever lurking there, those eyes were very indicative of the man himself.

Essentially a kindly man Blake was generous both with time and money where those in need were concerned and in those hard times there were countless occasions when the innate bigness of the detective was illustrated. His interest in his fellows was warm and genuine, his charity personal and always unobtrusive.....the few occasions on which it had been possible to disconcert the detective had been when his anonymous charity had been discovered and embarrassed by the thanks of the recipient he had fled in dismay.

There were many instances where Blake's deep religious faith had been demonstrated and one author revelled that he never travelled abroad without his Testament - a man of Science he nevertheless had a healthy respect for the unknown. His sympathy and aid for those in need showed his practical Christianity and irrespective of creed and colour he was ever ready to help those who had stepped out of line.

An active member of the Prisoners Aid Society he believed that once a man had paid his debt to Society he deserved a chance to start afresh, and just as he worked to track down the wrongdoer with all his skill it was more often than not his hand which helped the newly released convict through those difficult days.

When we think back to the Blake of the 1930's it is inevitable that we should see him as portrayed by Eric Parker who translated into light and shade the outstanding features of the famous criminologist to many this is the real Blake and personally I agree with them.

And what of Tinker, you ask? As is inevitable he too has changed with the years and from the waif of Edwardian days with his quaint Cockney slang we have seen him growing up, passing from an irrepresible and impetuous youth to a personable and charming young man, a worthy partner for the great detective. If Tinker has not lived long enough to garner a store of wisdom, nevertheless he possesses a native shrewdness that proves a good substitute for the ripened experience that only the years can give. We find now that he has been given the formal name of Edward Carter by one of the authors, Anthony Parsons, but to his friends he is still, and always will be, Tinker. One thing however which hasn't changed has been his unswerving loyalty to Sexton Blake and it is this loyalty and devotion which has bound them so closely together and made them such a wonderful team.

Time has dealt very kindly with the other member of the Baker Street household, Mrs. Martha Bardell. Gone is the rather common landlady with a roving eye for the local bobby and a weakness for three ha'porth of gin, as we knew her in the very early days - we see her now as the lovable old housekeeper, mothering both Blake and Tinker, delighting in her culinary skill and very proud indeed of her position in the famous household. The reincarnation of Sheridan's Mrs. Malaprop her treatment of the English language brought many hilarious moment to Blake and Tinker. And during the war years, when the detectives stayed at their post, she, brave old soul, insisted on staying in London to minister to their wants.....one of the little people who have done so much to make England great.

Certainly the war years left their mark on the great detective but physically he appears little changed from the character we knew so well in the 1930's. Perhaps his hair has grown a little sparser, receding now at the temples where the grey fingers of time have touched but he is still the same athletic figure, alert in his movements and as quick-thinking as ever. He has grown a little americanised in his methods - certainly he mirrors the growing concern with speed and his methods have been geared to the quickening tempo.

In the early days Blake was too perfect to be really human - clever, yes, but rather tiresome to our way of thinking. Now however, his keen analytical brain evokes our admiration and we find it difficult to separate the detective from the scientist - the chain of logic has been most successfully mated with test-tube and Bursen Burner. Au fait with the latest scientific methods of criminal detection, always he has proved himself one step ahead of his most knowledgeable confreres and opponents and herein lies the very essence of his success. Seldom now does he follow the trail with the faithful Pedro, grown old and fallible with the years - wireless and television, the mobile radio cars of the Flying Squad, walkie-talkie sets, helicopters, all these are swifter, surer means of tracking down the criminal, (but how we miss those exciting times when Pedro, equipped by Nature for the hunt had tracked down the wanted man to bring Blake's case to a dramatic conclusion).

As always Blake's talents were at his country's disposal but in this last war we saw him as the subtle Secret Service Agent rather than the cloak-and-dagger type of spy of the Great War period. A true cosmopolitan and skilled linguist, his facility for getting completely inside any character he was portraying, made him an invaluable member of M.I.5. The deep patriotism was there, felt by the reader; an integral part of the detective was his love for England and always when he had been abroad he expressed his pleasure at being back in "dear old London" again.

Hawklike and aquiline, a lean athletic Englishman he had become the epitome of the ideal private detective of fiction....and also Everyman's Englishman. There were many imitations attempted but beside the original character they appeared shallow nonentities, lacking that indefinable something which had elevated Blake to his pre-eminent position - a position which he was to hold through those uneasy years of the postwar period into the so called peace of the 1950's.....

(END OF PART TWO)

* * *

CORRECTION:

The little article about Sexton Blake's birthday by Victor Colby which was held over from December and appeared last month should have the dates amended as follows:- 21 years of age; birth year 1858; 100th birthday 1958.

J.P.

* * *

Witness to Murder (No. 423)Edwin Harrison

Sexton Blake Investigations, of Berkeley Square, London, W.1. versus The Syndicate, that immensely powerful octopus of international intrigue, against which the Blake organisation has clashed before, partly yet never wholly successfully, operating as it does through a myriad of independent channels.

