

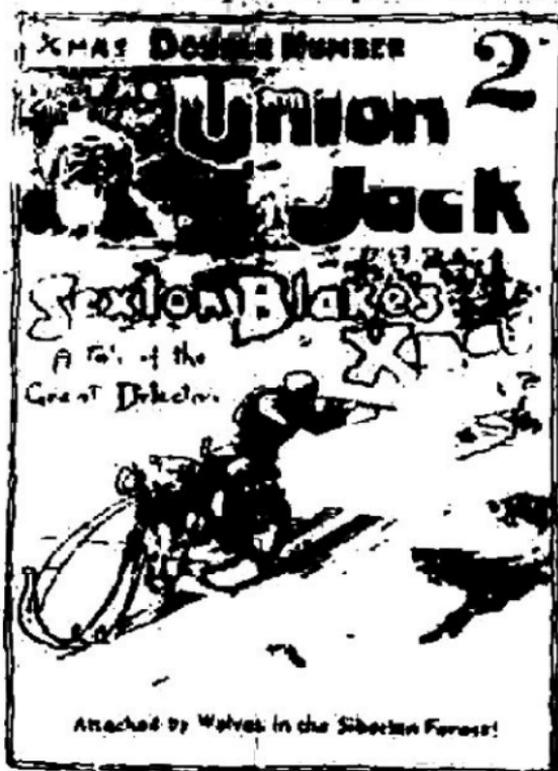
The  
Collectors  
Digest

(Vol. 2)  
No. 24.

Cover of the  
Treble Number  
of the Marvel.  
Christmas 1948



Two 3/6 Complete Novels!



Extract from a Frank Richards letter.

Now I have a spot of news. The first of the St. Jim's series, "Tom Merry and Co. of St. Jim's", will be published early next year by Thomas Campion, Ltd., 26, Manchester Square, London, W. 1. It will be followed after a not too long interval by the second volume, which is called "The Secret of the Study", in which Arthur Augustus D'Arcy comes up against a spot of trouble. And the same firm are to publish "Tom Merry's Summer Annual" during 1949 --- which will be very much like the old Greyfriars Annual in its contents, and which I hope old readers will like to see. By the way, the Tom Merry Books will be published under the general title of "Tom Merry's Own".



(Vol.2) No.24.

Price 1s.1d

Post Free

DECEMBER 1948

Editor, Miscellaneous Section  
Herbert Leckenby, Telephone Exchange,  
C/o Central Registry, Northern Command, York.

A HAPPY CHRISTMAS AND PROSPEROUS NEW YEAR  
TO ALL OUR READERS

-----

FROM THE EDITOR'S CHAIR.

Another Milestone: This is our Christmas and second Birthday. Once again my thoughts travel back to that Sunday afternoon when like a nervous father gazing at his first born, I, with a fast beating heart picked up our No. 1.

It was under average size, but it made rapid progress and is now a sturdy thriving youngster. Assemble the twelve issues of Volume 2 with their vari- coloured covers and 346 pages, and I am sure it will be agreed they make a handsome volume. With the use of a smaller type for the majority of the numbers (this particular one may be an exception owing to work on the Annual) a real feast of

reading has been provided, and once again a loyal band of contributors have rendered yeoman service. Many new friends have joined our ranks during the year, and very few have left.

One of the high lights of the year was the forming of the London Old Boys' Book Club, with which the C.D. is now closely linked. When I read the reports of its early meetings I said to myself "oh how I wish I could be there". At the time the opportunity seemed very remote, but it did come, and when it did, well you know what my reactions were. That surprise meeting that Sunday night at Surbiton, with all friends gathered together to give me a welcome like unto that of the prodigal son of old, will ever remain one of my life's happiest memories. And outside London friendships have been cemented in many places.

Other noteworthy events have been the publishing of "Boys Will Be Boys" with its enthusiastic reception from public and press alike; the arrival of two new Bunter books and the news of the return of Tom Merry. Yes its been a memorable year.

Most of you know what the C.D. means to me. It requires the burning of a lot of midnight oil, and I seldom have time to even browse over my collection. Yet I love it all, and if it had to die, I should feel that life was hardly worth living. Perish the thought - on with Volume 3.

\* \* \* \* \*

Death of Alan Kellow. It is with deep sorrow I have to report the death on October 16th, of Alan Kellow, of 7 Greenway Gardens, Happaway Road, St. Marychurch, Torquay. It is always sad to have to record the passing of a member of our little circle; it is particularly so in this case, for Alan was only 19. I had never met him, I only knew

him by his letters, yet I felt the news of his death as keenly as if I had seen him often. He had been an invalid for a long time, and when he could get out it had to be in a bath chair. Yet he used to write such brave, cheerful, little letters. He was a great lover of the papers, particularly the Magnet, and used to say how much they helped to pass what would have been long, dreary hours away. He often expressed his gratitude to those who had supplied him with papers and this brought him happiness in his illness. Yes, Alan was a lovable, brave little soul, an example to all of us who have the blessing of good health. On behalf of us all I took the first opportunity of conveying our sympathy to his parents in their great loss.

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The Return of Tom Merry. As will be seen from the Letter Box St. Joms is about to awaken from its slumbers after nearly ten years. Soon you will meet Tom Merry & Co travelling down to Rylcombe, New House and School House will again be at war, ere long you'll learn how dear old D'Arcy manages to be immaculate on his clothing coupons. Great news isn't it? Speed the presses!

