

(Vol.4) No.46.

October 1950.

The

Collectors'

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Digest



No 3. Vol 11

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OCTOBER 1950

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

FROM THE EDITOR'S CHAIR:

In a Fix. I'm writing my chat for the October number before the September one is out! The reason - my long-looked-forward-to holiday, and the necessity to look well ahead. Thanks to kind co-operation from the duplicating agency the September number should be safely away before I go. In the ordinary way of things I make it a kind of religion to do some work on the magazine every day that dawns. But I won't vow to do that whilst in London town. Not that I shall be away from it all; hardly likely, is it? The point is I want to deliver some copy before I go and it's not much use if it doesn't include this part. Then when I get back I can add the rest, including an account of my experiences, and do my utmost to have this issue away about the usual time. If I haven't quite succeeded I hope you will say, "Well, we'll excuse him, the fellow deserved his holiday."

A Remarkable Collection: Somewhere in this issue you will see an advert. from Mr. H. C. N. Price for five Sexton Blake Libraries. Only five, but there's a very special reason why

he is anxious to get them, for if he succeeds he will have complete sets of all three series; over 1300 in all. That must be something of a record. You know what it is though when you went just two or three numbers out of many. You can get the one just before, or that immediately after, but the coveted one eludes you. So have a heart, you fellows, if you have any of the wanted five.

=====

The "Annual" Will be Pecked Tight: Since our last issue I have received John Medcroft's "Serials from Victorian Boys' Journals". His contribution last year came out high in the popularity stakes, so will this one I guess when the new voting takes place.

Then from W. T. Thurburn comes a long and extremely interesting article on "Bold Robin Hood". He reviews the numerous stories that have been written about the famous outlaw, way back to Pierce Egan, with special attention to the 88 Aldines. And there's something from Peter Walker, but I refer to that in Hamiltonia. Yes, I feel more confident it's going to be a good Annual. Have you ordered your copy yet?

The Other Union Jack: As one keenly interested in the authors of old I, naturally, read with intense enjoyment Walter Webb's article in my colleague's section last month. It was a great score for Blakians. What Walter had to say about Patrick Morris, for instance, was a real revelation. I should just like to mention, however, that Walter fell into one little error. I did exactly the same a few years ago. It was over a statement in an early gd. Union Jack that R. M. Bellentyne was an editor of the Union Jack. True, he was, but it was of that other U.J., the comparatively short-lived one of the 1880's, usually known as Henty's Union Jack. Anyone could be pardoned for misreading the statement, for the Harmsworth editor of the time did not make it as clear as he might have done. Actually, R. M. Bellentyne died before the U.J. we are interested in was born.

Anyway, jolly good stuff, Walter.

Yours sincerely,

HERBERT LOCKTNEY.

P.S. Since writing the above I have received Harry Homer's article on the famous "Confederation" U.J. series for the Annual. Gosh! it's great, and I'm lost in admiration for the enormous amount of work he must have put into it.

POPULAR PAPERS OF THE PAST

No.10. "The Rocket"

Feb. 14, 1923 - Aug. 16, 1924 - 79 numbers.

By Herbert Leckenby

"The Rocket" shot off to a promising start, but fizzled out somewhat dismally after a run of only 79 weeks. On account of its name, maybe, it was given a cover of many colours; the mast-head showed the title in red on a yellow background, and the several pictures were in green, yellow, red and blue, in addition to a boxing photograph in black and white. To complete, a border of exploding rockets and many stars. It was all very eye-arresting, but, truth to tell, as an example of the colour printer's art it could not compare with the picturesque Dick Turpin - Clude Duval Aldines of 20 years earlier.

The coming of the "Rocket" was, no doubt, a result of the striking success of the "Champion" launched a year earlier, and the intervening "Pluck". The size was somewhat unusual - longer but slightly narrower than its two companions, in other words larger than the Magnet, but smaller than the rather unwieldy Boys' Friend.

There were 28 pages, including the cover, and full advantage was taken of every inch of space. There was certainly value for twopence so far as quantity was concerned. The editor, in its early days at least, was enterprising, dynamic F Addington Symonds, and in every line you could discern the guiding hand of his friend and master, Arthur Brooke (A.C. Marshall), one time editor of the Big Budget, and most lovable of men.

I have No.1 before me as I write, and if I had been reviewing it on the day it was published, I should have foretold a successful future, for its contents would have seemed just the thing for the boys of the period. The stories, in the main, fulfilled the editor's slogan "off the trail yarns", they got away with a bang from the word go; good, clean thrills, without the absurdities of the present-day boys' papers.

The first story in that No.1 was "Cyclone Sid!" It was described as "The First Great Non-Stop Yarn of this Whirlwind Series"; and this particular one bore the sub-title, "The Pirates of the Pole", author Reid Whitley.

Next came the start of a serial "The Temple of Thrills" by Rupert Drake. It bid fair to live up to its title.

Followed "The Cowboy 'Tec" introducing "Lone-Hand Lorrimer"; another series starting off with "The Desert Rider". Said to be written by Jake Danvers, doubtless a pen-name.

The next four pages were occupied by "The Golden Ladder", a serial of a rather different type, described as "A Real Human Interest Drama of a Boy's Rise to Fame." It was written by Raymond Lee, actually E. Le Breton Martin, a very popular author of a rather earlier day, especially on the "Big Budget". The artist Fred Holmes had also worked for that paper.

Still another serial "Chums of the Clyde" by Captain Melcolm Arnold, an author who I believe had a right to the military rank, for he had written many yarns of army life with the real atmosphere.

Finally, so far as stories were concerned, came "The People of the Abyss". This ran to six pages, three columns to a page, set solid in small, too small, type, much in vogue at the time. The author's name is indistinct on my copy, but it looks like Hartley Tremaine. The artist was J. H. Valda, a busy man in those days.

In addition to all this fiction, this big number contained a picture competition, "Telepics", puzzles, jokes, a free photo Siki v. Carpentier, and last but by no means least, a page of editorial chat under the heading "Sparks". Actually, it came on page two. In my opinion a boys' paper was not complete without an editor's chat, and when there was one I invariably read it first. It is something sadly lacking in the few boys' weeklies on the bookstalls to-day.

The chat in the "Rocket" was written, of course, by F. Addington Symonds, and friendly, lively stuff it was, a contrast to the somewhat schoolmasterly manner of quixotic Hamilton Edwards of an earlier day.

This, then, was No. 1 of the "Rocket", on the face of it a paper with a very promising future. For the run of the first volume, there was practically no change in style except that with some numbers the cover had one large picture instead of a number of small ones. The single ones were more effective. Here are some of the stories picked at random, which appeared in succeeding numbers.

"The Trail of the Perisher". This was written by Gilbert Chester, well-known to Blake fans.

"The Black Claw" by Ernest Wooton.

"Outlaws of the Mist" by Singleton Pound, an old author, this,

popular in the ha'penny days of the "Union Jack".
 "The Crime King" by Robert Standing, and "Frozen Gold", author,
 A. H. S. May.

