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*Digest*



Vol. 6. No. 64.  
April 1952  
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APRIL 1952

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

FROM THE EDITOR'S CHAIR

Our Name Makes News. Compared with some collecting groups our numbers are very small (stamp collectors probably outnumber us by hundreds to one) but we have a happy knack of creating interest. For example, a week or two ago, a Northern Club member, Horace Twinham, wrote to a Sunday newspaper pointing out that in something they had said they had confused Lord Mauleverer with D'Arcy. He also took the opportunity of telling them something about our activities. Promptly came a reply from the editor saying he scented a good story and asking if it could be arranged for a reporter to attend a meeting, preferably in the London area. Northern lost no time in getting in touch with the London Club, with the result that a representative of the paper will receive a cordial invitation to attend the April meeting. Incidentally, this is a good example of the co-operation between one Club and another.

Now this kind of thing is often happening and it emboldens me to suggest that our little, but very lively and

enterprising circle of old boys' book collectors, have played no small part in bringing Greyfriars to the television screen. Bragging? Not a bit of it. Here's our case.

A few years ago we began to get together. Came the C.D. and the forming of the London O.B.B.C. Interviews with Len Peckmen, Bob Blythe, myself and several others appeared in local newspapers. Exhibitions were held in York and London. Fleet Street newshawks who comb the local papers for likely stories began to take notice. They did a little interviewing themselves with the result that we became known to millions. Then came that request to visit a Club meeting from Leader Magazine. Followed that famous "write-up", echoes of which we still hear from time to time. More Clubs, more exhibitions, more press publicity. I boldly venture to say that in proportion to our numbers we have had more columns in the Press, not only here, but wherever the English language is spoken, than any other organisation which makes a hobby of collecting. Say as you like, it's a remarkable achievement in a space of about four years.

And, as inevitably a good proportion of that publicity brought the Magnet and its companions to the fore then I contend it had not a little to do with the possibilities of Greyfriars on television first being mooted.

In the words of the late Syd Walker - What do you think, chum?

=====

More Magnet Lore. The March number of the Reading and Berkshire Review has a long and very interesting interview with Mr. C. H. Chapman. It carries the title "Billy Bunter's Stepfather". In it Mr. Chapman reveals quite a lot about himself and his many years' work on the Magnet. In addition, the cover displays quite a number of the famous Greyfriars figures and a photo of Mr. Chapman himself.

The magazine is about our Annual page size and costs 4d. The publishers assure me that they will be pleased to supply copies to all who want them. I can assure you you will like it.

=====

Still Another Club. Since writing last there has been brought to my notice "The Greyfriars Club of Portsmouth", which has been recently formed. The chairman, Mr. Donald G. T. Cowd, 27 Lonsdale Avenue, Portchester, Fareham, Hants tells me that although the accent is on Greyfriars and St. Jim's, it embraces, and they welcome, collectors of all types of boys' books, just as we do. They meet once a month at the Carnegie Library, Portsmouth.

Mr. Cowd was very interested to hear all about our activities and it is evident there's going to be a cordial relationship between us. He assures me that any of our members will receive a warm welcome at their meetings, and, of course, the same applies with us. It is evident that although this is the youngest Club they lack nothing in enterprise. They have had some fine publicity in local papers, and have the good fortune to have the Portsmouth Club Librarian interested. As soon as I heard of that I suggested the possibility of an Exhibition later in the year, and there's good hopes of it coming off. Anyway, more about the "new chum" later. The secretary is Mr. A. J. Billing, 4 Marilyn Avenue, Waterlooville, Hants.

\*\*\*\*\*

A word to Nelson Lee Fans. I've a bone to pick with you, Leeites; you're not pulling your weight, and I shouldn't be surprised if Bob Blythe gets a little disheartened sometimes. He's been your standard-bearer for years now, yet oft-times when he looks round he finds he is almost marching alone. 'Tis true you are out-numbered by the Hamiltonians, and they have the advantage, too, that their favourites are very much in the limelight these days and thus provide them with plenty of copy. Even so, there's quite a lot of you, and I know you are as keen on St. Franks as ever. Trouble is you won't make your presence felt. There's plenty to talk about. For instance, you didn't agree with all S. F. Jones said about E. S. Brooks last month surely, yet at the moment of writing no one has come to his rescue.

Then there's the many series. You must think a lot about them or you wouldn't collect them. We have decided on the best ever Magnet series, how about finding the best Lee?

Gird your loins, Leeites, and start the good fight!  
Yours sincerely,  
HERBERT LECKENBY.

THE "ANNUAL" BALLOT

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THE MEN WHO WROTE FOR BOYS

No.6. - John Nix Pentelow

By Herbert Leckenby

It was as "Jack North" that I first got to know him and remember him best, but as he had several other pen-names too it will be simpler for this little biography if I call him by his real one.

If he had been living to-day he would have been of venerable age, for he was writing for the Guy Rayner papers way back in the '80s. One story called "Captain of the Nemesis" appeared in the "Boys' Novelette" and filled the whole of the sixteen large pages. Following his name it was said he was the author of "The White Cockade"; "Faithful Unto Death"; "Damon and Pythias"; "Venoc"; "The Captain's Packet" etc. Some of these, at least, were serials.

In a paper of the period I came across some time ago there was an example of the conscientious way J.N.P. did his job. A reader had written pointing out that the illustrations did not tally with the descriptions in the story. The errors were not of any great importance and they were

obviously the fault of the artist, yet Pentelow went to the trouble of explaining in the length of half a column how the mistakes arose. A sensitive and painstaking fellow, Pentelow.

These stories appeared before my time and in my own boyhood I never heard of J. N. Pentelow and it would seem that in later years he dropped writing stories under his real name, though frequently articles on cricket appeared with his initials attached.

In 1906 there started in "Pluck" a series of stories of Wycliffe School under the name of Jack North, in my opinion some of the finest yarns of school life ever written. It was not until about 1920 that I learned the real identity of the author. Those stories have always fascinated me. They had a good run in "Pluck", then were reprinted in the Boys' Friend Library along with some new stories. In one form or the other I read them when they first appeared. They were companions of mine during Zeppelin nights in the First Great War, to my joy I came across a pile of them in a second-hand bookshop in the 1930's. I passed the time away with them whilst on duty o'nights in the last war; for relaxation in my few leisure moments I turn to them still.

