

The COLLECTORS' Digest

VOLUME No 9

1946

100TH

Number!

APRIL
1955



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Robert H
Whiter SS

The Collectors' Digest

Vol. 9 No. 100.

Price 2s.6d.

APRIL, 1955

Editor, HERBERT LECKENBY,
c/o YORK DUPLICATING SERVICES,
7, The Shambles, YORK.

Your Editor Looks Back

Long years ago, in 1912, I paid my first visit to London. I was one of an organised party going up (or is it down?) from York for the day. Although I had never been there the names of many of its streets were familiar to me, mainly through the stories I had read in the "Boys' Friend" and other of my favourite boys' weeklies and the thought that I might see some of them made me impatient to reach my destination.

We reached King's Cross at 6 a.m., crossed the road, all 600 of us, and turned left. I looked up at the street sign. Grays Inn Road! "Ooh! what a good start" I said to myself gleefully, "the home of Nelson Lee!" We reached Holborn, then down Chancery Lane to Fleet Street where at Anderton's Hotel, now no more, we were to have our meals. During the day I had to go where I was led but after tea we were at liberty to go where we liked. I came out of the hotel - and walked the length of Fleet Street - street of my dreams. I gazed in awe at the newspaper offices I knew so well then I came to Ludgate Hill. I turned left and reached Fleetway House. I looked in wishing I had the nerve to enter its portals.

We left for home at midnight; I settled down in the carriage and thought over the events of the day. I had been in the Houses of Parliament, St. Paul's, the Mansion House, the Guildhall, but above all I had been in the Grays Inn Road, Baker Street, Farringdon Street and the Street of Ink! Then I began to dream. At the time I was in the printing trade and I thought to myself "Oh if only I had started life in Fleet Street or Farringdon Street maybe some day I might have become the editor of a big newspaper or a boys' paper." Just the dream of a youth with ink in his veins.

Whats all that to do with the 100th number of the "Collectors'

Digest" you might be asking; well now I'm coming to it.

The years passed on, for me far away from Fleet Street, but at long last, when the grey was beginning to enter my hair, I did become an editor. Not of some great daily or boys' weekly, but just a modest little magazine never seen on the bookstalls, circulating only among a few hundred fellows with a common interest. Nevertheless I vow that no Fleet Street editor with a huge salary, no editor of a successful boys' weekly, has experienced more thrills, more satisfaction, more happiness, found more friends than I have done in the eight years I have been running that modest little monthly of ours.



As I pen these lines the memories come crowding. I can only set a few of them down at random.

Almost at the very beginning we had a 'scoop' for in No. 2 there appeared a letter from Frank Richards giving the news that Greyfriars was reopening - the start of the Bunter Books, of course. Soon afterwards numerous newspapers gave the big event prominence, but as

we proudly said in No. 3 - "We had it first."

Immediately afterwards came the 'swindles' which brought about that famous No. 3A. Gosh! what a story. Several collectors had been 'bit' before we got wind of what was going on, but once we did, quite a number had reason to be grateful to the little C.D. for saving their money. I'll never forget the excitement of those weeks - the fellow at Leicester masquerading as a woman; the other crook down south with the aristocratic aliases - Roger Anthony Carstairs, Lancelot Percival Merrivale, Hugh Montgomery,

Eric St. Clair; Roger Jenkins' dramatic drive through the blizzard to Leicester; my letter to the Chief Constable of Leicester; the arrest followed by three years in jail for the individual there.

As for the other fellow well, as those of you who were with us at the time know, he disappeared into thin air; maybe he read about the fate of his fellow crook or possibly he got the "wind-up" when he got a letter from a certain collector, now dead, in which he was addressed by all his fancy names.

Yes, indeed, an exciting time for the editor of a humble little mag; and as I said at the time, it all proved up to the hilt the value of collectors of old boys books getting together in brotherhood.

And my word, how quickly it developed; the forming of the London O.B.B.C., followed by three others here and one in Australia. What countless happy hours and forming of staunch friendships have been brought about thereby. All owe a debt to Len Packman and Bob Blythe for starting the wheels running in London Town.

My first visit to London in connection with the hobby - never shall I forget it. Meeting Eric Fayne in Fleet Street (I would make it Fleet Street), the weekend at the Modern School; the Club Meeting there; the days that followed at "Cherry Place", Wood Green; and the grand finale at Charlie Wright's hospitable Greenwich home. Yes, indeed, sweet memories for the rest of my days.

