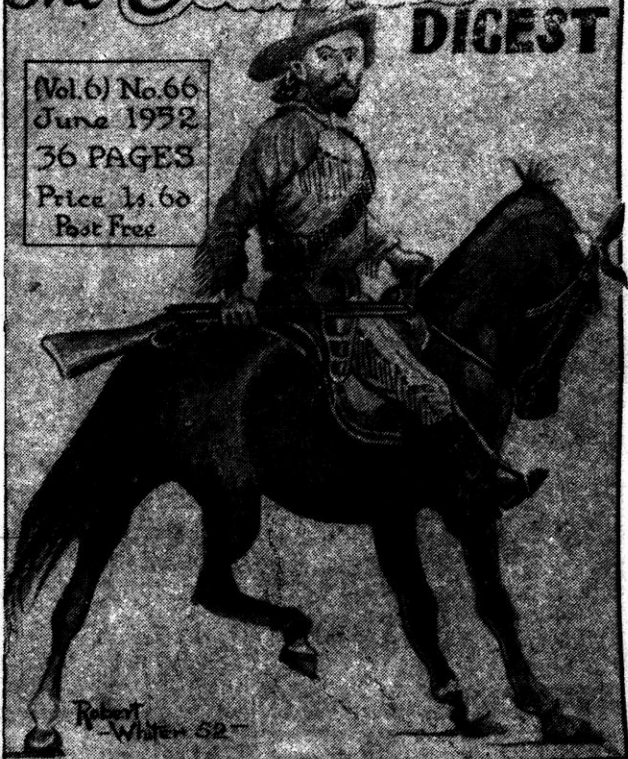


The Collector's

DIGEST

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JUNE 1952

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

FROM THE EDITOR'S CHAIR

Kind Thought. Ronald Hunter, in far-off Brazil, seeing my comments some time ago on unpaid Annual subs., thoughtfully suggests a whip-round and offers a remittance to start it. Now whilst I greatly appreciate the kindly gesture I am going to decline. 'Tis true there are still an odd one or two to come in - yes, still - but even if these bad boys let me down, the loss will now be very small. Two years ago when Clif Beardsell made the same suggestion, the position was much more serious. I have not forgotten what happened then - you came to the rescue splendidly and wiped the deficit out. If the same appeal was made again I have an idea knowing what good friends the C.D. has, you would go and do more than was necessary this time, and so, well, I'd rather not. Thanks all the same, Ronald.

Now, whilst on the subject of the Annual, just a word or two about the next one. I'm pleased to say things are progressing. That doughty London Club member, Charlie Wright, has been doing a lot of research concerning those

glamour boys of centuries past, the highwaymen, and a girl or two, like Starlight Nell, also. The result - a topping article. Other stalwarts are at work too; yes, it's taking shape, for the year is getting on. In fact, you'll be getting the familiar forms next month.

= = =

Memories of "Jack North". My article on John Nix Pentelow brought me a stack of letters, particularly from those who had pleasant memories of his Wycliffe stories under his pen-name "Jack North". They included two very lengthy and extremely interesting ones from a "new chum", H.G. Burrows, of Walthamstow. Mr. Burrows had met J.N.P. years ago, and I'll quote from one of his letters as I am sure it will interest quite a number.

"In appearance, he was medium to tall, broadly built, clean shaven, with crisp slowly greying hair. Speaking softly, he regarded one with mild, grey-brown eyes, in a manner which was rather disarming, as in any battle of words I am sure J.N.P. could more than hold his own.

"Yes, he was editor of the Boys' Realm (in 1922) and he lent me a book he had written published by Arrowsmith, called, I believe, "England versus Australia", a history of Test Match cricket between the two countries up to the First World War.

"Pentelow was born in Huntingdonshire, where he went to school. He returned to the same school as a master. He actually started writing at the tender age of eight, and was a successful author very early in life. His career as a schoolmaster did not last very long. I am not sure what he turned to next but whatever it was it took him a good deal round the countryside and for many years scarcely ever missed a cricket match on the Worcester County ground. All this time he was turning out stories for various papers, and after a while he retired to a village in Sussex and made authorship a full time occupation.

"He was indeed keen on cricket, and at the time I met him he was a member of the Middlesex, Sussex, and Surrey County Cricket Clubs."

Member of three great cricket clubs! No wonder he could write so intimately about the king of games.

Thanks very much, Mr. Burrows.

That £50 Magnet! My comments last month quickly brought a very frank and straightforward reply from the collector concerned. As I had an idea might be the case, an enterprising young reporter with a love for big figures had misconstrued something that was said. My correspondent says the £50 figure came about like this - Hearing a rumour that a Magnet No.1 might be for sale the collector 'phoned the lucky owner and offered a fiver for it. The man with No.1 replied that he did not know how the rumour got about, that he had no intention of parting for £5, and laughingly added, Nor £50 either. On being told that the reporter took it upon himself to say that a No.1 was valued at £50.

Well, it just shows you how easily these misunderstandings can arise, and goes to prove that there are two sides to the publicity question as some of our members contend.

I had to smile, though, over one letter I got in connection with this, however. It came from a member with a modest collection of Magnets. He had seen the article, so had his wife, and she had been urging him to get rid of them - and buy a television set! He said it made him feel like Ted Ray.

However, the arrival of C.D. smoothed things out, so all was well.

Yours sincerely,

HERBERT LECKENBY.

SALE OR EXCHANGE: 30 copies $\frac{1}{2}$ d. Gem 1907, 5/6 each.

Boys! Friend 3d Libraries for Sale or Exchange. Several green Penny Populars for sale. Two vols. Magnet, complete for years 1918 and 1919. Will give two copies for one of 1d red Magnet. White Penny Populars, 244 to 286, mint, 2/6 each, date 1917.

Wanted, $\frac{1}{2}$ d Gems 3-37, 10/6 each offered. Richard Whorwell, 29 Aspinden Road, Rotherhithe, London, S.E.16.

OFFERS INVITED for Chums, Volume 13; Chums 1938, Captain, Volume 26; "Jack Herkaway Among the Brigands" (bound volume). J.Hepburn, C/o Walter Willson, Ltd., 4 Waterloø Road, Blyth, Northumberland.

WANTED: Magnets, 1928-1937. M.Lewis, 10 Dudley Road, Folkestone, Kent.

(Note.- An old friend has taken over this feature this month, and a right good job he has made of it. - H.L.)

THE MEN WHO WROTE FOR BOYS

No. 7 - D. H. Perry

By Herry Dowler

If you wish your name to be included in the recognised reference books where the great writers of fiction are listed it is not sufficient to know a certain subject from A to Z. It is not sufficient to be a great authority on a subject. It is not sufficient to have mastered your chosen subject to such an extent that you are able to write about it with quite extraordinary detail and tremendous accuracy. This I say is not sufficient. What you must be able to do is to write with quite extraordinary literary power and originality, and mere knowledge as knowledge counts for practically nothing.

No more striking example of a writer possessing almost encyclopedic knowledge of the subject matter of his stories and yet dying as he lived practically unknown in the literary world, is to be found than D. H. Perry. It is true that some of his books are to be found in the public libraries, and you may run across one when you are prowling round the second-hand bookstalls, but consult any reference book you like, search unremittingly through old papers and magazines, and all the information you will glean -- that is if you are lucky -- is about equal to what we know about Shakespeare.