Wycliffe was a great public school with 500 boys and seven houses. There were many vivid descriptions of football and cricket games for the Inter-House Cups.

We read of them in the great hall assembled singing the school song which went thus:

"She made him a gentleman, frank and free;  
She made him an athlete, good to see;  
She made him a scholar, as he should be  
For such is the Wycliffe trinity.

"Gentleman, athlete, and scholar he,  
For such is the Wycliffe trinity!"

Seems to me there's more sense in that than in the dirges of those miserable moeners who murder music - the modern crooners.

The leading characters in the early stories were Jack Jackson, Donald MacDonald, Tuffy Davies and Paddy O'Hara, along with Harry Merry from Australia and Beiran Sinhji, a

Rajput of princely blood. All these boys were finely drawn, the sturdy English boy, the shrewd Scot, the gentle lad from Wales, the fun-loving Paddy. Moreover, Pentelow always took as much care with his minor characters as with his major ones, each one lived, from the house prefects to the youngest fag.

A unique feature about the Wycliffe stories was that the boys grew up, Pentelow told me years ago that he made a mistake here, for it inevitably meant the stories could not have an abnormal run. Nevertheless, they had the advantage of being more realistic, and they did last long enough to see the one-time mischievous juniors grow into dignified prefects, with new juniors equally fun-loving taking their places.

The method, too, gave the author more scope. There was, for instance, the description of the scene when the school assembled to say farewell to Raleigh, its idolised captain, with five hundred young voices making the rafters ring as they sang the song to which I have just referred. It was fine, soulstirring descriptive writing.

Many of the Wycliffe stories dealt with the feuds between the Brothers of Borden and the Hittites, the latter composed of all the worst elements in the school. The Head Hittite at one period was handsome Arthur Wickhart Dangerfield, a jealous fellow with a nasty temper, yet one with more good than evil in him, and one who really despised most of the fellows he led and admired those he fought.

Many were the mighty battles between the two factions, vividly described by "Jack North's" masterly hand. Then after a series of dramatic and tragic happenings, Dangerfield was sentenced to expulsion. No, he was not reprieved at the last moment, he had to go. Friend and foe alike regretfully bid him good-bye, and a chapter closed like this:

"They little thought then how soon they would see Dangerfield again. Still less did Harris, sitting there moody and miserable thinking of his late enemy, dream that within three weeks Dangerfield would take his hand and say farewell - a long farewell to him."

The school broke up for the Christmas vacation and a number of the boys went to stay with Jackson. Came a spell of wintry weather. Dangerfield, through a set of



circumstances came in contact with them again, and helped to save two girls who had fallen through the ice whilst skating. Dangerfield, already ill, died a few days later. The story told here briefly.

"When the Angel of Death at last descended, he died with a hand in his sister's and with Harris by his side. .... They buried him by his own request at Stanfield, under the shadow of the church that he had entered but once in all his life."

Not musky sentiment, but the kind which brings a catch to the throat. The stirring scenes that led up to it all can be read in "Prefect and Fag", Boys' Friend Library No.588 (1st series), a story I've read at least a dozen times.

I could go on telling of Wycliffe until I had no space left for anything else, but I must pass on for I have much to tell of John Nix Pentelow yet.

When the Wycliffe stories finished in Pluck a new series started concerning another school - Haygarth. Haygarth was really Wycliffe reborn with a similar set of characters, yet so skilful was Pentelow that the stories seemed quite new. I read them often, too, though they had not quite the appeal as those of Wycliffe. In one story there was again a boy who died under tragic circumstances, a less likeable boy than Dangerfield, and in quite different surroundings.

The Haygarth stories, like those of Wycliffe, had a good run in Pluck, and also appeared in many Boys' Friend Libraries.

And now I'll leave the school stories and tell briefly of some of the stories Pentelow wrote on cricket under another of his pen-names - Richard Rendolph. Pentelow knew as much about cricket as a leading first-class umpire of Frank Chester calibre. His stories, "Smith of Rocklandshire", "Young Yardley", "Boy Bayley, Professional", "Carden of Cardenshire" and many more, brought in the Tests and games against the actual first-class counties with real giants of the game introduced, Jack Hobbs and Patsy Hendren, Warren Bardsley and Vernon Rensford. Reading them you could see in your mind's eye the gasometers of the Oval, the green-sward of stately Lords, the famous Hill in far off Sydney, and many other grounds where King Cricket reigns.

Pentelow could write, equally entertainingly, articles

on the game. They were packed with the facts, figures, and interesting records. I can recall two such articles in the Boys' Realm, in October 1920, dealing with the Australiens our men would meet when they got "down under" that winter. Each article occupied a full page of tiny type, and old-timers know how large those pages were.

This indefatigable fellow edited several papers including the Boys' Realm itself, the Prairie and Robin Hood Libraries, and School and Adventure. In some instances he wrote a good proportion of the stories also.

He wrote under several other pen-names; why I know not, as I have said before, you could recognise him anywhere. I picked up a Marvel one day containing an army story said to be written by "John West". "Never heard of him before", I said to myself. I had not read far before I exclaimed, "Why it's Jack North". It was a good yarn, too. In the later days of the Marvel he also wrote a series of football yarns concerning the Mapleton Rovers. Here he was Randolph Ryle. Yes, a busy man of many identities was John Nix Pentelow. Yet I heard not long ago that he was stone deaf. That may not have been a great handicap as an author, but would be rather awkward in his capacity of editor.

As is now well known, J. N. Pentelow was for a time editor of the Gem and Magnet, and wrote a good many of the stories therein. That is a controversial subject which I do not propose to enter into here. But there is nothing to argue about where the Greyfriars and St. Jim's Galleries were concerned, and which J.N.P. compiled whilst in the editorial chair. They were typical examples of his tireless energy, for he must have spent gallons of midnight oil in swotting them up. All Magnet and Gem fans will owe him a debt for that alone.

I have said a good deal about this man who wrote for boys, yet there's a lot I have had to leave out. He died many years ago, yet to me with those yarns of Wycliffe School to turn to in hours of ease his name lives on.

---

**OFFERS INVITED FOR:** Captain, Volume 34.-- Nicely bound volume of "Boys Journal", containing No's 1-26.-- Ditto of "Cheer Boys Cheer" containing No's 28-52. NELSON LEE LIBRARY, Complete 3rd New Series, Mint. No's 1-25. J. Hepburn, 1, Sixth Avenue, Blyth, Northumberland.

