

The Collector's Digest

Vol. 7. No 24
DECEMBER 1953

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



* Wishing All Our Friends at *
* Home and Abroad a Happy Christmas *
* and a Prosperous New Year *

STILL ANOTHER MILESTONE: We have reached the end of our seventh year! Seven Years! Occasionally I have found time to browse over some of the thousands of letters I have received and read again stories of friendships formed through the aid of our little magazine. I have thought of the flourishing Old Boys' Book Clubs, which have been brought into being and where men and women meet in real comradeship. And, as a flood of memories pass before me I have the satisfaction of knowing that they have been seven full, good years, my only regret that there have not been thrice seven to look back upon. However, I have the consoling thought that the way is set clear for the start of a second seven full years.

Looking back on the year just passing the most outstanding event has been, of course, the change in our publishers. When I wrote my review just a year ago I was a little anxious for I was not sure when, where, and how the first number of 1953 would be produced. Well you all know what happened and all I will say about it now is that I am sure it will be agreed that the numbers

which comprise volume seven would grace any bookshelf.

There have been other changes during the year. Some months ago Maurice Bond after being in charge of Blakiana from the very beginning, found himself compelled, through pressure of business, to hand over to Josie Packman, and this month Jack Wood follows in the footsteps of Bob Blythe where the Nelson Lee Column is concerned. One was sorry that such enthusiasts had to give up their good work, but we are lucky in our fraternity in having others eager to take over the task.

As for the future, one idea I have is to run a series of articles under the title "My Collection". I think we have something which can be made really interesting here. For instance, there's Arthur Harris's unique collection of 'comics', Norton Price's remarkable one of Sexton Blake and Boys' Friend Libraries and Bob Blythe's only one in existence complete set of Nelson Lees. I should like these three, and others, to set down why you chose the particular papers you do collect; when you started; any outstanding thrills or disappointments you experienced in the process of getting them together and anything else you think may be of interest.

I am sure such a series will appeal to all even if it does now and again make some feel just a little envious.

Another thing. During the year I have had letters from Lee fans asking for a turn on the cover. Well your wishes are going to be gratified and the first one will start off the new year.

And now my sincere thanks to the loyal band for their support. It makes the hours I have to spend preparing the mag. each month a real pleasure.

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QUAINT COINCIDENCE: A month or two ago we drew attention to the fact that a real Sexton Blake had been charged with speeding. Now you will see from the Nelson Lee Column that a gentleman bearing that name has also been in a spot of bother. How's that for a million to one chance?

* * * * *

YOUR HELP WANTED: The editor of the B.O.P. is requiring urgently, on loan, loose weekly copies of the paper between January 1879 and December 1912, also of the monthly issue between 1913 and 1929. The editor has bound volumes of every year from the beginning, but the weekly and monthly issues of the years mentioned were destroyed in an air raid in 1941. Perhaps some of you can help. The address

is 4 Bouverie St., London, E.C.4.

The Editor proposes to celebrate the 75th Anniversary of the paper in March 1954. I should be grateful if someone would write us an article on this grand old paper, which gave the inimitable stories of Talbot Baines Reed to the world in the long ago.

A recent issue of the B.O.P. carried over 50 pages of advertising, a sure proof that it is still going strong.

---oOo---

IN A FEW MORE DAYS: The preparation of the Annual is rushing on to a grand climax. At the moment of writing about 50 pages and the cover have been run off, and believe me, it is going to be a lovely job. I am awaiting publishing day with as much anticipation as a boy to see the contents of his Christmas stocking.

We aim to make the day December 18th, an ideal date for readers at home at anyrate, for the packet should be dropping through the letter boxes just as you are getting into the mood for the festive season.

There will be more reading matter on a page, more pages than ever before, and, I am hoping, a record circulation. A few of the regulars have not yet actually sent in their orders. I suppose they took it for granted I knew they would want one. Anyway, I have earmarked one for them, and I am sure they won't let me down.

Now just a gentle reminder to those who have not yet sent along their subs. You won't forget that gentleman's agreement - cash on delivery at latest - will you? If you comply I shall be able to relax at Christmas, after many months labour, with a contented mind, and, of course, I shall be eagerly awaiting the verdicts of you all.

Yours sincerely,

HERBERT LECKENBY.

* * * * *

STOP PRESS: All the typing on the 'Annual' has been finished. There's going to be 142 pages, plus cover, eight pages more than last year. This despite the fact that the 'Who's Who', thanks to some smart tightening up in typing, is reduced by several pages. That with many more names added. On top of that there's more reading matter on a page. Yes, sure, it's going to be a good half-guinea's worth. And, at the moment, over 100 pages have been run off. The goal's in sight.

H A M I L T O N I A N A

Compiled by HERBERT LECKENBY

I am having no say this month as there was such a good response to my request for reviews of Christmas numbers. Happy memories!

He of the fertile brain, Eric Payne, also gives you a seasonable crossword. You won't want to cut out the square so if you want to have a go for the 5/- you can write out your solutions. No need to draw the square. Eric will be doing some more.

---oOo---

CHRISTMAS WITH THE MAGNET

BY ROGER M. JENKINS

There was always seasonable weather in the Magnet at Christmas time - snow would fall, as a rule, just before the holidays commenced, and someone in authority - possibly Mr. Quelch - would accidentally tread on a slide and find his feet whisking away beneath him, quite out of control. Bunter would be on the prowl, seeking a victim who would invite him home for the holidays, while Fisher T. Fish would moon about the school when all the others had gone, giving Mrs. Kebble and Gosling the benefit of his own particular transatlantic wisdom. It was all part of the same well-known and well-loved pattern, that of Christmas with the Magnet.

The custom of having a Christmas series, as distinct from an unconnected story or two, did not really come into fashion until the days of the coloured cover. There had been one or two notable single Christmas stories, like "The Mystery of the Christmas Candles" in 1921 with Inky playing a prominent part. "The Ghost of Mauleverer Towers" in the following year, when cousin Brian did his best to do away with Herbert, and later "The Mystery of the Head's Study" in 1925. But without doubt it was the series which made the Magnet Christmas numbers so memorable. The first Christmas series was in 1923, when Mick Angel invited the Co. to spend the holidays with him at the haunted castle of Lochmuir, in the Highlands. 1926 saw the kidnapping of Coker, but this was not perhaps so good a story as some. After 1923, every Christmas except 1925 saw a series, a few of which even lasted well into the New Year, like the Courtfield Cracksman (1929/30), Jim Valentine (1932/33), and the longest one of all, Mr. Lambe (1939/40).

Some Christmases were spent in very odd circumstances, like the 1927 one, when Bunter turned benevolent and started distributing largesse to the London poor, and the 1936 one, which was spent on board the Firefly in the company of smugglers. But there were also many conventional Christmases, such as the one in Cavandale Abbey in 1930 and the Polpelly treasure hunt in 1935. Another great favourite - and deservedly so - was the Reynham Castle series of 1937, with Bunter acting like a pig in clover. There were many other favourites - the clue of the Greek Message in 1938, the Phantom of the Cave in 1928 (both featuring Soames), and of course the famous Wharton Lodge series of 1933.