Two South Africans newly arrived from Cape Town are murdered within a few hours of their arrival in England. One a noted scientist, is shot dead and the briefcase he is carrying torn from his grasp. Inside are the fruits of ten years' research into the problem of the disposal of radio-active waste from atomic reactors, and highly important documents laying claim to the solving of the problem of radiation dangers, particularly from strontium ingestion. South African No. 2 dies when he is deliberately run down by a car in the process of keeping a telephonic appointment with Sexton Blake, a crime witnessed by one, Chauncey Todd, representative of the Johannesburg C.I.D., who in accordance with instructions from his superiors, had followed his two countrymen to England to keep them under surveillance. What significance lay behind the drawing - on one of Blake's own cards - of a green spider crouching in the centre of a blood-red web, which Todd found on the dead man?

The high standard set by his rather more experienced colleagues is satisfactorily upheld by new recruit, Edwin Harrison.

Rating.....Very Good

* * *

Dressed to Kill (No. 424)D. Herbert Hyde

Women's revenge upon women is the theme of this novel set almost entirely in London, featuring Sexton Blake and Paula Dane and - to a lesser extent - Tinker, and those pillars of Scotland Yard - Coutts and Grimwold.

The shooting of a sadistic S.S. officer by an American officer at a women's concentration camp at Ravensbruck in 1945 brings to Debbie Kenyon, a promising young film actress, over here to make a series of TV films for an American film producer, a terrifying ordeal at the hands of the mentally deranged woman who had once loved her dead German officer. Kidnapped and stowed away aboard a motor cruiser on the Medway. Just beyond Gillingham, the author described in thrilling fashion how the principal members of the Blake organisation smash the gang responsible for the abduction of the girl. Always easy on the eye,

Paula must have looked really dazzling in the yellow slacks she changed into at her flat (p. 28). They ended up in the Thames which was perhaps where they deserved to go, though it was unfortunate Paula was still inside them when they did. But apart from her attire, wasn't that sleek little sports car of hers rather too conspicuous, to trail such dangerous thugs across London with? No laurels for Paula's wisdom here.

D. Herbert Hyde is a new name on the cover of the S.B.L. but after the second chapter I had a strong feeling that it could equally well have been Peter Saxon. I wonder?

Rating:Very good

WALTER WEBB

Sexton Blake - URGENT MESSAGE

How many of you care whether the Sexton Blake Library which has been going for nearly forty-five years without a break ends its long life in the near future or whether it continues?

THIS DECISION IS LARGELY IN YOUR HANDS.

Mass circulations are the vogue in these modern times. Magazines with healthy but comparatively small readerships are sacrificed so that more money can be spent upon those papers which are already touching the million figure.

YOUR SEXTON BLAKE LIBRARY MAY WELL BE ONE OF THOSE TO GO IF NOTHING IS DONE TO BOOST THE CIRCULATION.

So, it is up to you, if you want your magazine to reach and pass its half-century, to do what you can to raise the circulation so that when, or if, the time comes for axing smaller circulation papers, it will not be one of them.

As you may know, the publishing house, which has been producing Sexton Blake every month for so long, has been taken over by a big newspaper combine interested in mass circulations.

That means, unless something is done, and done quickly, Sexton Blake may be killed - finished. And you should know better than anyone that once a character is killed-off, once a magazine is axed, it is never revived. It is your decision, you know - so please keep these facts in mind - and act now. Buy extra copies every month to show to

your friends; plug Blake as you never plugged him before. Mention him at every opportunity you get, Aim at getting as many new readers as humanly possible immediately. Think up new ways of getting your news-agent to display the Library - for the only reason Blake is not as well known today as he used to be is because he is lumped in, on the book-stalls, with children's picture papers like ROBIN HOOD and BUCK JONES.

Do all this - and Blake will go on, gaining strength with every issue, and above all you will still be able to buy a copy of the **SEXTON BLAKE LIBRARY** every month.

OTHERWISE - IT'S GOODBYE, SEXTON BLAKE!!!!

Think it over. It's in your hands. Act **TODAY!** Tomorrow may be too late.

*

HAMILTONIANA

*

Compiled by HERBERT LECKENBY

In a recent report by the Chief Medical Officer of the Ministry of Education it was stated that school children today were getting too fat. So, as no doubt you've noticed, the newspaper columnists seized on the Owl of Greyfriars for an appropriate headline. For example, the Daily Herald's - "Children Becoming a Lot of Billy Bunters". Useful chap, Billy.

* * * *

THE BUNTER SHOW: The play at the Palace Theatre seems to have been a success, though the general opinion among Hamiltonians seems to have been that it was hardly Greyfriars.

Nevertheless, as Larry Morley points out, Peter Noble stated in "Movie Merry Go Round" on January 18th, that the play was such a success that it is to be made into a film with Gerald Campion in the part he has made his own. Further developments will be watched with interest.