Now, why did a man with such exceptional knowledge of the subject matter of his stories and articles, live and die practically unknown to the ordinary man in the street? There is no doubt that he was an exceptionally well-educated man, an acknowledged authority on the armies of Europe, and steeped in military history and military grandeur, and one of the greatest authorities on Napoleon and his campaigns. Actors and artists would consult him for particulars relating to uniforms and accoutrements, and one has only to read his stories and articles to realise that here is a man that knows what he is talking about. All his writing was done in a studio, the walls of which were covered with military trophies.

Why then did such a man fail to get into the literary reference books, and why throughout his whole writing career did he remain an ordinary but very popular boys' story writer,

grinding out story after story at the low rates paid for such work?

His output was simply staggering and almost defies comprehension — in seven years he wrote more than two million words about Robin Hood and his merry men. For over 50 years he turned out story after story, and article after article, in all kinds of papers and magazines.

There are three reasons that I can think of, any one or all of which, will explain why D. H. Parry failed to hit the top of the bill, or for that matter the bottom of the bill, as far as literary recognition by the general public is concerned.

1. He may have been and probably was a man of an exceedingly reticent nature, and of retiring disposition who shunned publicity in every form.

2. Early in his career he started writing for boys, and except on rare occasions he kept in this rut practically all his working literary life, and never made any effort to get out of it.

3. While he had an amazing and almost encyclopedic knowledge of the subject matter of his stories and articles, as a writer purely and simply, he was no better and no worse than scores of other writers who contributed to the popular press.

I must admit that I find it difficult to pen this third reason, but in matters literary it is very difficult to assess the value of a story or article. As I write I am looking at a story by Parry, a $1\frac{3}{4}$ page story, in Vol. 1 of Chums about the Franco-German War. What is the difference between say this story and one of the short stories on the same subject by the great French writer Guy de Maupassant? Even I who make no pretensions to acute literary discernment, can see there is all the difference in the world. Maupassant would have condensed Parry's story into less than half the space; the characters would live not so much by what they said as by what they had left unsaid; there would be that marvellous and almost uncanny gift of describing in a few words what lesser writers would take pages to do; and lastly there would be that marvellous last sentence of Maupassant's — a fitting conclusion from the hand of the master.

And yet — I hesitate again. There is something in the work of Parry, at least in these short stories of his, that fills me with admiration. I would dearly like to know what Somerset Maugham would say about the respective merits of the short stories of D. H. Parry in this Vol.1 of Chums and the short stories of Maupassant.

David Harry Parry came from a long line of artists of the Manchester school. Both his father and uncle were artists, and D. H. Parry himself had studied in London under Calderon and Julian, and later in Paris. Drawing and painting seemed to have a great fascination for him all his life, and he himself illustrated many of the articles he wrote.

In his early literary career in the late 80's he wrote for Cassell's Saturday Journal, then for the New York Herald, and then for Answers. Between 1891 and 1895 he did a great deal of work for Chums, especially short stories and articles of a military nature.

Under the pen-name of Morton Pike he did a tremendous amount of work for the Amalgamated Press. No one with the slightest knowledge of literature, reading "The Red Rapiers", "The Black Dragoons", "Gilbert Nameless" and many other historical stories in the Boys' Friend and similar papers could fail to realise the touch of the historian and the military expert. These tales throbbed with life and verisimilitude.

Sometimes he wrote stories under the name of Captain Wilton Blake. Under this pen-name he wrote the following serial stories: "In the Ranks" and "Son of the Sword" in the Boys' Friend, "No Quarter" in the Boys' Herald, and "Thistle and Rose" in the Family Journal, and there may have been others under this pen-name of which I have no record.

He wrote both articles and stories for all kinds of other papers and magazines I have not previously mentioned such as Young Folks, Chatterbox, Cassell's Magazine, the Captain, and Cheer Boys Cheer, and it is quite possible he may have written under other pen-names or anonymously.

Sometimes he wrote stories which as far as I know only appeared in bound-book form, and many of which can still be found in the juvenile department of our public libraries. Among these may be mentioned "Kit of the Carabineers",

"The Sunken Million", "Sabre and Spurs" and "Hussars of the Wolf".

Amongst his more serious work may be mentioned "Britain's Roll of Glory" containing the records of more than 500 holders of the Victoria Cross, and his great pictorial work "The History and Costumes of the Regiments of the British Army." He wrote scores of articles on all kinds of military matters, and especially on the period of the Napoleonic Wars. Many of these articles he illustrated himself.

For over 50 years this truly learned man poured out several million words: serial stories, short stories, and so forth. He gave countless hours of happiness to thousands and thousands of boys and adults, but to practically all of them he was merely a name: he was Morton Pike, or D.H. Parry, or Captain Wilton Blake, and nothing more. If added to the quite remarkable knowledge of his subject matter he had paid more attention to literary craftsmanship, and considerably curtailed his output, he would undoubtedly have gained a higher place in the literary firmament.

He was no Conan Doyle or Stanley Weyman: he could not have written "Micah Clarke" or "A Gentleman of France". But within his narrow limits D. H. Parry's career as a writer has been a truly great one. Although just a name to the majority of his readers, thousands of boys and a large number of adult readers enjoyed the splendid romances that flowed from his virile pen.

He lived a long life and I feel sure a happy life. He departed quietly from this earth in January, 1950, at the age of 82 at his Overstrand home in Norfolk, and he now lies quite close to the grey North Sea which he loved so well.

WANTED: Magnets, Gems. Will exchange Empire Annual for Boys (1912) for any Greyfriars Holiday Annual.
Ian Sheerer, 45 Craigievar Crescent, Aberdeen.

WANTED: Old copies of Magnet, Gem, Penny Popular, etc. Good prices paid. J. F. Bellfield, 24 Grainger Lane, Cradley Heath, Staffs.

WANTED: Any copies Sexton Blake Library written by John G. Brandon. Please write M. Jacobs, 459 Commercial Road, London, E.1. (Wrong street number given last month.)

OUR HOBBY

By Gerald Allison

Let others keep their foreign stamps, their coins and
 matchbox lids,
 But I'll collect the dear old books we read when we were
 kids.
 Those were the days, and no mistake, when money had its
 worth,
 When you could buy six days a week, the grandest books on
 earth.

The Marvel; Pluck; the old Boys' Friend; the Magnet and
 the Gem.
 What papers can the lads buy now you can compare to them?
 And then there was the Nelson Lee; the good old Union Jack.
 Either of those could knock the flippin' Eagle on its back!
 And think of all the comics too: the Rainbow, Chips, and
 Sparks.
 And Comic Life, and Butterfly, and Lot-o-Fun, and Lerks.
 I wish I had a pile here now, six feet high from the ground.
 I'm sure I should be "Popular", if I could hand them round.

And now a word of thanks to those who in the days of yore,
 Had got the commonsense to store their papers in a drawer.
 It's due to them that each of us can have such hours of joy,
 In living over those grand times he had when just a boy.

Besides the books themselves of course we also have the Clubs.
 I'm sure we get a lot more fun, than th'chaps who visit pubs.
 Our meetings are such great affairs, where friendship reigns
 supreme,
 And what a lot of noise there is when we all let off steam!
 Praise too for Herbert Leckenby, and for his grand "C.D."
 Without that, half the hobby's joy would quite be gone
 for me.
 I'm sure we all would like to give our thanks to th'lad from
 York,
 Who entertains us with his mag, and also with his talk.

Lest, but not least, I wish to thank the small but chosen
few,
Who first thought of th' O.B.B.C. I'm sure they little knew
Just how good their idea was. Well, now we've branches
five
In England. Success to us all! Long may we live and thrive!