It is difficult not to resist the conclusion that the 1933 Christmas series was the best of them all. Billy Bunter was even more pushed than usual on this occasion, since his father had recently had a bad time on the Stock Exchange, and Bunter Villa was to be closed for the holidays. Mr. and Mrs. Bunter went to relatives in Southend, whilst Aunt Martha reluctantly accepted Bessie on the strict understanding that neither of her brothers accompanied her. Billy and Sammy were farmed out to Uncle George, who had rather a mean nature and objected to being told constantly that cakes and puddings were missing from the pantry.

In an effort to find better quarters, Bunter telephoned Wharton Lodge to inform Harry that he was prepared to put up with his fat-headed old fossil of an uncle over the holidays. Unfortunately it was Colonel Wharton who answered the telephone, and the desired invitation was not forthcoming. As he put down the receiver, Billy remarked peevishly to Sammy that he supposed he would have to put up with the stingy old codger after all. Unluckily, Uncle George happened to enter the room just at that moment, and Bunter's stay was abruptly terminated forthwith.

At this point, he conceived the fantastic idea of spending the Christmas at Wharton Lodge as an uninvited guest, camping out in an attic near Wharton's den. Food disappeared from the pantry, blankets and sheets were missed from Hurree Singh's bed, and a number of Wharton's books vanished from his bookshelves and found their way to a second hand shop, after which Bunter found his way to a restaurant. Of course, the episode ended with Bunter becoming an invited guest, and then things became relatively calm and bright.

It goes without saying that there are other Christmas series in the Magnet which rival this series. The second ghost of

Mauleverer Towers in 1931 was an exciting set of stories, with Lord Mauleverer in peril of his life once again. That peculiar Christmas at Hilton Hall in 1934, with an escaped convict always in the offing, was another gripping tale. And of course there was the famous Christmas of 1924, when Harry Wharton quarrelled with his friends, and spent part of the time with Vernon-Smith in Switzerland and the remainder with Jimmy Silver at the Priory.

It is difficult to choose between a Christmas with ghosts and drama, and a Christmas with mirth and jollification. For those who are fond of comedy, the 1933 series is without doubt supreme. Christmas with Bunter, Christmas at Wharton Lodge, Christmas with Laughter - these are the specifications which the 1933 series fulfilled in flowing measure. As we look back on those stories twenty years later, let us record our gratitude to Charles Hamilton for so many exquisite Yuletide tales, and drink a toast to the author who so regularly provided us with that unique and remarkable pleasure, Christmas with the Magnet.

* * * * *

"ONE CHRISTMAS NUMBER ---"

By Eric Fayne

The Editor has asked me to write on one Christmas Number of the Gem, and by that he obviously means my own favourite Christmas Number of the Gem. A bitter-sweet task, for, though it is always pleasant to browse over Xmas Numbers, it is also sad to reflect that the first Great War killed the Xmas Double Number while the second Great War killed every kind of Xmas Number - as we knew them - at any rate.

I choose as my theme the Xmas Number of 1912. This issue of the Gem contained no less than 60 pages. Publication date was November 23rd. In those times, the Gem Xmas issue seems always to have been published in November, while the Magnet's sister issue came several weeks nearer to Christmas. Maybe readers of that day had to save up their cash for those double size, double price issues - 2d.

There was no special coloured cover in 1912, but the usual blue cover was flecked with snow, and R.J. Macdonald drew a picture showing a schoolboy, with a lighted candle, staring in horror into an empty room.

The St. Jim's story was "NOBODY'S STUDY" - a 50,000 word story,

which today, more than forty years later, still stands as one of the finest school stories ever written. Though the plot was laid at St. Jim's, the Christmas atmosphere was impeccable, - snow, blazing log-fires, ghosts, and gas-lights which played weird tricks. It was, incidentally, the first story to introduce "Nobody's Study", the punishment room of St. Jim's.

"Dark and gloomy appeared the haunted room. It was in an isolated position, in a recess in the rambling old School House. At the end of the Fourth Form passage was a deep recess in the old stone walls, dimly-lighted in the daytime by a high and narrow window."

According to tradition, when St. Jim's had been a monastery a monk had vanished into thin air in that very room, leaving all his clothes in a heap behind him.

And, hundreds of years later -- "There's a yarn of a fellow who used that room, too," said Manners. "I heard it when I first came to St. Jim's. It happened long before any of us were here - before any of the Sixth were here for that matter. A chap was put to sleep in there - and when they found him in the morning, he was raving mad."

"Nobody's Study" was a thrilling tale to read by the fireside, while Mum made the Christmas puddings and sister coned over her list of Christmas presents. Old favourites starred in this grand Xmas story - Tom Merry, Levison, Lumley-Lumley, Skimpole, Kildare, Joe Frayne, - a veritable Yuletide dish to set before the Gem enthusiast.

The plot? Very eerie and chill-provoking indeed! Levison, engaged in snowballing, put a stone in his snowball. He received rough justice from Tom Merry & Co. The chums were preparing the "grand Xmas issue" of "Tom Merry's Weekly". Levison contributed a seasonable poem, and Tom Merry printed it in the "Weekly" without detecting the hidden insult which it contained. Here is the poem. The Yuletide flavour is obvious. No doubt you will detect the insult, too.

"The Christmas snow was falling
 On hill and dale and moor;
 Murky and dim, the winter night,
 Murky the lonely shore.
 Eerie and shadowy trees
 Rose by the river's brim,
 Rearing their leafless branches--

Yellow, and damp, and dim.
 In the deep midnight silence
 Sounded the stroke of one,
 And straight from the haunted chamber
 Strode forth the ghost, alone.
 In awful and spectral silence
 Like a shadow it glided by;
 Leaving no trace of footsteps,
 Yet seen by each startled eye!
 And thus in the silent night,
 Still by a spectral light,
 St. Jim's sees the gliding sprite."

Tom Merry elected to spend a night in the haunted room. Alone in Nobody's Study! At midnight, the gas-light faded and died, a ghastly groan sounded and an icy finger touched the boy's brow. Tom Merry flung open the door in the darkness, and rushed for his dormitory.

The next day, Levison openly derided Tom Merry for cowardice. That night, Levison himself stayed alone in Nobody's Study. The juniors locked the door on him, and fastened it firmly with rope on the outside. The following morning Levison had completely disappeared, but the clothes he had been wearing were in a heap on the floor of the room. The story of the ancient monk had repeated itself. And, after many exciting chapters, Lumley-Lumley solved the mystery.

But, in this wonderful Christmas Number, the 50,000-word St. Jim's story had a "full, supporting programme". A second long complete story was "THE HOUND OF THE MOOR", a thrilling yarn of Frank Kingston, Detective, by Robert W. Comrade. (The latter was, I believe I am right in saying, our old friend, E.S. Brooks.)

Yet a third "long, complete story" was "THE GRAMMAR SCHOOL'S TRIUMPH" by that rather mysterious individual, Prosper Howard. This was a story of Rylcombe Grammar School, with Tom Merry & Co. much in evidence.

On that seasonable blue cover of Christmas, 1912, were the words "GRAND CHRISTMAS DOUBLE NUMBER. OUR BEST NUMBER". And, as the Rio Kid, forty years later, would say, - "The Editor said a mouthful!"

"A STOLEN HOLIDAY"Reviewed 38 years after by Robert Farish

GEM No. 407...."A Stolen Holiday." It lies before me as I write, and what memories it recalls.