* * * *

RESULT OF QUIZZLE NO. 2: Solution to clue down: Colonel Wharton. Hidden words: The Terrible Three of St. Jim's. First correct solution was received from R. J. GODSAVE, 35 WOODHOUSE ROAD, LEYTONSTONE, LONDON, E.11, to whom 5/- has been sent. 10 points earned for London club. Points total:- London 20 points.

* * * *

QUIZZLE No. 3

A	1							
B		2						
C	3					4		
D				5				
E		6						
F	7							
G		8	9	10				
H		11	12	13				
I		14	15	16				
J		17	18					
K				19	20			
L				21				
M		22						
N				23				

The Letters in the numbered squares if placed in sequence in the lower grid will spell out a popular period - obviously earned in Britain but spent in America.

* * * *

CLUE DOWN: A. When Smithy goes on the tiles. (5, 6, 3)

CLUES ACROSS:

- A. How Bunter spent a post-war holiday.
 B. Fistical, but not quarrelsome.
 C. Evil genius of the China series. (4, 4)
 D. What Tom Merry had to do on the Old Bus.
 E. Where Dr. Lock stands to administer a flogging.
 F. St. Jim's master.
 G. Where the hounds should be in a paper chase (2, 5).
 H. What Bob Cherry does with his left.
 I. Enroll to Mornington (3, 4).
 J. St. Jim's boy who owned a race-horse.
 K. Scene of many a damp drama in the Magnet.
 L. He starred as the blue cover passed in- to history.
 M. Coker is - but won't admit it.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
17	18	19	20	21	22	23	

N. Every year there are three at Rookwood.

* * *

Write on a postcard, the words in the lower grid and the answer to the Clue Down. 5/- for the first correct solution received by the Editor. 10 points to Club Branch if any.

* * *

LET'S BE CONTROVERSIAL

(In this series, Eric Fayne touches on certain matters of interest to students of the Hamilton papers. He gives his own views superficially, if you will write to him, expressing your opinions on the topics he discusses, he will summarise readers' views in a future issue).

No. 23. WAS THE MAGNET'S "MR. LAMB" SERIES A COMPLETE SUCCESS?

The Mr. Lamb series appeared in 1939-40, and there is no shortage of copies of it at the present time. Almost every Magnet fan must have read it, and I think must possess it in his collection. Yet I have never, in the 19 years since it was published, heard anyone eulogise it, or, in fact, recall it much at all. This seems to be proof that it was not a complete success. Then where did it fail? - for there is much to be said in its favour.

I cannot quite decide whether the Lamb series was an attempt to repeat the unqualified success of the splendid Courtfield Cracksman series of 1929-30. If so, the effort did not quite come off.

There are points of similarity in the two series. Both started before Christmas, covered the Christmas vacation, and continued through the Spring term. In both series, the cracksman was, unsuspected, a resident of Greyfriars. Bunter and the Bounder featured largely in both, though neither character seemed quite so happily presented in the Lamb series. In the earlier series the investigations were carried out, in intriguing style, both by Scotland Yard; the private detective Ferrers Locke, had the Lamb case in hand. In each series, Mr. Quelch was missing from the picture for a time.

Why, then, with all the ingredients present for a terrific success was the Lamb series a partial failure - if it was? I think it was stunned - certainly not killed - by its colossal length. It was by far the longest series that Charles Hamilton ever wrote. Running for 16 weeks, each story a cover-to-cover specimen, it comprised no less than half a million words. In its closing weeks, it foundered under its own verbosity.

It was the greatest of pities, for it was ingenious throughout, and it started with the utmost promise. For many weeks the plot developed in fine style; the system, too prevalent at that time, of making each story almost complete in itself, was abandoned, with advantage. There were more Christmas stories than usual, the intimate little party was at Wharton Lodge, there was snow and ice and all the trappings of the season, there was a haunted Moat House. One of these stories was absolutely brilliant, with an unforgettable sequence when Bunter, who found himself a prisoner with Mr. Quelch, ate the master's rations as well as his own. (One tends, I think, in the later Magnet, to recall brilliant stories rather than brilliant series, as one does when considering the Magnet of a few years earlier).

After the new term started, there were at least two outstanding stories, which showed the Bounder falling foul of Mr. Lamb, and some fascinating sequences in which Bunter's ventriloquism terrified the new master into thinking that Mr. Quelch had returned to the school.

But the stories became somewhat repetitive, the plot dragged on and sank into tedium under its own massive verbiage. The final story was thrilling, and splendidly told, yet it came too late. In the near relief that it had finished at long last, one forgot the brilliance of some of the yarns, and the undoubted cleverness with which the entire plot had been constructed and unfolded.

If this giant series could be regarded as two series - and it certainly falls into two parts - each section might be considered tip-top. In earlier years one series had often filtered into another, with happy results. But the plot of the kidnapping of Mr. Quelch is too concrete for one feasibly to think of it as anything but one enormous series.