—oO—

(Note.- Yes, it's still spring, the time for poets, but I
don't think anyone will say rude things about Gerry's effort.
Blushingly, my blue pencil did hover over the sixth verse,
but, being only human, I let it go. - H.L.)

MY MIDLAND VISIT

By Leonard Packman

Having been invited by the Midland Branch of the O.B.B.C.
as a guest at their "first year's birthday party", I arrived
at mid-day at Birmingham station to be met by the Chairman's
wife, Midge Corbett. I had already been briefed as to her
appearance, but as soon as I observed a "Gem" prominently
displayed under a lady's arm, nothing else was really
necessary!

My hostess piloted me through very pleasant surroundings
to a restaurant. Here I found awaiting me Mr.C.H.Chapman,
whom I had previously had the pleasure of meeting in London,
Peter Mellor, the Revd. A. G. Pound, and, a great and
delightful surprise this, Mr. C. Maurice Down, editor of
the Gem and Magnet for many years. Needless to say, we
were soon all engaged in animated conversation appertaining
to the hobby.

After lunch, Jack and his wife, Mr. Chapman, Mr. Down
and myself went by car to Bunter Court (49 Glyn Farm Road,
Quinton), this being Jack's address. No sooner had we set
down than the Press arrived (Birmingham Post). Having
bomberded us with questions and taking a photo they departed
- and in came the B.B.C.!

A recording was then taken of a short discussion on
Billy Bunter, Harry Wherton, Gussy and Hurree Singh, upon
completion of which the recording was played over for us to

hear our own voices, but I must confess I did not recognise my own!

Having disposed of the B.B.C., we settled down to a real good talk on authors, artists and papers; in fact everything that makes our hobby the delightful subject that it is.

Then followed an excellent high tea which would have made Billy Bunter's eyes gleam behind his spectacles to behold, and more than even he could have put away!

After tea I took the opportunity to bag some autographs, and then we all made our way to the venue of the Party. You will read elsewhere of this grand function, but I derived much satisfaction in meeting quite a few chums with whom I had been corresponding for some time. Two of them in particular have been "Good Samaritans" to my wife in helping to complete her "Union Jack" collection, so I thus had a double reason for being very happy to meet them in the flesh.

Following speeches by our two celebrities, I said my little piece. I thanked them for their nice reception of the representative of the London Club, and as it had been announced that I was the Founder of the Club I made it very clear that my old friend Robert Blythe, of Nelson Lee fame, had Founded the O.E.B.C. jointly with me, and that he was equally entitled to any thanks and credit that may be considered due. I made special reference to him because I consider his name and the part he has played in what has grown to be an increasingly large circle, has been too much in the background.

Alas, all good things come to an end, and at 10.30 p.m. Jack and his wife escorted Mr. Down and myself to the hotel wherein rooms had already been booked for us by them for the night.

The following morning, Mr. Down and myself had a walk all round the town. I took the opportunity to ask my kind friend a number of questions pertaining to the hobby in the hope of acquiring some information. I found him most willing and obliging, and thanks to his kindness I learnt a lot I desired to know.

Those of you who have read Frank Richards' Autobiography know that Mr. C.M. Down was the gentleman on whom the Hon. A.A. D'Arcy was modelled, and I hope Mr. Down will take

it as a compliment when I say that he was undoubtedly the ideal model! Though he did not say "Weally, deah boy".

Having been accompanied by the Hon. Arthur Augustus to the station, I most regretfully said goodbye and duly caught my train to London, armed with copies of the Birmingham Post and Gazette as souvenirs of a most happy visit to the Midlands.

Thank you, Jack and Mrs. Corbett, Mr. Chapman, Mr. Down and all Midland friends. May London have the opportunity of reciprocally welcoming you sometime in the future.

FOR SALE: Collectors' Digest, November 1948 to current issue. Complete in mint condition. 1/- each. Also assorted lot of Gems and Populars, 1/- each. S.A.E. for list.

Wanted: Magnets 1549-1555. Good condition essential - exchanges considered. J. A. Boland, College Historical Society, Trinity College, Dublin University, Eire.

VOLUME Nelson Lee, 1 to 25 date 1933; Green Penny Populars; sale or exchange; Photo Bits, Sketchy Bits, Photo Funs, date about 1908, 1/6 each.

Wanted: 1/2d. Gems 3 and 37, 10/6 each offered. No.2 1d. Gem, St.Jim's Plucks, 10/6 each offered. Wanted: Gems, Magnets, Union Jacks. What offers for 1/2d. Empire Library of Gordon Gay, new condition. Richard Whorwell, 29 Aspinden Road, Rotherhithe, London, S.E.16.

THE PASSING OF REG HUDSON

(I received many letters as a result of my tribute last month. The extract below is typical of the others. - H.L.)

Dear Herbert,
4 Dee Street, Liverpool 6.

I was interested in your article on poor Reg; the last time we weretogether it was just as you mentioned; the meeting in City Square, a snack at Lewis's, and the stroll to Hyde Park Road. It's hard to realise it can never happen again; my last recollection of him was when he came with me to the tram-stop on the Sunday, and saying he would be gled to have me again anytime. I won't soon forget him.
sincerely, FRANK CLISE.

HAMILTONIA

Conducted by Herbert Leckenby

That staunch Magnetite, Jonah Barrington of the "Sunday Chronicle", had more to say about the television series the other Sunday. Under the heading "He's Not 'Quite Naice'" he let a B.B.C. very important person have it thus.

"TV's Billy Bunter is in danger; despite the enormous popularity of the initial Bunter series, one or two B.B.C. high-ups have decreed he's not 'quite naice'.

When I asked a very senior official how soon Bunter and his Greyfriars chums would be back he replied: 'My dear chap, the matter's not even under consideration.'

Strange, because when I took a ballot on March 30th the response in favour of a revival was (as Remset Singh would say) 'terreefic'.

So, if viewers, young or old, ever want to see Bunter and his chums again, it's no good writing to me or to Miss Joy Harrington, who is, after all, only the show's producer."

Good for Jonah Barrington. He deserves a better Christian name.



And here's a laugh. On April 28th Bill Martin had a letter in the "Daily Mirror's" "Live Letters" column. In it he set a riddle: "3/- gross a century ago, same price today". For the first correct answer from someone under sixteen he offered a copy of the "Autobiography of Frank Richards" as a prize. The following morning he received this letter.

April 28/52.

Dear Mr. Martin,

Whoops!! Nearly 100 telegrams, and more than 50 telephone calls this morning.

The first correct answer - farthings - came on the telephone to the office at 7 o'clock from Miss Heather Glendon, 49 Coniston Road, Tottenham, and she is the winner for your copy of Frank Richards' autobiography.

Sincerely, Edwin Redford,
Editor, Live Letters.

Bill also told me his own letter-box was chcked that morning. Looks as if quite a lot of people wanted the Autobiogrephy.

The editors commented on the big rush a day or two later and said they had given some Magnets to a boy who delivered a letter in the early morning. Very nice of them.

As will be seen from reports on other pages, the Midland Club had a great time on the occasion of their birthday party on April 28th. We must hand it to them for their enterprise in heving Maurice Down as guest, together with C.H. Chapman, to say nothing of our own personality - Len Packman.

The event got quite a lot of space in the local papers including some fine photographs.

According to the "Birmingham Gazette" Mr. Down said in reply to questions at the party:

"Boys' papers never carried many advertisements and it was that which decided that Bunter should go when news-print became very short.