The year 1915 was remarkable in that it saw the publication of three magnificent double numbers of the GEM, namely, "Winning His Spurs," "The House-master's Home-coming" and "A Stolen Holiday," the first appearing in the Spring, the second in the Summer and the third a few weeks before Christmas.

Reginald Talbot....the most likeable character, in my opinion, ever created by Martin Clifford....was the hero of the year, and the GEM was at its zenith. The First World War had begun to colour the stories. The searchlights pierced the night sky during the Zeppelin raids, and even for Tom Merry & Co. the hunt was on for German spies.

"A Stolen Holiday" was a good story, but it was rather spoiled for me when I read at the bottom of R.J. Macdonald's picture: "Good-bye, old chap," said Tom Merry, as he gripped the hand of Talbot, who was to spend the vacation with Colonel Lyndon. "Best of luck, and don't forget us before the end of the vac." "You bet," said Talbot cheerily. "Good-bye, old fellow." I wanted Tom Merry and Talbot to spend Christmas together.

Gussy, as usual, arranged the Christmas holidays for his friends, but this time the holidays were to be spent, not at Eastwood House, but at Southcliff House on the Essex coast, the home of his uncle, Sir Pulteney Vane. There had recently been certain mysterious happenings in the neighbourhood of Southcliff House. A spy or traitor had been making light-signals out to sea. The police had failed to capture him, and it was Gussy's uncle's idea that Boy Scouts, such as the St. Jim's fellows were, might succeed where the police had failed. This German agent must be captured, and Sir Pulteney Vane, feeling that the St. Jim's Scouts might accomplish the job, invited them to spend Christmas with him at Southcliff House.

Sir Pulteney Vane's secretary was a naturalised German called Otto Krantz, and this gentleman was a friend of Mr. Ratcliff, the House-master of the New House.

Mr. Otto Krantz's real purpose in visiting Mr. Ratcliff at St. Jim's was....unknown to his employer, Sir Pulteney Vane....to per-

suade Gussy and his friends not to go to Southcliff House for their Christmas holidays because of certain dangers. But Gussy wouldn't listen to him, and there was nothing more that he could do about it for the time being.

Figgins, Kerr and Wynn went missing during the morning of the break-up for the vacation, while Gussy astonished his friends by turning out with an enormous amount of baggage. Part of this baggage consisted of three huge trunks, and when Taggles and the gardener loaded them into the big car, which was to take the chums to the station, the old school porter told Arthur Augustus that one of the trunks was "mortal 'eavy." Figgins, Kerr and Wynn were in those trunks, and when the train left Wayland, ten happy fellows occupied a carriage on their way to spend their Christmas holidays at Southcliff House, thanks to Gussy's "tact and judgment."

But more of the Swell's "tact and judgment" was needed, because when the train landed the boys at Southcliff village, they found Sir Pulteney Vane's car waiting for them in charge of his secretary, Otto Krantz. The secretary recognised Figgins and Co. immediately, and knowing that they had been ordered to be detained at St. Jim's during the vacation, he showed at once that he intended to inform Mr. Ratcliff, without delay, of their whereabouts. Arthur Augustus, however, was equal to the emergency. "Vewy well, Mr. Kwantz," he said calmly. "I am glad to see that you have so vewy keen a sense of dutay. It is wathah wemarkable in a German. You paid a visit to the school with the delibewate intention of muckin' up Sir Pulteney's awwagements by inducin' me to wemain away from heah. I am quite assured that, if my uncle knew of your twickewy, he would wequest you to leave his service. I had not intended to mention the mattah. Undah the circs, I shall have no alternative." This broadside from Gussy completely "bottled up" Mr. Krantz, and he decided to forget all about Figgins and Co.

Sir Pulteney Vane welcomed the St. Jim's juniors on their arrival at Southcliff House. He was very glad to see them, and having told them as much as he could about the recent mysterious happenings, the boys were all keen to track down and capture the spy who had been making light signals to the enemy.

Kerr, the New House detective from Scotland, suspected Otto Krantz from the outset, and after some clever work on his own, he, with the help of Figgins and Wynn, captured Sir Pulteney's secretary in the very act of sending out light signals while the Zeppelins were overhead. The spy put up a terrific fight. He even

shot at Figgins with a pistol. But in the end the three New House juniors knocked him out, bound his wrists together and carried him in triumph to Southcliff House.

Sir Pulteney Vane and the rest of the St. Jim's boys were astounded when they learned of what Figgins and Co. had accomplished. Gussy's uncle couldn't believe that his secretary was a German spy, while Gussy himself remarked that he had had a "stwong suspish" about Otto Krantz all along.

The three New House men were the heroes of the hour, Tom Merry declaring that "Figgins and Co., if they liked, could call the New House cock-house at St. Jim's until next term."

It was a merry Christmas for Tom Merry and Co., and all the merrier because of the happy ending to "A Stolen Holiday."

GEM No. 407 was the last of the old-style double numbers, and during the year following its publication, my favourite paper lost something...charm, atmosphere, call it what you like...which, in my opinion, was never regained.

---oOo---

THE SECRET OF THE PAINTED ROOM
(Xmas Double No. The Gem)

BY GEORGE SELLARS

The shadow of the unknown hangs over Eastwood House. Lord Eastwood and his son Arthur Augustus D'Arcy have mysteriously vanished. What has happened to them? That is the problem Tom Merry & Co. set themselves to solve.

George Kerr plays a leading role in this grand story. The keen and canny scot gets on the track of the rascally kidnapper who is holding to ransom Lord Eastwood and Gussy. Chained and shackled they are both imprisoned in one of the old cellars at Eastwood House. The butler, who is playing for high stakes, loses in a battle of wits to Kerr, who succeeds in solving The Secret of the Painted Room.

* * * * *

COLLECTORS' DIGEST XMAS NUMBER CROSSWORD

Across: 1. There are three near Greyfriars. 7. Would Penfold mope to make one? 10. It sounds as though Bunter would like one, but it would really be more suitable for Wibley. 11. Miss Cleveland to you. 13. We prefer a merry one. 14. Bunter has a body one at

1	F	2	I	3	S	4	H	5	E	6	R	7	S	8		9	B	10		11	M					
12	R	13	O	14	L	15	E	16		17	E	18	T	19	H	20	E	21	L	22	A					
23	A	24	T	25	O	26	M	27		28	P	29	U	30	A	31	I	32	D	33	T					
34	N	35	A	36	P	37		38		39	E	40	D	41	S	42		43		44	M	45	E			
46	K	47		48	P	49	E	50	A	51	R	52	S	53		54		55		56		57	A	58	R	
59		60	Y	61		62		63		64	R	65		66		67		68		69		70	R	71		
72	H	73	A	74		75		76		77	B	78		79		80		81		82		83	I	84	S	
85		86		87	30	-	88		89		90	D	91		92		93		94		95		96	E	97	N
98	R	99		100		101		102		103		104		105		106		107		108		109		110	E	
111	D	112		113		114		115		116	M	117		118		119		120		121		122		123	A	
124		125		126		127		128		129		130		131		132		133		134		135		136	K	
137	D	138		139		140		141		142		143		144		145		146		147		148		149	K	

Whiffles Circus. 15. Mauly likes it in class; Smithy, in his study. 16. Said in a muddled way. 17. The mite of the second form has lost it. 18. Bunter seldom has one in his pocket. 20. A borough in Johnny Bull's county. 22. Harry, in short, is followed by a girl. Quite laughable, really. 23. Redwing would know how to handle this; and Bob Cherry can do it, too. 24. Harry Wharton seldom goes on holiday without his. 25. Lord Reckness' grandson. 27. A place to go to for the very best of kids? 29. He has a son at St. Jim's. 31.