The holidays which followed in succeeding years, with their joyous events too numerous to mention.

Then the scores of meetings I have attended of our Northern Club and the hearty welcomes I received on visiting the Midland and Merseyside ones. Yea, indeed, little did I dream of the joys in store for me when I first looked at No. 1 way back down the years.

Publicity! Press interviews and the night I broadcast from the Leeds studio! Gosh! I still remember the moment just before I was 'on the air' when I thought I was going to have 'stage fright', followed by my relief when I found I was word perfect.

Then there was "the amazing case of Harry Hartley"

To those of you who have 'tuned in' since just let me recall it briefly. In reviewing the run of the "Boys' Leader"

I told how Harry Hartley, a Liverpool boy, had in 1905 won a competition which gained for him a six weeks holiday in the U.S.A. and Canada. I remarked how interesting it would be if Harry Hartley could be found today so that he could give us his recollections. With over 40 years with all they have meant in between I thought it rather unlikely. Frank Case, however, was interested and set off on an investigation. He was rewarded for following clue after clue he eventually found Harry Hartley. That was remarkable enough but there was something even more astonishing for at that very moment Harry Hartley was actually corresponding with an officer in the same barracks as my switchboard was then situated - his office being just at the other side of the barrack square, and he was arranging to pay him a visit! If that had appeared in a story one would have been tempted to say, "No, dash it all that's a bit too far fetched."

Anyway a week or two later Harry Hartley did come along and brought Frank Case with him. Yes, truth can be stranger than fiction. Can the editor of a big daily relate a more intriguing personal experience than that? I doubt it.

Then there was that remarkable happening concerning Gwyn Evans I related last month. In those stories of old we are all so interested in the 'long arm' played many a part and here we are experiencing coincidences just as strange in our own lives.

Other vivid memories - the exhibitions! How well I recall the night Jack Wood told me that the Chief Librarian of York Public Library was keenly interested in our suggestion of an exhibition. Never shall I forget the thrill I got when a few weeks later I saw the famous Hunt Room displaying hundreds of papers from cur collections and watched the crowds displaying obvious interest. How happy I felt when the exhibition over the Librarian told me it was the most successful one ever held there. Followed other shows at Islington, London; Leeds, Sunderland, Gateshead, Bradford and Scarborough, all creating interest and a lot of publicity. Little did I dream in the days that I thought I had a hobby to myself that such events would come to pass.

Yes, indeed, thrilling, happy years have they been for me since I sat down to prepare that No. 1, but it hasn't been all plain sailing. There's been plenty of problems and anxieties too. For instance the great paper shortage, when we had to snap up an odd ream wherever we could.

There was also the shock I got when preparing No. 5 during

the dreadful blizzards of 1947. York was flooded at the time, and when I arrived at the duplicating agency I found to my dismay that half the copy had been lost on the way. I had to sit up all night re-writing it. How well I recall how with the dawn I prepared some breakfast and said with a sigh of relief "Oh, well, we shall be out on time after all," then after a meal well earned I set off to my work at my switchboard.

Yes, out on time. I am proud to think that despite all difficulties and set-backs throughout all the 100 occasions, our little mag. has never failed to get out on time. I am sure you will agree it is no small achievement. For such a record I have to thank in no small measure the loyal band of contributors who have never failed to come along with their copy. Never once throughout the years have I had to sit back and say with a perplexed frown on my brow "How the deuce am I going to fill it this time?"

And I mustn't forget the two duplicating agencies without whose help, all I have claimed, would have been impossible. The staff at our present one always makes every effort to ensure the C.D. is out during the first week in each month.

Whilst I have been writing this my thoughts have kept dwelling on those who are no longer with us having joined the Great Majority. The list, alas! is a lengthy one. Sadly I record them: John Medcraft, F.W. Wearing, W.H. Neate, R.A.H. Goodyear, Henry Steele, Joseph Baguley, Patrick Mulhall, Reginald Hudson, S. Orme, Ray Caldwell, Geo. H. Hess, Peard Sutherland, Jack Munro, Harry Stables, Joseph Parks.

There have been one or two others who were once regular correspondents who suddenly disappeared from our circle never to be heard of again. One was Tom Martin of Bristol. As 'Nemo' he drew the cover pictures for our first two Annuals and also wrote articles for the 'C.D.' Years ago he told me he had had a serious operation, but had got over it successfully and was going on nicely. Then came an ominous silence and I never heard from him again.