"Stories? We lived practically from week to week - we had to - and only about two episodes were in hand when the blow fell. (Actually four according to our records. - H.L.)

"Bunter was certainly not selling at its best when we stopped publication, but he was still selling."

Later Mr. Down told the Birmingham Gazette:
"I think Bunter and the "Magnet" will never come back. They've had their day. Youngsters nowadays seem to want jet propulsion, not those rather quiet, habit-forming school stories.

It is perhaps a pity, but after all, the fat lad had a good run."

Well, sadly, that seems to give the answer to the numerous devotees who write to me asking me why the A.P. don't republish the old stories. There's no sentiment in business and one has only to look at the women's papers to see that a paper for boys could not possibly compete where advertising revenue is concerned. We have to remember too that practically all the links with the Magnet at Fleetway House have been broken, for twelve years have passed since the fetal day.

And now to cheer us up is another of Roger Jenkins' thoughtful and popular reviews of the days when the Magnet was in its heyday.

THE FINEST PERIOD OF THE MAGNET

By Roger M. Jenkins

It is always difficult to be impartial in deciding exactly which is the best period in the history of a paper, especially if it happens to be a paper which one read in one's youth. It is always difficult, that is to say, to avoid mixing sentiment with good judgment. The answer which most people would give to the question "What is the finest period of the Magnet?" would, I think, depend mainly on the age and taste of those who answered. For my own part, I must confess that it is the period 1934/1935 that I enjoyed reading most as a boy, which was roughly the time I first began to take the Magnet. Nevertheless, the fact that I was then at an impressionable age and highly delighted with the stories of the time does not in itself make it the best period of the Magnet. I think the only way to attempt to answer this question satisfactorily is to review the whole career of the Magnet as would be done by someone who had never read a Greyfriars story until the Magnet had closed down. What would he make of all these thirty-two years of Harry Wharton & Co's adventures?

Let me say right away that I doubt whether the early red-covered era would even win a heat in this fierce competition. These early stories I admit are fresh and charming; they shew great imagination and promise of better things to come. The spindly-legged juniors in the accompanying illustrations ideally matched the spirit of the stories. But if the Magnet had come to an end in its red-covered days, I doubt whether many collectors in the year 1952 would be much concerned about the early numbers of a paper that started its career forty-four years ago. No, I think it can justly be claimed that, from an impartial point of view, these early stories are only of historical interest.

The next period one might, for the sake of convenience, take as being the age of blue ink on white covers which began in 1915 and ended in 1922. This was an important period in the history of the Magnet. It covered the crucial period

of the paper shortage in 1917, and the time when scores of boys' papers closed down about 1920. The period also marked a significant change in the writing of the Magnet. While the vast majority of the stories were single units, nevertheless the readers were becoming accustomed to having a small series now and again, like the barring-out against Jefferies or the episode about Tom Redwing who first came to Greyfriars under the name of Clevering. There is also, in the style of writing, almost a modern note. 1908 may seem years ago, but when reading the stories of 1918 most of the stories seem much more recent in style. As with the writing, so with the characters. Billy Bunter, especially, acquired that touch of artfulness combined with stupidity that mark him out as the Bunter we all know so well. It was in Magnet No. 715 that he pretended to be blind in order to escape lessons, and tried to touch Mr. Quelch's stony heart by saying pathetically "I shall never hear the birds singing in the trees again." There is no doubt that the Magnet was up and coming in those days, but there were still better things to come.

The third period I propose to take as being the one from the beginning of the multi-coloured covers to the end of the 'twenties. This was a mixed period indeed. The early part was mainly stories written by substitute writers, yet the dullness of these imitations only serves to enhance more brilliantly the merit of the genuine Hamilton stories of the period. And what grand series there were - the first Harry Wharton v. Mr. Quelch series, Bunter Court, the Sahara Desert trip, the de Costa series, the cruise to the South Seas - while towards the end, what shall be pick out - the Trail of the Trike or the trip to Hollywood when Billy Bunter blackmailed his way on to the films? There is no doubt that this was the time when the series really came into its own, and, however much we may enjoy a single story here and there, we must admit that a well-balanced series of seven or eight numbers still make the most enjoyable form of Greyfriars stories from the point of view of a collector. During the late 'twenties the juniors were still wearing Eton collars, but this was really the only connexion with 1908. The style of writing had reached its peak in the use

of witticisms, Classical allusions, and similes. While I doubt whether this was the finest period in the history of the Magnet, I think there is much to be said for judging it to be the runner-up.

The sward for the finest period must, I think go to the period 1930-1935. Everything seemed to conspire to further the success of the Magnet at this time. The substitute writers were retired for good; Charles Hamilton devoted his whole time to writing Greyfriars stories, to the exclusion of St.Jim's and Rookwood. And it was about this time that the author's eyesight began to fail, thus putting a stop to his continental trips and enabling him to think solely of Greyfriars. At this time also, the make-up of the Magnet was at its peak. The front cover acquired a new jauntiness with the passing of the 'twenties, while inside, Mr. Chapman's illustrations reached a height he never himself excelled, especially during the early 'thirties. The abandonment of Eton jackets for blazers struck a modern note which made everything about the Magnet seem refreshing and new. But above all, the stories themselves - what a grand treat the readers had! Whether it was the foreign series, like the China series, or the trips to Egypt and Africa, or the fabulour holiday in Rome with Bunter the Billionaire - or whether it was an English series, like that about Lancaster, or the Greyfriars barring-out against Mr.Brander, or Harry Wharton in trouble as the Swot of the Remove and later in disfavour with his form-master again, or the Smedley Series, the Hiking Holiday, the Greyfriars Secret Society with Mr. Prout as headmaster, the Portercliffe Hall Holiday, or the best of them all, the Stacey series - it was Charles Hamilton at his best. This type of series writing became so pronounced at this time that in 1934 there was only one story which did not form part of a series. I think most collectors will agree, however much they cherish a sentimental affection for some other time, that there was nothing to excel the period in the Magnet from 1930/1935.

As for the last five years' existence of the Magnet, well anything would seem to be an anti-climax after the Stacey series, and Charles Hamilton was not destined to climb quite as high as that again in the remainder of the Magnet's career, though the very last story of all showed a glimpse

of the old fire. But various circumstances now combined against perfection. Billy Bunter acquired a position in the stories which some think over-prominent at the time the Magnet came to be called "Billy Bunter's Own Paper". The Greyfriars story ran from cover to cover, a tribute to the author, but nevertheless it made the stories just a bit too long. The coloured covers gave way to ones of black print on salmon-coloured paper. In early 1939 the chapter numbers were omitted, the drawings seemed to lack the finish they had had seven years earlier, the print got bigger, and, when the war started, the pages were reduced, which made the series - like the one about Mr. Lamb - seem too long. But not everything declined. On the whole, the stories kept up a good average. Tracy was an interesting diversion, while Crocker was amusing. Indeed, there were two series at this time which were first-rate, one of these being the Carter series which is the wittiest one Charles Hamilton ever wrote, and the other being the Water Lily series about that glorious trip down the Thames in the last of all the pre-war summers. But good as these undoubtedly were, I think that, on the whole, nothing could best the period 1930/1935, and I think there will be a great deal of support for labelling this era as the finest period in the Magnet.