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Last - Lap. The final stages of the Annual have been reached and unless some unexpected hitch occurs copies should all be dispatched well before Christmas. At the moment I am putting the finishing touches to the "Collectors' Who's Who" which will contain well over 100 names.

May I just take the opportunity of giving a gentle reminder? Quite a number of subs have still to come in, and just a few have not yet ordered their copies. Please don't delay as we want to know exactly how many copies to order. And round

about Christmas Day that I may be hearing "Better than last year's" is the hope of

Yours sincerely,  
Herbert Leckenby.

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The Ideal Companion for Christmas. THE ANNUAL!!!!  
Have You Ordered Your Copy Yet?

+ + + + +

The Last Minute of the Eleventh Hour! The Annual  
Goes "To Bed" - Have You Ordered Your Copy?

+ + + + +

Subs. for the Annual are now Due.

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Few Bound Volumes "Magnet" Urgently Wanted, any date or condition; also "Monster" Libraries; any reasonable price paid, (or could exchange, for above only, various "Captain" volumes and "Holiday Annuals"). Please respond promptly, advertiser emigrating soon. Joseph Baguley, "Moorings", Pensilva, S.E. Cornwall. N.B. Offer parcels, my choice only, one dozen "Boys Friend Monthlies", mint state, fl --- 1923 - 1936.

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For Sale: 50 Magnets 1462 - 1551; 122 Gems 1461 - 1663; 82 Schoolboys Own Libraries, including 29 St. Franks, 18 St. Jim's, 14 Rookwoods, 15 Greyfriars from No. 228 - 411. Gordon Thompson, 85, Deerpark Road, Belfast.

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FAMOUS EDITORS BOUGHT BOYS' BLOODS.

By R.A.H. Goodyear.

In far-off days T.P.O'Connor, M.P., edited the Sunday Sun and criticised in that newspaper the manuscripts sent in by literary-minded readers. He gave me valuable encouragement and amiably printed some of my early efforts. In a faded cuttings-book, time-yellowed at the edges, I have found what he said in answer to some long-forgotten observations of mine on penny papers for boys. Presumably these would be Ching Ching's Own, Boy's Comic Journal, Boys of the Empire and Boy's Popular Weekly, which were the publications I favoured at the time. "Tay Pay", as he was affectionately nicknamed by his contemporaries, answered as follows:

"It seems fashionable to decry such publications as you name and to force many boys who read them to peruse them clandestinely. For my part, I have found in them much that was entertaining and seldom anything that was downright offensive or demoralising. True, these serial-writers for boys are not divinely inspired nor is their grammar always correct. They often shamelessly help themselves to huge slices of Sir Walter Scott or Harrison Ainsworth and pass it off as their own but this may possibly be a good thing for their juvenile readers, who might otherwise never see anything written by those past-masters of romantic literature. If I were to surprise some school-boy descendant of mine in the act of perusing the Boy's Comic Journal, for instance, I should not tap him on the shoulder and sharply say 'Here, young fellow, hand that to me at once - pass it over!' as though he was fondling a pistol or a poniard. I should pass quietly by with an understanding smile, or perhaps pause to ask, 'has the hero wriggled his way out of the pirates' cave yet? Did he succeed in getting the heroine free first or is she still

writhing in the chains that bind her to the wall?"

T.P.O'Connor became the Father of the House of Commons and was writing regularly and skilfully almost to the day of his death. Another well-known author, J.A. Hammerton, so long a leading editor with the Amalgamated Press under Lord Northcliffe, writes thus of his youthful reading:

"The 'bad boy' of the school was a singularly blonde youth who eventually achieved expulsion. Perhaps the fact that his name was Harry and that he resembled, in his person, the pictures of Handsome Harry of the Fighting Belvedere, led to that long sustained boys' penny blood being a favourite with my playmates. While far from despising an odd hour with Handsome Harry, I was more attached to the Boy's Own Paper, where, in addition to the excitement of such stories as 'The Prairie Chief' by R.M. Ballantyne, Talbot Baines Reed's 'A Dog with a Bad Name', Jules Verne's 'Clipper of the Clouds' David Ker's 'Ilderim the Afghan' and Lovett-Cameron's 'Tom Saunders', my awakening curiosity about nature, vanished civilizations, inventions, famous personalities, had more satisfaction than in the Boy's Standard, the Boys of London, Ching-Ching's Own or any of the other bloods. Not that I could have been consciously critical of the crudities of such stuff as Sweeney Todd, Three-String Jack, or Spring-heeled Jack. My taste merely made me more partial to informative reading".

I confess there was never one of Ballantyne's very many stories for boys that could hold my interest for ten minutes even. An old friend has just told me, with charming candour, that whatever popularity I achieved with my own books was due to my inside knowledge of the sport. "You gave 'em the dope about football and cricket and threw in lots about all the other games boys love to play," he said, "so of course you had to succeed, you crafty devil."

I replied that Talbot Baines Reed knew little or nothing of football and cricket and usually excluded them from his yarns and yet made successes infinitely greater than mine. I never heard, however, that any of his stories were republished in America and I gather that no British public-school stories have the ghost of a chance of being welcomed in the U.S.A. Nick Carter, Sexton Blake and Nelson Lee are much more in their line of country.