In fairness to the Lamb series, there is one important factor to be considered. It appeared in the early months of the war. In consequence, it is a period piece - and a period, at that, of which we do not care to be reminded. By contrast, the Courtfield Cracksman series of 1929 will never date. It is as fresh and as welcome as the flowers in May, 1959.

Finally, if we tend to regard great stories as not so great, it is only when we compare them with other work of Frank Richards. Roger Jenkins, in his Annual article, made that very clear. By any other yardstick, the Lamb series would be magnificent.

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

* * * * *

CONTROVERSIAL ECHOES

No. 21. IS IT POSSIBLE TO REGARD THE WHOLE SET OF STORIES AS A SERIES?

HERBERT LECKENBY (our Editor) writes: "I was very interested to see your comment on the treatment of Bob Cherry by Doctor Locke, resulting in 'Bob Cherry's Barring Out'. It is something I have often thought about myself. It would appear to be base ingratitude on the Head's part to expel Bob so soon after Bob saved the Head from disgrace. But, as you point out, such thoughts only occur when one regards the stories as one great series."

ROGER JENKINS writes: "From the point of view of the collector, the question of consistency in the stories assumes an aspect of importance, and - if the editorial columns can be delieved - there were also a considerable number of readers who had taken the papers for years and who would be quick to spot inconsistencies."

The 1922 series you mention reveals another inconsistency, apart from the question whether or not Levison had been expelled from Grey-

friars. In Gem No. 142, Dr. Holmes got to know of the expulsion, and Levison was allowed to stay at St. Jim's in spite of this. So the 1922 series was at fault on both counts, but it was so well written that I don't suppose many collectors would wish that something else had been written in its place.

I have mixed feelings about plot repetition. I usually tend to think the first version that I have read is the best, and regard all other versions as inferior. Probably the answer is that general themes could be repeated successfully, but repetition of detail might prove annoying.

In a sense, Charles Hamilton achieved the impossible; he wrote countless stories complete in themselves each week, and yet at the same time he maintained an air of continuity which made the reader believe that, although the slate was wiped clean each week, nothing that had passed was entirely forgotten, and everything would have some significance in the future."

GEORGE SELLARS writes: "I believe it would be possible to divide the Gem and the Magnet each into two series, and not one. Half the Gem stories must have been about Tom Merry and his pals; the second series could be composed of stories featuring the new characters who overcrowded the St. Jim's stage, plus stories of temporary characters.

The same thing applies to the Magnet. One series features Billy Bunter, the other comprises the stories of Harry Wharton and Co."

GEOFFREY WILDE writes: "I think you have raised an extremely interesting question here. Actually, I think there are difficulties in seeing the collected stories as a true series. While I fully agree that reminiscence is essential to convincing characterisation, the role of time in the stories is an ambivalent one. It takes survey (if I may paraphrase Shakespeare) but it must also have a stop. The Hamilton world which so many readers know and love in intimate detail is not only a point of departure but a point of return. It admits change, because without it there would be no story, but in the end it is all as it was in the beginning. That indeed, is one of its most endearing qualities. It does mean, however, that while we can loosely visualise the tales as covering a certain span, literal continuity is impossible.

The impossibility, as you hinted in one of your references, is chiefly psychological. Confronted with small practical inconsistencies we can suspend our disbelief; but could Bunter really have failed to learn from the uncountable salutary lessons life taught him? Could the Famous Five have remained the same clean-hearted boyish characters after their grim experiences in China? Could innumerable personal relation-

ships have been only temporarily modified by the various often drastic, changes they underwent?

Repeated plots also quite clearly represent an insurmountable problem in this respect. I fully agree with you, though, that from the purely literary standpoint they were often quite justified, and that the damaging mistake was in the reproduction of minor incidentals."

ERIC FAYNE adds: "In 'Cardew's Catch', the fine new Tom Merry story, Mr. Wottle boxes Gussy's ears, and Frank Richards tells us that it was the first time that Gussy's aristocratic ears had ever been boxed. Martin Clifford should have reminded Frank that Knox once boxed Gussy's ears, and produced a magnificent series in which the one and only ran away from school and had astounding adventures at Greyfriars, Highcliffe, Rookwood and Cliff House. We forgive Frank - but he will really have to take 'six' for making Trotter the St. Jim's page in the new story. The two new Tom Merry tales are so good that we could forgive Frank anything - but we really must consider Toby Marsh's feelings."

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THE UNPLEASANT MASTERS AT THE HAMILTONIAN SCHOOLS

By Roger M. Jenkins

There can be no doubt that Charles Hamilton's greatest feats of adult characterisation lay in masters like Mr. Quelch and Mr. Prout. They were not perhaps ideal masters like Messrs. Railton and Lascelles and Dalton, but they were very human and three dimensional; for the reader they really lived. The pleasant masters were rather colourless is comparison, and the parts they could play in the stories were very limited. Perhaps to counter this defect, the three main schools had their quota of unpleasant masters as well, and it is these who have given rise to considerable criticism over the past ten years or so.