THE LATEST TOM MERRY BOOKS

The two April issues of the new Tom Merry books are well up to the high standard set by this excellent series. Martin Clifford, in these new tales, re-introduces two of the less popular characters on the St. Jim's stage. It is a little difficult to see why Trimble, - never an attractive character, - should be brought back on to the scene after being absent for so long. Nevertheless, "Trouble for Trimble" is well worth reading. The theme is not particularly original, but the yarn has one or two new twists, is wittily and breezily written, and is a generally satisfactory dish.

The welcome to Skimpole after a long absence is perhaps a little warmer than that to Trimble. He is an improved Skimpole in "Skimpole's Snapshot". The irritating soezms

of Determinism are absent, and we see Skimmy as a keen but cranky scientist. Actually Manners is the "featured player" in the story, and though the plot has been used before with this same character, it is a happy little yarn, which swings along brightly from start to finish.

I wonder why Martin Clifford has retained the unimpressive new boy, Jimmy Ridd, on the St. Jim's stage which is already rather overcrowded.

Though it is a little unreal to see Mr. Chapman illustrating Tom Merry and Gussy, it is grand to welcome this fine artist back to the fold.

Everybody seems to agree that the Tom Merry series is excellent value in every way. These books deserve great success. Is there anything that each one of us can do to help the sale of the series, and so make them permanent? It will be rather tragic if they fail for lack of general support.

Magnet Titles (contd.)

"S" denotes "Substitute".

- 916, Billy Bunter's Bolt. 917, Bunter Caught.
- 918 (S), Rival Oarsmen. 919 (S), Schoolboys versus Pros.
- 920 (S), Fishy's Hair-Raising Stunt. 921 (S), The Greyfriars Film-Fans. 922 (S), The Bounder's Way.
- 923, Brother and Prefect. 924, The Scapegrace of the Third. 925, His Brother's Burden. 926, The Captain's Election. 927, The Whip Hand. 928, Captain and Tyrant.
- 929, The Worst Form at Greyfriars. 930, The Rebels of Greyfriars. 931, Loder's Last Chance. 932 (S), Facing the World. 933 (S) From Greyfriars to Borstal. 934 (S) Bowling Out Bunter. 935 (S) Coker's New Year's Resolution.
- 936 (S) Quelch's Queer Adventure. 937 (S) The Prefect's Plot. 938 (S) The Hand of an Enemy. 939 (S) Back to the Factory Again. 940 (S) The Hidden Foe. 941 (S) Billy Bunter's Legacy. 942, The Mystery of the Head's Study.
- 943 (S) A Feud with the Fourth. 944, (S) Fish's Debt Collecting Agency. 945, A Star of the Circus. 946, Pedrillo at Greyfriars. 947, The Circus Schoolboy. 948, Righting a Wrong. 949 (S) The Temptation of Peter Hazeldene.

OLD BOYS' BOOK CLUB

London Section. Cherry Place. Wood Green. May 18th.

A record attendance had a very pleasant surprise as both Gerald Campion, TV's Billy Bunter, and C.H. Chapman were in attendance, thanks to the efforts of Bob Whiter. Another visitor for the first time was Jim the Penman alias Jim Sutcliff of Pitsea, Essex. Geoffrey Hockley, New Zealand member, hit on the appropriate title when he had it called "The Brotherhood of the Happy Hours", as a wonderful time was had by all. The TV Billy Bunter was a very popular visitor, he knows his "Magnets" and gave a very good account of his recent telecast. He signed numerous autographs and was rather amazed at the enthusiasm that there is for the old books. Both he and Mr. Chapman got along together fine. Chairman Len was in his best form and so was E. Reynolds with the catering and a very fine quiz. Bob Blythe, not to be outdone by Bob Whiter's fine Greyfriars effort last month, produced a very fine map of the Surroundings of St. Frank's and gave a fine talk on the subject. This went down well with the "Penmen" and the other Lee supporters and was enjoyed by the rest of the company including Roger Jenkins who afterwards gave a good reading about a Rookwood adventure. The quiz devised by E. Reynolds was won by Bob Whiter, second was C. Wallis, third was Len Packman, Charlie Wright and Roger Jenkins. The Rececourse Adventure quiz resulted in Cliff and Bob first, and Ron Deacon and Charlie Wright third. Full of good happenings the evening sped to its close and after Mr. Chapman had answered many questions with intelligent answers the time came to wend our various ways home. A fuller report of the happy hours will be given on the monthly club news sheet which will be sent to all members.

June meeting at 12 Ashburnham Place, Greenwich, London, S.E.10, on the 15th.

UNCLE BENJAMIN.

Northern Section
Meeting, 239 Hyde Park Road, May 10th, 1952.

J. Breeze Bentley in the chair for the first time expressed pleasure at seeing Harry Stables back following

an illness, also to Harry Dowler, with us again after a considerable interval. There was a muster of 20 in all.

Gerry Allison revealed that £14 had been spent in books during the month, nevertheless we had still £10 in hand. The books included a complete set of C.D's and Annals, poor Reg Hudson's collection, and these would be available to members. Gerry also gave a glowing account of the London trip.

Then came Tom Hoppertoh's talk, "The First and the Best", a provocative title, for it referred to the Gem which in the presence of a number of Magnetites seemed to be asking for it. Nevertheless, in that confident style of his he built up a good case, contending that St.Jim's had a larger and better variety of characters than Greyfriars. When Tom championed D'Arcy I glanced across at Vera, that doughty defender of Mark Linley and Co. Surely enough there was the light of battle in her eyes, and when the discussion opened she let it be known in no uncertain fashion that she "did not like D'Arcy" and was still faithful to the Magnet. Others had things to say, so much so that it was found the tea was getting cold. Altogether an enjoyable hour.

Next meeting, June 14th. Harry Stables will give his postponed talk, "The Saga of Deadwood Dick". Old timers please note.

MIDLAND SECTION

First Birthday Party. Townsend Club. Birmingham

A gathering of forty, yes, forty welcomed the three star guests, C. H. Chapman, C. Maurice Down, and Leonard Peckman, on April 28th. It was a huge success from beginning to end. As will be seen from reports elsewhere, there were several fine reports in the local papers, and the B.B.C. was in evidence. In addition, George Smallwood brought his recording unit, with the result that all the speeches were recorded.

Mr. Down spoke first, and then invited questions, an offer that was taken advantage of in no uncertain fashion.

Mr. Chapman also had a great ovation, and devoted most of his time to a description of his visit to the maestro on

on the occasion of the opening of the television series.

Len Packman, who had already been bombarded with questions and requests to see his famous scrap-books, gave a most interesting account of how he and Bob Blythe had formed the London Club, of many things that had happened since and the personalities he had met. He also gave many useful tips which were carefully noted.

Many toasts were drunk, including one proposed by Ted Devey to Jack Corbett our Chairman. Maybe you had had a lot of "Mrs. Mimble's Pop", so we forgive you for generously referring to Jack Corbett as Founder of the Club, because you, Ted, was one of the twenty-four who founded the Midland Section in April 1951.

A grand and memorable evening came to an end with the singing of Auld Lang Syne.

The Rev. and Mrs. Pound again kindly played host to Mr. Chapman.

Next meeting, June 30th.

PETER MELLOR,
Secretary.

MERSEYSIDE SECTION

4th May, 1952.

There was an excellent attendance at this meeting which opened at 8 p.m.

The chairman gave a brief summary of section progress during the past month, and said he was sure the members must feel gratified at the healthy state of the library, to which additions are constantly being made.