OLD BOYS' BOOK CLUB

London Section East Dulwich Meeting March 16th.

Chairman Len fit once again and his gathering a great success. Highlight was the illuminated address for the President, Frank Richards, which was on show. It was the work of Bob Mortimer and a very able job he has done, thus fully deserving the unanimous thanks of all those present. Ron Deacon gave a humorous reading from "Magnet" 1658, "The Wanderer's Return" featuring the immortal Horace Coker. E. Reynolds gave a poetry reading from "Magnet" 1000 entitled "The Record". Roger Jenkins read a paper on the "Magnet" period 1930 to 1935 which he considered the best, a debate about this followed. Bob Blythe gave an address on "To Bind or not to Bind". Jim Perratt presented his anagram quiz and the chairman officiated with the quiz that was kindly sent from the Liverpool club. Len won the former and Roger Jenkins the latter. A copy of "The Berkshire and Reading Review" with the fine C.H. Chapman article in it was shown and orders were taken. All overseas members interested in it have their copies already in the mails. Eric Landy is to be congratulated on securing his complete sets of "The Aldine Library". Truly a very memorable meeting. And so, Len, thanks from all for a very enjoyable time.

UNCLE BENJAMIN.

April Meeting at Eric Fayne's Modern School on the 20th.

Northern Section

Meeting, 239 Hyde Park Road, March 8th, 1952.

Chairman Reg. Hudson still being absent, I again deputised. I was able to report that I had seen Reg. during the afternoon and he had expressed a hope that he might be able to get to the Annual General Meeting on April 12th. He will receive a cordial welcome if he does.

We had another disappointment, for after reading the minutes, secretary Norman Smith had to announce that he had received word that morning that Harry Stables, who was to have given a talk, "The Saga of Deadwood Dick" was unable to be present as he had been suddenly ordered to hospital for an operation. It was the hope of all present that the

operation would not prove to be a serious one and that Harry would soon be with us again.

There was the usual cheerful story when Treasurer-Librarian Gerry Allison gave his report - good business in the Library and cash in hand £17.16s.3d.

The meeting was then thrown open to "all-in" debates on the three big events of the past month - the Greyfriars television, the "Autobiography of Frank Richards", and the Tom Merry books. The television series, needless to say, provided an animated discussion. It was frank, forthright and free, from those who thought them a complete fiasco to those who defended staunchly, having thoroughly enjoyed them. A vote was taken and the defenders won by a majority of five.

There was little difference of opinion about the Autobiography, all who had read it had enjoyed it. The only regret was that the story started when the author was seventeen. Everyone was satisfied with the Tom Merry books.

Yet a good time was had by all the sixteen members present.

Attention! All Members! The next meeting April 12th is the Annual General Meeting, our "Budget" day. It will be a more cheerful one than Mr. Butler's. Let's have a record attendance, please.

HERBERT LOCKNEY.

---

Merseyside Section. Meeting, March 9th.

The meeting opened at 7.30 p.m. to a good attendance. There was quite a lot of business to be got through, and the chairman commenced proceedings by welcoming yet another new member, Mr. Morgan, of Great Crosby, an enthusiastic Hamiltonian. He has already made his presence felt by lending a large number of Magnets, Gems etc. for which we are very grateful.

The chairman thanked Jim Walsh for the photographs which he took at the February meeting; these are very good indeed, and arrangements are to be made for the distribution of copies. The secretary then read the minutes, and this was followed by an open debate on the T.V. programme. The general concensus of opinion was favourable, and it was unanimously agreed that the later programmes were far better than the first effort.

After this came refreshments, and food for thought was provided in a novel Greyfriars quiz devised by Jim Walsh. This was won by Edna Mervyn, with young Peter Webster a close second. Both are to be congratulated on a really good, and, if they will forgive us saying so, unexpected performance!

Supplies of the new club stationery were then sold, and the meeting ended at 10 p.m. with the usual hectic library business.

Next meeting, Sunday 6th April, 7.30 p.m.

FRANK CASE, Hon. Sec.

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Midland Section. Meeting at the Townsend Club, Birmingham, on February 25th.

There were twenty-one members present. After the Minutes were read, our Chairman gave us an interesting talk on "The Magnet", and "The Gem". One interesting point was that in 1932, at the request of the editor, Martin Clifford wrote what was (for him) a most unusual story about a boy called Lumley-Lumley, the title was "The Boy Who Came Back". When Jack finished his talk there was considerable discussion about the TV-Bunter shows. George Smellwood had very kindly brought his Sound-Recording Unit, and those members who had not seen the first transmission were able to hear the sound track of it played back. The general opinion of the meeting was that there is much room for improvement in the TV transmissions of Billy Bunter. This opinion later appeared on the front page of the Birmingham Gazette. The headline read "The Bunter Club is Disgusted".

Our next item was the raffle for a framed sketch of Bunter, sketched by Mr. Chapman when he visited us last October. At threepence a ticket our funds benefited considerably.

Well, that's all for now, Chums, and if you're in Birmingham on Monday April 28th, come and join us at our Club Birthday Social at The Townsend Club, 65 Church Street, Birmingham, 3.

P.S. Founder Member Joyce Carroll, who became Mrs. Peter Mellor on February 9th at St. Chad's Cathedral, joins me in thanks to all for their good wishes and telegrams.

PETER MELLOR,

Secretary.

Australasiän Branch

The second meeting of the O.B.B.C. in Victoria was held at the Railways Institute on Friday, 9th November. The Chairmen, Don Wicks, opened the meeting at 8.30 pm.

The Minutes of the first meeting having been confirmed, a discussion was held concerning the Newsletter. Although all agreed that the first issue had been successful it was also thought that room was still left for improvement. Jim Merralls thought that its scope should be widened, and asked if articles could be procured from "prominent collectors". The Secretary replied that this was being done and that one would probably appear in the next issue. It was moved and accepted that the Newsletter should, as soon as possible, be divided into three sections - "Club Notes", "Detective Papers" and "School Stories".

The next item on the agenda turned out to be the highlight of the evening - an exhaustive quiz prepared by Jim Merralls. In this Miss Stevens richly deserved her clear victory and the "Gem" which was her prize.