Wanted. Gems 453, 687, 989, 1515, 1517, 1518, 1521, 1550. Top prices offered. Can any fellow Collector help please? Leonard Packman, 27, Archdale Road, South Dulwich, London, S.E.22.

Wanted. Odd boys' books, anything. What offers? Exchanges Detective Weekly, 1 - 50. Henry J.H. Bartlett, Peas Hill, Shipton Gorge, Bridport, Dorset.

3 Red Magnets for each of the following Magnets. No.903 "Sports Week at Greyfriars"; 692 "Manleverer's Peril"; 347 Changed by Adversity: Popular No 251 (1923) "Manly Swot". E.B. Flinders, "Roseview", Gosmore Road, Nr. Hitchin, Herts.

Wanted. Early Issues of Gem, Magnet, Pluck, Dreadnought. A few Magnets and Gems for disposal, and Red-covered Magnets for Exchange only. Eric Fayne, 23, Grove Road, Surbiton, Surrey.

Wanted. Aldine Publications, Dick Turpins, Claude Duvals etc. E.R. Landy, 4, Nuneaton Road, Dagenham, Essex.

For Sale. 56 "Gems" 1917 - 19, 1/6d each; S.O.L's Nos. 229, 232, 238, 242, 355, 361, 364, 394, 1/6d each. Holiday Annuals, 1927, 1928, 1929, 1932, 1933, 1937, 10/- each. "Magnets" Nos 400, "The Sunday Crusaders"; 403, "Straight as a Die"; 404 "Going the Pace";

"School Friend Annual" 1931, and 9 copies "School-girl" featuring Bessie Bunter. What offers?  
W.H. Neate, "Wenlock", Burnham, Bucks.

THE BOY WHO DECEIVED.

Story of a Christmas Number

by Herbert Leckenby.

I have before me a copy of the dear old Boys Friend of yester year. As I turn its green tinted pages my thoughts go racing back through the years to a certain Sunday night when the 20th Century was very young. The scene, my home, Holly House; so appropriate a name for the story I have to tell. It was a rambling old place in the outskirts of my native city, and in it I spent nearly ten happy years. I loved it for one special reason, way up several flights of stairs there lay a roomy attic in which I was able to store my beloved papers, the Boys Friend, Boys Realm, pink covered Union Jacks, and the



rest. That was something I had been unable to do in an earlier home, for as I have said before papers of the kind were frowned upon by a stern father. Oft times I would steal up the stairs to my treasure trove, and there with the rays of a candle throwing shadows around, select one or two from the modest pile, then make my way down again with them reposing beneath my jacket.

It was otherwise just a lumber room, but it had, of course to be "spring cleaned" sometime. Then, however, I had a friend. At the time my mother has the assistance of a maid, Doris by name. Doris, bless her, was an avid reader of the Girls Friend, and Horners Penny Stories, so we were fellow conspirators and I could rest content that when the attic was "turned out" my papers would not find their way to the cellar fires or the dustbins.

Well, the Sunday night I can recall so vividly was one exactly a week before Christmas Day. We had just returned from the nearby chapel in which I was obliged to spend some hours each Sunday, whether I wished to or no. It was a real winters night, the wind howled round the house, on the lawn at the back there lay a mantel of snow and icicles clung to the shrubs and holly bushes. Members of the family were gathered round a roaring fire, and in addition, a lady friend of my mothers, who had come along with us from the chapel. I was sitting reading at the far side of the table, quite a distance away from the fire, book on my knee. After a while, the lady visitor turned to me and said with a smile "You seem to be out of it across there. Your book must be interesting, may I see it?" Bashfully I passed an open book over to her. "Ah! Pilgrim's Progress" she exclaimed with beaming face "now that is a sensible book to read", and passed it back with a kindly nod of approval. Did a blush of shame spread over my cheeks? Perhaps it should have done, for what I had really been reading still

lay on my lap and it was something quite different - the Christmas Double Number of the Boys Friend lay there, folded into four. But maybe I could salve my conscience by the thought that now and again I had been reading a few sentences from Pilgrim's Progress. Then again in excuse for my misdeamour I could plead that whereas Bunyan's immortal work had been given to me by a maiden aunt, that Boys Friend had been earned by the sweat of my brow, by the running of errands and the like. But the real honest to goodness reason was of course that the stories, in the Green 'un appealed to my boyish fancy more than the progress of Christian and Greatheart.

Now the Boys Friend I have before me is one of the very same issue as that which rested on my knee that wintry night at Holly House over forty years ago. My parents and that lady friend have long since passed on, but this copy is more immaculate than the one I read then. Let us now run through its contents so that you younger members of the clan can see what was on offer to boys for twopence in the days when they read by gaslight, and Dick Barton heroes were undreamt of.

The date was December 17th 1904, and the front page (reproduced here) shows an incident from a complete story "A Friend in Need". You will observe it is a wintry scene with driving snow and an escaped convict shown in the rays of a lamp. The page was drawn by Arthur Clarke, one of the most popular artists of the day, and who first drew the rotund figure of Billy Bunter nearly four years later. The story itself described as a stirring and pathetic Christmas story was written by dear old Allan Blair, who loved to write yarns of poor boys climbing the ladder of life. This in addition to the cover occupied three and a half of the Boys Friends large pages.