Eric Fayne has very aptly pointed out that no master like Mr. Ratcliff could ever have kept his position for any length of time in a reputable school. It had to be presumed that Dr. Holmes did not know a great deal of what went on in the New House. From time to time certain matters were brought before him, but for the sake of consistency one must suppose that each time he had forgotten the previous affair. Author's licence of this kind is quite permissible in a series which ran for over thirty years.

The fact is that the unpleasant masters had a definite contribution to make to the stories. They furnished the opportunity to feature a clash between the boys and a particular master; it might be a simple matter of the juniors getting their own back for some minor act of in-

justice, or it might be the signal for a full-scale rebellion, but whatever it was it was something which could never have come about had there been no masters of this kind to act as catalysts. These stories were seldom masterpieces of subtle characterisation, but they were always immensely readable, playing as they did upon the elementary emotions of the readers - the eternal struggle between black and white, between good and bad. Occasionally an unpleasant master might be featured in a really first-rate story, but this was very infrequent.

No. 1 - Mr. Horace Hacker: "It cannot be pretended that Mr. Horace Hacker is a person who really matters much to the Greyfriars stories", declared J. N. Pentelow in Magnet No. 544. "We should not miss him if he dropped out; and no-one ever writes to suggest that a story about Mr. Hacker would be welcome."

In 1918, when this was written, there is no doubt that this appraisal was correct. Apart from Magnet No. 416, in which he showed scant sympathy for the Shell team's desire to compete for Colonel Wharton's Cup, he did not feature greatly in the stories - indeed, it was not until 1928 and Magnet No. 1086 entitled "The Form-Masters' Feud" that he again played any notable part at all. On this occasion Bunter ventriloquised, leading Mr. Hacker to think that Mr. Quelch had insulted him. The story provided a delightful portrait of the staff at Greyfriars, written with the especial charm that is to be found only in a Magnet of the golden age.

"Horace Hacker was not a bad-hearted man, by any means," said Charles Hamilton in Magnet No. 1617, "he was, according to his lights, a dutiful man. But doubt and distrust seemed to be parts of his nature. He did not trust boys, and did not, in fact, trust anybody, and he was rather proud of it than otherwise. Mr. Capper, the master of the Fourth, could have his leg pulled to almost any extent by the boys. Hacker felt a deep contempt for Capper. But Hacker probably made more mistakes from distrust than Capper ever did from trustfulness."

In that particular number Mr. Hacker set out to prove that the Famous Five were a set of young blackguards. (It was not for nothing that he was called the Acid Drop by his form). This was an entertaining story, though even the most avid reader could scarcely have termed it anything but a good average tale. Similarly, the Tuckshop Rebellion series in Nos. 1510-1515 was a most popular set of stories, but readers who were mindful of past glories could not help deprecating the indignities Mr. Hacker underwent on that occasion. The regrettable element of sheer farce which ran through the entire series seemed quite out of place when dealing with a regular member of the staff like Mr. Hacker. In point of fact, Mr. Hacker was the most restrained and the

least objectionable of all the unpleasant masters. It is all the more unfortunate, therefore that he should have featured in only one memorable series - the one about his nephew, Eric Wilnot, which began in Magnet No. 1457. Wilnot had been obliged to leave his old school under suspicion of theft, and Mr. Hacker had managed to get him a second chance at Greyfriars. The Shell master did his best to believe in his nephew's innocence, and tactlessly intervened on his behalf many times, usually making matters much worse than before. This was a repetition of the Cleeve series in the Gem, and thought it lacked the powerful impact of the St. Jim's version, there is nevertheless something very satisfying about the Wilnot series, in which everyone acted, as he hoped, for the best, but in which nearly everyone was, in point of fact, mistaken.

The Wilnot series was the last of Charles Hamilton's great character studies. If it was not among the very best, it was at least much superior to any Greyfriars tales that were published subsequently, and it did leave the reader with the satisfying thought that Mr. Hacker was at heart a human being, a man not utterly devoid of kind feelings, and very far from being an unreasonable tyrant.

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HARRY WHARTON - WORST BOY AT GREYFRIARS? - Part 2

By W. O. G. Lofts

Several days after 'Mother' had written about Harry Wharton and had described him as the worst boy at Greyfriars, the "Star" office had been flooded with letters from indignant readers who stated that he was certainly not. Only several of the readers letters were able to be inserted in "Mother's" column, and they read as follows:-

"Well really, it's not bags of flour but coals of fire that have been heaped on my head. Who would have thought that my affair with Harry Wharton would have created such an indignant outburst? His fans declare that he was always the hero but in number three hundred and something, published in 1937, Harry Wharton was the worst boy at Greyfriars.