The debate between Miss Stevens and Race Mathews upon the respective merits of "Greyfriars" and "St. Dranks" showed a victory for the former, although both speakers put forward good cases and other members contributed freely.

Formal business having been concluded, the meeting was adjourned and all members settled down to discussion, sale and exchange. The meeting finally broke up at about 11.30 pm.

URGENTLY WANTED: The following numbers of the Nelson Lee Library, old series: 106, 252, 294, 328, 329, 331, 332, 334, 357, 389, 520, 521, 532. Any reasonable price paid, or would exchange for Modern Boys or Thrillers at value for value. I should also like to take the opportunity of apologising to any correspondents whose letters I have not replied to of late. This has been due to business reasons. I am now in a position to reply more promptly. E. McPherson, 80 Benedict Street, Glastonbury, Somerset.

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, Laleham, Middlx. Just returned from abroad and apologies to all previously sending lists for not replying before.

HAMILTONIA

Conducted by Herbert Leckenby

Happy Hamiltonians! What a lot they have to interest them these days. On top of the three big events comes the interview with Mr. C. H. Chapman in the "Reading and Berkshire Review" referred to in my editorial chat. It is indeed a very interesting addition to Greyfriars lore.

I am sure Mr. Chapman won't mind me pointing out that he makes one little error. He says the Greyfriars characters were first drawn by Arthur Clerke. This of course was not so for the distinction went to Hutton Mitchell. Arthur Clerke took over about No.40. And here's something else. In my chat I boldly assert that our little world played no small part in bringing Greyfriars to television. Well, here again if it had not been for Bob Whiter's alertness in spotting Mr. Chapman's sketches in "The Bicycle" and as a result getting in touch with him, the veteran artist might never have been brought into the limelight and given the credit he deserves. Yes, it's a feather in Bob's cap alright and another significant example of how we "make news".

As I write, the fifth episode of the television series will have been shown. I have only seen the first one, but from what I have gathered the general opinion seems to be that they have improved somewhat as they have gone on. Even so, the question as to whether they have really been successful or not arouses as much argument among the faithful as Mr. Butler's Budget among the general public. However, it will be all over next week, then will come the inquest.

If only it had been possible to put on such a series say fifteen or twenty years ago when they could have chosen from an army of boys brought up on the Magnet. I fancy I can hear a chorus of voices saying sighfully, "Ah, if only."

I don't know if the "Autobiography of Frank Richards" is selling well among the general public; certain it is it is being well supported in our ranks. On the whole, fans are well satisfied, but there has been a little criticism. A number wish Frank Richards had told us more about himself; they say "it is strange for an autobiography to start when

the author was seventeen. Frank Richards' explanation is, I believe, that he didn't think anyone would be interested. But I wonder if he's right. I don't think it's mere idle curiosity, simply that seeing he has written so much about boys, they naturally wonder what sort of a boy he was himself and how he fared up to his seventeenth year. However, what is told seems to have interested everybody. There's a little surprise here and there over a certain chapter, but as the author relates his experiences quite frankly, we'll say no more about that.

Reviews on the Tom Merry books were crowded out last month, but we'll try and get them in this time, for so far the March numbers have not appeared. There's no controversy about the first two stories, for everyone votes them excellent.

And here an explanation. In our February issue it was stated R. J. Macdonald would be taking on the covers. Unfortunately through an unforeseen circumstance this will not be so. However, the next best thing has happened, for C. H. Chapman has been engaged. He tells me he has already done four.

Some time ago I received a letter from a newcomer to our circle, Stanley Smith, Lord Wandsworth College, Long Sutton, Basingstoke. It contained a most striking account of the way in which he made the acquaintance of the companion papers. I know how much this kind of thing appeals, so I am quoting it here with Stanley's permission.

"I was in hospital at the time. I'd been there for some months and, as far as I could see, seemed doomed to be there for a long time to come. One day I remember particularly. I was bored - bored as only a boy can be - I'd read every book in the hospital (at any rate, all those that they gave to me) and everything that had been brought in by kind relatives and friends. The hospital, itself, was a small one and all the rest of the male patients were, to me, old men. I was, as I have said, bored, lonely and rather hopeless. Then someone gave me "something to read" and I found myself holding a paper-covered book of the type that I'd never seen before. It had a white cover and was headed "The Penny Poplar" - war time price 1s. Underneath the heading was a picture



of two boys (Wun Lung and, I believe, Bulstrode) engaged in an argument on the ice. My interest was aroused and I opened the book. In doing so, I opened the door into a new world in which my boredom, loneliness and preoccupation with my sches and pains was to be lost for ever. That may sound extravagant, but it is the sober truth.

(This was inspired by Leonard Mosley's caustic old man out comments in the "Daily Express" recently.)

GREYFRIARS AND THE JET-AGE

By Jim Walsh

I have the honour and privilege - so I am assured by a prominent newspaper critic - of participating in the Jet-Age. I feel neither honoured nor privileged.

You see, I realise that the sforessaid P.N.C. means it as a two-edged compliment. When he wishes to disparage the product of a byegone era - for ss such he evidently regards the twenties and thirties - he lends, by implication his own modernity of outlook.

Greyfriars, its "impossible schoolboys" and their activities are, he tells us, dated, out-moded, a bore and out of touch with the realities of the times as we - lucky people - know them.

Now a subject which has given me much food for thought since the Magnet ceased publication is this - if the Greyfriars stories came to be regularly written again could they be presented with an "up-to-date realism" sufficient to disarm such vituperative criticism as I have quoted?

And I not only ask Could They but - SHOULD THEY?

Let me give you a possible instance of such "progress".

How do you imagine the tuck-shop? Do you see it as I do tucked away in a corner of the quad, its bow-fronted window and bulls-eye panes still preserving a quaint Victorian aspect; guarded by a leafy elm benesth whose welcome shade the fellows sit on a wooden bench sipping ginger-pop?

Out-dated! Away with it! Let's fell the tree and reze the shop and on its site erect a modern, stream-lined, chromium-plated Milk Bar and Soda Fountain in which the fellows jive to the reucous strains of the juke-box.

Thrills you eh! Or does it?