Another complete story, four pages, with a real

Christmassy flavour was "The Secret of the Red Room" or Christmas Eve at Hillingham Hall, a tale of Cavaliers and Roundheads, by Morton Pike. The picture heading showed a ghostly lady on a ghostly horse, Ah! the very yarn for a wintry night nigh to Christmas! Could you blame a boy if he preferred that to the tribulation of Christian?

Moreover the yarn was gloriously illustrated by "Val" that artist who had no peer where historical stories were concerned.

A third complete was "Dick Lavington's Temptation" - "a charming Christmas tale" and a fourth - "Bob Graham's Xmas Box" by Beverley Kent. In addition there were three other short completes "Our Christmas Pantomime" a laughable school story; "The Bridge of Death", and one of a series "Mistress of the Seas".

Seven completes! But that was only part of the fare for there were goodly instalments of no less than four serials - the start of a new one "The Idle Apprentice" a yarn of Jack Sheppard; "The Defence of Danescliffe" by star school writer, Henry St. John; "Rule Britannia" a war story by Reginald Wray, and "Jack, Sam & Pete" those famous characters created by S. Clarke Hook.

No and even that wasn't quite all for there was a page of "Xmas Tips and Dodges", an article "From Newgate Prison to Tyburn Tree", and last but not least "Your Editors Den" occupying one whole page. It was adorned of course by the familiar features of Hamilton Edwards seated in the editorial chair and looking very thoughtful. In it he addresses himself to "my friends", "my chums", and talks of "our paper". Yes indeed Hamilton Edwards knew how to run a boys journal. I wonder how many present day editors will be remembered in 40 years time.

And, oh what are these foot-lines announcing a

great new serial in the Boys Herald - "Nippers School days"? Yes, Ye Lee fans-in 1904! But the school was St. Ninians, not St. Franks, for Nipper went to St. Ninians for years too. He should have been a well educated youth in very truth.

It was a grand two pennorth, wasn't it? Alas, such Christmas Numbers are no more.

I wonder if the Recording Angel placed a black mark against my name for my deception that winters night so long ago, or did he with an understanding smile and a kindly shake of his head, hold his pen? I like to think the page was clean.

### RETROSPECT.

By Benjamin G. White.

The recent article by our worthy editor entitled "Streets of Memories" gives rise to thought for conjecture of what Dick Turpin of 'Aldine' library fame would find if he reversed his famous ride and journeyed from York to London on Bonnie Black Bess. He would find that some of the streets of memories have disappeared whilst, on the other hand few remain. Yes, Newgate Street is still there but Newgate Prison has gone, the place of incarceration of Jack Sheppard with the assistance of Jonathan Wild their taker. Journeying along to Goswell Road he would find that thoroughfare still there but the house wherein the possible ancestors of Sexton Blake's house keeper lived, Mrs. Bardell of Pichurchion fame, no longer there. Back to Farringdon Street where happily the Fleetway House is still in existence, although not turning out the papers and books so beloved by boys and old boys of a decade or two ago. Further west he might look in vain for Nelson Lee's abode in Gray's Inn Road. Still further westward

he would find Baker Street the homes of three great detectives, Sherlock Holmes, Sexton Blake and Ferrers Locke. But the only place he may in the future perhaps see the characters themselves might be in the famous waxworks nearby. Traversing many more of the memory streets of the great metropolis he would see many of the old fashioned newsagents so beloved by boys and old boys of the early twentieth century but alas! no longer selling the papers and books so beloved by the aforesaid generation. This he would find out is due to the paper shortage and learn that the great publishing houses had to suspend the issue of a great many popular papers.

However a consolation would be the sight on the bookstalls and the newsagents that, grand new book "Boys will be Boys" featuring all the boys periodicals of yester year. Finally returning to York with its memorable old streets, he would be pleased to learn of the issue once a month a periodical which gladdens the hearts of most old boys who enjoyed the vintage years of the papers they loved so well.

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Report on the November meeting of the Old Boys Book Club, held at 706, Lordship Lane, Wood Green, London, N.22

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The meeting was opened at 6.15 p.m. by Mr. Packman, the Chairman, and the minutes were read by the secretary, of the October meeting. They were passed as correct and signed by the Chairman.

The correspondence followed, and most letters were from members unable to attend; - of these there were about seven

Mr. Treasurer then gave his report, and we were

found to be fairly well in hand as regards funds, thought some members are not up to date.

The next subject was that of the badge. Mr. Whiter, gave a short resume of what had been said at other meetings prior to this, about the badge. He described it, and informed the club that a Latin motto had been chosen, meaning Boyhood is Everlasting, and that after a consultation with three learned schoolmasters, the motto stands as "Puer Manebit". Mr. Whiter said how he had written to a badge manufacturer, and quoted the card in reply. He said he had then sent off a sketch of the badge, and read out to the Club the reply he had received, which quoted a price far beyond the region of our funds. At the cheapest it would be in the region of £25. He said however, that he had another address to which he was going to write, stating that he understood this firm could give a reasonable price.

A vote of thanks and a hearty welcome followed for our guest Miss Filenders, a new member, Mr. Preine; and also to Mrs. C. Wright who had come for the first time with her husband.

