

The Collectors' Digest.

VOL.6 NO.63 : MARCH 1952 : 1/6 POST FREE : 32 PAGES AGAIN !!!

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Vol. 6 No. 63

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MARCH 1952

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

FROM THE EDITOR'S CHAIR:

"It's Just Right" Following my comments on the policy of the C.D. last month I have had numerous letters assuring me that our little mag. is just as they want it. Several of those who have been in from the beginning remind me of the exciting days of the swindles when the C.D., then only two or three months old, did a great deal to save collectors their money, and to bring one of the swindlers to justice. "It was a good job we had the C.D. then," says one of the old-timers. "Carry on keeping it lively and topical along with its crisp articles. It's just as we want it." I was particularly encouraged by the comments of a new chum who, writing before he had seen what I had to say last month, said:

"I am rather at a loss to express in words my admiration for the C.D. It is informative and entertaining, but it is the personal, human note which is evident from cover to cover that made me enjoy it so much. The format too is extraordinarily good and all responsible for lay-out and duplicating are to be congratulated."

Well, I don't think I need say any more.

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Grievances from Overseas. I have received recently letters from members of our circle in distant lands which have greatly perturbed me. In some instances these friends say they feel a little hurt at delay in replying to letters they have written, or because they have received no reply at all. That's a bit disheartening, but there's an even more serious grievance and that's the condition of books sent out to them, and for which a pretty stiff price has been paid. To show that their complaints are not unjustified some examples have been sent to me. To say that I am shocked is to put it mildly. There are inner pages missing, copies are tattered, and in one instance a cover and commencement of a story has been substituted for that of an entirely different story. I can just picture the dismay and disappointment of the eagerly anticipating collector opening a parcel and finding a considerable proportion of the copies therein in such deplorable condition. It would be bad enough here, but it's ever so much worse when the unfortunate one is thousands of miles away, thus making it at the very best months before he can hope to get redress.

The collector who sent me these dud copies spent 5/- in air-mailing them, a proof of how upset he felt about it.

Whoever sent out the copy with the substitute cover might claim that it looked quite in order from outside. That might be so but in these days of high prices it is only right, and in the long run good business, that copies should be examined before being despatched. Stories with the four centre pages missing, too, are simply useless.

Now in the Commonwealth countries, the U.S.A., and other places there are scores of staunch members of our hobby circle, fellows who love the old papers as much as we do here. They eagerly await news and their parcels. When incidents like those I have described happen they naturally feel advantage is being taken of them. I should hate to think that any of it has been done deliberately, or that it happens often, but I do appeal that copies be examined with special care before despatching them, thus earning the gratitude of a grand lot of fellows across the seas.

= = =

Envelopes. - Last month I secured a supply of envelopes which enabled me to send out copies flat. These are far more satisfactory, and I can mail the month's issue in half the time. But, heavens, how the price has rocketed again. So may I appeal to you to return these new ones when you happen to be writing?

Yours sincerely,
HERBERT LOCKENBY.

Postscript. My appeal ~~about~~ outstanding subs. last month brought a prompt response from several members. But there's still over a score to come and it's over two months since Christmas. Have a heart, you chaps to whom it applies.

THE "ANNUAL" BALLOT
How They Stand Now

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WANTED: For Library Northern Section. To complete Wharton/Quelch Series Magnets 1285, 1286, 1287, 1296. Also Gems 1221, 1222, 1224, 1229, 1236, 1255, 1257, 1258, 1289, 1290, 1291, 1293, 1296, 1297, 1300, 1314, 1639. Please advise. G. Allison, 7 Summerfield Gardens, Bramley, Leeds.

WANTED: Magnets between 700 and 900 or Bound Copies. Pre-war Hotspurs, Triumphs, Skippers, Adventures, Wizards, Rovers, also collected. Lists to P. Willett, Church Cottage, Lallham, Middx. Just returned from abroad and apologies to all those previously sending lists for not replying before.

The "Collectors' Digest"
discovers
THE MOST POPULAR MAGNET STORY OF ALL TIME

Result of the Grand Finale of the
COLLECTORS' DIGEST voting contest

There was a large entry for the Final of this interesting Contest, and the Editor has pleasure in announcing that the popular vote has placed the eight leading Magnet series in the following order:

- 1st, E. THE HARRY WHARTON versus MR QUELCH SERIES.
- 2nd, D. The Lancaster Series.
- 3rd, F. The Christmas Mystery of Wharton Lodge Series.
- 4th, C. The China Series.
- 5th, A. The Bunter Court Series.
- 6th, B. The Redwing-South Seas Series.
- 7th, G. The Popper Island Series.
- 8th, H. Christmas at Polpelly Series.

The First Prize of £1, plus a photograph of the cover of the chief story in the leading series, is awarded to
Anthony Baker,

Christchurch Vicarage,
St. Albans Road,
High Barnet.

The Second Prizes of 5/- each are awarded to
W. Webb, 84 Park Road, Sparkhill, Birmingham.
J. W. Hurrell, 10 Ilfracombe Gardens, Chadwell Heath, Essex.

Consolation Prizes of Schoolboys' Own Libraries are being sent to W. L. Williamson, Leeds; J. Dow, Aberdeen;
C. J. Bartlett, Beckenham.

The Editor thanks the large number of readers who sent in their votes, and helped so materially to the great success of this contest.

SALE/EXCHANGE for Magnets, Boys' Friend Weeklies, Chums 1923, 1924, 1929-30, 1936-37, Schoolgirls' Annual 1924, Captain 1921, S.O.L's, Dixon Hawkes, etc. G. Mell, 41 Woodland Road, Darlington.

THE NELSON LEE COLUMN

All communications to Robert Blythe,
46 Carleton Road, Holloway, London, N.7.

This month we welcome a new writer to the Column, though not to the C.D., Mr. Jones of Penrith, Australia. In the past he has given us some clever and analytical articles on various authors' capabilities as imitators of Charles Hamilton. This month he turns the spotlight on E. S. Brooks, not as an imitator, but as an author in his own right. It is printed here without comment, but I must say that I'm not certain whether he's presenting bouquets, or heaving brickbats!

I said, "without comment"; perhaps I had better add the familiar proviso that the opinions stated are the author's and I do not necessarily agree with them - in fact, I disagree strongly with some of his findings. However, I'm hoping that his arguments will be sufficiently controversial to call forth enough comments to make up an interesting article next month.