Just listen to this from Mr. R. P. Kingston, one of my most ardent followers, 'what a foul libel you have perpetrated. May a thousand past 'Magnet' readers storm your gates and demand an apology! And Mrs. R. of Ilford, a regular correspondent, writes: "Father of three says Harry Wharton isn't the worst boy at Greyfriars! How I chuckled when I read your bit; you certainly give us variety for our penny. About two months ago my father came unexpectedly and I hadn't a magazine handy so I gave him the 'Magnet' and said 'here, read this

while I get the dinner ready'. He could hardly tear himself away, and since then has asked me to save it for him each week. I might add he was 70 last October. Father of three is always late to bed the night the 'Magnet' comes. But away with the printers' ink boys for here come my Max and Clive running down the drive."

Well, 'Mother' certainly was put in her place, and was convinced perhaps by this correspondence that Harry Wharton was only the worst boy of Greyfriars in this series of stories.

In presenting these old extracts from the press in the C.D. two things are very noticeable. The vast interest shown by adults in anything connected with Greyfriars, at a time when the Magnet was still being published. And, secondly, that the magic of Frank Richards' stories were suitable to readers of all ages, including a man of 70, who obviously found great pleasure in the twilight of his life through Harry Wharton and Co. of Greyfriars School.

GOODBYE - "TINY TOTS"

By W. O. G. Lofts

And so the last of the Amalgamated Press pre-war coloured comics for the very young has ended; No. 1334 dated January 24th, 1959, carries the announcement that it will be incorporated with "Playhour". The "Tiny Tots" first saw the light of day on the 22nd October, 1927, and was intended for the very youngest of the reading public, a sort of companion to the "Chicks Own" and "Bubbles".

It's Editor at the death of the paper, Mr. Basil Reynolds, is an actual personal friend of mine; readers of the S.P.C. will no doubt recollect an article written by myself on him, and his famous Uncle Warwick Reynolds of the St. Jim's drawings featured in the "Gem". A very talented artist Basil Reynolds will not be lost to the A.P. however, as he has been given another position as Editor of some of the Xmas Comic Annuals.

After months of research readers will be interested to learn that I have compiled a list of every comic ever published in this country with runs, dates, publishers, etc. Pride of place for having published the most different titled comics goes of course, to the Amalgamated Press who have had about 70 since the first "Comic Cuts" appeared in 1890. The rarest comic of them all I should say, without hesitation, is the "Bo-Peep" which had a run of 235 issues from 1929 onwards, no copies have been found in existence apart from A.P. and British Museum files.

continued on page 53

NELSON LEE COLUMN

by JACK WOOD, Nostaw, 328 Stockton Lane, York.

Phone: 25795

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As a change from Jim Cook's admirable despatches from St. Frank's we have this month another letter from Jim Sutcliffe, who has been silent in our columns all too long.

He makes the suggestion that next year's Annual might survey St. Frank's stories in the Boys' Realm, and as I have several of the stories I am willing to collaborate with anyone who has the rest and is agreeable. The theme should be interesting.

No answer yet to Jim's query last month, who was Charles Wentworth? Can anyone help?

And now, from Jim Sutcliffe -

RANDOM RECOLLECTIONS

Old Series No. 142 "A Mystery of the Night" or "The Doctor's Ordeal".

Reading Jim Cook's gossip from St. Frank's about Dr. Brett in the July C.D. - brought to mind what was probably the only story in which he was portrayed in one of the leading roles.

The opening chapter was preceded as usual at that period by the author's note that Nelson Lee and Nipper were at St. Frank's to escape the attentions of the murderous Chinese Society, the Fu Chang Tong, in the characters of Mr. Alvington and Richard Bennett.

The story begins with quite a trivial incident in itself at the time, but destined to lead to amazing events, with a form room setting. Tom Burton, a comparative newcomer to the Remove but already nicknamed "The Bo'sun" is getting a bottle of ink from the top shelf of the cupboard at the request of Mr. Crowell. In his efforts to reach the shelf he involuntarily grunts! The grunt becomes the subject of some good humoured remarks from Mr. Crowell on the "crime" of over eating - a very unpatriotic thing to be guilty of in the early months of 1918.

Gulliver, however, makes use of this opportunity to whisper loudly "foodhog" and for which he earns for himself two strokes from Mr. Crowell's cane.

The Bo'sun however is very concerned that he should have an excess of weight in war-time and sets about getting rid of it as speedily as he can. Study F which he shares with Conroy Minor is turned into a gymnasium, not satisfied with this however, he persuades Nipper to get

up an hour before rising bell to go for a three mile run!

They decide to cut through a gap in the hedge to get on to Bannington Moor and in doing so make a gruesome discovery - lying in the bottom of the ditch is the body of a dead man.

Nipper decides at once that "Old Alvy" must be told as they return to the school. Nelson Lee decides to inform the pompous Inspector Jameson of Bannington Police by telephone, after which he proceeds to the site of the crime, guided by Nipper and the Bo'sun, being anxious to make a few observations of his own before the police arrive on the scene and notes that the man had obviously been struck down from behind with a heavy spanner which was still lying beside the body.