But we will pause awhile before considering such frightening prospects further; let us see how Greyfriars conformed to the times when the Magnet itself, far from being a "back-number", was very much a reality. Where modern inventions were concerned, Greyfriars was not quite the back-water that the jet-age critics would have their readers believe. How long is it since Coker's "stink-bike" and Browney's wireless set first shattered the calm of the old place? Did not an aeroplane occasionally swoop down and scoop a fellow off the playing-pitch or land a stranded junior on another one in time for the match? (the latter incident occurred actually, if memory serves me right, at Rookwood only a year or two after the first war).

Then the murmur was "impossible stunts" - too up-to-date! Now its "impossible schoolboys" - too out-of-date! Verily the critics are hard to please!

True, the storms and upheavals of the day left hardly a ripple on the Greyfriars surface. The Gold Reserves then, as now, occasionally somehow took flight from the vaults of the Bank of England and provoked a crisis. But the Greyfriars fellows were more concerned about the whereabouts of the Hidden Loot that yet another petty crook had "lifted" from the Courtfield Bank - that institution robbed so many times it would only have been the good offices of the Famous Five Loot Recovery Dept. that enabled it to keep solvent.

But the worth of criticism that howls "dated", "out-moded", can be gauged from the fact that of all the villains who pitted their wits - to their undoing - against our heroes, it was the current bogey-men of the topical press that now seem most boring in retrospect.

Thus we had the Hun of World War I - for such, during the spate of tyrannical masters at the various schools, proved to be the wolf in scholastic sheep's clothing - and, almost at the end, the Nazi of World War II.

In between, during the Abyssinian affair, we had the Fascists, Count Zero and Muccolini; here, the designation of Italians as "dagos" and "macaroni-munchers" gave rather a Jack Herkewey touch to some otherwise good stories.

But, fortunately, such inflictions were few and, on the whole, Frank Richards succeeded very well in avoiding the very trap into which subservience to the jet-age critics

would have had him fall - the dating of his stories by the effort to be up-to-date! As a result, all of us can re-read an old Magnet with undiminished pleasure; but who the devil wants to re-read old newspapers with their "up-to-the-minute" headlines?

But we are less concerned with the Old School as we Old Boys knew it than with the Greyfriars as the Jet-Age Kids might see it or, rather, as the critics would like them to see it.

Imagine - pleasant thought - that the old Magnet is on the bookstalls once again; and imagine further - horrible thought - that it has now been taken over by a firm of the Thompson calibre who have installed a sub author to write the stories.

The editor decided on a policy of bang-up-to-the-minute realism.

Unfortunately, though the editor has a policy that controls the paper, the politicians have a policy that controls the editor - not to mention the forty-odd million non-editors. And that policy, like the seasons, is subject to rapid fluctuations.

Hence, the editor's policy of up-to-date realism is liable to have unfortunate, not to say farcical, results.

Witness the announcement in the Magnet you have just bought - "Commencing next week. Grand Holiday Series featuring the Exciting Adventures of Harry Wharton & Co on the Continent".

And in next week's - "Owing to the imposition of the "25 Currency Limit on spending abroad, Harry Wharton's holiday tour is cancelled. Read within about the Exciting Adventures of the Greyfriars Chums at Margate!"

Or again: the sub author writes a story revolving round the bother which ensues when Dunter uses another fellow's identity card to achieve some trickery. And the day before the Magnet is due to appear identity cards are abolished. So the story is Dated before it is published!

Then there was the case when the author forgot he was now in the jet-age and absent-mindedly introduced one or two real old-fashioned Study Spreads and Dorm Feasts. The editor gently pointed out that this was not in keeping with the paper's realistic policy and that he couldn't shock to-day's youth by suggesting that the sosses were fried because coupons

for the fat had been wangled in Fishy's Black Market; or that the tin of cream biscuits had been acquired because Mauly still had influence with the girl in the bun-shop.

And, as a climax, have you heard the startling news that uranium has been discovered under the old Quad? You can hardly wait, I imagine, to read the further news of the Greyfriars Atomic Research Plant. You will, I am sure, quiver with excitement when you read in your Magnet - "Next Week. The Great Election. Wingate v Loder. Who Shall be Head Shop Steward?"

Well, dear readers, you can wipe the beads of perspiration from your brow. There's no need to inflict any more on you for that was the last issue of the Magnet - New Series; even the Jet-Age Kids could stomach no more!

We can afford to be facetious at such flights of fancy and grateful that such fiction is but phantasy (pshaw!) at present. But, in serious vein, my outlook has not changed very much from the time when, as a young boy, I was forced through circumstances to change my own school. I was like a fish out of water and desperately unhappy; the old faces gone, in their stead new classmates whose ways were all different to my own.

What consolation then within those magic pages; for here was a school that never changed and one in which the old familiar faces were always there to greet one.

As it was then, so is it now; to that now Old Boy the old school still remains one of the few unchanging things in a changing world.

Let the Jet-Age Kids have their space-ships - if the cheery Co. will give a lick of paint to the old van and hitch up the old horse I'll be quite happy to jog along the dusty lanes with them once more. They can have their rocket-propelled aerial monsters; but if the Water Lily ever takes to the silvery Thames again I'll tow that dear old dinghy from London Bridge to Oxford - with Bunter in it too!

So when we next "look-in- on Greyfriars may it reflect the Changeless Scene; the changing one we'll leave to the vitriolic pens of the Carping Columnists and Jibing Journalists.

To escape from that we look to a mightier pen dipped in a more congenial fluid - The Spirit of Eternal Youth.

As a fitting conclusion I will paraphrase, if I may, the words of that immortal poem of Rupert Brooke's:

There is One Corner of Our Own Dear Land,  
That is For Ever Greyfriars.

THE NEW TOM MERRY BOOKS

By Gerald Allison

The first sight of the two new St. Jim's stories by Gold Hawk Books at 1/6 each was most favourable. The format was excellent, and if the artist had not quite succeeded in portraying the Gussy, Blake and Trimble etc. we know so well, he could certainly have done far worse.

What a pleasant experience it was again to buy new yarns about Tom Merry & Co. at a reasonable price. One is lost in admiration for Martin Clifford. What courage to begin a new venture of this kind at his time of life. May he live for ever!

And what about the tales themselves? Well, I enjoyed them both. There are certainly no other school tales of comparable merit appearing today.

"Tom Merry's Secret", is a very pleasant romp and was most satisfactory all through.