E. S. BROOKS

1. In the Nelson Lee Library

By S. F. Jones

It may be noted that Brooks loves to deal with humanity en masse. He is fond of barrings-out, gallant concerted efforts, adventures in strange lands involving groups of characters. His situations are undoubtedly exciting, things like St. Franks' fight against William K. Smith, the struggle against petticoat rule, the saving of the wrecked steamship on the Sussex coast. But here we see the writer's limitations. He can be exciting, he can rarely, however, be dramatic. For real drama you need interplay of character and for character you need depth. This perhaps explains why Brooks is not so successful with individuals. Crowds en masse can be given something exciting to do, individuals must show that they are worth writing about, that is, they must have depth when they are forced to stand alone. Generally speaking, Brooks' barrings-out etc. are every bit as exciting

and interesting as Hamilton's, his attempts to dramatise single characters, on the other hand, are nowhere near Hamilton. Cardew's feud with Tom Merry, Wharton's with Quelch and Stacey, these are beyond him, since he is generally unable to penetrate beyond action to the springs of action, which lie in a careful analysis of character. As a substitute for careful analysis Brooks substitutes surface characteristics. Thus he gives us boys who speak in rhyme, who jumble words like Bertie Onions, who are deaf like Trotwood minor, who perform wonderful physical feats like Waldo junior, who talk pedantically like Timothy Tucker. Hamilton does so too, of course. We see the character of one "talent" in Dutton, Skimpole, Coker and Grundy. Hamilton, however, has given us Wharton, Mauleverer, Vernon-Smith, Cardew, Levison, Talbot, D'Arcy, Messrs. Quelch and Prout, Levison minor and Menners Minor and the immortal W. G. Bunter. Brooks could not go so far. He had to do something, however, and so he gave us a fair collection of freaks. The freaks are vivid, of course, but I deny their dramatic possibilities. Even Handforth must stand with them in company with the impossible Coker and Grundy. It may be noted, however, that a later creation, Vernon Travers, is a good attempt at natural drawing. I am convinced too by the lovable Fatty Little. Nipper is rather an impossibility. Never doing anything wrong, he is forced to tell you so, for the most part in the first person.

Brooks' plots are sometimes marred by improbabilities. In one series, for example, the cads of St. Franks attempt to discredit the reformed Fullwood by inviting him to a gambling orgy. By some trick or other Fullwood is left alone to bear the brunt of the blame when the authorities find out. He clears himself, naturally, but strangely enough, the inquiry into the orgy is not prosecuted to the end. It is forgotten within a few chapters, this most uncommon orgy which at St. Jims or Greyfriars would have raised the roof. Another improbability is the lack of scholastic calm and dignity about St. Franks. One would never suppose that the boys were there to learn things. The school appears merely a centre for some stirring events like flood, siege, rebellion and plotting.

A desire for innovation is too apparent in Brooks. The

school is destroyed, the school is rebuilt, the H. use system is changed, even the old Headmaster disappears, everything is in a state of flux, nothing remains the same. Brooks would have done far better to keep the school as it was in the early twenties. He was certainly then at his best. All he had to do was to develop the characters he already had. I cannot but help thinking that his American journey was responsible in a way for his unaccountable urge to shift and change. Or else his judgment was at fault.

There is a crudeness in Brooks' stories which springs from this love of change. And perhaps there is some over-sensationalism. Together with his occasional harshness and violence of diction they would exclude him from the class of Hamilton. I should say, however, that in spite of all, I have always found him a most interesting and entertaining writer. Here was imagination, power and originality. What a pity that the final polish was missing!

Brooks' diction shows many peculiarities. He is a most individual writer. By his adverbs, for instance, you shall know him. Here they are:- crisply, hotly, darkly ("You've got nothing to grumble at, my fussy!" he said sourly"), smoothly, evenly, coldly, briskly ("said Willy briskly"), harshly, wildly, thickly ("he gasped thickly").

Characteristic adjectives like "bally", "infernal" and "dotty" are real blemishes in Brooks. "Infernally", a natural corollary of "infernal", is used frequently by his adults. Hamilton avoids both and earns our gratitude by so doing. "Squiffy" = "drunk" is a favourite, but Hamilton uses it once or twice. "Dotty" is a signpost for our author.

The use of the ejaculation "Good Gracious" deserves notice. Brooks' adults, particularly the elderly, employ it frequently. They often burst forth into these words or their equivalent in the middle of their speech. "Boy, you will report to my study in one hour's time for a severe cening!" interrupted the Head pleasantly. "Good Gracious! Am I to be defied by my youngest pupils? Go at once! These passages are now out of bounds!"

Brooks loves "and". Sentences frequently begin with this word: "And Henderson lost no time in explaining his position." Interrupted speeches frequently end with "and": "There's nowhere to go and everything's getting worse day

day and —". "And" also introduces paragraphs, a usage not unknown in Hamilton. "Too" is sometimes added to "and", as for example in the following sentence: "And there was something else on this morning too."

To cut things short Brooks likes the phrase "in a nutshell". "The scheme, in a nutshell, was to hold the island as a hostage."

As a concession to vividness Brooks likes making his characters gulp. Handforth is a great exponent: "Handforth gulped"; "Oh rather!" said Bell with a gulp.

During moments of excitement Brooks' schoolboys lose some of their polished language. "'But don't talk about that pond affair. If you do, I'll get wild," said Wallborne the knut in a most unknutly fashion.' "This silly ass has mixed me all up," says another fellow. Allied to these things are questions ending with "eh?" like that addressed by Linton to Castleton in the imitation Gem story by Brooks: "Getting tired of it, eh?"

A peculiarity of our author is to break up some speech after the first word and then resume it. I give three examples:

- (a) "You," said Smith, "have said it."
- (b) "So," said Archie, "I observe."
- (c) "That," said Archie, "is the stuff."

Though not, as far as I know, used by Hamilton, this is not a bad device for getting a kind of humorous emphasis. It suits characters like Archie, who, by the way, is a charming and lovable creation, one of Brooks' best.

"my son" and "my lad" are rather characteristic. If statistics were taken, it would probably be found that Handforth was the latter most frequently.

Brooks likes to emphasise that a thing is really a fact. Hence his fondness for phrases like "as a matter of fact" and "in fact", e.g. "The smoothness of the whole enormous undertaking, in fact, was decidedly startling." Another allied phrase is "to be exact".

In keeping with his somewhat grandiose themes, Brooks uses some big words. Some things are "startling". Someone's assurance is described as "marvellous". Characters tend to be noisy: "shouted Armstrong". A childlike exuberance is displayed when a blow is described as

"a real beauty" - but this is perhaps because Nipper is supposed to be the real narrator. (Next month Brooks as an imitator of Hamilton).