The secretary then read the minutes, and submitted the financial report, which was unanimously approved. Then to the lighter side, in the form of two quizzes: an individual and a team quiz, devised by Webster Minor and Major respectively, and the company were soon involved in some hard thinking, not unmingled with humorous asides. George Timmins won the individual quiz, which pleased everybody, as he has been very close on previous occasions. The team quiz was won by Jim Walsh, George Simpson and Geo. Timmins; this was a very close victory, as only one point separated each team.

The evening had been so pleasant that all were sorry

to see it end, which it did with the library business; this, incidentally, was a record for loans and receipts. Thanks are due to Bill Horton, our Librarian, for the very efficient job he is doing. Meeting closed 10.30 p.m. Next meeting: Sunday, 1st June.

F. CASE,
Secretary..

AUSTRALASIAN BRANCH

The third meeting of the Australasian branch of the O.B.B.C. was held on Friday, 11th January, at the Victorian Railways Institute. Chairman, Don Wicks, declared the meeting open at 8.30 p.m.

After the minutes of the second meeting had been read and confirmed, the Secretary rose and delivered his first report. He stated that the Club's position was extremely satisfactory in all ways. Not only was it on a sound financial basis but also new members were being regularly added and the news letter was showing great promise. Before concluding he brought to the notice of members that the parent body in London proposed to issue lapel badges if sufficient support was forthcoming for the idea. This report was accepted by the meeting, and the proposal of the London branch supported. It was directed that the Secretary should communicate this support to the Secretary of the London branch and at the same time express the thanks of the meeting to him for his article published in the news letter.

Club business having thus been concluded, a round table discussion was held upon the respective merits of Greyfriars and St. Jims. As usual this resulted in a win for the former, but it was felt that the supporters of the latter might have made a better showing had their leader, Tom Dobson, been present.

At the conclusion of the debate it was decided that members should each prepare a paper upon their favourite Hamilton character. Those suggested were Miss Stevens, Harry Wharton; Tom Wicks, Horace Coker; Jim Morralls, Mr. Quelch; Tom Dobson, Tom Merry; and Recc Mathews, Billy Bunter. It was also decided that Gordon Kirby should write the main article for the next issue of the news letter.

THE NELSON LEE COLUMN

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

I'm taking a back seat this month while an old hand takes over.

If there's any space left at the end I'll add some more titles - if not, I'm afraid you've had it again until next month!

REFLECTIONS

By Leonard M. Allen

The last few months have produced quite a lot of criticism of our author, E.S.B., but most overlook the fact that his stories were written for juveniles only. Whilst the authentic school stories of Richard Bird, Gunby Hadath, Hylton Cleaver, R.A.H. Goodyear were and will always be my favourites, I still find the St. Frank's yarns a refreshing contrast. I remember my pals and I fervently wished that our school would one day be flooded or provide a giant bonfire. We had a perfect setting, for at the end of World War 1, the entire establishment was moved en bloc to an old country mansion on the outskirts of the city. Completely surrounded by the E.S.B. high wall there were also mysterious cellars and stables but, best of all, a Tower. Needless to say, all these were thoroughly investigated, but our only rewards were whackers and impositions. Our ardour was thus somewhat damped and we confined ourselves to identifying scholars and masters with the St. Frank's characters, commencing with a Russian master who was the most obvious suspect as a spy. Indefatigable as we were, however, we failed to detect any sign of approaching madness in the Headmaster.

Although Brooks had many original ideas with his scholars he did introduce several characters that had close resemblance to adult writers' creations and the stories were none the worse for that. In a reply to an enquiring reader he stated that P. G. Wodehouse, Rider Haggard,

H.G. Wells and Conan Doyle were his favourite authors. Wodehouse was certainly responsible for Glenthorne, Phipps and Browne, one does not require Lee's deductive powers to trace the connection with Wooster, Jeeves and Psmith, or the "Lost World" plots with the other authors.

Waldo, however, was founded on fact, strange as it may seem. He was somewhat tentatively introduced on Dec. 28, 1918, in the Union Jack, title of the story "Waldo, the Wonder Man". As a circus strong man his amazing performance in the ring was challenged by a sceptical Tinker, who was soon convinced of Waldo's powers. Taking to crime he was successful in eluding capture although E.S.B. sent Lee, Blake and both assistants on his trail. The author mentions in a foot-note at the conclusion of the story that, according to "The Lancet" there was an actual case on record of a man who could feel neither pain, cold nor heat. He would hold a burning match against his skin, and then carelessly pick off the charred epidermis, without feeling the slightest pain. Waldo did not have many encounters with Nelson Lee but, after his reformation, he sent his son along to St. Frank's as a scholar. Although Stanley Waldo possessed many of his father's amazing qualities he was not a conspicuous success and soon faded into the background. Old man Waldo at the time was fully occupied straightening out the affairs of a corrupt football club, Middletown Rovers via Boys' Friend Library (2nd) 445 even going to the extent of playing centre-forward. Most E.S.B. fans will agree that the Wonder Man was the author's most enduring character, for, today he is still a best seller with Collins, slightly diluted perhaps, as Normen Conquest.

Glancing through some copies of "Pluck" I was surprised at the number of favourite characters featured at various times. Blake, Tinker, George Marsden Plummer, Will Spearing, Huxton Rymer and many others graced its pages in addition to short stories of Lee and Nipper. This now somewhat neglected paper was revived in 1922 by the Amalgamated Press and after a few weeks St. Frank's was introduced. The story was a serial entitled "The Kidnapped School" and concerned the Remove as usual, and their adventures when abducted by a criminal gang for ransom. This yarn was republished in the Boys' Friend Library eleven years later in two volumes,-

"The Kidnapped Remove" and "The St. Frank's Castaways".

We have often been told that authors when in doubt wrote a berring-out and generally this was successful, but judging by the recent ballots more original stories topped the poll. I doubt if any school had more rebellions than St. Frank's, possibly the Governors were to blame, they certainly had a flair for selecting tyrants and other dubious characters as masters, but the most popular series during the hey day of the Lee was the Ezra Quirke effort. This was republished in the Schoolboys' Own Library and, as a result of popular demand, Brooks re-introduced the character in the First New Series. These stories, however, had not the same appeal and that was the last of Ezra Quirke. It would be interesting to learn readers' favourite St. Frank's series; the top of my list is the Stage series, the last in the small issue of the paper. This ran from Numbers 561 to 568 and was an original plot for a school story; Brooks introduced human interest but again pandering to popular demand, laid on the Handforth a little too thick.

Strange policy of the Amalgamated Press, after eight years continuous writing of the Lee stories, Edwy Searles Brooks was introduced as the author by name, although serials credited to his pen name, Robert W. Comrade, had already appeared. A whole page was given to the matter emphasising E.S.B.'s reluctance to be exposed. (sic) Evidently the announcement proved popular with readers, for a few weeks later the author's photograph appeared although the stories were still credited to Nipper only. The publishers, however, soon rectified this and, in due course, this publicity was further enhanced by the popular "Between Ourselves" feature with photos of a reader and the author heading the column each week. One wonders what has happened to these subscribers, rarely is the curtain lifted by finding a familiar name.