The Head stands between two duck's eggs in the entrance to his study. 33. The first and last of 11. 34. Peele undoubtedly has one, the twister! 36. Presumably, the Greyfriars page will do this. 37. An opening for Morningson. 39. Wibley often did this. 40 & 42. Harry Wharton is, at Wharton Lodge. 41. Gussy's brother is Lord Conway. 43. Part of the turret room has gone, and the remainder is very damp. 44. Singularly, these birds lose interest without a mass of tree

Down: 1. Martin's best pal. 2. A jot. 3. The Greyfriars stories never are. 4. He makes, part of it, but only the edge. 5. The Toff is almost an erring lad. 6. Nobody has one at St. Jim's. 7. Peter loses heart, - maybe by means of Bunter. 8. They never grow it at St. Jim's. 9. She might be tamer than Lord Eastwood. 12. In the middle of the Chase. 16. Two doubles for this girl, and when Hurree Singh is at home he has her in his pocket. 17. The Little Sister of the Poor. 19. Describes the ancient crypt of Greyfriars. 20. Special, in short. 21. Does the New House junior possess one? 22. Gosling is heard to say it, and Mr. Mumble, the gardener, has one. 23. Harry Wharton & Co. pull for it sometimes near Pegg. 24. Coker is not, but Linley is - and there's a girl in it somewhere. 26. Does Coker's pal do this on the Green? 28. Loder could be, and certainly is, when compared with the Juniors. 30. Tom Brown will

be acquainted with this. As a wireless fan, he led T.V. at Greyfriars. 32. And Wildrake will know all about this!! 35. Bob Cherry is always ready for a bird of this nature. 38. Is this Mr. Bank's downfall? 40. A lesson from Mr. Quelch, who dispenses with the political gentleman.

A postal order for five shillings will be forwarded to the sender of the first completely correct solution opened. Solution in our next issue.

* * * * *

BLAKIANA

Conducted by JOSEPHINE PACKMAN

27, Archdale Road, East Dulwich, London, S.E.22.

Once again the season of Peace and Goodwill is here, so Len and I would like to extend to you all our best wishes for a very Happy Christmas. No doubt all you 'Union Jack' enthusiasts will once again bring out those treasured Dickensian Xmas stories by the inimitable Gwyn Evans, but I would also advise a re-reading of the story Walter Webb has chosen for us.

I am afraid that I have again exceeded my allotted quota of space for Blakiana and, even so, my article on the Three Musketeers will have to be concluded in January. Fortunately, I have dealt with all the stories in the 'Union Jack' in which they were featured, leaving only three S.B.L's for the final instalment.

January Blakiana will also contain the second part of Walter Webb's three-part article, each of which are complete in themselves. Thus we shall have a fine opening for the New Year.

J. PACKMAN.

SEXTON BLAKE'S CHRISTMAS TRUCE

By WALTER WEBB.

During its 39 years existence the UNION JACK LIBRARY published many a fine Yuletide story of Sexton Blake, but there were very few to better that which appeared in the year 1924. Then George Hamilton Teed proved, with a grand story, called SEXTON BLAKE'S XMAS TRUCE, that he could write a Christmassy detective yarn quite as well as Gwyn Evans, recognised by popular vote as the best of them

all. The days of the double-number issue were already a thing of the past at that time, and the issue in which we are concerned was not even an enlarged one; even so, it is outstanding, not only on account of the excellent story it contained, but because of the splendid coloured cover design by E.R. Parker, work he seldom surpassed in later years. It portrayed Sexton Blake, with Mademoiselle Yvonne at his side, greeting Dr. Huxton Rymer with a cordial handshake. At Rymer's side stood Mary Trent, his young and pretty ally. Both Blake and Rymer had doffed their hats in respectful greeting to the ladies, and on the faces of all four were warm smiles, which simply exuded peace and goodwill. Blake, shown in profile, looked handsome and not unlike John Barrymore, one-time screen idol, in a blue suit, but Rymer and the girls were warmly clad in thick coats, Mary with a fur round her neck, Yvonne with a scarf. Both girls wore a cloche hat, surely the most hideous article ever invented as headgear for the woman of the twenties, and if this fact did strike a somewhat jarring note, the artist, of course, was not to blame for that. The picture was completed with a view of Winfield Grange in the background, with, still further back, one or two gaunt, leafless trees. The wide drive, thickly coated with freshly fallen snow, gave the necessary Yuletide atmosphere, and so, now to the story itself.

It was Tinker who gave birth, and then voice, to an idea which had been nibbling at his brain for several days. Tinker loved Christmas, and having with his master fought crime all the year round, naturally expected to spend his Yuletide in peace. His idea was to shut up the house in Baker Street, pack Mrs. Bardell off to her niece, and insert a notice on the front door, informing the public that they would be in office again on New Year's Day. But Blake, whilst sympathising with Tinker's point of view, pointed out that their position was akin to that of a doctor, or a policeman - they must be on duty at all times. A disgruntled Tinker brightened up considerably when John Graves, Yvonne's uncle, came round with an invitation from his niece to spend Christmas with her at Winfield Grange. Graves suggested that they fix up a truce with the criminal classes over the holiday and even to invite some of them over to Winfield - an idea which Tinker gave his most enthusiastic support. Thus it came about that amongst the dozen, or so, crooks Blake extended invitations to was Dr. Huxton Rymer and his pretty secretary and partner, Mary Trent. As Professor (cont'd page 370)

adverts

WANTED IN TIME FOR XMAS PLEASE! Nelson Lee Library:- 1st New Series: 7, 15, 16, 17, 19, 20, 33 & 40. Nos. 42 to 50, 52 to 56, 66, 67, 85, 86, 88, 185, 186, 188, 189. 2nd New Series: 1931 complete only. (50 - 101). 3rd New Series. No. 1 and No. 20 only. JOHN GUNN, Junior, No. 1, STRATFORD SQUARE, NOTTINGHAM.

FOR SALE: Thrillers, Union Jacks, Boys' Friend 3d and other odd copies of other papers. S.A.E. List. W. CLOUGH, 3 FOMPHILL GROVE, SALE, MANCHESTER.

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DETECTIVE LIBRARY WANTED: Your price paid for any of the following numbers in good condition; 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 8, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 17, 19, 21, 22, 24, 29, 31, 33. L. PACKMAN, 27 ARCHDALE ROAD, EAST DULWICH, LONDON, S.E.22.

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WANTED: Schoolboys' Own Libraries and Story Paper Collector - J. BELLFIELD, 24 GRAINGERS LANE, CRADLEY HEATH, STAFFS.