POPULAR PAPERS OF THE PAST

No.16 - The Boys' World; 30/5/1905 - 6/3/1906 -	41 numbers.
The New Boys' World; 13/2/1906 - 30/3/1907.	56 numbers.

By Herbert Leckenby

It is a curious fact that the famous House of Cassells, although they published several successful adult periodicals, never (with the notable exception of Chums) managed to launch a boys' weekly which lived for long. One attempt was the "Boys' World" started in May 1905. Despite the fatherly help of "Chums" it never looked like making a go of it from the start. If those responsible had thought of doing a little snooping at Pearsons in Maiden Lane they might have been warned, for there they might have found that the Boys' Leader was dying when less than two years old. The "Leader" with the aid of some brilliant authors had put up a gallant fight against the mighty Harmsworth trio, the Boys Friend, Boys' Realm and Boys' Herald, but had found the odds too great and was in its death throes. Nevertheless, the Boys' World was born.

For a good deal of the information I have about it I am indebted to Harry Stables of Bradford, but neither have much data on the first series of 41 numbers. It had, however, 15 pages, the large somewhat unwieldy size first made familiar by the Boys' Friend. The paper was white, and there were four columns to a page.

An early serial was "Wolf Man" described as "A Tale of Amazing Adventure in the Underworld". "Underworld" had no reference to the dark side of London, or any other great city, for the story was of a wonderful land under the Arctic ice. It was a real, well-written thriller; the author being one "Frank Powell". It was possibly the pen-name of a more familiar writer, for apart from a sequel to this story I cannot remember coming across him anywhere. Anyway,

he could write.

There was also a series of adventure yarns "Singleton the Searcher" by Singleton Carew, a name familiar to readers of "Chums". So far as I know these yarns and "Wolf-Man" were original, but with No.28 started "Good Old Troddles" by R. Andom, which had certainly appeared elsewhere and, I believe, had been published in book form. Reprints when only six months old did not sound too good, but another serial, "At the Blast of the Bugle" by Percy Laws, starting in the same number, was I think new.

Came No.41, March 6th, 1906, and then a drastic change. The following week appeared "The New Boys' World", "Brightest and Best of Boys' Papers". The page size was reduced to one a little less than that of the Magnet - and there were 48 of them, the price - One Penny. It looked like a desperate attempt to challenge the Boys' Friend and its sturdy companions, but truth to tell, the "New Boys' World" had not a very attractive appearance. The paper on which it was printed was of poor quality and the illustrations, almost without exception, were frightfully amateurish. The front page was printed in colours, but it was not a very good example of the printers' art. Nevertheless, the reading matter was not at all bad, and I suppose that was what mattered most. There were no less than five serials, "McTavish the Great"; "The Vengeance of the Wolf-Man"; "The Runaway Schoolboys" (another story of Troddles and his chums); "The Spectre Motor-Car"; and "The Finding of the 'Golden Hog'". In addition there were two comic pages (in colours) and numerous articles.

The by no means least interesting feature, however, was the new editor. He was A.G. (Smiler) Hales, quite a character of the time. Introducing himself he said he had been a war correspondent and soldier. He had travelled all over the world, had tried gold-digging, the breaking of horses, and big game hunting. He described how he had seen most of the beautiful temples, churches and cathedrals from St.Pauls to the temple of the living Buddha in the Mongol desert. Indeed, a picturesque and unusual personality to have in the editorial chair of a boys' weekly. He wrote a good deal for the paper, too, including the McTavish story mentioned above.

What's more, his editorial column was very interesting and to the onlooker - amusing. As can be expected, he did not pull his punches, his replies to his correspondents were vastly different to the somewhat smug sermonising of Hamilton Edwards or the petulant protests of H. A. Hinton. For instance, the face of one Thomas Alfred K. would be red when he read this:

"You say the other boy struck you. If you will send me that other boy's proper address I will send him a shilling."

Editor Heles didn't seem to like Thomas Alfred K., did he? And here are a few more examples of his straight from the shoulder style. I wonder if the "New Boys' World" lost a few readers as a result. We are assuming, of course, that they were genuine replies to actual correspondents.

Arthur Graves.- Your contribution is absolutely perfect with these exceptions. (1) It is not true. (2) It wouldn't do a farthingsworth of good if it were. (3) It is in horribly bad taste. (4) You would have to fly the country if I published it. (5) They wouldn't let me fly, they'd keep me to pick oakum for about two years for libel. With the above exceptions, Arthur, your contribution is a gem.

A.W.- When a boy is impertinent by post it is a sure and certain sign he is a cur.

U.G.S.- I don't think from your style that you are a boy; certainly not a young boy. Judging by your letter I should put you down at the silly stage, neither boy nor man. Anyway your remarks about the clergymen are in bad taste, they are silly, vapid, and devoid of the saving salt of real humour."

Of course all his replies were not like that; the majority were complimentary and pally. There was also some talk about a great gathering of readers. Whether or not this came off I am unable to say, but I should think it was doubtful, for it wasn't long before there were signs that the paper was entering stormy waters. With No.10 the coloured cover was dropped, the reason given that it made the paper look like a "blood". More likely it was a matter

of economy for the coloured comic pictures disappeared, too. And with No.9 came another reprint, "The Boys of Templeton". Actually, this was Talbot Baines Reed's "Follow my Leader" which had appeared in book form long before, and probably also in the B.O.P. With No.14 came a new serial by A. G. Hales himself. "Telegraph Dick" and also "The King's Scarlet" by G. Manville Fenn, another reprint, originally appearing as "The Queen's Scarlet". A little later on the energetic editor had still another, "Slim Jim, Last of the Bushrangers". Then on February 2nd, 1907, came "The Boy Pioneer" by Edward S. Ellis. It was his "Ned of the Blockhouse" in disguise, a book that had been available in the juvenile section of the public libraries for years. It was the beginning of the end, for with No.55, March 30th. it was announced that it was to be amalgamated with "Chums". That venerable paper took the "New Boys' World" under its wing for six weeks, and then all mention of it disappeared. Another boys' weekly had died in infancy. Poor A.G.Hales, he tried hard to make it a success. He had said that although he had edited several adult papers, this was his first attempt at one for boys. Probably it was his last. And in all likelihood Hamilton Edwards would twirl his moustache and cynically smile. Another challenger to his "big three" had bit the dust..