Titles

2nd New Series

No.71, High Jinks at St. Franks. 72, St. Frank's at the Derby. 73, Hands off the Head. 74, Hendy's Midnight Capture. 75, St. Frank's under Canvas. 76, The Open Air

Heroes. 77, Peril Camp. 78, His Majesty of the Remove.
79, The Kidnapped King. 80, The Bandits of Caronis.
81, The Mountain Tyrant. 82, Prisoners of the Pass.
83, Through the Enemies' Lines. 84, For League and Cup.
85, The Spoil-sport of St. Frank's. 86, The "Live-wire"
Rebels. 87, The Battle of St. Frank's. 88, The Wrong
Mr. Wright. 89, The Black Hand at St. Frank's.
90, Handforth's Good Deed. 91, The Riddle of the Seven
Stars. 92, The Curse of Osra. 93, The Menaced Schoolboy.
94, Handforth the Guy. 95, St. Frank's in Disgrace.
96, Pep for the Saints. 97, The Schoolboy Racketeer.
98, The Whispering Peril. 99, The Castle of Terror.
100, The Well of Doom. 101, The Man in Black. 102, The
House of Secrets. 103, The Mystery of the Smugglers' Cave.
104, The Return of Prof. Zingrave. 105, The Captives of
Craig House. 106, The Monster of Most Hollow. 107, The
St. Frank's Fortune Hunters. 108, Pirates' Treasure.
109, Fooled by St. Frank's. 110, The Mystery New Boy.

For those of you who have never seen a copy of the famous No.1, let alone read it, Jack Cook of Newcastle has obliged with a synopsis of the plot. It will appear next month.

Letter Box (continued from p.184)

(Mr. Webster's letter continued)

The remarks attributed to Mr. Webster are really the comments of Miss Edna Mervyn, one of our lady members.

Finally, there is no suggestion of opening a Branch at Manchester. I only offered an invitation to any "old boys" living in that area to join us.

Yours sincerely, D. B. WEBSTER

(Note. This has no connection with the interview referred to in my editorial chat last month and this.- H.L.)

Are your Subs. paid up-to-date?

LETTER BOX

Frank Richards Agrees with Walter Webb

April 7th, 1952.

Dear Herbert Leckenby,

Many thanks for the April C.D. I am very interested in your remarks "from the editorial chair" on the subject of B.B. on TV., and I have no doubt that you are right.

But are you quite on the mark with regard to the original Magnet artist? My impression always was the same as Chappin's, that Arthur Clerke was the man.

The TV. Bunter series is over, and on the whole, I think that viewers should be satisfied. The TV medium is so utterly different from writing, that one cannot reasonably expect it to produce the same effect: and it was much nearer than I could have expected. And surely Gerald Campan was an excellent Bunter. I was simply amazed to see how well he did it. How popular the series was, the Sunday Chronicle has left in no doubt.

I liked very much Walter Webb's remarks on page 124, and agree whole-heartedly. The stag-hunter is, to my mind, precisely on a moral level with the miserable hooligan who torments a cat or a sparrow or a butterfly: indulging the same savage instinct to hurt and frighten defenceless creatures. I was very glad to see this in the C.D. — even a "still small voice" is something, on the side of the angels!

With kindest regards,

Always yours sincerely,

FRANK RICHARDS.

(Note.— Hugh W. Fennell, who was closely associated with Fleetway House at the time, confirms that to Hutton McClere goes the distinction of first drawing Bunter. He soon, however, gave way to A. H. Clarke. — H.L.)

It is regretted that the publication of the above letter has been delayed so long. H.L.

Here's another Name for your List:

April 24th, 1952.

Dear Herbert Leckenby,

Thank you for your letter. Yes, the result of the Sunday Chronicle "quiz" was extremely interesting. I rather expected a majority: but 94 per cent was really a surprise. But the fact is that, in spite of a few little unavoidable drawbacks, it was a very good series.

I nearly missed the review in John o'London, but luckily Clive Fenn saw it and sent it along. I found it very pleasant reading. Did you see the one in the Spectator?

No, I have never even heard of "Roland Rodway": so far as I remember. But the fact is that I never looked at the "Vanguard" outside my own numbers. It is barely possible that the name may have been put on something I wrote, as H.J.D. had a fancy, I think, for a variety of names: but if so, I never heard of it. Certainly I wrote a tremendous amount for Trapps and Holmes about the turn of the century: dozens of serials, at least a thousand short stories, and "long complete" stories without number. I remember one serial of endless length called the "Heart of Africa", written under the pen-name of "Robert Stanley", followed by a sequel of equal length called "India's Peril". But there were lots and lots. What is quite amazing to remember is that up to fifty years ago these were written with the pen: though Remington had come to stay before the Vanguard happened.

With kind regards,

Always yours sincerely,

FRANK RICHARDS.

Liverpool, 15/4/52.

Misunderstandings

Dear Editor,

I should be obliged if you would, through the medium of the C.D., correct several erroneous impressions which appeared in the "News Chronicle" of 4th April last.

The article gave the number of books in our "collection" at the fantastic figure of 7,500 (I only wish it were so!) whereas the correct statement should read "several hundred".

Contd. on Page 183.

WANTED: Boys of England Re-issue 1906. E.V.Hughes,
Laughing Waters, Pagham Beach, Bognor Regis.

ANSWERS: Pearsons Weekly, Tit-Bits, Ideas, London Opinion, London Mail, John Bull, etc. etc. Mint condition. From 1910 on. Preserved by secret process. 5/- per doz. assorted. Post Free. From C.E.F.Vennimore, 25 Byron Avenue, West Hounslow, Middlesex. Owner of No.1 Magnet, Gem. Greyfriars Herald, etc. Also 150 No.1's of periodicals from 1908 onwards. Not for Sale. Collection consists of 30,000 periodicals.

GIRLS OWN PAPER in the finest condition. Bound volumes for the years 1884, 1886, 1897, 1890. What offers? Also Boys Own Paper 1915, 1916, 1917, 1918. Loose copies in first class condition. 5/- volume. Post Free. Frank A. Willison, 6 Meredith Street, Cradley Heath, Staffs.

MELL, 4 Milbank Crescent, Darlington, offers Brooks S.O.L's, "Boys will be Boys", Richards "Auto-biography", for "Magnets" or cash.

LATE NEWS:

Reference Frank Richards letter on Page 185- there will be more about Robert Stanley in next issue.

Midland Section O.B.B.C: E.J.Davey, 36 Bourton Road, Olton, Birmingham 27, is now Secretary.

As extra space has had to be devoted to Club activities, this number has been enlarged to 36 pages in order to give other matters their fair quota. There certainly will be a dead loss on the issue, so if I have to file my petition you'll know the reason why!! H.L.



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

The Round Table.

So our favourite character has broken into the new entertainment medium! Looking through the television programmes the other week I was very surprised to see the name 'Sexton Blake' and, for a minute, I thought I was 'seeing things'. But no, the name was there, and even though the programmes consisted of a pre-war film, it marked another milestone in the career of The Man from Baker Street". Stories, stage plays, films, radio plays and now television! It is a pity that Blake wasn't given the same chance as Billy Bunter for there is ample scope these days and I feel that a good Blake television play might go down well. However the showing of the old film "Sexton Blake and the Hooded Terror" might be just a start and it is to be hoped that someone will show some kind of initiative and present a new and specially prepared vision programme one of these days. As a matter of fact I have always shuddered at the "Hooded Terror" part of that film title. As you know it was actually an adaptation of the Pierre Quirould/Granito Grant story "The Mystery of No. 13

Continuing the Round Table.

Cavorsham Square" and if this title had been used it might have tempted more people to give it some attention. As it was, and still is, the sensational title used makes it sound definitely "penny dreadful" type. But I am wandering from the point. This film was the start of Blake's television career, or I hope that is what it is. Without delay we should urge the B.B.C. to do a series of Blake programmes. Once again a united effort is necessary and if they receive enough letters on the subject it might bring results.