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WANTED: To complete collection. Schoolboys' Own Library No. 27. Nelson Lee Libraries, Old Series (small) - Nos. 2; 5-19 inclusive; 22; 23; 25 - 37 inclusive; 39 - 48 inclusive; 50 - 55 inclusive; 58; 61; 63; 64; 65; 67; 68; 69; 71 - 75 inclusive; 78 - 84 inclusive; 86 - 94 inclusive; 98; 99; 102-105 inclusive; 107; 109; 110; 111; 115; 116; 117; 124; 129-134 inclusive; 136; 137; 139; 140; 141; and 142. JACK WOOD, NOSTAW, 328 STOCKTON LANE, YORK.

Most MAGNETS 1931-1940. School and Sport 1 - 24. All Sports 1 - 450. 500 "Topical Times" 1930-1940. Schoolboys' Own Library All types. 100 Newnes Dick Turpins. 200 Gems 1907-1922 (Many Talbot

adverts

stories). Boys Realm 1913-1928. Marvel, Boys' Friend Library, Popular, Detective Weekly, (all periods). Pals, Rocket, Boys' Magazine, Champion, Young Britain, (early 1920s). Triumph, Skipper, Nelson Lee, (about 1930). Double Xmas Numbers: Boys' Friend, Popular (1917), Nelson Lee (1917), Cheer, Boys, Cheer (1912), Boys' Realm (1913). Bound Volumes (Mint): Boys' Friend Weekly 809-844, 845-883. Gem 499-553 (also includes Popular 2 - 16). Wild West Weekly (1938) 1 - 26. (Your duplicates accepted in part exchange). SATISFACTION GUARANTEED. Exchange suggestions welcomed. Offers of books always appreciated. (Your price usually paid!). S.A.E. requirements, please.

WISHING ALL READERS A MERRY CHRISTMAS, AND
A HAPPY NEW YEAR.

T. LAMBERT, 347 GERTRUDE ROAD, NORWICH.

Literary, Debating and Dialect Societies of Great Britain, Ireland and France. Sections III and IV. Compiled by Geoffrey Handley-Taylor and published by Hinrichsen Edition Ltd., Museum House, Museum St., London, W.C.1. Price 5/-.

The above is a most interesting and concise list, an addition to two already published, of societies of all descriptions, where men, and women love to get together and discuss subjects which interest them. It has evidently been compiled with great care by Mr. Geoffrey Handley-Taylor, for it is a mine of information. Prominent are "Writer Circles" which appear to exist in every town and city of any size.

In Bibliography the 'Collectors' Digest' is listed with a reference to the four Old Boys' Book Clubs.

Our existence only came to Mr. Handley-Taylor's notice as the handbook was going to press, otherwise there would have been more about us.

However, there is to be another edition shortly and he has kindly offered to give us special prominence. I should therefore be grateful if secretaries would let me have the actual dates their Clubs were formed straight away.

Thanks to Mr. Handley-Taylor, the activities of Frank Richards, the Clubs and the C.D., got a fine 'write-up' in the columns of the "Irish Independent" recently.

Andrew Butterfield, Rymer was owner of Abbey Towers, a small, well equipped estate, not far from Horsham, in Sussex. Mary, at one time, had been housemaid there, but having discovered the secret of Rymer's livelihood, had soon proved that she could be of far more value to him as a partner. Despite the gulf in years, a deep bond of affection had quickly sprung up between them, then deepened still further into love, with the result that it was only on rare occasions that Rymer moved without either the advice or active participation of Mary Trent.

Rymer was in conversation with a crook named Hermann Klein when he received an indirect message from Sexton Blake, asking him to come over to Baker Street and give his opinion to a proposal which the detective wished to make to him. Klein had two years before attempted to ruin both Yvonne and her uncle in connection with what is recorded in Sexton Blake's 'Index' as 'The Case of the Winfield Handicap'. Klein's plans were foiled by Blake on that occasion, with the result that the crook had been sent to prison. Now he was out again, thirsting for revenge, not only against the detective, but Yvonne as well, and to further that revenge he wanted the assistance of Rymer. It was after seeing Mary Trent that Rymer went to see Blake. The idea of a truce at Christmas appealed to the better side of his nature, and he gave Blake his whole-hearted assurance that he would respect it. On leaving Baker Street, Rymer made his way to the Hotel Venetia, and entering the American Bar, where he had arranged to meet Klein, was staggered to see the latter in conversation with none other than the master-criminal, George Marsden Plummer! The reason for Rymer's amazement needs a little explanation here. In his previous tussle with Blake it was recorded that Plummer had met his death through the medium of the dreaded Death Ray which had come into his possession. The author of that episode was not Teed, nor was it Osborne; the only writer likely to kill off a popular, long-standing character like Plummer would be the man who created him. Therefore I can only assume that Lewis Carlton was responsible. Klein found a very willing ally in Plummer and the scheme which the precious pair had concocted between them included a raid on the Christmas party at the Grange by as many followers as they could rope in, to grab as many valuables as they could lay hands on and make a lightning getaway. On being asked to join in, Rymer, true to his promise to Blake, refused, but because of his friendship with Plummer, avoided telling the detective of his

meeting with the two crooks.

John Graves soon began to doubt the wisdom of Blake's move when, whilst out motoring he was shot at, but luckily not hit. When the luggage of Rymer and Mary Trent was searched afterwards the result only added strength to the theory that the shot was fired by Rymer. Blake and Tinker were also the victims of an attack as they were motoring to the Grange. This time it was a dog-faced ape - one of the most savage specimen in existence - which leapt from the branches of a tree and landed on Tinker's shoulders as he was driving. After a desperate struggle, in which the car was nearly wrecked, Blake hit the beast repeatedly with a heavy spanner, until, battered into unconsciousness, it slumped to the floor of the car. It was Christmas Eve when the attacks had taken place, and after dinner that evening the three victims, accompanied by Yvonne, having made their way to the library, discussed what steps they must take in the face of the unforeseen circumstances which then confronted them. Suddenly, Tinker saw a face peering in at them through the window, and recognising the features of George Marsden Plummer, the man both Blake and himself had seen die before their eyes, was so overcome with shock that he was unable to articulate for some minutes, during which time Plummer had time to make himself scarce. Blake was concerned but disbelieving when Tinker managed to tell what he had seen, but when from other parts of the house came feminine screams and revolver shots, then Sexton Blake knew that a treacherous attack was being made on the Grange. No doubt remained in the mind of the famous criminologist but that Rymer had doublecrossed him. Always resourceful, Yvonne marshalled the lady guests into the music-room, where they were removed from the scene of the shooting. Blake, Tinker, Graves, and the rest of the male guests, having armed themselves with weapons of different kinds, stood fast, grimly determined that the raiders should not attain their designs. It was then that Blake saw, with mingled surprise and gratification, the big frame of Dr. Huxton Rymer, side by side with Graves, beating off the attack of a number of the enemy. When Blake lost his weapon, Rymer coolly tossed him a spare one of his own, and it was that action which proved the turning point.

The bandits were led by an American crook, named Black Gans, a ruthless desperado, who knew only one law - the law of the gun. And it was by the gun - Rymer's - that he died, for Blake, knowing

that Gans would take the life of any one of the party without the slightest compunction, shot him through the heart. On seeing their leader go down, and noting the grim, inflexible features of the commanding-looking man behind the smoking weapon, the raiders were thrown into a panic, which resulted in a disorderly retreat. Those captured were soon disarmed and made secure, pending the arrival of the police. The only casualty amongst the defenders was Tinker, who had been struck by a glancing bullet, but, under the skilful hands of Dr. Huxton Rymer, he was quickly made comfortable, and the last act in the drama took place at his bed-side as Christmas Day was ushered in.