In No. 21 a star feature was a long complete story by that brilliant, charming but wayward character, the late Gwyn Evans, fondly remembered for his bizarre Sexton Blake yarns. This one in the Rocket was typical of him; its title, "The Vengeance of Pharaoh", which told of "Denger" Done, the Cyclone Sleuth! Poor Gwyn! A tragedy he died before his time.

Starting with No. 13, the title of the editor's chat was changed to "I Say", another example of the influence of the old "Big Budget" for the editor's column therein was named the same.

But there was a more important connection with that long dead paper, for in No. 10 there commenced a new serial entitled "The Potter's Heritage". The author was given as Carras Yorke, but that was just one of the pen-names of the old editor of the "Big Budget" himself. There's true romance in real life in that situation, the young editor employing the older one, the man who had taught him all he knew and to whom he owed so much.

Four other serials started during the run of Vol. I, "Isles of Gold" by Paul Hotspur (actually Lester Bidston, a Liverpool schoolmaster); "The Valley of Secrets" by Vincent Armitage; "The Two-Gun Sheriff" by Jake Danvers; and "The Lure of Ophir." Earle Denesford was given as the author of the letter, but that, of course, was only another name for the editor, F. Addington Symonds.

In the last number of the volume a new serial was announced to start the following week, "The Painted Death", by Wal Sayer. Complete stories for the same number were "The Creeping Terror"; "The Bullion Robbers"; and Vagabond Vol - Knight Errant" (Gwyn Evans).

As I have said, I can go no further than Vol. I, but I think I have told enough to prove that for a third of its career at least, the "Rocket" was a real live, go-ahead paper, running just the kind of stories boys love. Why then did it die so young? Maybe it was that once again "three's a crowd", that pocket money would not run to the "Champion", "Pluck" - and the "Rocket" (to say nothing of "Young Britain" which had come under the same control) and that therefore the younger brother had to go.

I think it more likely though that someone had a craving to try and compete with the Thomson papers by imitating them, and that meant the control of the "Rocket" passed out of the hands of Mr. Addington Symonds. With him would go the intimate touch, the link between editor and reader, the tributes to authors and artists, for the publishers over the Border care nothing for these. But that's just my opinion, maybe I'm prejudiced, for I loved just those things in the papers I read when a boy.

WANTED: Sexton Blake, Libraries 1st series, 13 and 23. 2nd series 405, 407 and 513. Also collecting Boys' Friend Libraries. What have you? H.C.N. Price, 22 Northdown Road, Margate, Kent.

WANTED: All Back Numbers of Collectors' Digest. Also Annuals. Also wanted, Magnets No's 1250, 1257, 1290. Your price paid. S. Smyth, 1 Brandon Street, Clovelly, N.S.W., Australia.

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

WANTED: Marvel (1d) No. 393. Boys' Friend Libraries (1st series) No's 1, 2, 7, 6, 109, 119, 122, 130, 142, 154, 159, 169, 182, 184, 188, 196, 203, 208, 225, 245, 293, 395, 595. Also Cheer Boys Cheer, 1d. Weekly, all numbers. E. Blight, "Sandhills", Constantine Bay, St. Merryn, Cornwall.

WANTED URGENTLY: Gems No's 819 and 946. Josephine Peckman, 27 Archdale Road, East Dulwich, London, S.E.16.

7/6 each offered for any of the following "MONSTER" Libraries in good condition: 1, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19. L. Peckman, 27 Archdale Road, E. Dulwich, S.E.22.

FOR SALE. To the Highest Bidder. No. 2, (1d) Gem. No.2, Magnet, in absolutely mint condition, guaranteed by Mr. L. Peckman. Half proceeds of sale to the Old Boys' Book Club. C.E.F. Vennimore, 25 Byron Avenue, West Hounslow, Middlesex. There is a special reason for this sale.

Look out for an article shortly on an amazing collection.

"Hamiltonia"

Controlled by Herbert Leckenby

In the golden days of the "Gem" and the "Magnet" the editors were frequently asked, "Why don't the characters grow older?" On such occasions the editors, especially H. A. Hinton, would reply facetiously and draw a fanciful picture of Bob Cherry with a beard, or Mark Linley hobbling along on crutches. Well, that of course was no answer at all. You don't qualify for the old age pension as soon as you leave school.

Anyway, it always has been an interesting subject on which to let one's fancy play, for all the characters were so life-like that one could not ^{help} wondering what might have happened to them if they had passed on from the world of school. We've all met old schoolfellows at some time or other and get chatting about "Where did so-and-so get to?" "Remember Smithy? He's doing jolly well," and so on. And how interesting you find it.

Well, this is just by way of an introduction to the article for the Annual from Peter Walker. He deals with the subject, but he approaches it from a new angle. I'll just whet your appetites. He has just settled down for a train journey from Bristol to London, when three more passengers get in - two men and a lady. The three start chatting and to his astonishment Peter realises he is unavoidably listening to Harry Wherton, Frank Nugent, and Harry's wife, formerly Marjorie Hazeldene. Peter gets drawn into the conversation and soon is learning all that has happened to many of the other famous ones, including those once of St. Jim's. For instance, he hears that old Dr. Locke died some years ago at the venerable age of 82, and that Mr. Quelch is still alive but living in retirement. That D'Arcy - but that's as far as I'll go. Even though we know the characters are just where they were, Peter's fantasy reads so naturally that it quite intrigues me and I feel sure it will you when you read it. After all, we're all sentimentalists, or I shouldn't be writing this, or you reading it.

+ + + +

For a period in the heyday of the Gem and the Magnet readers' back number wents were published. It was interesting to note the great demand for certain stories: "Bob Cherry in Search of His Father"; "Figg's Fig Pudding"; and "Bob Cherry's Berring-Out" were three I particularly remember. At

the time, of course, hundreds of stories had not been written, and the vogue was more for single stories rather than "series". I wonder which was the most popular "complete in one number" story and the most sought after "series". Judging by my post-bag, where the latter's concerned, I should say the irresistible, fantastic, intriguing "Bunter Court" would be high in the list. What do you think?

+ + +

Peter Walker again! Here's another article he sent me some time ago. It contains no statistics, but my post-bag tells me Hamiltonians in particular love this kind of thing, for when he relates so whimsically how bashful he was about buying his Magnet, many of them will say involuntarily, "Just like me." More than once I have had letters from new-comers who, in asking me if I can help them to get some Magnets or Gems, add, "I went them for my son." I have smiled to myself and said, "I wonder." Maybe there's been a son in the offing, but when father has got to know me better - well, it's evident it isn't only sonny who's enjoying the Gem or the Magnet.

Anyway, here's Peter's piece. I haven't even deleted what he says about myself.

THESE NAMES MAKE NEWS

By Peter A. Walker

During the letter part of the 1930's, when the bookstalls and newsgents were still graced by the presence of the "Magnet", I, an adult, with what I was pleased to believe, an adult mind, used to almost furtively slink into a certain newsgent's and whisper that I wanted the "Magnet". I then slunk out, with it covered by the current issues of the Radio Times and The Listener, and only opened it in the privacy of my own home late that night. Week by week these copies were collected together. I mean the Magnets, not the Radio Times! And tucked away at the back of the cupboard were the handful I had saved so preciously since 1920 and 1921. Amongst these were a few odd copies dating back to 1914.