WANTED: "Union Jack" 896. Sexton Blake Libraries 1st Series 54, 57, 219, 229, 233, 241, 253, 271, 276, 283, 307, 312, 325, 356, 358, 360, 366, 371. 2nd Series: 1, 8, 16, 21, 25, 35, 41, 42, 72, 77, 52. Good prices offered. Josephine Packman, 27 Archdale Road, E. Dulwich, S.E.22. Many thanks to all fellow collectors who have supplied my wants in the past.

WANTED: Union Jacks, 1905-17; also Nelson Lees, 1915-18. R. Rouse, 3 St.Leonards Terrace, Gas Hill, Norwich, Norfolk. 80 Boys' Realms, Boys' Friends, Id, etc. 1903-16. Offers, exchanges, S.A.B. for list. 347 Gertrude Road, Norwich, Norfolk.

WANTED: Bound volumes Magnets, Boys' Friend weekly, Boys' Realm. G. Mell, 41 Woodland Road, Darlington.

OLD BOYS' BOOK CLUB

London Section. Blackheath Meeting. February 16th.

Inclement weather did not keep the enthusiasts away from the home of the popular Deacons, but the vice-chairman, Josie Packman, had to take the chair owing to the indisposition of Len. This she did in an able manner. A very lengthy correspondence was read including many letters from the overseas members. Peard Sutherland had sent a copy of the "Sunday Times" from Vancouver with an excellent write-up about him and his collection, quite a treat to read after some of the stuff that has appeared of late. Here is a genuine collector who has a very remarkable collection. Proceeding the topic of the badge was discussed and Bob Whiter undertook to obtain quotations and colour schemes. This was passed unanimously. It was announced that a letter of congratulation had been sent to Mrs. Ida Hardy on the occasion of her 90th birthday anniversary. This lady's late husband is still remembered with affection for the many fine drawings he did for "Chums". "Topham" was the key word of the eliminator quiz which was won by Ron Deacon. Bob Blythe was 2nd and Roger Jenkins and Bob Whiter 3rd. The standard of knowledge in this quiz was very high and shews the high rate of interest in the hobby. The usual team quiz was held and enjoyed and several good suggestions for the March meeting at Hume House, East Dulwich, London, S.E.22, on the 16th, were made. And so another milestone was passed in the club's history.

UNCLE BENJAMIN.

OLD BOYS' BOOK CLUB. Northern Section.

Meeting 239 Hyde Park Road, Leeds. Feb.9th, 1952.

Owing to the fact that Reg. Hudson, unfortunately, is not well enough to attend, I took over duties of chairman, hoping my tenancy would be brief. My first duty, however, was a pleasant one, for I was able to welcome three new members: Harry Whiteley, John Charlesworth (both of Huddersfield) and Denis Everingham of York. We were pleased to see Frank Case, secretary of the Liverpool branch, again

and Tom Hopperton (Scarborough) looked in for a short time.

Minutes of last meeting were read. Regarding future meetings it was decided to hold the April one on the second Saturday, April 12th, as usual, despite the fact that it is Easter Saturday. It was thought that the holiday would not have an adverse effect on the attendance. March meeting, when Harry Stables will give his talk "The Saga of Deadwood Dick", the 8th inst.

Treasurer-Librarian Gerry Allison smiles broadly each time he gives his report. No wonder - library sales for month £4.17s.5d., subs. £5.7s.0d.; Cash in hand £14.6s.3d. It shouldn't be forgotten that the library turnover is not obtained without a lot of work on the part of Gerry.

Gerry then did some talking much to the enjoyment of all present, for he read two delightful extracts from the Magnet series which has been voted by a large majority the best series of all - the second Quelch - Wharton series.

Between the two readings we had a quiz, a real teaser, set by Norman Smith. Tom Roach again came out the winner with 13 out of 16. Looks as if Tom is going to be the Len Packman of the north.

Among other business discussed was London's proposal of an Old Boys' Book Club Badge. Several members promised to buy one if the badges were obtained. Joe Owens proposed a tie of appropriate colours as an alternative.

A very enjoyable meeting closed at 9.30 p.m. The misadventure which befel Horace Twinham will not go down in the minutes!

Report of the Meeting of the Midland Section,
O.B.B.C. on January 28th at the Townsend Club,
Birmingham 3.

We start the New Year in grand style with two new members, Miss Fletcher, and Miss Partridge swelling the January attendance to nineteen. There were six apologies for absence, and we're sorry to hear Mrs. Corbett is indisposed with a severe cold. It was nice to have Mr. Bourne back again after his long spell in hospital; everybody was pleased he is now able to get about a bit.

The Minutes and Correspondence were read, and then

Treasurer Norman spoke on finance. By a large majority, his proposal that subs. be paid at least three months in advance was carried. Other decisions were, members who pay a year in advance only pay 21/- instead of 24/-. Visitors at our Meetings pay 2/6 per night. Postal members, of course, are admitted free, and we wish they would come and see us. The Rev. A. Pound energetically opposed any suggestion of increasing subscriptions, and wanted a brake applied on expenditure like the Club Newsheet and Circular. "This," said Mr. Pound, "would save us money we need for other items." Chairman Jack Corbett spoke in favour of retaining circular, and a vote showed a majority also in favour. Nevertheless, there was wisdom in Pound's argument, and who can tell what the future will prove?

The Secretary announced that Len Packman of London Club had accepted invitation to our April Party.

Ted Davey read out a few amusing "Ditties on being a Ghost" from an early Magnet.

It would not have been a Midland meeting without a Quiz, and two level point winners were Sylvia Price and Caroline Scott. This was a surprise, and I do believe one lady swotted up on Magnets lately to have reached such degree of accuracy after being bottom of the class for so long. We had the usual sales table as the last item on the programme, and boy, oh boy, see those Magnets snapped up!

Next two meetings are February 25th and March 31st.

PETER MELLOR,
Secretary.

O.B.B.C. (Merseyside Section)

February Meeting

The meeting opened at 7.30 p.m. There was a good attendance, including two new members, also Mr. Roth of the "Wallesey News", to whom the chairman extended a hearty welcome.

The secretary read the minutes, and submitted a statement of accounts; he was pleased to say there was a substantial cash balance in hand, which would be utilised for the purchase of books for our fast-growing library. Then

followed a most ingenious and amusing quiz (devised by our chairman). This was won by Jim Walsh with F. Case runner-up. The prize of a book was passed on by Jim to Frank; a very nice gesture. After refreshments a number of photographs were taken of the company and book display, and we are eagerly awaiting the results. An interesting shot should be that of our oldest and youngest members (George Simpson and Peter Webster) with our lady hobbyist, Edna, completing the trio.

This was our most entertaining meeting to date, mainly due to the efforts of our chairman, which are much appreciated. The meeting closed at 10 p.m.