Then Rymer explained what had happened after his meeting with Hermann Klein in the Venetia. Both the latter and Plummer had urged him to take advantage of the proposition made to him in order to arrange a big coup at the Grange, but he had refused to commit himself until he had seen Mary. When she talked the matter over with him she would hear nothing of Plummer's plan, but was all for accepting the offer of a truce. As Mary's wishes were more to him than anything else in the world, he consented to do as she desired. In the meantime, Plummer came down to Abbey Towers to lie low, and brought Klein with him, and they again pleaded with him to join in with them; he refused. He had given his word and meant to stick to it. On the day he arrived at the Grange he kept a rendezvous with Plummer, and heard of the attempted assassinations on the lives of Blake, Tinker and Graves. There was no hypocrisy in Rymer's attitude; he remained strictly neutral over the whole thing, refusing to join his fellow-crooks, yet not giving them away. The escape of George Marsden Plummer, the master-mind who had organised the whole affair, was satisfactory to Rymer in every way, even though, in that instance, they had been on opposite sides of the fence.

As Sexton Blake offered his hand in apology for the treachery he had thought Huxton Rymer guilty of and in gratitude for the service he had rendered Tinker that night, and found it gripped tightly in Rymer's own, the joyous sound of bells was heard echoing across the frosty air, ringing out that old familiar message - the message of CHRISTMAS.

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"THREE HUNDRED --- NOT OUT"

BY GERRY ALLISON

This month - November 1953 - the Sexton Blake Library 3rd Series presents its 300th number. Hearty congratulations

to the publishers, authors and artists on this fine achievement. There have now been 1426 issues of the S.B.L. over the three series. Long may it continue to appear!

We are wont to grumble at the sort of yarns we get these days, but really ought to be glad that we are still able to get new Blake stories every month, when almost all the Library's compeers of pre-war years are now nothing but a memory.

And this month we have two very good tales, which provided me with some most enjoyable reading. As a matter of fact, I was pretty sure they were winners before I opened them. How come? Well, I get my copies early each month from Stringer's bookstall in Leeds Kirkgate market. Old Mr. Stringer, retired, has many bookshops all over Yorkshire, and has supplied me with many good things in the way of old boys' books. He is a real expert antiquarian bookseller, and also a Sexton Blake fan. He always snaps up the new copies as soon as they appear.

This month, his wife told me, he took one of the new numbers to read in bed on the day he got them from the distributor. "He enjoyed the tale so much," Mrs. Stringer went on, "that he actually went down in the middle of the night for the other one, and finished that, too, before he went to sleep!" Well, there's an enthusiast for you. Now for the books themselves.

No. 299. "The Mystery of the Swindler's Stooze". Walter Tyrer.

This yarn, with such an ugly title, is one of Tyrer's competent, straightforward tales, which can be read at a sitting. I read it at two, to be exact. The action was divided between London, and the fen district on the East coast. All the characters are well-drawn. This author has a way of bringing even his most insignificant people to life. Take Potter, who was clerk to the vallain of the piece, Josiah Symes. Potter only appears twice, but he is quite a living person: "an elderly man, who chewed cloves, because he believed they disguised the flavour of rum." Blake and Tinker are quite good; the plot develops logically; and the rascals are all brought to book. Very satisfactory.

No. 300. "The Case of the Nameless Millionaire." Anthony Parsons.

Parsons is in good form these days. Here he gives us a grand, melodramatic yarn of a plot against Egypt - almost in the Bulldog Drummond tradition. There is an atom bomb involved, and Blake just manages to save the country at the cost of five ribs, a broken leg, and concussion! For this he gets the Star of Egypt from the hands of 'the General' himself. It is nice to see Blake once more solving

these international quarrels. Perhaps he could go to Trieste next month. Parsons' "Stinker" is still a pathological case. Snap out of it, Anthony.

* * * * *

THE THREE MUSKETEERS (Part 3)

By JOSEPHINE PACKMAN

oOo

After their last adventure in France and subsequent escape from the French police, the Three Musketeers appear to have retired from their murderous criminal career; but in U.J. No. 1147 "The Adventure of the Five Giants" they emerge from their retirement at the request of their erstwhile patron Mathew Cardolak, to embark on a fresh criminal adventure.

According to a report by a party of miners in a mountainous district of Mexico, the remains of a race of giants has been discovered, and the Mexican Government has given permission for expert anthropologists to investigate the matter. Now, an ancient Chinese legend is believed by the learned men of that country - that in the long, long ago there existed a race of giants, and that the Five Giants of Sentse started upon a journey to find new lands for the Emperor, who gave each of them a jewel, known as the Five Sacred Jewels of Asia.

These jewels, if found upon or near the newly discovered skeletons are worth a fortune, and just the bait to capture the interest of Cardolak and his agents, the Three Musketeers.

It is soon known that these criminals are fitting out an expedition, and an old Chinese friend of Blake's - Hong-Lo-Soo - requests his help in the matter, for the giant skeletons and the rare jewels they possibly hide are too valuable to the world for them to be destroyed and the jewels stolen by such vandals as the Three Musketeers and their unscrupulous patron. Blake naturally agrees to help his Chinese friend, and he and Tinker set out for Mexico well prepared to meet any trouble that might arise; and trouble certainly comes to them, for the Three Musketeers soon learn that the detective is on their trail, and a murderous campaign is started against Blake and Tinker.

But although Blake beats them at their own game, he is not fated to meet them, for something far beyond his control takes a hand in the game. Late one night when their camp lies in slumber -

except for Blake and a peon who are on guard - there is an ominous rumbling, seemingly from the bottom of an abyss near them. It awakens Tinker and the rest of the peons employed by Blake, and as the rumbling grows louder the very earth beneath them seems to rise and fall in swiftly passing waves. From across the ravine comes a low whistling sound that rises and rises to a deafening roar, culminating in a monstrous crash, with a wild burst of red flame to the East. It is an earthquake and an eruption amongst the volcanic mountains, and it is only the fact that Blake and his party are on the side of the ravine away from the upheaval that they survive. All night long a terrific storm rages, and then a bleak morning reveals the awful damage that nature has caused.

Nothing more is seen of the Three Musketeers, even when, after a terrible journey, Blake and his party at last reach the cave where the giant skeletons have been discovered. Blake finds that Hong-Lo-Soo is right, for under the spot where each skeleton had lain was hidden a jewel: the Five Sacred Jewels of Asia; - a giant diamond; an enormous ruby; a mammoth pearl, still enclosed in some strange sort of quartz, which Blake discovered later, served to keep it "alive"; a great sapphire and a wonderful topaz. No wonder those arch rogues coveted such beautiful jewels.

A skeleton and a jewel are handed over to the care of five different museums, and Blake and Tinker return to England satisfied that they have performed a good service to the world. As for the Three Musketeers, no more was heard of them. All Blake could discover was that Cardolak's yacht SULTAN was cruising in the Gulf of Mexico for some weeks, and then one day it sailed away as mysteriously as it had come. But Sexton Blake knew that if the Musketeers still lived the future would bring proof, for while those three crooks existed, some upheaval in the underworld would always cast them to the surface.