Occasionally these saw the light of day, when an overwhelming surge of nostalgia overtook me, and once more I lived in the world of Greyfriars and St. Jim's. On fine summer's days I retired to a sunny corner of my garden and re-read

"The House-master's Homecoming," and as Christmas approached I stoked up the fire, and embarked once more with Harry Wharton & Co. to the South Seas, or revelled in the "Ghost of St. Jim's". This little collection of Magnets and Gems stood as a reminder of happy days.

But - and this is most important - nobody knew anything about it except me! This little hobby of mine was my secret. I alone was the only man in the United Kingdom who collected Magnets and Gems. They were bought and read and kept in the same manner as Skinner's little smokes behind the woodshed. This was my hobby. A sort of personal weakness. Just imagine, me, a married man, reading and enjoying boys' papers!

Still, there it was, and still is! As you may well imagine, my wife lifted an amused eyebrow - and still does!

But - that awfully personal and somewhat furtive hobby is apparently indulged in by others! and many others! The astounding thing about it too, is that it is quite open and above board. They even hold exhibitions showing off the whole thing to the world!

Which brings me to the point that the Collector's Digest reveals the fact that schoolmasters, doctors, clergymen, business men, civil servants, artists and both males and females collect Magnets and Gems. As I remarked in a previous article, nothing in connection with this hobby gives so much pleasure as reading the letters which reach me from so many good friends. These days they come from not only the British Isles, but Canada and South Africa.

The Annals, as all C.D. enthusiasts know, give complete lists of all our fens' names and whereabouts, and during the long winter evenings this list afforded me much enjoyment and amusement.

I considered, for instance, that Mr. Leonard Packman, the energetic and esteemed Chairman of the London Old Boys' Book Club, might, at that moment be immersed in the exciting adventures of the Toff, making his way towards the bomb that might explode any second, and successfully removing it before the arrival of the troop train. Or, alternatively, he might be compiling a list of the occupants of the studies in the Remove at St. Frank's. Or again, he might be browsing through ancient Magnet titles, fortified by the knowledge that Mrs. Packman was by his side to help.

The monthly activities of the L.O.B.B.C. as described by

Mr. Ben Whiter make interesting reading, and one wonders who are these people whose names appear regularly in print? Ben Whiter, Bob Whiter, Eric Fayne, John Medcraft.....

The pupils of Mr. Fayne, away down at Surbiton, Surrey, must assuredly be amongst the luckiest boys in the world. Fancy having a master who loves the Magnet and Gem! My mind goes back to the days when I stole furtive glances at the Magnet from underneath my desk lid. And I remember having my shining new Gem confiscated from under my very nose by an irate master. Probably, however, even Mr. Fayne does not permit this type of Gem and Magnet reading! But there is no doubt that his boys are certainly lucky people.

One can imagine members of our clan, as they walk down the street, being pointed out by hero-worshipping boys, in the same way that Compton or Hutton is pointed out. "Look," they excitedly whisper in awe-struck tones. "Look - there's Compton or Edrich or Hutton! Got his 1000 runs in May." They might equally stare at Len Peckman or Eric Fayne, and in the same awe-struck whisper, "Look, Len Peckman! Got his 1000 Gems last year!"

Such is fame!

It is indeed gratifying to note the elergy amongst our members. It is more than gratifying to know that they find relaxation in reading Frank Richards. There is one thing pretty certain about all these people who form our circle of collectors. They must be happy people, who know how to get the best out of life. An example appears to be Mr. Peard Sutherland in far away Vancouver, in Canada. This gentleman has been good enough to send me his photograph which reveals a happy, smiling personality, suitably surrounded by Magnets and Gems and a very charming small daughter. It is nice to know that these Canadians can appreciate English life as is portrayed by Mr. Hamilton.

Away up in Yorkshire at Hull, to be precise, is Mr. Leslie Branton, a gentleman with whom I correspond quite a lot. I have never seen him, and it is doubtful if I ever shall. Yet I feel that I know him well. I have no idea what he looks like - he tells me that it is just as well - but I do know that if it hadn't been for the Collectors' Digest, I should have missed some most agreeable and entertaining correspondence. I have a notion that he is tall, wears horn-rimmed spectacles, flannel trousers and a sports

jacket, and might be mistaken for a University don.

It is interesting to reflect on how one became aware that other people actually collected Magnets and Gems. In my case, I will remember how, whilst in the Services in 1943 I was astonished to read an advertisement for Magnets in the "Exchange and Mart". As a result of some correspondence I was contacting a Mr. Jack Corbett of Birmingham who has been good enough to send me frequent copies of the "Story Paper Miscellany".

In many ways I am more indebted to Mr. Corbett than anybody for "putting me wise" in the matter of "The Collectors' Digest" within a couple of issues of its career.

I know Mr. Corbett to be a lover of Weston-super-Mare, but unfortunately we have never yet met. Some time ago an article on Mr. Quelch by Dr. Wilson of Glasgow gave me great pleasure.

One can well imagine, in these days of "National Health", the relief Dr. Wilson must obtain from his scanty leisure hours with his Magnets. It is nice to reflect that whilst Dr. Wilson is busy diagnosing tonsillitis in some unfortunate patient, he is wondering whether The Bounder succeeded in negotiating the fence round the Three Fishers, and is looking forward to the next Magnet in the series.

So far I have not had the honour of meeting our tireless editor, Mr. Herbert Leckenby. Since embarking on his editorship, Mr. Leckenby has, as the saying goes, got around a bit. He is well known in London, he has broadcast from Leeds. In his enthusiasm for the hobby he is tireless.

One can well imagine the violent activity in the York typing and duplicating agency as the C.D. goes to press each month. And what a gigantic task Herbert wades through each month when the time arrives to despatch all those C.D.'s to their subscribers! Quite frankly, I don't know how Herbert does it. I am sure that each month when the C.D. is slipped through the letter-box, a new vast army of "C.D.-ites" breath a little prayer that Herbert has once more risen to the occasion.

This does not decry the efforts of Mr. Maurice Bond, who, in his quiet, but effective way, contributes his Blake quote with regularity and charm. I am not a great Blake fan myself, but like most C.D. fans have read him a great deal years ago, and I am a firm admirer of the drawings of Eric Parker. But I do know that despite little support, Maurice contrives to bring the true Blake atmosphere into his most readable

section of the Collectors' Digest.

Most C.D. readers have a lot of reason to thank their lucky stars for the existence of Mr. William Martin of Stonebridge Park, N.W.10. His rubber stamps must be on countless hundreds of Gems and Magnets. Good luck to him, and long may he continue to supply our long felt wants!

For many years I have been an admirer of Mr. Frank Pettingell and I am sure that all members of the clan of collectors are delighted to have this distinguished actor in their circle. I have seen Mr. Pettingell on stage and screen, and have heard him several times on the air, one of his best performances surely being the old Yorkshire industrialist in J.B. Priestley's "An Inspector Calls".