Next meeting, Sunday, March 2nd.

F. CASE,
Secretary.

WANTED: Boys' Friend 4d. Libraries Nos. 516, 528, 535, 539 and 542. All dated 1920-1921. C. Churchill, 123 Pin Hoe Road, Exeter.

WANTED: Blue-covered Gems containing Talbot stories. Price to Robert Farish, 24 English Street, Longtown, Cumberland.

SALE or EXCHANGE: ½d. Gems and Magnets bound, 1918-19; several 1916, 1920 Mint condition. Exchange for Red Magnets, Blue Gems, 31 Union Jacks 1932, 1/6 each. 10 Boys' Realms, 1902, 1/6 each. Wanted: ½d. Gems, 3 & 37, St. Jims Plucks, 10/6 each offered: Pluck, Specs & Co. and others 3/6. Nos. 30 and 38 Boys' Friend 3d Library, 30/- each offered. Wanted: Gems, Magnets, Jack Sheppards. Offers: No.1 penny Gem. Richard Whorwell, 29 Aspinden Road, Rotherhithe, London, S.E.16.

WANTED: "Schoolboys' Own Libraries". Kindly forward numbers and prices. SALE: "Sexton Blakes", 129-186, published 1946-48. OFFERS: - H. B. Hemingway, 32 Dickerege Road, Kingston, Surrey.

HAMILTONIA

Conducted by Herbert Leckenby

Gosh! where am I going to start this month - television; the Tom Merry books; and at the time of writing the Auto-biography expected any moment. Well, I'm expecting a good deal of space will be occupied by comments on these great events, though some may have to be held over until next month.

However, first we'll go back a bit. Just as we were going to press last month came the news that the boy selected to play Bunter had backed out at the last moment, causing consternation at Lime Grove. The powers that be completely changed their plans and engaged experienced actor, 29-year-old Gerald Campion for the part. As you will be aware, this development was seized on with delight by all the scribes in Fleet Street, and the provinces, too. Fred D. Cooke in Reynold's News, February 3rd, had something particularly interesting to say, and as maybe not many of you see this paper I will quote him.

"Early in December the B.B.C. told the world they wanted a Billy Bunter for a new children's T.V. programme. Seventy-five porky hopefuls threw their bun devouring propensities into the arena in a bid to catch the selector's favour.

"Seven weeks elapsed and the impatient viewing public (with adults evincing even greater interest than the youngsters) began to wonder if a bright idea had taken the wrong turning.

"All doubts were resolved with last week's announcement that Mr. Gerald Campion, a professional actor, is to become Television's Fat Boy of Greyfriars.

"A few illusions were shattered by the details. For Mr. Campion is 29, married with two children, and weighs a mere 11 st.12 lbs. But as a professional actor he has saved the B.B.C. a lot of trouble.

"They could have saved themselves a lot of trouble and desperately scarce money, in the first place, if they had confined their invitation to professional actors.

There must be hundreds of them well adapted to the Bunter role.

"But no, the B.B.C. had once again to learn (?) the hard way and go through a weary process of elimination before realizing the extreme unlikelihood of finding the physical attributes of a Bunter combined with histrionic skill, outside the professional ranks."

Well, doesn't all this, and all that has happened, agree with and confirm what we have said in these columns, that they would never get a boy to play Bunter satisfactorily?

What's more, has there ever been in the whole history of television, or sound for that matter, a programme which has received so much advance publicity as the Greyfriars one? It has been really astounding. We who have been devoted for years, and have had to stand the chaff of our friends, can surely claim the last laugh.

Well, tomorrow night at this time, all being well, I shall have seen the first of the series, so more later.

February 19th, 11 p.m.

I wonder how many of those who will read this were sitting before a television set three hours ago. Quite a few, I fancy, including those who said they had no desire to do so yet who couldn't resist at the last moment. And here I am wondering what they are going to say about it to me tomorrow and following days. As for my own reactions, I bite the end of my pen and wrinkle my brows in perplexity. I'm stumped, for I hardly know what to say.

As the hour approached for the famous characters of Greyfriars to come to life I was hoping I should afterwards be able to sit down and write, "We were wrong when we shook our heads in doubt, when we declared that the artistry of Frank Richards, that immaculate English, that plot, running on oiled wheels, that elusive something, could not be transferred to a television screen." But, alas, as I sat there I did not find myself exclaiming, "Gosh, I take it all back. They're getting it across, that's just like Bob Cherry; that's Harry Wharton to the life; it's Greyfriars!"

Am I being unfair? No, I don't think so; I didn't expect that they had managed to find boys who looked just

like the boys displayed in this week's "Radio Times", but I had a lingering hope that they had succeeded in coaching them to act something like them.

The experienced seniors were not too bad. Kynaston Reeves as Mr. Quelch did at times get near the Quelch we know; and there were glimmerings of Bunter in Gerald Champion's portrayal, although he was more like the early Bunter. But oh dear the boys. A colourless Harry Wharton, what we feared, a member of the chorus; an incredible Inky repeating a few of the familiar lines without the slightest expression; a Bob Cherry who said "Hello! Hello! Hello!" now and again like a parrot; worst of all, a dreadful caricature of the steady, handsome Wingate we had all visualised.

However, don't let's be too hard on Joy Harrington. She has been asked to do the nigh impossible and the programme may improve as it goes on. And if it gives the rising generation (who won't be as sensitive and critical as we are), a desire to become more fully acquainted with the famous characters, it will have been all worth while.

But it's time I shut up and made room for someone else.

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Opinions gathered by 'phone

Bunter and Quelch succeeded in getting into the skin of their parts. All the boys playing parts, however, were disappointing. You cannot get the genius of Frank Richards into the cramped space of a television screen. - Norman Smith, Leeds.

It didn't come off. Only Gerald Champion as Bunter was at all successful. Kynaston Reeves was more like Hacker than Quelch. The boys seemed more like fags than Removites. - Bob Whiter, Wood Green, N.22.

It wasn't Greyfriars as we know it; the boys, of course, had not been brought up on the Magnet, therefore couldn't be expected to play their parts convincingly. Nevertheless, I enjoyed it. - Jim Hepburn, Blythe.

On the whole, better than I expected. Bunter and Prout very good, but the boys, with the exception of Frank Nugent, were hopeless. - Don Webster, Liverpool.

I was pleased with it. I saw both viewings; the eight o'clock was the best, especially in the hosepipe scene. Some of the boys were poor, and used expressions never found in a Frank Richards story. This also applied to Gosling.- John R. Shaw, Camberwell, S.E.5.