The next point brought up was that of the cost of refreshment, and was mentioned by Mr. Blythe. Mr. Chairman took up the suggestion, saying that costs of refreshments should be taken from the funds. This was carried unanimously. It was then suggested that it should start from the October meeting, and this was put to the vote and also carried.

The date of the next meeting was fixed as being Sunday Dec. 5th, and, as it is impossible for Mr. Fayne to have it at The Modern School, Mr. C. Wright very kindly offered his home at Greenwich, and this was welcomed by all. Mr. & Mrs. Wright were thanked for their kind gesture.

The Xmas party came up next, as a tentative

has been fixed. This is Saturday January 1st, 1949, and of course is open for confirmation with Mr. Fayne.

Book pricing followed and the Nelson Lee was chosen. Mr. Blythe was called upon to make a suggestion, he being the best authority on the Nelson Lee, and he divided it thus:-

Old Series.

No 1	to No 111	.. .. .	2/-	to 1/6d.
No 112	to No 337	.. .. .	1/9d	to 1/6d.
No 338	to No 568	.. .. .	1/6d	to 1/3d.

New Series.

No 1 (Nos. 1 - 194)	.. .. .	1/3d	to 1/-.,
No 2 (Nos. 1 - 161)	.. .. .	1/-d	to 9d.
No 3 (Nos. 1 - 25)	.. .. .	9d	to 6d.

Nos. to be specialised.

No 1 and No 112, Old Series, and any one number in the first category, Nos. 1 to 111.

As for the Magnet, the prices rely on condition of the books, but the top prices quoted here are the ceiling prices.

Mr. Chairman then asked for suggestions as to the next book to be priced, and the Gem was decided on.

Mr. Robert Blythe then said he had a suggestion to make, and it was on the question of research, with a view to compiling a reference book of the Magnet, Gem and Nelson Lee, the Sexton Blake stories being impracticable. He gave his theories and we discussed them and resolved on the following course. We are to split up into groups, according to which book we read. Each person will endeavour to read 12 books a month, and while doing so, will jot down everything

of interest re: place names, towns, characters etc. no matter how unimportant. The findings will be either brought to the meetings or sent to the Secretary each month. They will be given to Mr. Packman, who will keep them safely until a certain amount has accrued when they will be sorted, tabulated and put in alphabetical order, and so it will go on until we can get a complete list together with definitions, and we hope we can get it typed or perhaps published. This sounds a tall order, but we all feel quite confident that we will succeed and to this end I am appealing for the co-operation of all members.

For this meeting we had a picture quiz, and it was won by Mr. Leonard Packman, with Mr. Charlie Wright second, and Mr. John Geal third. The prizes were calendars painted by Mr. Robert Whiter.

A point was raised that members who do not keep paying their subs. regularly, and who get two or three months in arrears, should be barred from meetings unless a reasonable explanation is given. At least one person was to have this pointed out.

The meeting closed at 8.15 p.m., and refreshments were brought round, whilst members held the usual "exchange and mart".

The attendance was Mr. & Mrs. & Miss Packman, Miss Flinders, Mr. & Mrs. Keeling, Mr. & Mrs C. Wright, Mr. & Mrs. R. Whiter, Messrs. M. Haswell, B. Whiter, J. Geal, B. Prime, R. Blythe and R. Mortimer.

EILEEN WHITER, (Hon. Secretary)

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Wanted: "Monster Libraries" Old Series Lees, Boys Magazines. H. A. Smith, 13, New Road, Scole, Diss, Norfolk.

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An Interesting Letter from the Author

of

"Boys will be Boys"

Dear Mr. Leckenby,

Our letters crossed in the post. Very many thanks for sending on the copy of the current Collectors Digest, and for giving my rather over-rated book so much of your editorial space.

I had fully expected that when the expert reviewers of the collectors' magazines got round to my book they would be tearing strips off it right and left. Either I have not made as many errors as I feared, or you have been too kind to point them out.

The interesting thing about the press notices (I have just checked through about 60 of them) is that such a high proportion of reviewers have seized on Gem and Magnet.

I hope to remedy some of the errors in subsequent imprints, but the first four impressions were put through very quickly to meet the unexpected demand.

May I say that I greatly enjoyed reading Mr. Stewart Hunter's notice? I suspect he knows a great deal more about the early "bloods" than I do, but is too generous to say so.

Two interesting sequels to the publication of BOYS WILL BE BOYS which may have escaped your attention are: the NEW STATESMAN (which gave it a page) is currently running a competition in which readers are asked to write 12 lines of nostalgic verse recalling the delights of the penny dreadful. Needless to say, I have competed, though I doubt whether I shall see my name among the prize-winners on Friday. The results should make a fruitful topic for your Digest.

The other point is that Foyles are doing one of their literary luncheons on BOYS WILL BE BOYS at the Dorchester on November 25. Compton Mackenzie is speaking and will be supported by the usual celebrities.

It remains for me to thank you most warmly for your friendly interest in my book, and for the flattering things you have said about it. I hope it may be the means of stimulating the circulation of your admirable Collectors Digest and of the Collectors Miscellany too.

Yours very sincerely,  
E.S. TURNER.

P.S. By all means I should like to have one of the annuals. Cheque enclosed.