With such a variety of distinguished professions represented in our circle, it makes one realise that our hobby isn't such an adolescent one as many people may think.

I was most interested to see a photograph of Mr. A. V. Lawson in the Leader of a few months ago. Mr. Lawson is, I understand, the oldest member of our group, and I only hope I look as happy and contented in another thirty odd years.

This will probably depend on whether the Kremlin permits the re-publication of the Magnet and Gem! It is something of a relief to consider that names like Harry Wharton, Tom Merry, Smithy, Levison, Cardew, Bob Cherry, Sexton Blake, Nelson Lee, still live, despite the advent of the Kaiser, Hitler, Mussolini, and now No.1 disturber of the peace, Joseph Stalin.

MAGNET TITLES (Continued)

401, Bunter's Anti-tuck Campaign; 402, The Midnight Marauders; 403, Straight as a Die; 404, Going the Pace; 405, The Remove Eleven on Tour; 406, The Conjuror's Captive; 407, The Jape of the Season; 408, The Rebels of the Remove; 409, Harry Wharton & Co's Pantomime; 410, Bunter the Masher; 411, The Bounder's Relapse; 412, Hazeldene's Honour; 413, The Schoolboy Speculator; 414, Bob Cherry's Challenge; 415, The Colonel's Cup; 416, Fought for and Won; 417, Foes of the Sixth; 418, Shielding a Scapegrace; 419, Coker's Engagement; 420, Flooring Fishy; 421, Skinner the Skipper; 422, His Highness; 423, When Friends Fall Out; 424, The Mailed Fist at Greyfriars; 425, Micky Desmond's Luck; 426, The Terrible Two; 427, False Evidence; 428, The Upper Hand; 429, Coker's Conscript; 430, The Forbidden Match; 431, The Hero of Greyfriars; 432, The Boy from South Africa

Old Boys' Book Club

London. East Dulwich Meeting. August 27th.

Returning after a fortnight's browsing amongst the old book shops of Dublin, Belfast and the Isle of Man, it is with great pleasure that I report the latest chairman's meeting. Following Eric Fayne's great effort of last month so ably reported by brother Bob, it was with pleasure that a score of members assembled at Len's popular rendezvous. His able partner, J. sie, fresh, after her efforts in both Hamiltonia and Blakiana, had devised a real difficult quiz. This was conducted first and caused quite a good deal of serious thinking by the participants. Genial Charlie Wright defeated the strong field by amassing a total of 23 points, with Bob Blythe, Bob and Ben Whiter sharing 2nd place with 11 points. Creditable mention must be given to John Geal and that formidable challenger from the Northern branch, Clive Simpson, who each had 9 points. Truly some good efforts in a very difficult yet popular quiz.

The usual formal business was soon dealt with and a good financial report was given by the treasurer.

The chairman expressed his thanks for the good response to his request of last month about members bringing along many duplicates etc., for the sale and exchange. Good business was done and he asked the gathering to try and bring supplies to the Hove meeting.

The good news about Bob Blythe was well received and on a proposal by the secretary and seconded by the chairman it was agreed to unanimously that the club obtain and send him a supply of the Nelson Lee coloured crested notepaper that our own Jack Wood is in a position to supply.

Another unanimous vote was that a copy of every Frank Cichards book published be purchased and circulated round the members for their perusal.

This brought one of the highlights of the evening as chairman Len announced the postal members ballot. Six books were drawn for and the fortunate winners were J. Wood, E. Lundy, R. Jones, E. Blight, W. Orr, and Robby. These books will be dispatched as soon as published. The postal members' quiz is in the course of preparation, so all these members are

advised to brush up their knowledge of the hobby in readiness.

And so a memorable meeting came to a close with a hearty vote of thanks to the host and hostess.

Attendance quite good despite the holiday season was Len and Josie Peckman, C. and O. Wright, R. and M. Deacon, J. Geal, W. Lawson, C. Wallis, Robby, Harry Homer, F. Keeling, R. Southwood, A. Stewart, J. Burrell, R. Godsave, Clive Simpson, E. Reynolds, R. and B. Whiter.

BENJAMIN G. WHITER.

Old Boys' Book Club

"Floreat Hove"

The club has had some very memorable meetings in the past, but none to surpass the one at Hove, Sussex on September 17th. Once again a happy party of members, with the worthy chairman, Len Peckman, in command, left Victoria station bound for the "New House" by kind invitation of Dr. Holmes, alias Robby. A splendid run down was followed by a grand walk along the Brighton front to Hove, the heavy seas running and the high wind giving the party a keen appetite. In fact, the wind reminded the vice-president, "Our Herbert", of his native Yorkshire moors. Well, the hour approached for meeting time, the well-loved figure of Robby appeared, and soon we were on our way to the "New House". On the way we were joined by the doyen of the club, Arthur Lawson, who had come down by a later train. On arriving we were soon installed in a grand room and after some get-together conversation, chairman Len opened proceedings with a few well chosen remarks about our worthy vice-president, and a note of thanks to the host and hostess. Our Herbert was then called upon to give his address and this he did in a right good manner. He stated how pleased he was to be with us once again. Continuing, he spoke of his round of visits to various members including the meeting of Rex Dolphin at the Arsenal Stadium, the visit to the latter being arranged by another Bleke fan, Harry Homer. No doubt Herbert's worthier pen will describe his happy times elsewhere. Furthermore he spoke of the past events, viz. the formation of the Northern Branch, his B.B.C. broadcast, the forthcoming Leeds Exhibition, and the grand publicity in the northern newspapers. He stressed the feast of good things that would appear in the "Annual" and said it would be the best so far. To this grand address

Len Packman suitably replied and thanked Herbert for all his good work. A telegram was then read from the President, Frenk Richards, wishing the meeting every success, and a very happy time.

The usual formal business was then disposed of, and the company retired to a feed that would have gladdened the hearts of all the fat boys of the old books we love so well. Kay and her willing band of helpers are to be congratulated on such a splendid repast. During the feasting the house of surprises, as friend Hylton put it, was greatly enjoyed. The musical boxes, clocks and stereoscopic viewers with photographs of last year's gathering, were greatly admired. Returning to the meeting room, business was resumed. The better supply of books to postal members was to be sully discussed at the next meeting.

The quiz then followed and the result was a very popular one, as a copy had been sent to Bob Blythe and he had the most points, 12 to be correct. A foregone conclusion was the filling of second place by Len Packman; you cannot keep him down on old boys' book knowledge. He had 11 points, and then came R. Crollie and Bob Whiter with ten points each. Two other good performers were Herbert and his host Charlie, who, no doubt, had burned quite a lot of midnight oil discussing our hobby. Robby then presented the prizes and then Pearl White came into her own as Robby showed a couple of episodes of "The Exploits of Elsie", which were greatly enjoyed by a fully appreciative audience.

Two new members were announced and these were G.W. Fuller and H.C.N.Price. The latter gentleman has all the Sexton Bleke libraries except five.

Next meeting will be at 706, Lordship Lane, Wood Green, London, N.22, on Sunday October 15th.