In "Tom Merry's Rival" we again have Tom challenged as captain by Cardew. But not the Cardew of the Gem. Gone is the cool, suave, insouciant Ralph Reckness, who never lost his imperturbable sang-froid under any circumstances. In his place we have "Cardew the Cad", a much less likeable character. The old Cardew was never a cad. Racke was.

But it would be invidious to criticise such an excellent tale for a fault which is quite certainly "in the eye of the beholder".

The election of the new Captain was very exciting. Tales about trials, elections, fights etc. are always enjoyable right up to the end because of the uncertainty as to the result, and this yarn will satisfy everybody - I think.

Thanks a million, Mr. Clifford.

ON SALE: 250  $\frac{1}{2}$ d. Union Jacks; 230  $\frac{1}{2}$ d. Plucks; Gems, Nos. 563-564, 1558-1663. Magnets, 1461-1467, 1573-1584, 1589-1598. F. Machin, 38 St. Thomas's Road, Preston.

THE NELSON LEE COLUMN

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

Among Brooks' many claims to fame there is one that has not been dealt with to any great extent. And that is he was, and is, a most prolific writer.

Apart from the Nelson Lee Library and the Union Jack, his work may be found in many other boys' papers. As we know, his first effort to be accepted was a serial in the Gem in 1910 called "The Iron Island". Information concerning what he wrote between then and 1915, when he commenced writing for the Nelson Lee, is very scanty, but I think it fairly safe to assume that he was responsible for several stories in the Magnet and Gem. One Gem story, at least, we know to be his because I have the original MS. It was "The Terrible Three's Sub" (No.146, 1910). It is also safe to say that he wrote most of the St.Jim's stories between 1926 and 1931 (see Eric Payne's article "And every story a Gem" in this year's Annual).

As to the quality of these stories, it is a debatable point. His earlier efforts to imitate Charles Hamilton's style was not good. Certainly they cannot be classed amongst his best work. However, when we come to the later period I feel that a lot of the stories were as good as those in the N.L. It's true I only possess one such series called "Hendforth at St.Jim's" (which I consider very amusing) but I should imagine those that preceded and those that followed were on a par with this series. I think that the reason this particular period was better than the rest was because, being a well known and well liked author in his own right. After having written so many St.Jim's stories he decided that he couldn't be bothered to imitate any longer, so gradually troubled less and less until at last - in the series mentioned above - he made no attempt to imitate at all and wrote without any restriction of his normal style. In consequence these later Gem stories, as I say were as good, in their own way, as those in the N.L.

The Union Jack and the three series of the Sexton Blake Library are another profitable field for anyone searching for his stories. There are those who say that he was much

more at home writing detective stories than school stories. Well, that too, is a debatable point, but detective stories were his first love and they're certainly his present, so let's see what he wrote in the U.J.

The first that I can definitely trace to him was No.446, "The Coffee Stall Mystery". I haven't got it, so I can't say much about it. Then comes a big gap to No.720, "Twixt Sunset and Dawn". I haven't got that either! But from then until the very last copy but one he wrote at least 68 stories and that's approximately one in every twelve issues, which isn't a bad average.

The majority of these stories are concerned with the adventures of Waldo, but towards the end he introduced a much more entertaining character, one Eustace Cavendish, based I'm sure upon Archie Glenthorne. However, before Waldo came on the scene in No.794 "Waldo the Wonder Man" the stories were just plain detective yarns, with no particular opponent to Sexton Blake. These early stories were nearly all written in the first person. They were a mixed bag, some were good, some weren't. However, an interesting side-light on a few of them was that he frequently introduced Nelson Lee and Nipper. Indeed, in one story, No.777, "The Flashlight Clue", he introduced some of the St.Franks characters.

With the advent of Waldo, however, he dropped all this and concentrated on Waldo alone. Every story from then until the introduction of Cavendish in No.1354 revolved around Waldo. It is perhaps not generally known outside Blake circles that the original Waldo was a bit of a dirty dog, in fact he was a villain of the deepest dye! Possibly Brooks found he "had something" in this character, so it was not long before he was cleaned up and turned into the "Robin Hood" of crime. In fact, he became so respectable that it hurt! He even became one of the big noises at Scotland Yard on one occasion.

Perhaps one of Brooks' best known stories in the U.J. was that in the "Proud" Train Series called "Blind Luke". As you may know, six authors were given certain facts and had to build a story around them. In the resulting competition to judge the best story, Brooks' effort was awarded the palm. In connection with this series Brooks told us the following story.

It appears that he was not one of the original six to be chosen, but at the last moment one of the authors fell ill and the editor phoned E.S.B. in a great flap and asked him if he could turn out a story in time for the next issue (they were printed weeks in advance, of course.). This he agreed to do and set down to write it straight away. (As a matter of fact, I think he dictated most of his stuff to his wife, but that's by the way.) He must have put in some pretty hard work on that occasion, for he had it finished by the following morning, and it was in the editor's hands the same day. For this special effort he received not one word of thanks and what was more important - nothing extra in the pay packet! But that was typical of the A.P.

For once in a while I've got more material than there's room for, so there'll be more next month.

Here's a few more titles to finish off with. You know, I shall feel lost when I come to the end (any year now). They've been listed in the Column for so long they're almost part of the family!

2nd New Series

- No.51, The Hero of Shingle Head. 52, Rebellion at St.Franks. 53, Up, The Rebels! 54, The Rebels Triumph. 55, The Fighting Fags. 56, Handy's Pals. 57, Archie, the Spendthrift. 58, Bucking up the Fourth. 59, Copper's Captured Cops. 60, The Mystery of the Monastery Ruins. 61, From Prairie to Castle. 62, Flooded out at St.Franks. 63, The Peril of the Moor. 64, St.Franks by the Briny. 65, By Submarine to the Pole. 66, Invaders of Gothland. 67, St.Franks in the Lists. 68, The Valley of Fear. 69, Lee the Lionheart. 70, Schoolboys in Armour.

WANTED "Union Jack" 896. Sexton Blake Libraries 1st Series 54, 57, 219, 229, 241, 253, 271, 276, 283, 307, 312, 325, 356, 358, 360, 366, 371. Second Series 1, 8, 16, 25, 35, 41, 42, 73, 77, 52. Good prices offered. Josephine Peckman, 27 Archdale Road, E. Dulwich, S.E.22.