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NOTE: But Mr. Turner did win a prize in the New Statesman competition. Here's his contribution; read it and smile:-

Ah! Doris Dare she held her own,  
With Beake and , a girl half grown,  
Who grabbed with the masked unknown  
Who foiled the sickest slickers  
Who served justice and the Right  
Was dragged by cars in frantic flight  
Or left to angle from a kite

(While Pterodactyles poised to bite)  
 Who leaped with golden hair alight  
 From clock towers of appalling height  
 Yet though it all stayed brave and bright  
 And never showed her knickers

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27, Archdale Road,  
 E. Dulwich,  
 London,  
 S.E.22.  
 27th October, 1948.

A Call for Tom Merry.

Dear Editor,

I am very pleased to hear that the long awaited two Greyfriars books are being published this week.

I do not know whether anyone else has approached you at all, but I and several other "Gem" collectors have been wondering if it could be possible to approach Mr. Hamilton with a view to producing a Tom Merry & Co. (St. Jim's) book on similar lines? I feel sure it would be very popular. Perhaps you would like to let me know what you feel about it?

With kind regards,

Yours sincerely,

LEONARD PACKMAN.

(Chairman London Old Boys Book Club)

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Rose Lawn,  
 Kingsgate-on-Sea, Kent.  
 29th October, 1948.

Tom Merry Answers the Call.

Dear Herbert Leckenby,

I have just been reading Mr. Turner's book "Boys will be Boys", which you will remember was referred

to in the C.D. some time ago under a less happy title I hope the book will come your way, for it is not only a mine of interesting information, but a gorgeous chuckle from beginning to end. Frank Richards is let off very lightly --- for which relief much thanks! --- and he never enjoyed a book more. Pages 128 and 161 are worth a guinea a box! But the whole book, from the first page to the last, is a joy for ever.

Now I have a spot of news that may interest you. A delightful publisher proposes to issue Tom Merry in book form, somewhat on the lines of the Bunter books; so in the near future St. Jim's will be on the map again. This has made Martin Clifford as happy as Frank Richards --- quite a pair of Cheery-ble Brothers!

With kind regards,  
Yours sincerely,  
FRANK RICHARDS.

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**NOTE:** How's that for a happy coincidence? Would that all wishes could be anticipated like that. Its great news for the Gemites. D'Arcy and Frank Richards seem to have enjoyed "Boys will be Boys" doesn't he? (H.L.)

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60, Salcombe Road,  
Walthamstow, London, E:7.  
11th October, 1948.

### Who First Thought of the Meetings?

My Dear Herbert,

Thanks for the latest C.D. I must congratulate you on the compiling of such a useful and attractive work. I was ever so pleased to hear you had such a grand time and needless to say I was delighted to

meet you again after a lapse of three or more years.

Now I would first like to say something about what was said at the Surbiton meeting about the C.D. originating the idea of holding them. I am sure you will take it in good part when I say I can claim to have done that. About seven years ago, I discussed the question with Mr. Cox, Mr. Whiteley of Manchester and others, and Mr. Cox mentioned it in the Bulletin he was publishing at the time. And if you remember you and I talked about it when you used to ring me up when I was fire-watching. There was also a talk of a dinner with Mr. Hamilton as chief guest. It was finally agreed that nothing could be done whilst the war was on. Now that the Club has started, I am, owing to difficult circumstances, unable to take an active part, nevertheless, I follow its activities with great interest and wish it every success.

Yours very sincerely,

ALFRED HORSEY.

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Comment: I have had to condense Alfred's letter, but I think I have given the material points of what he said. Now it is quite true the "get together" idea was talked about during the war as Alfred says, and I have recollections of ringing him up dead on ten o'clock when he was fire-watching and the matter was often discussed. It is true too, there was talk of a dinner with Mr. Hamilton as guest. This came to Mr. Hamilton's notice through some letters I sent him to read, but whilst appreciating the compliment, he asked us to forget the idea, as he was unable to get about. It was recognised that nothing could be done whilst the war was on, and the whole question was allowed to lapse.

Now perhaps it is the case that when I used the word "originated" when I commented on the Surbiton meeting it was hardly the most suitable one. Possibly 'encouraged' would have been better. We were able to

give the proposal publicity and since the first meeting we have reported them fully and done all we could to make them a success. That these efforts have been appreciated I think was apparent by that grand gesture when fellows came from all over London, and even John Robyns from Brighton just because I had "come to town". But as I also said the project would not have got far if Bob Blythe, Len Packman, Eric Payne, Bob Whiter, just to name a few had not got down to it in real earnest. That Alfred was unable to take an active part I fully recognise knowing him as I do, and certainly I should be the last to deprive him of any credit he should have in bringing the happy state of affairs about as I know what a good friend he has been to many members of our clan. Hence the lengthy explanation. (H.L.)

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**For Sale:** 1000 Books mainly 1918-22. School & Sport 1-20, very scarce, what offers? Nugget Weekly, 1/- each; Newnes Black Bess Library, 9d each; Champions, Thrillers, 9d each; Boys Cinemas, Sports Budgets, B.O.P's, Modern Boys, Hotspurs, Chums, Scouts, Pals, Football Favourites, Wizards, British Boys, Adventures, Sports for Boys, Rovers, Rangers, Sport and Adventures, Film Funs, Young Britains, 6d each. Nelson Lees 1929-33, 1/- each. W. Martin, 93, Hillside, Stonebridge Park, London, N.W.10.