Over nearly a decade it is inevitable that some should have been called by the Grim Reaper: but oh how regretfully have I recorded their passing, almost the only unhappy task during those hundred months.

Apart from those we have lost through death, it is extremely gratifying to be able to claim that a comparative few have left

our circle once they have entered it, and of these only a minute number through loss of interest.

Well, here I must stop browsing; I've a lot to squeeze into this number. In conclusion let me say how much I appreciate all the kind tributes I have received already. They have made my eyes a little misty and if I deserve all you say well let me assure you I have been repaid a hundredfold, and my greatest wish is that one day I shall be assembling the copy for No. 200 of the Collectors' Digest.

Thank you, everyone.

Yours very sincerely,

Herbert Mackenby

WANTED: Magnet No. 215 (will pay 7/6d). S.J. LATSKY, LATSKY ST., STELLENBOSCH, SOUTH AFRICA.

WANTED: Chums Bound Volumes (or monthly numbers) Nov. 1920; Oct. 1921; Nov. 1922; Oct. 1923; Nov. 1919; Oct. 1920; Nov. 1924; Oct. 1925. H.G. MATTHEWS, 38 VICTORIA ST., ALDERNEY, CHANNEL ISLANDS.

WANTED: Sexton Blake Library (First and Second Series only). Your Price Paid for Good Copies. Serial Numbers and Series to: JOSEPHINE PACKMAN, 27 ARCHDALE ROAD, EAST DULWICH, LONDON, S.E.22.

WANTED: Any copies of "Chips" between 1914 and 1920 (inclusive). Good Condition only. 2/6d. each offered. L. PACKMAN, 27 ARCHDALE ROAD, EAST DULWICH, LONDON S.E.22.

WANTED: S.O.L's complete, reasonable condition - Nos. 322, 325, 352, 367, 370, 374, 379, 385, 391, 394, 395, 397, 400, 403, 407. Magnets 1645 to 1649, 1651 to 1659. Your valuations asked. D. HARRISON, 51 MERTON MANSIONS, LONDON S.W.20.

CHANGE OF ADDRESS: All friends please note that my address now is: 56 SHERRINGHAM HOUSE, LISSON STREET, ST. MARYLEBONE, LONDON N.1. Arrears of correspondence will be dealt with as soon as possible.

W. O. G. LOFTS

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READERS IN REMINISCENT MOOD

THE FIRST OF THE MANY

(The very first letter I opened after No. 1 had gone out was from Hubert Machin. It contained a subscription - for six numbers. Exclaimed I "Gosh what a good start! He's an optimist." Well, his faith was justified and it gives me special pleasure in publishing this tribute from him now. - H.L.)

" 38, St. Thomas Rd., Moor Park,
Dear Mr. Leckenby, Preston. Jan. 26.

Heartiest congratulations on the approaching 100th number of C.D. Never did I doubt that C.D. would be a success! In the capable hands of Mr. Herbert Leckenby I was certain that this fascinating monthly would grow from strength to strength.

C.D. No. 100. Well done! Herbert Leckenby, it is a great achievement.

The C.D. has been to me the highlight during the post-war years of ('boys' books') famine.

It attracts as a 'Magnet' shines in the darkness like a 'Gem' and is a real Old Boys' Friend.

Many thanks for the hard work you've put into it.

* * * * *

H. MACHIN.

"

(As I have said before Harry Dowler was my first hobby friend. How well I remember that fateful telephone call one evening during the war. In a way it set me off on my career as an editor for Harry later put me in touch with Bill Gander, and Bill's S.P.C. led to the C.D.)

Harry's schooldays were strangely like mine. I too, went along just as eagerly to buy that first Christmas Double Number of the Boys' Friend on the same morning. My only regret is that forty years were to pass before we met.

I don't agree with all Harry says in his last two paragraphs for I shouldn't have got far without my loyal band of supporters. However, Harry ordered me to leave the paras. in. - H.L.)

ONE TO HUNDRED - PLUS !

By HARRY DOWLER

I was brought up in an atmosphere of books and reading.