I was agreeably surprised, and thought the show quite good. Bunter, to my mind, was quite good, though he could do with a good bit more padding. Week I think was Harry Wharton, who was too small, and never gave the slightest suggestion of leadership. I thought Bob Cherry good. Undoubtedly the show could do with a little more zip but, considering everything, I thought it was a success. - Eric Fayne, Surbiton.

What the Press has to say

The much heralded "Billy Bunter" came to TV last night. This endeavour to recreate famous school adventures, of which older viewers have unperishable memories, seems to have had a mixed reception.

There had been a lot of ballyhoo of the search for a boy to play Bunter, but in the end the B.B.C. had to fall back on a professional actor, which seemed right and sensible. Yet I feel that several of the gang gave as good performances as did the fat boy.

For me, Greyfriars School stories back a host of delights and youthful fun, but I wonder if they appeal to the youth of the present age. The playing was first-rate, and time will prove if Bunter still has his wide appeal. I hope he has. Alfred Willcox, Yorkshire Evening Post.

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The first instalment of "Billy Bunter of Greyfriars School" last night on TV was a very faithful rendering of the original atmosphere of the Frank Richards' stories, but I feel it was an error to have Bunter played by an adult.

There was too much nonchalance in his manner and not enough of the aloof dignity for which I particularly remember the fat "Owl of the Remove".

Kynaston Reeves was a perfect Mr. Quelch in appearance and manner, but Bob Cherry had a Cockney accent quite alien to his character. The peculiar benality of the

schoolboy slang invented by Richards was reproduced in detail.

With these reservations I, as a sometime Greyfriars addict, was satisfied with this first instalment, believing that concrete realisation of character is never as satisfactory as one's own imagined conception.-

Robert Robinson in "Yorkshire Evening Press".

banner

Leonard Mosley of the "Daily Express" under a/heading "Boosted Bunter is a bore. Futile - Dismal - Dated -," dipped his pen in vinegar with a vengeance. His criticism was far different to ours. We lamented because, in our honest opinion, the B.B.C. had not succeeded in bringing beloved characters to life. Mosley maintained they were not worth bringing to life because they were dreary, outmoded, and impossible. If he really thinks so he's about the only man in Fleet Street who does. Anyway, by now I gamble he knows the names of more than one member of our circle.

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Full of misgivings, the nation's four million viewers switched on the first episode of "Billy Bunter of Greyfriars School". Was yet another legendary hero of our childhood to go to the wall? Was this mountain of a boy, this monstrous death trap for jam tarts, to be deflated by television in the same way that Richman Crompton's William and Lewis Carroll's Alice were filleted by the cinema?

Fortunately our fears were unfounded, and Joy Har-ington's convincing production of "The Siege of the Remove" must have been a very pleasant surprise even to the most ardent Bunter fans. Stephen Taylor's settings of the dungeon-like classrooms were some of the most realistic settings I have seen on television, and the older members of the cast gave characterisations which fitted most of our preconceptions about the dreamworld of Greyfriars.

Twenty-nine year old Gerald Campion looks very like the Bunter of the original drawings. His performance, however, was too restrained. The Bunter bounce was lacking. The Famous Five were played nervously by schoolboy actors who must learn to say their familiar catch phrases with more assurance and play the schoolboy heroes with a more heroic air.- John Bourne in the "Yorkshire Post".

Television has come in for a blast of hate over its Billy Bunter. It couldn't deserve it more. It is incredible they have gone to town on a show which no one who understood modern children would have touched with a barge pole.

Anyway, this generation knows not Bunter as mine did. Months ago Bunter was suggested to vision by an outside source. It was turned down. Suddenly it is taken on "inside" heralded by trumpets, and given to a staff producer to handle. Take the silly thing off. Collie Knox. - in the "Daily Mail".

Gee! What controversy. It all reminds you of the radio feature "We Beg to Differ", doesn't it?

Frank Richards on Television

By John R. Shaw

Just prior to close down on the night of February 18th viewers were shown a short film of an interview given by Mr. Hamilton, at his home, to Miss Joy Harrington and the Magnet artist Mr. C. H. Chapman.

The author was always referred to by his famous pen-name. The exterior of his house was shown, but most of the film was made in his study, and included many close-ups, which proved him to be very young looking for his eighty years.

Among other topics Mr. Richards related the three sources of the Bunter character - his relation who was always expecting a cheque; a portly Amalgamated Press editor; and a famous Victorian whose name we may only guess.

Mr. Chapman pointed out that each boy had his particular characteristics, such as Bob Cherry's curly hair, Harry Wharton being a darker boy. He also mentioned that they enlarged Bunter's glasses to make him "The Owl of the Remove".

Lastly Mr. Richards revealed that he is translating the Odes of Horace into English verse - truly an astonishing feat.

The announcer held a Magnet cover before the camera while announcing the film, which was an excellent introduction to the television series of Greyfriars plays.

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THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF FRANK RICHARDS

Charles Skilton, Ltd. 10/6. 190 pages.

Reviewed by Herbert Leckenby

The Autobiography was among my mail on the morning of February 21st. I turned over the pages eagerly, then said to a colleague who fortunately was standing by, "Be a pal and take over, please." He proved to be one. I left my switchboard, retired to a corner placed my hands over my ears caring nought for the nonce about the demands and requirements of the modern army. I read on, fascinated and absorbed, until a voice said, "Hi you, it's lunch time."

It was the best morning I had had, on duty, for years. Why was I so thrilled? Well, you see years ago Frank Richards had kindly let me see two or three of the chapters in manuscript. They had whetted my appetite for more. Now, at long last, I had got the whole meal. I found it very appetising and my hunger was appeased.

Now I can honestly say unto you - get it. It's been well worth waiting for, I can assure you. Strangely enough for an Autobiography there's not a single "I" in it, for its author uses the third person and talks about Frank, and Martin, Owen and Ralph and one or two more. It's an unusual way of doing it, but it's an unusual man who's writing it. For instance, in the first chapter he tells you how, when seventeen, he wrote his first story, how it was accepted immediately, and he became five guineas the richer. George Bernard Shaw and many another famous man of letters couldn't boast of that. Many of the engrossing chapters tell of how the papers we know so well came into being, and of his experiences in writing the stories. It's real inside stuff., take it from me. And although he tells us that some things he originally said have been toned down, it's still very frank in places. In the 1950 "Annual" I told you briefly the circumstances under which the first "substitute" story came to be written. Well, Frank Richards now tells the story in his own words, and the shock it gave him.