And so another chapter in the history of the hobby closed with Robby seeing us off to the bus ere catching our various trains.

Attendance: Herbert Leckenby, Len, Josie and Eleanor Packman, Charlie and Olive Wright, John and Mrs. Geal, A. W. Lawson, Harry Homer, Fylton-Flatman, Roger Southwood, Ron Crollie, E. Reynolds, Bob and Ben Whiter, Robby, Key, Elaine, little Julie, Joan and Angela.

BENJAMIN G. WHITER.

Old Boys' Book ClubNorthern SectionAugust 26th, 1950, 239 Hyde Park Rd., Leeds.

The Chairman opened the meeting promptly at 6.30 p.m. We were pleased to see there Harold Ogden from Manchester, and Harry Dowler of course was there from the same place. It couldn't be a meeting without Harry.

The minutes of the previous meeting were read by the Secretary and the Treasurer made his report.

The question of holding a meeting at the time of the Exhibition was discussed. There was a strong feeling in favour of it, so Saturday September 30th was fixed. It was thought that members could visit the Exhibition in the afternoon, then go on to Hyde Park Road, thus making a real good day of it.

The Secretary reported that owing to the holidays he had not been able to see the City Librarian recently, but it was understood all books on show would be in glass cases, and under supervision, and that members would be able to visit the Library on Sunday, Sept. 24th, to arrange the lay-out. S.F. Armitage promised to get advanced publicity into several local papers.

Harry Dowler then gave an interesting talk on that grand old paper, the "Boys' Friend", a talk which was much enjoyed.

Bill Sawyer reported that whilst in London he had had a chat with Mr. Charles Skilton and that as a result, forthcoming Bunter Books would be available to members at a reduced price, probably 5/6. Members who could not attend meetings could apply to him by post.

Refreshments were then taken and afterwards the Librarian got busy.

Members present: Miss Vera Coates, Harry Dowler, Harold Ogden, Harry Berlow, Norman Smith, Reg. Hudson, Horace Twinham, S. F. Armitage, Charlie Price, W. L. Williamson, Gerald Allison, and Herbert Leckenby, Northern Section Correspondent.

Time is getting on. Have YOU
ordered your Annual yet?

Advertise in the Annual 2d. word.
It will be read from cover to cover.

Advertisement for the C.D. 1d. word.

Nelson Lee Column

(Conducted by Robert Blythe)

All communications temporarily to Leonard Peckman,
27 Archdale Road, East Dulwich, S.E.22.

First of all, I am sure Lee-ites (and others) will be glad to hear that Bob Blythe is out of hospital. He is now convalescing at home, but it will be some time before he is able to resume his activities. However, the fact that he is with his wife and little baby son is something ALL will rejoice in.

Incidentally, the O.B.B.C. competitive quiz held at Hove on Sunday 17th September, a copy of which was sent to Bob, resulted in a surprise win for him - by a short hand. If this is what he can do after a protracted illness, I can foresee some "nice work" from him when he gets cracking in the hobby again.

The "scoop" anticipated a couple of months ago has, unfortunately, had to be postponed. It will, however, be forthcoming very shortly.

Now for another item of great importance. Thanks to Jack Wood, the second part of the St. Frank's article, the first part of which appeared in last year's C.D. Annual (by Bob Blythe), will be in this year's edition. I have already seen the manuscript and, believe me, it's a real mine of information. Gallons of midnight oil must have been burnt in the course of necessary research. Great work, Jack!

Quite a few collectors have taken my tip and bought some Nelson Lees from Bill Martin. His stock is going down, and those of you who are still "wanting", should step in while the opportunity presents itself. At any rate, there should be no necessity to send me an S.O.S. for "Lees"!

This month sees the completion of Nelson Lee old series titles. Next month will see the first batch of 1st new

series titles, so, as Bob would say, "Press on"!

551, The Ghosts of Dorrimer Island; 552, The New Year Revellers; 553, The Schoolboy Dictator; 554, The Tyrant of the West House; 555, The Schoolboy Despot; 556, The Revolt of the West House; 557, The Flame of Rebellion; 558, The Town Commander; 559, The School Without a Master; 560 Loyalty Wins!; 561, The Lure of the Footlights; 562, Stage-Struck Archie; 563, Handforth on the Trail; 564, The Triumph of Trackatt Grim;; 565, The Stolen Play; 566, Handy, Behind the Scenes; 567, St. Frank's in Court; 568, Handy's Round-up.

Finally, a few more Boys' Realm St. Frank's stories:-

134, Trained to Lose; 135, Rivals Awheel; 136, The Rugger Remove; 137, Skaters and Schemes; 138, The Gamesmaster's Attonement; *140 Septimus the Knight-Errant; 143, Nipper's Pentamino; 146, Fenton the Rake; 149, The Ghost of Westlake Hall; 151, The St. Frank's Brass Band; 152, A Bubble Burst; 154, Sir Monty's Miner; 156, A Secret Film; 159, The Reclaiming of Rawston; 162, The Wozlem's Egg; 166, Fatty and the Fair One; 168, The Last Laugh; 170, Timothy Tucker's Triumph; 172, The Horse Thieves; 174, The Life Savers.

* Intermittent after No. 138.

Next Meeting: Old Boys' Book Club, Northern Section, Saturday October 28th, 6 p.m. at 239 Hyde Park Road, Leeds. If you are thinking of joining the Club, come along to this meeting.

WANTED: Fantasy fiction in old boys' books and otherwise. Will exchange. Henry J. H. Bartlett, Poes Hill, Shinton Gorge, Bridport, Dorset.

"Tom Merry's Own" is out!

Time is getting on. Have YOU ordered your Annual yet?

HOLIDAY SUPREMEBy Herbert Leckenby

Well, it's all over, and here I am biting the end of my pen and running my hand through my hair, wondering where on earth to start. Inevitably it's going to be an inadequate account of a marvellous holiday. It's two o'clock in the morning, and I keep staring at the clock with a misty eye as I think of all that has happened and the crowd of good fellows of both sexes who had conspired to make memorable the visit of a country cousin to town. My thoughts travel back further to occasions when I came up for a day and knew not a single soul. No wonder I marvel at the contrast.

Well, by adding four pages to this issue I'll try and give some account of what has happened to me. First, I must place something which occurred during the early part of my stay, a meeting with Bob Blythe. I had expected to visit him at the hospital; instead I saw him in his own home, for happy to relate he had returned there a day or two before. I was so pleased to see him looking so well and cheerful in the company of his devoted wife and the sturdy son he was seeing for the first time. May he soon be active again in the Club he did so much to bring into being.

Then there was that great occasion - the Brighton meeting. Ben Whiter, that energetic secretary, tells you about it in his report, but I must add my quota for it fairly shook me. The generosity, cordiality, and hospitality of dear old Robby and his good lady was simply astonishing. I am not ashamed to say that when I looked at that happy throng I felt a tugging at the heart strings. No wonder that when on splitting up at Victoria round about midnight the verdict of us all was "The end of a perfect day".