With the arrival of Inspector Jameson, bursting with self importance, Lee's own investigations are temporarily suspended although he, Nipper and Burton are allowed to remain while Jameson carries out his own investigations.

In his guise of Mr. Alvington, Nelson Lee appears almost indifferent to the proceedings which is just the correct attitude to adopt with the Inspector who was far more likely to volunteer information than he would had Lee appeared inquisitive. Jameson was searching the dead man's pockets and informed the trio that he had found visiting cards bearing the name of Stephen Ford of Twickenham, but the discovery which was to become most important was a cheque for three pounds, fifteen shillings, the drawer's own name being James Brett, the Bellton medical practitioner and already a personal friend of Nelson Lee.

On the strength of this friendship Lee persuades Inspector Jameson to allow himself and the two juniors to accompany him to Bellton to interview the doctor.

Jameson begins by questioning the doctor's chauffer, Williams, in rather an underhanded way without Brett's knowledge, and the information he obtains puts Brett in rather a bad light regarding his association with Stephen Ford the previous night. Next follows Jameson's interrogation of the doctor and on the face of it things look rather black against the doctor although Lee himself is never in doubt as to Brett's innocence.

Inspector Jameson decides to arrest Brett and takes him off to Bannington.

Meanwhile Nelson Lee sends Bennett and Burton back to St. Frank's for morning lessons and returns to the scene of the crime himself hoping to pick up a few clues which would enable him to secure his friends release.

With only a rural "bobby" left on guard, Lee was successful and eventually tracks down a tramp in whose pockets is found three pounds

five shillings in cash - this being exactly the amount paid in cash by Dr. Brett to the dead man and which was not found in his pockets, together with a watch and cigarette case stamped with Stephen Ford's initials.

In view of these discoveries Jameson is compelled to admit that "Mr. Alvington" has been useful and that his case against Brett is not as watertight as he had imagined.

Nelson Lee immediately informs the doctor that he should be free in next to no time, only to have his hopes dashed after the surgeon attached to Bannington police station, reports that the tramp, although admitting to the robbery could not possibly have delivered the death blow with the heavy spanner, because, as the result of an accident a month previously, he was without strength in his arms completely.

Lee is non-plussed and while racking his brains for a fresh starting point spots an item in a newspaper lying in the police station.

He immediately turns to Superintendent Dixon who is in charge of the station and says "If I can produce absolute proof of Dr. Brett's innocence within the space of two hours will you release him this evening?" The Superintendent stared, "I do not see how you can produce such proof Mr. Alvington" he said.

Anyway, Lee got his way, even to the extent of borrowing a car and first returns to the scene of the crime again, where he climbs up a tree the branches of which overhand the ditch where the body was found. His examination completed he returns to Bannington once more and visits the big military camp situated on the outskirts of the town, where the following conversation takes place. "I merely wish you to answer a few questions Lieutenant Bransby" said Nelson Lee. "I understand that you were in command of the airship which was cruising over Bannington during the night?"

"That's right". "Did you approach Bellton?"

"We passed right over the village".

"Now there is one very important question I wish to ask" said the school master detective. "Whilst on this trip, did you, or one of the men under your command, drop anything from the car?"

Lieutenant Bransby gave a little start, "Why yes" he said slowly, "The mechanic slipped and dropped a spanner".

"Exactly", said Nelson Lee smoothly.

"A spanner, I regret to tell you. that a gentleman was killed on the instant by this spanner - it was most extraordinary but easily understandable."

Well the Lieutenant accompanies Lee to the police station, the spanner is identified as being the one dropped from the airship.

Old Boys Book Club

LONDON SECTION: The Eleventh Annual General Meeting was held on Sunday, January 18th, at the East Dulwich home of the Packmans, Len and Josie and Eleanor, all of which were at that memorable meeting eleven years ago. The only change in the officials for 1959 was that Len vacated the chair in favour of Frank Lay. The rest were re-elected en bloc. Grateful thanks to Len for steering the Club through 1958 and best wishes to Frank for 1959. Elections over and then to the very enjoyable social side of the Club. Excellent quizzes, one of Charles Wright's famous talks, "More Collections and Re-Collections", sales and exchanges, reminiscences exchanged, in fact all those delightful things that go to make up some of "The Happy Hours".

There was an excellent attendance who greatly enjoyed Josie's feed and the very varied programme. There was much news about the successful Billy Bunter Show that ran for three weeks matinees at London's Palace Theatre and thanks to Len and others for souvenir bills and programmes. The February meeting will be held at the home of Nelson Lee Bob Blythe on Sunday, the 15th. Will all those hoping to attend kindly inform Bob at 2, Oxford Place, Cross Road, Neasden, London, N.W.10. Came the time to depart but for some another happy hour as the Sexton Blake Circle held a meeting directly afterwards. Report of this will appear in March Blakiana.