You also learn what he thought about the editors and

other personalities of Fleetway House he came in contact with. Frank is frank, yet kindly.

There are also fascinating chapters about his travels on the Continent. One entitled "Monte Carlo" you'll probably read more than once. I won't tell you a word about another, "A Belle of New York". It would spoil it.

And it isn't only the reading matter, for there are several splendid photographs including one of Frank Richards in 1912.

Frank Richards finishes like this:

"His eightieth birthday looms on the horizon. He envisages it with equanimity.

"He will never see Alps or Apennines again. He will never ride on the Corniche road, or sail a boat on Lago Maggiore, or saunter on a sunny boulevard - or even walk up Fleet Street. And he doesn't mind very much. He still finds the world a jolly old place to live in, and is happy and contented. He has many readers, and judging by their kind letters they are all his friends. Every morning he reads "fan" letters over breakfast, which, if it were needed, would put him in a cheerful mood for the day. And when he looks up from the typewriter, at his window over the sea, at the bookshelves with innumerable photographs of young people pinned along the edges, at Sammy the cat watching him solemnly from the cushions in the armchair, he feels that he is as lucky in age as he was in youth.

And so, dear reader, adieu."

To me it's nice to think that not a few of those letters he reads each morning will come from members of our own circle. That he may be spared to read their letters for many a year to come will be the wish of each and every one.

This review would not be complete without a word of congratulation to the publishers, Charles Skilton Ltd. There's nearly 200 pages of clear type on good paper. The page size is 5" by 8½". There's an attractive dust jacket bearing that charming photograph of the author and Sammy the cat engaged in a game of chess. May the book be the best seller it deserves to be.

LETTER BOX

Frank Richards Enjoyed It.

February 21st, 1952.

Dear Mr. Leckenby,

Perhaps you may have seen the classic features of the Oldest Inhabitant on TV last Monday? As you know, the Bunter plays began on Tuesday; and as a sort of preliminary center, F.R. was put on TV on Monday evening. I set back in my armchair, watched myself on the screen, and listened to my own dulcet tones, with a pleasure which - I hope - may have been shared by others. This is the first time I have appeared on television, and it was quite a joyous occasion.

I hope you will see the Bunter plays. The first programme, on Tuesday, seemed to me remarkably good, and the production was as near perfect as anything could be. Gerald Campion was Bunter to the life, and I half-expected Mr. Quelch to step out of the screen, he was so much alive. I had a very happy half-hour viewing, and am looking forward with much anticipation to the rest of the series. Who could have foreseen this when Bunter was first evolved in 1899?

With kind regards,

Always yours sincerely,

FRANK RICHARDS.

MAGNET TITLES (Contd.)

"S" denotes Substitute.

No.851, (S) The Iron Hand at Greyfriars. 852, (S) Peter the Plotter. 853, (S) Standing by their Pals. 854, The Man Who Came Back. 855, Treasure Trove. 856, (S) Drummed out of Greyfriars. 857, (S) The Schoolboy Domestic. 858, The Parting of the Ways. 859, Sentenced by the Form. 860, Vernon-Smith's Feud. 861, (S) True Blue. 862, The Greyfriars Arab. 863, The Foe from Africa. 864, Bound for Africa. 865, The Schoolboy Tourists. 866, The Call of the Desert. 867, Foes of the Sahara. 868, In the Power of the Sheik. 869, The Vengeance of the Sheik. 870, (S) Billy Bunter's Wembley Party.

BLAKIANA.

March 1952.

Editor: H.H. Bond, 16, Erw Wen, Rhiwbina, Cardiff, S. Wales.

The Round Table.

I am pleased to be able to resume this feature once again. My appeal for letters and articles was not in vain and I think that a good and varied programme is now assured, at least for the next few months. My Co-editor, Herbert Leckenby, has nobly contributed a fine article and others are promised from Bill Colcombe and others. The correspondence during February was good to read and I shall now be able to give the full meaning to the title of this feature.

Miss Vera Coates of Leeds writes: "I do wish the resumes of the current Sexton Blake libraries had not ceased, it is interesting to read how they compared with one's own opinions. Could you not start a few articles from members concerning short series of UNION JACKS they liked. I mention short series as I enjoyed them best. I will remember, and have since obtained the Shadow Club series by Gwyn Evans. I consider that and the Mr. Mist series (which I should like to obtain) my favourites. I think I started reading Blake about 1928 and read them on and off since. Poor Pedro, he was one of my favourite characters but seems to have passed away. I am enclosing an article I found in our local paper concerning him".

Thank you Miss. Coates. I like your suggestion for a series of articles on the U.J. short series. How about it you chaps? It doesn't matter how long or how short your contributions are. They will be most welcome. And what is the general opinion about the return of the criticisms on current libraries? Do you want 'em or not. The gist of the article on Pedro will be found on another page. But I should like to think that Pedro is still lying stretched out on the hearthrug at Baker Street.

Graham Davies of Swansea writes: I fear, alas

The Round Table (continued).

that the Blake of 1952 is only a shadow of the former Blake of the 1930's and early 1920's. What a grand realm of authors there was in those days! But now Teed, Skene, Evans, Murray, Brandon and the rest are all gone, and the present day Sooton Blake Library is only a pallid and incidental affair compared with the old 90 page S.B.L. Whatever happens to Blake, however, at the hands of present day authors, will make no difference to the memories of him that are held by those who were boys in the 1930's, memories of one of the finest, grandest characters in English fiction, a great and noble Britisher! Incidentally what a grand Blake author was old Anthony Skene. I have been reading some of his S.B.L. stories in the early 1930 period. I believe he is still alive, though not writing, good luck to him, wherever he is!"

I think Mr. Davies echoes the feelings of us all in his belief that the current portrait of Blake is a mere sketch compared to the fullness of the original picture painted by so many hands in the days gone by. There was a series of masterly brush strokes long ago, but I am afraid that we shall never see such times again. Maybe the modern young readers of the Library are thrilled by the comparatively unexciting adventures of the Man from Baker Street, but that is only because they have no memories. Were they to read the old stories I am afraid they would agree with us old timers. And I think most of us will agree with the praise of Mr. Skene. He was, indeed, one of the finest action writers ever to wield a pen, or tap a key (as the case may be) and certainly his creation of Zenith was a landmark in Blake history.

It would be nice if Anthony Skene could write just one more Zenith v Blake story and round off what to most of us is a feeling of wonder. What became of Zenith? Did he die a natural death or was he involved in some violent action that robbed Blake of one of his favorite opponents? I don't suppose we shall ever know now, but it WOULD be great to know the end of the story.