Whilst there I had the pleasure of meeting for the first time the "Father of the House", Arthur Lawson, and also one of our very youngest members, Roger Southwood. He had actually travelled all the way from Fernborough, a journey which would take him three or four hours each way. He was at Brighton first, too. There's enthusiasm for you.

A third member of the circle I met there for the first time was Ron Crollie, of Romford. It was his first visit to a meeting. I've an idea it won't be his last. May I be there on one of the occasions, Ron.

Another great thrill, with a delightful surprise in

addition, was a visit to the Arsenal game on the Saturday. This thanks to the generosity and scheming of that great fellow with the beaming countenance - Harry Homer. I made my way to my seat in the front row of the West stand there to find seated in the adjoining ones - Rex and Mrs. Dolphin. I have corresponded with Rex for years but this was the first meeting. That's a perfect example of the plotting that goes on to make memorable a fellow's holiday. And that wasn't all. After the game we were greeted by Harry Homer, who introduced us to several well-known personalities, took us on a tour of the famous "Gunnery" headquarters, and entertained us to tea. I enjoyed every moment, even though I was chuffed because a Yorkshire team had been slaughtered.

Here's an account of another typical day. At 11 a.m. I met Eric Landy at Liverpool Street, renewing acquaintance after two years. An enjoyable chat about "Aldines" over a cup of tea. 1-30 p.m. found me at Bill Martin's where I gazed in awe at his vast stock, stacks and stacks of all the favourites. I wonder how many cellars and attics he has emptied through his enterprise during the past few years. A long 'bus journey and at 4 o'clock I was greeted by Tom Strype in Grays Inn Road, magic name to all Nelson Lee fans. A great fellow, Tom! He escorted me to a cafe, where he would have me sit at the very same table I had set at exactly a year before, and where Harry Dowler had set in the meantime. Sentiment? Of course it's sentiment, but oh how I love such touches. 6 p.m. back at Greenwich where I found Charlie Vennimore awaiting me. Over tea I heard something of his marvellous collection, a collection of which you, too, will hear something anon.

Not a bad day that for a veteran, but then whilst in London I seem to be invigorated with some Greyfriars elixir of youth.

Other memories come crowding - delightful evenings at Eric Payne's and Jimmy Stewart-Hunter's, with Tom Satchell looking in at the latter's, as he had done on two earlier occasions; a return visit to John Shaw's with the minutes speeding on wings.

And, oh, I mustn't forget my very first evening when my fellow Yorkshireman, Clive Simpson, came along to Greenwich. We sat jawing until the early hours, so much so that Clive had to stay till breakfast-time, as it's a long walk to Twickenham. An absorbing subject ours.

Another perfect afternoon with Arthur Richardson at Aerial

House, Theobalds Road, talking not of aviation; instead the golden days of the Boys' Friend and other long dead papers. The subject again so fascinating that I was five minutes late in my appointment with Roger Jenkins at the Marble Arch. More tea with Roger, then a long walk through Hyde Park, Green Park and on to Waterloo, hearing on the way something about Roger's articles on Vernon Smith for the Annual.

And twice I had the pleasure of finding myself in that room at Wood Green, now almost as famous as the fictitious ones at Greys Inn Road and Baker Street, the room where the Old Boys Book Club first saw the light, the home of those stalwarts, Ben and Bob Whiter, and where now numerous trophies hang.

An interlude was a run to Southend to see the illuminations. Well, not an interlude exactly, for Charlie Wright and I talked all the way there and all the way back on the eternal subject. Our only regret was there was no time to fix up an appointment with Bill Colcombe.

And on the majority of my journeys I was accompanied by those faithful and tireless guides, Len Peckman and Charlie Wright. Len met me at Kings Cross on my arrival, Charlie would have done so if he had not had an appointment with the dentist. They both said au revoir to me on my departure. They had plotted and planned for days before my arrival in order to make my holiday the happiest yet. How well they succeeded! It went like clockwork, there was not a hitch from start to finish. With them I must link Josie and Olive who looked after my comfort in splendid fashion. It's indeed a heavy debt I owe them.

Verily the streets of London are paved with golden memories for evermore.

WANTED URGENTLY: Gems No's 819 and 946. Josephine Peckman, 27 Archdale Road, East Dulwich, London, S.E.22.

FOR SALE: 112 Detective Weeklies, No's 23-139. Only 5 copies missing to complete run. 2 Greyfriars Holiday Annuals, 1925-26. 2 Chums Annuals, 1938-39. Offers, C. Baker, 7 Marine Terrace, Waterloo, Ceernarvon.

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

FOR SALE: Bound volume Nelson's Lee Library Sept. 1928 to Dec. 1928. In good condition. Offers. Kenneth H. Shaw, 6 Swift Street, Bernsley, Yorkshire.

THE LEEDS EXHIBITION

No sooner was I back from London than I was off to Leeds to help arrange this great event. Reg. Hudson kindly put me up and Sunday morning found us in a large, lofty hall in the Leeds Central Library, a room admirably suited for our purpose. Bill Sawyer, who has worked like a Trojan to make it a success, was already there, and with him Vera Coates. We were joined by Norman Smith and Gerry Allison, and were soon at work filling the rows of glass cases. By tea-time we had finished, and the result of our labours looked good indeed. Particularly effective were the Hamilton and John Medcraft sections. Notice boards were filled with press cuttings and old time posters. In the entrance hall were three well filled, lit-up cases just to give visitors a fore-taste of what they were to see inside. And now I will hand over to Bill Sawyer who will tell you something about the opening day.

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THE DAY!

By W. F. Sawyer

The 25th at last! I started off with a pile of letters, one from Frank Richards expressing his good wishes. Several 'phone calls, then dashed off to the Art Gallery. There was grabbed by two fellows with "machine guns" who wanted to take my photograph. A "Magnet" and a "Gem" were removed from the show-case, and we got going. Then they wanted a boy, so the search started. Boys are not easily come by at 10-30 in the morning, but eventually one was found. Large model of Bunter was then removed from case, and more photographs taken. Reporters now got busy. Managed to get home for lunch, which was interrupted by more 'phone calls.

More interviews on getting back to Art Gallery. Then Mr. Shewcross, editor Yorkshire Evening News, Councillor Mrs. D. Murphy, deputy chairman, Library Committee, and Sir George Martin, ex-Lord Mayor of Leeds, arrived. I introduced them to the crowd, and Mrs. Murphy made a short speech. Then Mr. Shewcross declared the Exhibition open, and confessed that his boyhood favourites were Jack, Sam and Pete. I then thanked the speakers. More reporters, more pictures and a 'phone call (even here I couldn't dodge them).

We had a steady crowd all day and during the dinner hour (before the Exhibition was officially open) quite a rush.

The Exhibition is obviously going to be a huge success, and it is possible it will be extended beyond the fortnight originally arranged.

I went home at 9 p.m. tired, but happy.

OFFERS INVITED FOR: 4 bound volumes as follows:

- 1) 1d. Marvel's No's 25/29 and 31. (6)
- 2) True Blue - 3 copies including one Xmas Double Number. 1d. Marvel's No's 93/94, 113. (6)
- 3) Union Jacks No's 25/32. (8)
- 4) 1d. Marvels No's 17/18, 21/24. (6)

All above neatly bound with stiff covers and all papers complete except covers.