UNCLE BENJAMIN

NORTHERN SECTION MEETING, JANUARY 10th, 1959: Despite a real wintry night the best attendance for an ordinary meeting for a long time gathered to welcome Roger Jenkins on his annual visit. As he had travelled all the way from Hampshire, a round trip of 600 miles, it was all very gratifying. Among those present were Cyril Banks, who unfortunately cannot get very often, and another new member, Mrs. Elsie Palmer of Thackley, Bradford, who like David Lancake last month evidently soon felt at home.

Roger's theme was "The Unpleasant Masters at the Hamilton Schools". He dealt forthright with four of them, Messrs. Hacker, Selby, Ratcliffe and Manders. Needless to say as with all Roger's talks, it was thoroughly enjoyed and an animated discussion followed, which took us to refreshment time. Roger's first subject appears in Hamiltoniana this month; the others will follow.

Afterwards we got down to a cross-word puzzle, thought out by Gerry Allison of course. The prize was won by Roger, which made a perfect finish. There's one of those wretched five week intervals

to the next meeting, February 14th. Stanley Smith will be the speaker. He too, will have to make a long journey, let's make it well worth his while with another bumper attendance.

HERBERT LECKENBY, Norther Section Correspondent.

O.B.E.C. MIDLAND SECTION, Meeting held December 16th, 1958. The meeting which eleven members attended, was the last of the year and was more of a Christmas Party than the usual monthly meeting. To say it was the best of a good many would not be exaggeration. At any rate, what with the very interesting items and the various eats and drinks (the latter thanks to our worthy Chairman, Jack Corbett and George Chatham and Beryl who acted as hostess) all present had a very enjoyable evening.

We were sorry that Mrs. Corbett could not be with us and the same regret that Jack Ingram was prevented from attending. We quickly disposed of the first item, a Christmas Quiz set by the writer. Jack Corbett and Beryl got maximum results. Norman then entertained us with one of his "fire work" talks and this time he broke fresh ground. He dealt with the better known illustrators of boys papers, and mentioning quite a few well known names, questioned whether these people in every case ever read the stories they were illustrating. The different styles of each artist was enlarged upon and examples from several periodicals were produced. A short talk by Tom "Forty Years ON" was then on the agenda. Did we derive as much pleasure from the papers we read forty years ago as the youth of today with the present type of literature in forty years from now?

A nice little party to wind up a satisfactory year and that it's only fault we could find with it was that it was "little"; we wished the rest of the "gang" had been there. HARRY BROSTER, Secretary.

MERSEYSIDE SECTION MEETING- 11th JANUARY: A very special occasion this, for not only was it the first meeting of the new year, but also our 100th. 1959 got off to a flying start with this very happy and successful get-together, which augurs well for the rest of the year. Unfortunately, Merseyside was really in the grip of a bitter Arctic spell. Dispite this the attendance was excellent. One very important decision was taken at this meeting. It was unanimously decided to extend the activities of the Merseyside Section in order to embrace ALL literature, past and present. With an eye to the future, the members are determined that the "grand fellowship" of the Section which has been enjoyed at 100 meetings will continue for many more years to come, and it was felt that this change would ensure this

aim by adding a new and healthy interest to the hobby. At the same time, Merseyside is also determined that the "Old Boys' Books" section will not be neglected - on the contrary the determination is to create an even bigger and better "Old Boys' Books" section,

Jim Walsh had the happy thought of bringing along his handsome tape-recorder to this meeting, and he duly recorded short "100th birthday" speeches from each member present, commencing with Chairman Don Webster and ending, appropriately enough with Elsie Webster. Considerable amusement, and not a little astonishment was displayed when the tape was played back. It does nothing for one's ego to hear one's voice played back. One member, with a pronounced accent immediately went out and we feared he had shot himself; happily he had only paid a visit somewhere else! Jim went to a lot of trouble over this, and all those present were very grateful for his happy gesture.

Don Webster weighed in with a most interesting "Classics Quiz", and a very delightful evening was completed when a bottle of port was produced, and a toast was drunk to all sections of the O.B.B.C.

The writer's own impression, for what it is worth, is that 1959 will prove to be the most successful in the history of the Merseyside Section.

The next meeting will be on Sunday, 8th February, 6.30 p.m. at Neville Road. In conclusion, the members of this section send their warmest good wishes for a very happy New Year to their good friends in London, the Midlands, the North and last, but not least, to those of the Golden Hours Club, Australia.

FRANK UNWIN

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WANTED URGENTLY: — Sexton Blake Libraries 1st series Nos. 17, 105, 109, 197, 198, 201, 202. Sexton Blake Libs. 2nd series Nos. 8, 25, 102, 111, 129, 213, 236, 243, 272, 293, 296, 306, 422, 474, 495, 520, 667. Boys Friend Libs. 1st series. Nos. 10, 68, 102, 105, 107, 165, 229, 246, 669. Boys Friend Libs. 2nd Series. Nos. 392, 396. Union Jacks Nos. 881, 1041, 1098.
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