Correspondence has been very light this month. I suppose the good weather has a lot to do with it, but nevertheless I like to think that Blake fans still show some interest in the hobby. How about it? I still am looking for new articles and will welcome them long or short.

No news of the S.B. Circle at the time of writing. I understand that some sort of meeting has been held but I have had no direct information so will have to hold over any remarks until next month.

Cheerio for now.

 COMING NEXT MONTH:-

"TALKING OF BLAKE" - Discovery of the S.B.L.

by Graham Davies.

Sexton Blake Library reviews.

Some while ago we featured monthly reviews of the new S.B.Ls by Gerry Allison. Since these were discontinued I have had quite a few letters saying "thank goodness" and "please continue them". The final decision rests on YOU the reader. Please use voting slip on another page.

H.M.B.

(THE "UNION JACK" AT IT'S PEAK.)

A new article from the pen of our good friend and editor
Herbert Leckenby.

A month or two ago I had something to say about the U.J. at it's worst (in my opinion). Now to a pleasant task, to review it when I think it reached the heights.

There were several good periods. Just before the first world war for instance, when many of the "characters" who were to become famous were taking the stage. Yvonne, Wu Ling, Carlac, Kew, Huxton Rymer, to name a few. Then there were the days when tales of the Confederation, the mightiest of all the criminal organisations, were appearing frequently. Later came the time when it was decided to publish the names of the authors, round about the middle of the 1300's. From then on until near the end was the best time of all.

It was not only that the stories themselves were, in the main, excellent; knowing the authors added spice to the meal. Moreover, the "Round Table" appeared very frequently. Ah! What a delightful feature that was (I know how disappointed I used to be when it was omitted) where controversy raged about the merits, or otherwise, of the authors and the stories.

Yes, the U.J. at that period had a real energetic and enterprising editor, and he made the paper livelier and more intimate than it had ever been. But even he showed he didn't know everything about the real history of Sexton Blake, for he, like others before him, boasted No. 2 of the old 1st series as the first Blake story ever, when, of course, as we have revealed, it wasn't so. I can't resist slipping that in.

However, to the authors and the stories of that peak period. With such a brilliant band of authors writing frequently it could not be other than good. Ted, he of the classic style. Robert Murray, who could hold your attention from first word to last. Gwyn Evans, that

U.J. at it's Peak (contd).

skilful weaver of fantastic plots! Alas they lived at the pace of their plots. It was a collage who said of them "They loved life, they were Bohemians, there were times when they had no money or no food; and they died before their time".

There were others, Anthony Skene, who have us Zenith that strange character crook who gained one's sympathy. Lewis Jackson, creator of Leon Kestrel. Edwy Searles Brooks, known personally to many of us; Rex Hardinge, Gilbert Chester, C. Malcolm Hincks and many more.

Of the stories one thinks instantly of the six which formed the "tram" series. They were the result of one of the most novel ideas in fiction. Six authors were given a skeleton plot; a man, one Alfred Proud, was found dead on a tram and in his possession were a strangoly varied collection of articles. These had to be accounted for plausibly and the authors, at the finish, had to reach the same destination. The six authors chosen were G.H. Teed, Robert Murray, Gilbert Chester, Anthony Skene Gwyn Evans and Donald Stuart. Robert Murray, however, was taken ill and Edwy Searles Brooks was brought in at the last moment as told by Bob Blythe in our April issue.

Each author, whilst sticking to the rules laid down, worked out an entirely different route and it was really fascinating and weird to read the stories one by one to find oneself gradually arriving at the same terminus.

Another cute idea concerned a serial "The Next Move". Here four authors wrote an instalment in turn. Yes, there was a real live wire controlling the destinies of the U.J. at that time. I wonder ~~how~~ who he was.

Outstanding among the stories of that happy period were, of course, the bizarre Christmas stories by Gwyn Evans. They have been praised deservedly many times by my collage of this section, so I will leave it at that, except to say that there was one Christmas when a stranger wrote the story. It would be unfair to say it was a poor seasonal yarn, but oh! How we missed the inimitable Gwyn.

Two other series this stormy petrel from Wales wrote were "The Men Who Were Dead" and "The League of the

U.J. at it's Peak (contd).

Union Man", stories only he could have written and got away with. There was also "Miss Death", but possibly she appeared just before the authors were named. I am writing entirely from memory. For that reason I am not quite sure if these stories written around gangsters (which were all the rage in other quarters) appeared with the authors names attached to them. If so they were a blot on that period I am praising. They were not in the Blake tradition.

George Hamilton Teed was much to the fore in the period under review, so it was bound to have it's highlights. He introduced Roxane Harfield, maybe a re-incarnation of Yvonne Cartier. "Sequels" are said to be seldom satisfactory, but those of a new generation found them as fascinating as their elders had her predecessor.

On the other hand those old enough to remember the original Confederation yarns found the reprints somewhat disappointing. The revising seemed to be done in a haphazard sort of fashion. Making the mighty organisation of evil-doers a mere shadow of it's former self. Still, even then, to anyone who had not read the originals, the stories were good.

And there was one other, apart from the authors who helped to make that period outstanding. That brilliant artist Eric R. Parker. He made many of the covers really striking.

Yes, to me, the old U.J. at that time was at it's zenith. But apparently the people at the helm did not think so, for soon the old flag which had flown at the mast head for generations was to be hauled down. In it's place we got the "Detective Weekly". Instead of the striking coloured covers we got a permanent bilious looking yellow. True, several of the authors and Eric R. Parker carried on, but somehow the spirit of the dear old Union Jack did not live on. Why, in it's new form they even evicted Sexton Blake for a time. Surely the editor who used to meet us at the Round Table was not responsible for that.

Chapter Evelon.

This story, explained Hamilton Edwards, "has been written with all the skill at Mr. Maxwell Scott's command, to show the grave danger attending the invention of a perfect plying machine in the hands of an unscrupulous scoundrel". Of such type was John Hansell. Arrested by Nelson Lee, accused, tried and found guilty of stealing the plans of a new gun which the War Office was about to introduce and selling them to the German Government, Hansell was sent to prison. The shock of his conviction as a traitor to his country killed both his aged Mother and the girl to whom he was engaged to marry. After four years imprisonment he was granted a free pardon when the real culprit confessed and then committed suicide. Granted two hundred pounds compensation Hansell vowed a terrible revenge on the Government which had wrecked his life, and on Nelson Lee who had been the means of sending him to prison. To the nation which had allowed those things to be done to him Hansell swore revenge by reducing public buildings to smoking ruins and establishing a reign of terror in Britain hitherto unknown. Royalty, peers, commoners--towards all he would show no mercy! Six months in South America saw John Hansell a rich man. He returned to England and made the acquaintance of a young inventor named Blythe, who had just built an aeroplane. Seeing in this, an instrument by which he could obtain the revenge he had sworn, Hansell shot Blythe and stole his machine. Sexton Blake and Tinker arrived on the scene in response to a request from Blythe to visit him, saw the machine take off but were helpless to stop it. Before he died Blythe told Blake of Hansell's intentions and the Baker Street detective decided there and then to warn Nelson Lee of his danger. Lee, something of an inventor, too, had just finished perfecting a small flying machine which he had named the Gaffly. Knowing that Lee intended to visit St. Ninians, at which school his assistant Nipper was a pupil, Blake decided to go there.

Chapter 12 will appear next month.