Nelson Lee Library, 3rd New Series. complete 25 numbers in mint condition. J. Hepburn, 1 Sixth Ave., Blyth, N'land.

CORRECTIONS

The September number was numbered No. 46 on the cover in error. It should have been 45.

There were some errors in tabulating the Magnet volumes in Bill Martin's advert. last month. Some items were also omitted. It appears this month as it should have done in September. It was decided not to sell anything until the advert. reappeared.

(Letter Box contd. from p.297)

Mr. Geal's assumption that the Cleverhouse House yarns, purported to have been written by Wally Hemmond, were the work of Gunby Hedeth, and so enquired direct from Mr. Hedeth himself. In a card received from him today from his home in the French Alps he tells me that most emphatically he never used Wally Hemmond's name as an alias and asks me to correct Mr. Geal's statement. Mr. Hedeth told me some time ago that he had never written for boys' magazines since the days of the CAPTAIN, so it would seem that the "John Beresford" yarns are not from his pen either.

Yours sincerely,

ARTHUR J. SOUTHWAY

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Letter Box

More About Jack of All Trades

Rose Lawn, Kingsgate-on-Sea,
Broadstairs, Kent.

September 9th, 1950.

Dear Herbert Leckenby,

Many thanks for the C.D. which dropped in yesterday. You have given us some very good items this time. I like very much A.K.Harris's article. Evidently he regarded the old paper as a "Gem of purest ray serene": though unaffected by the Magnetic attraction of its companion! Bernard Prime's article on our plump old friend Mr. Prout is - to me at least - very enjoyable reading. And I endorse every word in Tom Johnson's letter re the article last month on the "Famous Five".

Thanks to Leonard Peckman for his kind remarks on "Jack of All Trades". What he says about the incompleteness, as Hurree Singh might call it, of the book, is quite correct; but the fact is that the "Jack of All Trades" series is somewhat in the nature of an experiment. In the old days of the Magnet, a vast majority of readers plumped for the "series" which practically amounted to a serial - a dozen or so numbers being filled to make the story complete. Frank Richards had the bright idea - as he deemed it - of a series of books on the same lines; the story developing from book to book instead of from number to number as in the old Magnet. Each book will give a definite section of Jack's career; but the main theme will be carried on from one volume to another. I have had this idea in mind for many years; and I think I have mentioned it to you before, some time or other; I don't think it had ever been done before, but why not a new departure sometimes? So there you are, Leonard! I am looking forward to the Annual, and especially to Eric Payne on the popular Popular.

With kind regards, Always yours sincerely,
FRANK RICHARDS,

=====
Gunby Hadath Settles It

P.O. Box 8, Beaconsfield,
Cape Province, South Africa.

16th August 1950.

Dear Mr. Editor,

Further to Mr. John Geal's letter to the June DIGEST, and to Mr. Allen's reply in the July DIGEST. I rather doubted

(Contd. p. 295)

 B L A K I A N A .

SEPTEMBER 1950.

THE ROUND TABLE.

I hope that you will not think that we have entirely dispensed with the now familiar heading to this section. I had to leave it out last month owing to the length of the Walter Webb feature, and find, as a result of that "one feature" item that I have a lot to insert this month and so must make use of all available space. I hope the section will look normal in the November issue of the C.D.

Since writing my last Round Table chat I have had the very great pleasure of meeting, for the first time, one of the most ardent Blake fans and a regular contributor to both the C.D. and the Annual. Accompanied by his wife, Irma, Rex Dolphin arrived one Sunday morning. As you may guess we had some delightful hours talking over our common interest and once again it seemed to me that there must be some magical influence within the Blake circle, for it seemed as though Rex and I had known each other for years. Everything seemed so natural and I must confess that I was sorry to see Rex and his wife leave us on the Monday morning. Don't forget, I will welcome any Blake fan who comes this way.

I would like to apologise to Leonard Packman for the abrupt cutting off of his fine little article "Worlds Greatest Actor Detective" in the August issue. I expect he will have realised that space was the problem. Believe me it is no easy task to fit all these things in, in fact sometimes it is a decided headache. However, the conclusion of Leonard's feature appears in this issue and I hope that we shall be able to avoid such happenings in the future.

Let me know what you think of our new innovation. I refer to the brief criticisms of the S.B.L. 3rd series volumes now published. Reactions to this and other features will be appreciated.

In conclusion let me impress upon all Blakians that the C.D. Annual for this year WILL definitely contain the long omitted "Confederation" feature by Harry Homer. I think you will all like it.

H. I. BOND.

SEXTON BLAKE - WORLD'S GREATEST ACTOR-DETECTIVE

By Leonard Packman
(Concluded from No. 44)

As could only be expected, Blake could not go on changing roles at such speed for ever, and he had to slow down considerably, being content with Yachtsmen (408), Hawker (424), Music Hall Manager (440), King's-Prizemen (458), and Laundrymen (467).

By this time Blake had pretty well covered all the parts that even such a great actor as he could play. It is therefore not surprising that from this time onward we find him in only a very occasional role.

In between times, Blake, of course, was far from idle. However, we find him at a later date in the role of Pirate (618), Lumberjack (968), Gun Runner (992), Convict (1250) - this must have been a favourite role of Blake's, for it was the second time he had played the part! - Lord Mayor (1308), and finally, Gangster (1414).

To sum up, it is definitely known that Sexton Blake played at least 82 different roles in the course of the 29 odd years of this "Union Jack" series, and I do not think anyone can dispute my title of - "Sexton Blake - World's Greatest Actor-Detective"!

THE SEXTON BLAKE LIBRARY - AUGUST 1950

No. 221. The Mystery of the Crooked Gift. Anthony Parsons.

This story of blackmail has a good beginning, and when the scene shifts to India the impression of place is realised quite credibly.

Blake is well portrayed, but one wishes he had the adventures himself, instead of merely solving these complicated "Who-dun-its". His ethics at the end of this tale are surprising, to say the least.

But Carter Schib! Obsessed with "nifty bits of fluff", and using out-of-date vulgarisms, (titfers, etc), he revolted me. And his execrable and tasteless pun in the Bombay margin. A proper S-TINKER!

No. 222. The Case of L. A. C. Dickson. John Drummond.

A quite enjoyable tale, with one cosy little scene in

Baker Street. Some convincing characters, and a plausible plot.

Blake's assistant was more like the Tinker we used to know, but even here his master had to say sharply, "Less flippancy, please. It's bad enough, without having to listen to your jokes too. Sit down."

That's the way to talk, sir.

G. A.

THE MYSTERY OF SEXTON BLAKE!

By Charles Baker

I was always under the impression that the first Sexton Blake story ever published appeared under the title of - "Sexton Blake - Detective" in the "Union Jack", May 4th 1894, and that it was written by Harry Blyth. The plot centred round a coffin being exhumed from a grave in a churchyard at dead of night; there was an illustration of Sexton Blake holding up a lantern to give light to the sexton and grave diggers to work by. I thought this spot of undertaking had given the author the idea of the name, "Sexton". However, now I understand that a much earlier adventure of Sexton Blake was published in the "Marvel" in 1893; this has been recorded in an interesting article by Mr. Walter Webb.