We deeply regret to announce the death of  
 REGINALD ARTHUR HUDSON, Chairman Northern Section  
 of the O.E.B.C. He passed away suddenly on  
 Sunday, March 21st.



LETTER BOX

Frank Richards is Pleased !

March 10th, 1952.

Dear Herbert Leckenby,

Many thanks for the C.D.: crammed with interesting matter to me! I like your review of the Autobiography very much indeed. My dear boy, you have done me proud! When I read your review, I almost made up my mind to write a second volume, filling in the gaps! But I remind myself that it is possible to have too much even of a good thing! I have been rather amused by letters I have received, on the subject of those chapters now locked up in a drawer. They seem to interest some readers quite as much as the published chapters, perhaps a little more.

Bunter on TV seems to have roused quite a lot of comment. For myself, I can only repeat that I like it very much indeed. If it isn't quite perfect, is anything, in this imperfect world? I just love watching the plays and wish that they were going on for ever.

I like too John Shew's note on my first appearance on the television screen. John seems a little surprised by my remark to Miss Herington that I am translating the odes of Horace into English verse. Actually, this happy and enjoyable task has been with me for years — a little bit like Mr. Quelch's History of Greyfriars! I nourish a hope of publishing, before very long, a volume of the alcaics selected from the four books of the Odes: in English but preserving the Latin metre. Though what the reviewers will think of a translation of Horace by the author of Billy Bunter I just don't know!

With kind regards,

Always yours sincerely,

FRANK RICHARDS.

The Mystery Run of "School and Sport"

Dear Editor,

Mr. J. K. Swan has kindly thrown a little light on my uncertainty as to how long "School and Sport" actually ran, as he has copies of Nos. 25 and 27. H.A. Hinton evidently

## Old Boys' Book Collector

No.1 published 1st March. A few copies still available. Art Cover, 36 large 10" x 8" pages 12 articles; including those by Frank Richards and Lewis (Kestrel) Jackson, plus "That Dreadful Mr. Reynolds", "Frank Richards' Sch. Days", "Jack Sheppard", "The Greyfriars Herald", "The 1/2d Vanguard Library", "Hamilton's Leading Men", review of "Frank Richards' - Autobiography", etc. . . . .

No.2 ready 1st June. Contents include "Behind the Scenes", the inside story of "The Gem" & "Magnet", by their Editor, C.M.Down; "Frank Richards Replies", the full text of his controversy with George Orwell & Harold A. Albert plus "The Demon Barber", "Coloured Counties and Coloured Covers", "Hamilton's Key Men, (D'Arcy, Bunter & Lovell), etc. etc. Order yours now.

Single copies 2s.0d post free: Annual Subscription 8s.0d, from:

Tom Hopperton, Courtlands, Fulford Road, Scarborough.

(contd. from p.117)

made a bigger fight of it than, in common with Clifford Clive and Roger Jenkins, I had imagined. No.25 was in a new format - sixteen pages and "Magnet" size - headed "New Size, New Stories" and "Great Free Gift Number", the gift being four photo plates. A new series of detective stories featuring Martin Cripps began, and St.Kit's was still going strong in both numbers. Mr. Hamilton's foundation served the editor better than he knew.

Yours sincerely,

TOM HOPPERTON.



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Edited by H.H.Bond. 10 Erw Wen. Rhiwbina. Cardiff. S.Wales.

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### The Round Table

was not quite so crowded this month, but nevertheless correspondence has been much brisker than for many months past and again I am able to quote excerpts from one or two which I am sure will be of interest to the majority of Blake fans.

Ronald A. Nicholls of Whitchurch, Nr. Bristol read the old U.J. fairly regularly between the years 1926 and 1933 until it became the illfated "Detective Weekly". The latter publication Ronald says "did not quite have the same appeal as the U.J" and I think we all agree with him there, although early numbers were more in keeping with the old Blake traditions than were the latter issues which left the reader wondering if Blake was likely to survive the change. "One of the series I particularly enjoyed" continued Ronald, "was the Paul Cynos stories. We shall never read such stories again in my opinion, as the present day S.B.Ls are not to be compared with them". At this point our new arrival at the Round Table asks if it would not be possible to form a library of old U.J and S.B.L. copies "so that members could have an opportunity of re-reading some of the grand yarns". Perhaps this could be discussed at the next meeting of the Sexton Black Circle at Southend in April. The idea is a good one, of course, but in my estimation it could only be arranged by a number of collectors who would be willing to loan copies to members of such a library at a small charge. Perhaps the Circle will have a chat about this and let us know.

## Continuing The Round Table

Ronald Nicholls criticises the articles by Walter Webb which, he says "seem to go on like the brook in Tennyson's poem. Do you not think that articles on series that appeared in the 1920's would appeal more to the majority of Blake fans who were not reading the U.J. during the Edwardian Era?"

Well, one can look at it in two ways. I think that most of the readers of the stories in the 1920's, being familiar with their "purple period" might welcome some information about their favourite character as he appeared in issues long before their time. Personally I think Walter Webb has done a marvellous job in unearthing such a wealth of information about the pre-war (1914-1918) Blake scene, but of course we are all entitled to our own opinions and it be interesting to know what others think. I might add here that I am featuring Walter's long article as a serial in order to lend a little variety to Blakiana. Even his admirers might not agree to a full "Edwardian Era" issue.

Another long and interesting letter came from Stanley Smith of Basingstoke, Hants, but as space is very limited this month I shall have to feature his remarks next month. In the meantime thank you Stanley for your most interesting letter and I am sure most readers will enjoy hearing of your Blake interests.

Finally Anthony Baker of High Barnet writes:- "I am writing to tell you how much I enjoy Blakiana. Like Miss. Coates I too wish that the S.B.L. reviews had not stopped. Not knowing pre-war Blake stories very well I found it interesting to see how Gerry Allison compared the present day tales with the old ones. Could you resume the lists of the S.B.L. titles? I found these very useful as I am sure many others did. Walter Webb's serial is extremely good, as is, of course, the Round Table. In fact Blakiana is excellent however you look at it and if only you resumed the S.B.L. reviews it would, in my opinion, be perfect". Thank you Anthony for your bouquets. I shall be pleased to hear if others want these reviews to be resumed. Cheerio for now.