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**For Sale:** "Magnets", "Lees", "Populars", "Dixon Hawkes", "Gems", "S.O.L's, Bound Volume of "Scoops" 1 to 19. H.A. Smith, 13, New Road, Scole, Diss, Norfolk.

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#### CHRISTMAS WITH SEXTON BLAKE.

My first Christmas with Sexton Blake was in 1927, twenty years ago. How I eagerly awaited that wonderful story "The Affair of the Black Carol" with all the well known Gwyn Evans characters therein, "Splash" Page, Ruff Hanson etc, etc. The cover of the "Union Jack" No. 1260 which contained the above story was both happy and pathetic. The figure of Blake as conceived by Mr. Eric R. Parker, Blake, the perfect example of manhood (to me at the time at any rate), dressed in his faded old red dressing gown, stooping and shaking hands with a little cripple. It was a fine example of the Xmas story in the Evans manner, in fact it was a seasonable detective adventure animated throughout by the gladsome spirit of Christmas-tide. It was the kind of yarn that one read and re-read in a matter of hours. Yes, that wonderful narrative of Blake's Xmas stay at Lyveden Manor which proved to be both tragic and happy as the U.J. cover indicated was unique, it breathed the spirit of Xmas, that spirit which the estimable Ruff Hanson found rather out of the rut. It was, he somewhere stated, quite unlike the Yuletide season in the States where

apparently the Dickens touch had not yet made itself felt. One can recall with pleasure the account of "Splash" Page's scheme to have a real Dickens Xmas. Of how he managed to get the detective and his assistant friends to take on the roles of Dickens' characters and even wear suitable costumes for the parts. How they all journeyed to Lyveden Manor on an old fashioned stage coach complete with guard and tootling horns. A masterly picture of the Dickens group appeared in this Xmas number with Sexton Blake as Sydney Carton and Tinker as Sam Weller. How Mr. Parker managed to make Blake look like himself and Carton is still a mystery to me. It looks easy but I am sure it was quite the opposite despite the artists great ability.

The enjoyment I derived from that never-to-be-forgotten Xmas of 1927 made me desirous of obtaining some of the previous Gwyn Evans Yuletide yarns which I knew had gone before. Remember that wonderful story "Mrs. Bardell's Xmas Eve" in which the dear old dame was kidnapped and we were again treated to Xmas at an old baronial mansion complete with Christmas Ghost. But if that yarn was a winner what of its predecessor "The Mystery of Mrs. Bardell's Xmas Pudding" (or rather that troublesome pudding made by Mary Ann Cluppins, Mrs. Bardell's sister. The author called this yarn a tragi-comedy and I can think of no better description of it, in fact the term would apply to all the Evans stories of the festive season. In it we see Blake as a human kindly man, thinking more of the kind of Xmas other people were likely to spend rather than of his own pleasure. His gifts to poor, and especially those to the wives and families of criminals he had caused to spend Xmas in Gaol were under the cloak of anonymity. It somehow gave one a thrill to think of their favourite character settling back in his saddlebag chair, pipe alight, and plunging into the ghostly adventures of Ebenezer Scrooge. The value of Mrs. Bardell to the great detective was very apparent in the "Xmas Pudding"

story too. As Inspector Goutts told him "you have no need to go abroad treasure hunting Blake - you have your treasure right here in Baker St". And Mrs. Bardell blushes as she toys with the fire irons. But he was right, for what better treasure can a man have than a perfect cook. The story above was the first of the Gwyn Evans Xmas variety, for as one turns back the pages of the old U.J. one finds that G.H. Teed and Edwy Searles Brooks also contributed the type of story that was "just right" for the Blake fan in mid-December. Recall, for instance that happy occasion in 1924, when Blake called a truce in his fight against the crooked Dr. Huxton Rymer. That was the time when Blake and Yvonne were closely linked together. I always remember the cover of U.J. No 1105 which carried this yarn. Blake and Yvonne greeting Rymer and Mary Trent. George Marsden Plummer also came into this yarn, but in his case no truce was called and it must be stated here and now that although Rymer had been working more or less with Blake in this particular story he was pleased that Plummer finally escaped the meshes of the law, as he nearly always did at the end of the story. But the grand spirit of this story makes one really appreciate the human touch, the understanding of the normal Blake lover, when sleuth and crook forget their differences and shake hands.

Christmas with Waldo in U.J. No. 1054 dated 22.12.23 was an exciting affair and this time with a ghost that really did appear to be the real thing. Yes, "The Flaming Spectre of Cloome" was a very creditable story from E.S. Brooks, rather reminding one of the type of thing he was doing for the "Nelson Lee Library" at about the same time.

The 1000th number of the U.J. was also the special Xmas number for 1922 and contained that memorable yarn "The Thousandth Chance". I have never been able to find out who wrote this particular yarn or whether it was the joint work of several of the leading writers of the time.. One cannot say

with certainty whose style the story reminds one of and it is impossible to tell from the characters. You will follow my argument when I tell you here that Graves, Rymer, The Three Musketeers, Mary Trent, The Black Duchess, Leon Kestrel, Zenith, Plummer and Professor Kew, all appeared in one story.