As the serial "Sexton Blake at School" has also been mentioned by Mr. Webb, I would like to say a few words on this matter. The serial commenced in the "Boy's Herald," No. 238 - Vol. V, February 8th, 1908. The lad afterwards known as Sexton Blake, first appeared in the story without a name, living a strange life in a grim forbidding martello tower in a lonely spot, his only companion being his guardian, an eccentric man known as Dr. Lancheater; the boy on returning to the tower one night is horrified to find that Dr. Lancheater, his only friend, has been murdered. The boy discovers a letter telling him to go to a certain house in London where he will find friends. The house to which he goes is a magnificent building in the heart of London. The boy's arrival is announced by a footman to two distinguished looking men, one of whom springs to his feet with a startled exclamation, "We must not tell him his correct name!" he exclaims. "We will call him Blake - Sexton Blake!"

The author, Cecil Heyter, started off in splendid style, but to my mind, did not manage to keep it up, for after the reader had been filled with high expectations of finding that Blake might be heir to a throne or something of the sort, the story after showing great promise at the start grows very weak at the end, and after all the mystery about Blake's name, no real explanation is given, only that Sexton Blake's father, a Dr. Berkely Blake, had discovered a formula and had been murdered by a certain Francois Leroux, head of a powerful gang of crooks. What the formula was we are not really told; of course if it was one for the Atom Bomb there might be something in it! I have always thought that when Cecil Heyter commenced the story that he intended it to have quite a different ending to the insipid one he gave it. It was never explained why the lead's real name should be kept from him, or why the name of Dr. Lenchester should work such wonders whenever it was mentioned, or what happened to Sexton Blake's double?

"Sexton Blake at School" was later published in an abridged form as a complete tale in the "Boy's Friend 3d. Library (first series) No. 102, and in this edition Blake still appeared as a boy of unknown name.

Many years later in 1933, the story was again re-published in the Boy's Friend 4d. Library (2nd series) No. 388, but with some alterations, Blake appears right from the start as Sexton Blake, the author is now given as John Andrews. In the two former editions the headmaster of St. Ann's was Dr. Wilson, but he has now become Dr. Locke!

It is interesting to note that in the Boy's Herald p.672 of No.250, and again on p.801 of No.258, June 27th 1908, Hamilton Edwards states that "Sexton Blake at School" was written by Cecil Heyter.

NOTE

To those admirers of Sexton Blake who walk along Baker Street, wondering at which house their hero may reside, I give them this hope:-

In the "Boy's Herald" No.225, Vol.V, Nov.9th 1907, in "Your Editor's Advice" col.3, Hamilton Edwards replies to reader J.L.M. (How to remove freckles) "Sexton Blake is a real detective, is still alive, as many criminals know to their cost, but for obvious reasons, I cannot tell you his real name, or the precise address at which he resides." !!!

I am afraid he must be rather an old gentleman now, as I

see it has been mentioned that he was in the Princess Alice disaster of 1878. Cecil Hayter writes in the school tale of Blake riding in a motor car as a boy, but I do not think any cars were about in 1878. It is all a great mystery, a mystery that only Sexton Blake himself could solve.

ZENITH'S LOVE AFFAIRS

- By A. Young

The first "Zenith" story, "A Duel to the Death", appeared in the U.J. in 1918, and the last one appeared in the U.J.'s successor, "The Detective Weekly" early in the War. Zenith therefore flourished for about twenty-one years. During the whole of that period, he seemed to have only one love affair, and I don't think it was with Frau Krenz. Judging from Anthony Skene's description of her, I should think Zenith's association was purely business and platonic. Zenith undoubtedly fell in love with a Marie Louise, however. She first appeared in "The Case of the Six Clues" when Blake on holiday accidentally stumbles into a country house at which Zenith is giving a dinner party. Marie Louise was present at this party and Blake dined with them. I do not think the sweet was ever reached, since Oaklahoma Sam appeared on the scene with the announcement that Tinker had been nabbed by him, and in the ensuing struggle Blake not only cuffed some of Zenith's Japs, backheeled Zenith into the fireplace, but set fire to his house as well. We next hear of Marie Louise in that fine yarn, the "Case of the Crystal Gazer". It will be recalled that Tinker on the track of Zenith receives a terrific blow on the head with a heavy sponner, but as he is wearing a crash cap under his real cap he is only stunned. Zenith, who had just had an opium bout, thought he was killed. Marie Louise expresses sorrow that such a fine lad should be killed when so young, and Zenith then expresses his love for this lady. He also has an assignation with her and when Blake unconsciously saves her life, Zenith returns the favour by sparing Blake's, so that he must have been pretty fond of her. Marie Louise is mentioned indirectly in the "Case of the Elsingham Legend", but never appears actually on any scene. In the "Case of the Toxic Tulips", however, she walks with Zenith as an equal to the meeting of the Criminals Convention, and when Zenith is dying she bids him farewell. She disappeared from the scene after that, as she never appeared

with Zenith in the "Return of Zenith the Albino" and subsequent yarns. Perhaps Zenith wearied of her or she found another boy friend in Leon Kestrel or Wado, or maybe some upright sort.

In a previous article I mentioned how I thought Skene's best work was to be found in the series ranging from "A Duel to the Death" to "Plague", which yarns covered a period of about three years. The reason for this, or rather one of the reasons for this, is that Blake's attitude towards Zenith changed in rather a peculiar manner in the later yarns. For instance, in Sexton Blake Library 331, "The Fatal Mascot", Blake actually dines with Zenith in a public restaurant and gives him time to make a getaway. In view of the atrocious ends Zenith had devised for Blake in previous yarns, and more important still in view of Zenith's murderous attempt on Tinker in "The Case of the Crystal Gezer", and his equally murderous attempt on Tinker in "On Secret Service" when Tinker is dumped into a gasometer to suffocate from gas poisoning, it is hardly conceivable that Blake would voluntarily dine and wine with him. Admittedly Blake dined with Zenith in "The Case of the Six Clues" alluded to above, but here it was for strategy to gain time. Again in "The Fatal Mascot" yarn Blake and Zenith were actually allies, which struck a wrong literary note with me. However, Anthony Skene, faults and all, is my great favourite.

COMING SOON! "THE NOVELS OF ANTHONY SKENE"

Northern news in brief

This should be a "gem"
of an exhibition!

WHEN the Leeds "Billy Bunter" Club exhibition of old schoolboy books opens today at Leeds Art Gallery it will be larger than planned because so many people have kept these books.

Hundreds of boys' books, magazines, and comic papers have reached the home of Mr. William Sawyer, secretary of the "Billy Bunter" Old Boys' Book Club (Northern Section), and he is still answering some of the 500 letters.

The books have more sentimental than financial value, say the organisers, and hundreds are expected to visit the exhibition which should bring back many childhood memories.

Yorkshire

Observer:

25.9.50