This is the last story about the Three Musketeers to be recorded in the Union Jack, their remaining adventures being described in the Sexton Blake Library.

PUBLISHERS NOTE - 1953 ANNUAL

Although every care is exercised in the duplicating and making up of the 1953 ANNUAL, it is possible that faults such as blank pages etc., have passed through unnoticed. Should this occur in YOUR Annual, if you would return it to us we will rectify the same, with pleasure.

GOSSIP ABOUT ST. FRANK'S



By Jack Wood
Nostaw, 328, Stockton Lane, York.

Thank you, Bob Blythe, for your good wishes on my taking over this important section of the C.D. Thank you, too, on behalf of all Leetes for all the excellent groundwork you have put in over the last six years in keeping the St. Frank's flag flying so bravely. I only hope I shall be able to maintain the high standard you have set; perhaps Nipper himself, in introducing the first number of Nipper's Magazine, expressed my own thoughts at this historic moment remarkably well.

"Well, here it is," he wrote. "I'm not going to blow any trumpets, or clash any cymbals, or anything of that sort. I'm hoping my little magazine will speak for itself."

"If there's anything you don't like, just say so. If there are improvements to be suggested, well, suggest them. I'm willing to do anything reasonable to please those for whom I am catering. After all, that's my job. I want this magazine to be alive, and I've done my utmost, with the assistance of willing helpers, to make this first number a real bunch of energy. It stands to reason that there will be improvements as we go along, and I have in hand a number of contributions."

"Any fellow is at liberty to send in manuscripts, and they can be quite sure of a fair reading. I want snappy articles, short stories and topical paragraphs, and there is a good opening for sketches, so buck up, you authors and artists, and do your little bit to make things hum."

Like Nipper, I have done my best to make this, my first job as Nelson Lee editor, interesting and entertaining. I hope you will rally round and give me the support that I'm hoping for in the months ahead. And now, with best wishes for Xmas and the New Year
.....read on!

HANDFORTH'S BAD BARGAIN!

By W.F. Champion

(Concluded)

"The sudden jolt had such an effect upon the springs that the body tried to part company with the chassis. Church shot up into the air, thudded down again, and skidded off the seat, landing on his back. He struggled there amid the suitcases and bags, muttering imprecations."

Soon after, in Helmsford, a policeman holds up his hand—but Handy, without knowing it, is in top gear again. He just manages to miss the man-in-blue by a bare inch or two.

"This'll mean prison!" gurgled McClure breathlessly. "He's got your number, and you'll be summoned—"

"I can't stop the thing!" howled Handforth desperately.

However, after a few more hectic miles have been covered, he does manage to more or less master the surging, snorting juggernaut, and the journey continues more or less peacefully—for a spell!

"There came a sudden devastating rattle, a fearful crash, and silence—at least, comparative silence. The Ford still went on, and the engine was still pulling.

"Whoa!" roared Church. "We've dropped something!"

But it was only the offside rear wing, which the shocked Handy ordered to be salvaged and dumped in the car with the luggage.

The next thing to part company was a headlamp.

"They searched for the headlamp, and found it in the grass. Not that it was much good, since one of the back wheels had run over it. Handforth was now beginning to look more and more concerned."

Just before Bannington is reached they come to a little decline and an arched-bridge—a common enough object on the English country roads. 'The Ford gathered speed as she went down, and there was a sudden jolt as she took the hump of the bridge. Church and McClure bounced upwards, two suit-cases fell out; the hood tore free from its moorings, and dropped overside in the dust.'

Oh! there was lots and lots more in this vein, page after page of it—and I still feel as though I'd swallowed a whole bottle of rejuvenating tonic whenever I read it!

However, the hood is picked up, tattered and torn, and joins the wing and the headlamp in the back of the car, while Handy watches

with a set expression of misery: 'He was looking pale, and there were haggard lines appearing on his rugged face.'

In this way they arrived at St. Frank's, and the old school is shocked. Naturally, when he learns what has transpired, William Napoleon Browne is shocked most, and decides he must put matters right.

So, immediately after a hurried tea, he, Handforth & Co., Pitt, and three or four more juniors pack themselves into the Ford like sardines, 'the unfortunate vehicle sagged perilously,' and the uncertain journey back to Miggs Garage is commenced.

The return journey is, if anything, even more mirth-provoking than the run to St. Frank's, but space does not permit going into full details. The springs go, another wing falls off, there are two punctures, one wheel goes all 'wobbly', then a door and a number-plate drop off into the dust.

At one point there was a 'noise that sounded like half-a-dozen explosions in one. The Ford simply shivered from stem to stern, the bonnet burst open, bent and twisted, and the radiator caved back. There was a terrific and unearthly jolt. But still the Ford roared onwards.'

In actual truth, they had shed the engine, which was rolling down the road after them, in the dust, 'smoking and knocking itself to atoms.'

'The radiator followed. It gave one or two sagging jolts, boiling water spurting out amid clouds of steam, and then it rolled sideways and disappeared.'

By now the hurtling monster had no brakes, not even an engine to steady its pace by compression, and all the packed bunch of hilarious schoolboys could do was hold on and hope for the best--- leaving Handy to cling grimly to the steering-wheel. And at this interesting stage, another of those hump-backed bridges appears ahead. The Ford hits the hump, and simply rises into the air.

'For a brief fraction, the occupants had all the sensations of flying, and then the Ford hit the ground, slewing round at the same moment. To remain whole any longer was simply out of the question. The strain upon the wheels was tremendous. There were a series of cracks like gunshots, the wheels flew off in all directions, and the body struck the road with a thudding crash, and slithered along amid the dust.'

Luckily, not only is no one hurt, but, at this juncture, a lorry, of the "tipping variety" arrives on the scene, and, for a

fiver, the driver agrees to cart the remains of the "ancient-flivver" to its destination.

Well, to cut a long story short, they eventually arrive at the garage—to catch the unsuspecting Mr. Miggs standing happily by the side of the Austin-seven, the engine of which is ticking-over beautifully.

Of course, the rogue hasn't a leg to stand on. Browne points out that the transaction was not legal, Handforth being a mere schoolboy. He further casually mentions the fact that his father, the eminent judge Sir Rufus Browne, is presiding at the local assizes shortly, whereupon the rascally Miggs, thoroughly subdued, allows Handy to drive off joyously in his Austin without a demur.

And so ended a most exciting and unusual first day of term!

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THE NAME'S THE SAME !

STOLE FROM WOMAN'S WALLET. Sequel to Meeting in Public House.

Nelson Lee, aged 55, bricklayer, of Fortune Gate Road, Harlesden, was fined £20 at Willesden Court on Monday for stealing about £5 from Mrs. Bertha Edith Taylor at Beaconsfield Road, Willesden.

(Extract from the Willesden Chronicle, 6th November, 1953.)

* * * * *

BROOKS HAD MORE SCOPE!

By R. GODSANE

A great advantage enjoyed by the author of School-Detective stories over the author of School Stories is the wide scope offered. E.S. Brooks has taken full advantage of this situation with his skill in blending the two. Instead of being confined to the usual breaking of bounds after lights-out for the purpose of placing bets with the local book-maker, or playing billiards and cards with doubtful characters, Brooks uses the breaking of bounds at night for the purpose of investigating the mystery running through the serial.