Cherio for now.

H. Maurice Bond.

SEXTON BLAKE - HOUSEMASTER. by Leonard M. Allen.

All Blake enthusiasts know that the detective's education was far from neglected for, after his public school days, he gained distinction at both the Oxford and Cambridge Universities thus he was amply equipped to undertake the duties of a mere housemaster at Kingsmore College. His appointment was made on March 6th 1920 and recorded in No. 32 of the ill fated "Detective ~~Weekly~~ Library" in an attempt to increase circulation. The previous issues of the paper had been in strict accordance with the title, but, as the Amalgamated Press had overloaded the juvenile market with too many attractions after World War I, boys had to consider respective merits of each very carefully, before parting with three halfpence out of their meagre pocket money. Possibly owing to the success of Nelson Lee at St. Franks it was thought the same mixture would be acceptable with Sexton Blake as "Schoolmaster Detective".

The stories were of the series type and concerned the Bagley boys, whose father was a Governor of the school. Bagley Senior had incurred the displeasure of a powerful profiteering group, The American Natural Products Trust, by exposing their methods. The trust by way of revenge threatened the lives of his two sons and Blake was called in to protect them whilst at school. Tinker, for some strange reason, as his education had been sadly neglected, was appointed secretary to the Headmaster. Even as Blake arrived at the school he was only just in time to save one of the Bagleys from a runaway motor car. The following weeks he was able to clear one lad of a charge of attempted murder, then rescue the other from a mental home and both from a kidnap attempt aboard ship. After this, however, the Trust began to slack off their activities and the stories became school yarns pure and simple, with Blake and Tinker in the background, although the

Sexton Blake-Housemaster (continued).

latter had a hectic two week period when accused of theft.

The author, not credited but strongly suspected was Sidney Drew introduced all the familiar ingredients to popularise his stories. First came the unpopular master to cause a barring out, five new boys, all distinctive types were introduced including Sunny Morning, a Rod Indian, Hodgo, a profiteer's son, Shakespeare Burns, a rhymster, Timber Too Wilson with his wooden leg and Hagner with his portable menagerie of white mice, toads and such. All the characters rapidly bodded down but too late to save the "Detective Library" for in spite of the Head, Sexton Blake, Tinker and the rest of the masters being sacked by the new profiteer Governor, Hodgo Senior, and a further rebellion by the 600 scholars, the Editor announced the paper was to be merged with others to form the "Nugget Weekly". The author tidied things up in the usual few lines, Kingmore Colloge was informed that the popular master of the fifth, Mr. Gresham, was really Sexton Blake, secretary Hargroaves was Tinker and as Baguloy Senior had apparently ousted the Trust single handed all that remained was for them to give three cheers to the departing detectives.

Just a thin promise they may return was indicated:-
"Tinker leaned back in his seat as Kingmore was lost to view

'Guv'nor' he said, 'I wonder if ever we shall see the old school again'.

'I wonder' murmured Sexton Blake softly.

'I hope so' muttered Tinker with a sigh.

Special Attraction Next Month!

THE UNION JACK IN THE DEPTHS".

a new and interesting article by HERBERT LECKENBY.

**SEXTON BLAKE WAS WRONG!
HIS "PEDRO" NO WONDER IDG!**

Thus ran the headlines of an article in a Yorkshire paper "Evening Post" according to a cutting submitted by Miss. Vera Coates of Leeds.

The "Evening Post" reporter writes: I remember that when Sexton Blake and Tinker, never-baton crime-detectors of my youth, were on the trail they nearly always had their bloodhound Pedro, straining at the leash. Times change. At Mytholmroyd this week West Riding officers were tracking burglars with a Labrador. Shades of Sherlock Holmes! What are detectives coming to? I found the answer at the West Riding dog-training centre, at Aberford, where the Labrador in question has his home. Head dog-master here is Mr. J.K. Parker, who was trained in police dog work in South Africa and was in charge of the dogs that worked with the Palestine Police from 1934 to the disbandment of the force in 1946. "There's no saying definitely which is the best dog for following a trail" says Mr. Parker. "Every man has his fancy, and there are good dogs and poor dogs even in the same breed. The Austrian police use Boxers; the Germans, Alsations, like the London police. In South Africa they have stuck to Oubermann Pinschers for over 50 years, and they swear there is no better breed".

"I always thought the bloodhound was the best" I said. "It used to be best, no doubt," admitted Mr. Parker, "But through breeding it's gone softer, and it doesn't seem to have as good a nose these days. I wouldn't change the youngest of my untrained dogs for any bloodhound. Every breed I keep is better than a bloodhound I'm convinced".

The cutting goes on to describe the activities of various types of tracker dogs but that does not concern us in the C.D. But we are concerned to know that Pedro now belongs to an apparent lesser breed of manhunters! Any letters of this subject will be welcomed.

H.M.B.

Chapter Eight.

Not a betting man as a rule, Blake on this occasion accepted Grine's challenge that he - Blake - would find it an impossibility to trace the missing thirteen within a month, and set off on his quest, standing to win, or lose - as the case might be - the sum of one thousand pounds, put up as the stake. Blake had an immediate success, for he discovered one of the missing husbands in Grine's own household - the latter's butler! How the detective subsequently traced the other twelve deserters was entertainingly told in a narrative well spiced with humour, the ending of which, by its unexpected twist, gave a satisfactory 'finis' to the whole proceedings. And the author? Well, only Cecil Hayter could have written this, for the style - slick, breezy and evon, was undoubtedly his.

Those Edwardian adventures of Blake were a very mixed lot; not so much as regards subjects, which were well varied enough, as quality, for in some cases authors were fortunate to see their work in print so poor was the material. An example of this is to be found in "Two on the Trail" (U.J. No. 89 dated 24th June 1905), which must surely rank as one of the most mediocre Blake tales ever published! The detective is asked to go out West and bring back the son of a distracted father who is living out there a sort of highwayman's existence by robbing trains and stagecoaches, the proceeds of which he uses to help distressed settlers. Following chapters record Blake's efforts to keep the son, Masked Jim as he is known, out of the hands of the police. There is plenty of hard riding across the prairies, including clashes with cowboys and Indians, very juvenile stuff, none too well related, but it is the lack of any sort of a plot around which the incidents could have been woven that results in the reader being unable to conjure up any interest in the ultimate result of Blake's quest.

Chapter Nine next month.

SUPPORT THE NEW SEXTON BLAKE CIRCLE - write to Harry Homer at Yaldon Farm, Heathfield, Sussex for information.