Back again now to 1928. Six years have passed since, during Xmas 1922, the delectable Mademoiselle Yvonne had told us that "he (Blake) is not ALL masculine, for there have been times when he has been as tender as a woman". Still we find Blake a philanthropist although his tenderness is not directed towards the woman he loves now. He is once again very much the detective, but the detective with a kindly nature who does not enjoy the task of putting his fellow men behind bars even though he considers it his duty to the public to stamp out as much crime as he possibly can. Once again we find Gwyn Evans in festive mood and his well remembered "Crime of the Christmas Tree" in U.J. No. 1313 with it's delightfully simple but most effective white, green and black colour scheme on the cover illustration. This story was most likely the only one published that, or any other Xmas, combined the mirth and jollity of Christmastide with a well told detective yarn. The combination (which we had now grown to expect annually) was both rare and refreshing. And the plot of this story was unique, although it was actually based on the real life case of the man who was killed by an icicle falling from a tree and piercing the flesh, literally stabbing him to death. And what a delightful idea of Gwyn Evans' was the organisation known as "The League of Robin Hood".

I must make mention here of the story which followed "The Crime of the Christmas Tree". It was called "The Mystery of the Siping Vampire". Now could anyone ask for a Christmas story more suitable title than that. After terrifying peril Blake eventually solves the mystery of the Vampire but he had to experience the thrills of the unseen and unheard.

There were unnerving incidents and a tangled problem with a first class surprise at the conclusion. One the reader did not quite expect and most effective.

In 1929 Gwyn Evans decided to double his efforts and so we were treated to two full length stories dealing with the same case. "The Mistletoe Milk Mystery" and "The Masque of Time" were truly in the old traditions. Once more we had all our old friends with us, including the League of Robin Hood. Once more we find thrills and drama alternating with Christmas fun. Festivity and mystery welded together into a harmonious whole. It is definite that these two yarns contributed greatly towards the Blake enthusiast's Yuletide enjoyment. In the rush of Yuletide preparations one would often seize the chance to get a quiet half our with both these Pleasant mirth making stories.

Moving on to our Xmas with Sexton Blake in 1930 we find the same old Gwyn Evans giving us the old but ever new formula. This time "The Man who Hated Xmas" which story was ingenious of plot and gripping in the extreme. Gosh! How that young man could put it over. It was a pity that dear old Ruff Hanson should have disappeared from the Yuletide stories by this time though, maybe due to the varying associations between this country and the U.S.A. at the time no doubt. When Blake points his pipe stem at the irrepressible "Splash" Page and says "the man who hated Xmas" he expressed the feeling that all of us had towards work during the holiday season. True, in the story "Splash" had wanted to get a special edition out at a time when all things should have given way to the party spirit, and it is necessary to emphasise here that the "Radio" reporter was NOT the "Man" referred to in the title.

In 1931 Gwyn Evans was ill and could not give us his usual brilliant story for Xmas day. Instead William J. Elliott (now well known as the author of a number of first rate novels published by Messrs. Gerald Swan of London) took his place and we exper-

lenced a Christmas with Blake under "entirely new management" as it were. It was said at the time That Gwyn had supervised the construction of this story from his sick bed but we are inclined to doubt this for none of his grand characters appeared to cheer us up and Blake was not the same kindly man we had grown used to through the years. Nevertheless the atmosphere of the story "The Phantom of the Pantomime" was fitting to the time of the year. Imagine a decaying, derelict theatre, a ghostly secret of the past, a hair-raising play with a succession of real, unstaged thrills. Here Blake and Tinker were at grips with a first class mystery even if dear old "Splash" and "Ruff" were absent. New readers of the period would not, I suppose, have worried a jot at their absence, but us old stagers felt inclined to turn our thoughts to past years. I know that I, for one, yearned for a seasonable Xmas with my favourite detective and found myself searching my cupboards for back numbers. I found 'em - and had a happy Xmas!

1932 was the last Xmas of the U.J. and the last REAL Xmas with sexton Blake, for ever since that year (and I am not forgetting the attempts to recapture the Yuletide spirit in the "Detective Weekly") we have read what I consider to be nothing but routine Blake stories. The Dickens atmosphere was gone, the kindly spirit exemplified by the character of Blake was missing. However, it is worthy of note that the last U.J. Xmas story WAS by Gwyn Evans and his fine effort "The Masked Carollers" tried bravely to recapture the glory of the past. Once again the master of the Blake Xmas story succeeded in combining sinister mystery with seasonable mirth. There was a festive atmosphere tinged with fascinating adventure. The yarn concerned proved beyond doubt that Evans had become an institution at Xmas time. He was definitely a looked-for Xmas treat. Yes, the final U.J. Xmas story which dealt with such things as Mrs. Bardwell's Xmas Egg, was a winner all the

way even though ALL the past was not recaptured. It made my 1932 Xmas brighter anyhow. I remember that.

In conclusion let me express a hope that this Xmas of 1948 will prove a happy one for all readers of Blakiana and that Sexton Blake will contribute to your happiness this and each succeeding Yuletide. I wish you all a real, rollicking Merry Xmas and as Tiny Tim once said "God bless us - every one".

H. M. BOND.

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