In the earlier Nelson Lees quite a few investigations by Nipper & Co. sometimes with Nelson Lee, were carried out at night, and Brooks made good use of the river Stowe and Willards Island, which to my mind added greater interest to the Serial. In the Hunter the Hun serial, the rebellion is more or less confined to the day, and the mysterious activities of Mr. Hunter being investigated at night. In other words, the reader is treated to two stories with

close connections between them. The author is not bound quite so much to the form room and sporting events, and can give his attention to happenings outside the school whilst still giving attention to the inside depending on the series being written. The much wider range of characters is also an asset as he is not confined too much to local rough characters for his stories of less sportsmanlike types.

Owing to Nelson Lee's connection with Scotland Yard detective Brooks can bring in criminal gangs into his stories without them appearing incongruous, such as the Green Triangle criminals and the Chinese drug smugglers during the St. Frank's stay in London, after Titus Alexis had set fire to the college near Bellton. This gives a fine opportunity for Nelson Lee and Nipper to bring their skill to bear in beating the crooks, and makes good reading.

Brooks cleverly brings in some light relief in the detective side with the activities of E.O. Handforth, who strangely enough, has a never failing high opinion of his detective ability, even after his many attempts and failures.

OLD BOYS' BOOK CLUB

L O N D O N S E C T I O N

By a fortunate coincidence the November meeting of the club was held at the home of Blakiana, Josie Packman's residence at East Dulwich, thus celebrating the Diamond Jubilee of Sexton Blake. An excellent attendance graced the portals with N. Throckmorton making his first visit. Chairman Len welcomed the company in his usual breezy style and once the agenda formalities were done with got down to the lighter side of the meeting.

Alan Stewart gave an excellent report of his visit to Jimmy Iraldi in New York, his inspection of Jimmy's Hamiltonian collection, coin collection, Sherlockia souvenirs etc., truly a very happy occasion.

Impromptu talk fell to the lot of Bob Whiter who outlined how he began to read the old papers. Brother Douglas started him on the road when 8 years old by giving Bob a "Magnet" to read to keep him quiet. Thus the urge to read the papers started and all the ones of those days were indulged in, "Magnets", "Gems", the Thomson

"Famous Five" plus "The Modern Boy" and the Greyfriars Holiday Annuals. Continuing Bob stated that there was only a thin dividing line between his like of the "Magnet" and "Gom". The talk was thoroughly enjoyed and great was the applause at the close.

Eleanor Packman had cooked up a good quiz and this was won by Len with Bob Whiter second and Charlie Wright and myself in third position. Following this Ron Deacon conducted a memory test with fifty answers to be given. Charlie Wright gained first place and Josie second with Bob Whiter in third place. Two very fine competitions and greatly enjoyed by all.

An extensive sale and exchange was conducted and as the feed was first rate the whole meeting was a qualified success.

Christmas meeting was fixed for Sunday December 20th., 3.30 p.m. at 706 Lordship Lane, Wood Green, N.22.

UNCLE BENJAMIN.

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N O R T H E R N S E C T I O N

14th November, 1953

Vera Coates, foundation member, will not be at the Christmas party, for on that date she has an even more important engagement - it's her wedding day!

At this, our November meeting, therefore, chairman J. Breeze Bentley had the pleasing duty of presenting her with a timepiece on behalf of the Club. In doing so 'Breeze' said humourously that he did not know whether it would aid her to prepare her husband a cup of tea or vice versa.

Though Vera will change her name she assures us that it will not change her habit of attending twelve meetings of the O.B.B.C. per year.

Many happy years, Vera.

There was a splendid attendance, including three who can only attend occasionally. Cliff Beardsell, Charles Auckland and Robert Pick. Cliff and Charles from Stockport and Sheffield respectively would vow, I am sure, it was well worth travelling many miles to hear our chairman's talk on "George Joseph Carberry" a prominent member of the Greyfriars Sixth in the early days of the Magnet.

'Breeze' also brought in several chapters from Magnet No. 107 "The Cad of the Sixth" which he said was one of Frank Richards'

finest stories, and the one in which Carberry was expelled.

This can be said; as read by Breeze it sounded as dramatic as many a stage thriller. He held his listeners complete in his hand until nearly nine o'clock and got a terrific round of applause at the finish.

The talk will appear in the form of an article in the Annual.

Now don't forget the Party on 12th December. It starts at 4 pm. If you can possibly attend please advise secretary Norman Smith as soon as ever possible. There'll be plenty of fun and games, and food in abundance.

HERBERT LECKENBY, Northern Section Correspondent.

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MIDLAND SECTION MEETING - 16th November

Our programme for this evening had been arranged by Messrs. Bellfield and Porter and their friend Miss Russell so we were assured of a full and enjoyable bill of fare. I commented in last month's report that although we are mainly Greyfriars enthusiasts we had deserted our Alma Mater for a trip to Rookwood. Now we went further and went home for Christmas with Jimmy Silver & Co. to the Rookwood equivalent of Wharton Lodge, namely Silver's home "The Priory".

Our programme commenced with a reading by Tom Porter from "S.O.L." No. 138, "The Ghost of the Priory". We heard how Lovell, out of sheer bravado sleeps alone in the haunted room and gets the fright of his young life when he sees and feels the ghost. We are to hear the end of the story at our Christmas Party. Somehow I don't think the ghost is a real one, and I fancy Morny is suspicious of it.

We were back at Greyfriars in the quiz which followed. Our chairman scored 100%, an almost unheard of event previously.

Then back again to Rookwood for a dialogue which we had to complete with our own versions of the ending. These were then read out for adjudication, Jack Ingram being the winner and receiving the attractive prize of a vintage "Collectors' Digest".

Despite all this happy activity, we nevertheless found time to raffle the latest "Tom Merry Annual". Our most recently joined lady member made the draw and, to our great pleasure and amusement drew her own number. Only cads like Bunter and Skinner & Co.

would think that its a "wangle."

Yet another evening went very swiftly, and I must conclude by recording our most grateful thanks to Beryl, Tom and Jack for their enthusiastic and untiring efforts on our behalf.

EDWARD DAVEY.

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MERSEYSIDE SECTION
8th November, 1953

There was a somewhat smaller company present at this meeting, but, in view of the bad weather, it was quite satisfactory, and did not detract in any way from the evening's enjoyment.

A number of matters were dealt with by the chairman, and arrangements were concluded in the matter of an informal Xmas tea, which is to be held on Sunday, 13th December, at Waterloo House. Don Webster and Frank Case will be going to Birmingham and Leeds respectively on 12th December, so it looks like being quite a festive week-end for them.

The recent acquisition of a number of complete "Nelson Lee" series is very pleasing, and much more satisfactory than the rather miscellaneous selection with which we have had to make do up to now.

Most of the evening was taken up by a general knowledge team quiz, and this was a great success. Very few points separated the contestants throughout, and the issue was in doubt almost to the end of the last round. Jim Walsh acted as arbiter, and he had quite a job on at times - we were all such voluble talkers - except when we were stumped by our opponents' "snorters" - despite the latter's assurances that they were "easy ones". We shall certainly have a repeat next month.

The meeting ended with the library business at 10 p.m.

Next meeting 13th December.

FRANK CASE.

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