H. Maurice Bond.

The "Union Jack" in the Depths  
 by  
 Herbert Lockery

I can remember the UNION JACK from the very day Sexton Blake took over permanently, and if I were asked to state a time in the long years which followed when the stories were least interesting, I should unhesitatingly plump for the period roughly lasting from No. 250 to 400. I had been a regular reader from the beginning, but oft times during this three years I felt like giving the paper up in disgust, and once I even wrote to the editor and asked him to stop Blake stories if they couldn't make them better, and return to yarns of a varied type as had been the policy during the first two years. Fortunately the editor did not follow my advice, fortunately indeed, I can hear colleague Maurice Bond and dozens of others say when they read this.

But honestly you follows the great majority of the stories during that period were ghastly tripe, some of them making it an ordeal to read through. True, Plummer had been introduced, a sign of better things to come, but he only appeared very occasionally.

The reason for this long spell of poor stories was the mania for making Blake and Tinker adopt strange roles and the attempt to cash in on some passing event. It would appear that the editor would have a talk to Mark Darran or Murray Graydon (the two who wrote the majority of the stories at that time) point to something which was making the headlines at the time and say "Write a story around that". The idea might have succeeded occasionally but more often it flopped. For instance, Lord Northcliffe ordered all his newspapers to attack the great soap firms. The campaign caused a great sensation and later lost the newspapers a lot of money when they were sued for libel. But the Union Jack story which was written round

it and in which Spearing played a part, was one of the most puerile I ever read.

Then take No. 385 "The Father of the Chapel" a curious title to some and nothing to do with the Non-conformist faith. For the benefit of those who know not the printers craft I might explain that "chapel" is an ancient term for a meeting of printers when they got together to discuss their affairs, and the father is their elected chairman. At the time of this story there was trouble in the printing world and it told of the events leading up to a strike on a newspaper. Volunteers, including Blake and Tinker, were hurriedly got together and the paper triumphantly got to bed on time. Now I was working on a morning newspaper in those days, and I know all about the race against the clock throughout the watches of the night; when just one member of an expert staff absent could create a desperate situation. So naturally when I read that story I throw it down, smiled wryly and exclaimed "What piffle!". Blake might know how to lock a criminal but it didn't follow he could lock up a page of type.

There were many other crude stories like that in the days when the U.J. was at it's worst. Here are just a few examples of the roles the versatile Blake adopted, usually with the help of Tinker. No 256 Chef, No 297 Publisher, No 298 Showman, No 305 Lock Keeper, No 308 Bookmaker, No 313 Consul, No 340 Postmaster, No 355 Bath Chair Man, No 361, Ice Cream Merchant, and No 379 Bandman. Of a truth a policy which which were an idea absolutely threadbare, with the result that the stories were the last word in absurdity. I question if even the most loyal Blake fan could digest such stories as these to-day.

Another black mark against many of them, in my opinion at least, was the tendency to introduce a humorous touch. Neither Mark Darran or Murray Graydon was at his best when trying to be funny and they certainly failed here. Tinker was portrayed as a cheeky almost uneducated kind of office boy, plucky and loyal to Blake it is true, but oh so different to the well-spoken intelligent youth G.H. Toed who made him at a not very much later date.

Yes, unquestionably, it was a drab period. With few

exceptions each story was complete in itself, the criminals were small time ones who were forgotten almost before the next story was on sale. Where Murray Graydon was concerned there was invariably a stereotyped love interest with the hero proved innocent, wedding bells as epilogue, Sexton Blake and Tinker as honoured guests and Pedro somewhere in the offing.

Fortunately better days were in store. Ere long Erstwhile, aristocratic Plummer was appearing more frequently, glamorous Yvonne came to brighten the pages (oh these splendid double numbers) for many moons we were thrilled by Blake and Tinker's battles with the villainous Carlac and Kew; urbane, fanatical Wu Ling; man of many faces Kestrel; and many more who brought the pink covered U.S. out of the depths and made it one of the best of weeklies of all time for boys and adults too.

THE END.

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We have pleasure in announcing that another brilliant new article by HERBERT LECHEBY, recognised authority of the Old Boys Book Collecting world will appear very soon. It will be entitled:-

"THE UNION JACK AT IT'S PEAK".

Your views of this month's star feature will be very much appreciated. Address all letters to H. M. Bond at the address given under our heading.

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**IMPORTANT!**

Next month we hope to be able to publish a report on the second meeting of the Sexton Blake Circle which is to be held during April at the home of Bill Colcombe at Southend. All interested in this Circle should write to Harry Honor, Yulden Farm, Heathfield, Sussex.

AND PLEASE DON'T FORGET WE STILL NEED LOTS OF ARTICLES!!!

Chapter Nine.

Making one of his rare departures from tradition, Editor Beck gave the author's name to this one, though one felt that it would have been kinder to the chronicler, Mark Barran, had his name been left out, for the above was hardly a true reflection of his work. In contrast, stories like "Secrets of a Great City" (U.J. No.79), "The Army Detective" (No. 93) and "Twice Round the World" (No. 104) all published in the same year, 1905, were quite good.

With his "Boys Friend" serial "Sexton Blake in the Congo" fresh in mind, therein he vehemently renounces the cruelties bestowed on the unfortunate natives, one found it difficult to believe William Murray Graydon's ready acceptance of the fact that stag hunting was an exciting sport and quite humane, as he stated in his story "The Stag At Bay" (U.J. No. 212). The spectacle of a stag being chased by hunters and hounds until it is driven into the sea and drowned, or until overcome by sheer exhaustion and terror it must needs (with it's last remaining reserves of strength) turn at Bay to be torn to pieces by the triumphant dogs unless a well aimed bullet from one of the huntsman mercifully puts a speedy end to the sufferings of the unfortunate animal - this may be exciting, as the author stated; but sport, according to British standards, decidedly no! Once again we had W. Murray Graydon's portraying Blake in a far from favourable light; for surely great lover of animals as he is known to be, the Ian from Baker Street would have condemned this "sport", at least silently, instead of condoning it! Far from this being so Blake, we find, joins the hunters, Tinker and Pedro too - helping to hunt the stag down, leaving one compelled to wonder what Blake's feelings would have been had Pedro been in the same unfortunate position as the hapless stag! How little of Blake's true character must the author have understood to have placed him in such a shameful position, for without doubt, had further stories on similar lines been indulged in, his popularity would soon have ebbed.