Ours was a large and happy family. I vividly remember the pillow fights, the slidings down the bannisters, the tents and wigwams manufactured out of our bed-clothes, and countless other tricks and pranks my brothers and sisters, and of course myself, indulged in. Our heads were crammed full of romantic ideas, due in large measure to my father who was a great reader. The house was always full of books and magazines, and my father was an ideal storyteller for children. We were thrilled to bits as he related to us in simple language stories out of the Strand Magazine such as "The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes", "Rodney Stone", "Brigadier Gerard", etc. How well I remember sitting on one of my father's knees and my younger brother Colin on the other knee as he told us in childish language the first instalment of "The Tragedy of the Korosko." I was barely seven at the time.

I seem to have been able to read, and read well, at a very early age. Space prevents me mentioning in detail the books and papers I read as a juvenile. I know I read the Brown Fairy Book, the Pink Fairy Book, and every other conceivable colour of the Fairy Book series. Later I read Chips and Comic Cuts, and eventually worked my way up, so to speak, to school and adventure stories borrowed from the library. I read school stories by Harold Avery, Andrew Home, Talbot Baines Reed, and countless other authors. I also read adventure stories by Manville Fenn, Ballantyne and others. But school stories were my prime fodder. I read all this literature long before I was 10 years of age.

But early in the year 1901 - I was 10 years old at the time - I got my first glimpse of a paper which was destined to play a conspicuous part in my life. One wet afternoon coming back to school, after going through my usual habits en route (1) seeing how many hops I could do Alexandra Road in (2) warming my hands on a hot wall outside a baking establishment, and (3) gazing in rapture at the comic papers in a newsagent's shop, I went straight into school, and to my astonishment there was Charley Riley, my deskmate, reading a large green paper, and laughing uproariously. He was reading a school story "The Kings of Calcroft" by Sidney Drew, and his merriment was so great that when I got home I persuaded my mother to give me $\frac{1}{2}$ d. to buy a copy. I have bought all sorts of boys' papers since then, but never have I found a paper which has given me so much pleasure as the Boys' Friend. From that day it became an integral part of my life.

Shortly before my 11th birthday it increased its price to 1d., and well do I remember its first Double Christmas number. It was No. 26, and so excited was I that I could hardly sleep the night before, and I got up at an unearthly hour, tightly clutching my two pennies, and going into the newsagent's shop next door to our house. What a feast of reading it was, and even to this day this particular number, which I have in my collection, still gives me a tremendous thrill.

When I left school - the same school that Frank Pettingell attended and a great friend of mine - I still continued taking in the Boys' Friend, as well as, from time to time, other boys' papers, and, of course, I did a tremendous amount of swapping. In fact, I was so much in love with these boys' papers that I began to buy back numbers in bulk. The first person I bought Boys' Friends, Boys' Realms and Boys' Heralds from was Harry Hinchcliffe from Liverpool. I used to buy 40 or 50 at a time at about $\frac{1}{2}$ d. a copy. Later I bought quite a lot from Arthur Budge of Huddersfield. As the years went by I sometimes put a small advertisement in Exchange & Mart, and it always brought good results. At one time, I had in a large tin trunk in my bedroom over 400 copies of the Boys' Friend, Boys' Realm, and Boys' Herald. What happened to all these papers goodness knows! Years later after I had carved out my future career and had got married I still craved for these papers, and especially the Boys' Friend, and I had to start all over again trying to get them.

During all this time I never dreamed that there was a single person in the whole country who was so keen as I was for these old boys' papers. I thought I was the only ONE!

As time rolled on, however, I found that there were quite a number of people who were interested in the boys' papers of my time. I think that the first person that I came in contact with was Bill Gander in far away Canada. Bill had just started his little paper compiled and printed by himself "The Story Paper Collector." This was early in 1941. Then one day a little later in the year my telephone rang and I had a long conversation with a chap in York. Yes, you are quite right. It was the chap who later was to become the Editor of the C.D. and it is my proud privilege to be his first hobby friend. We have exchanged scores of letters, and we have seen each other on several occasions in such widely-scattered places as York, Leeds, Manchester and London.

From now on it was only a question of time before I realized that I was not the only pebble on the shore, but that there were a hundred - plus! A whole crowd of faces and names spring to my mind as I write, all of them very friendly, and tremendously delighted to see you and do all they can for your comfort. Many of these fellow-enthusiasts I have seen in their own homes, and sometimes in my own home in Manchester. There are quite a number, however, whom I know only by correspondence such as John Gocher of Sudbury in Suffolk and Arthur Harris in Llandudno.

I generally manage to get to London once a year where I always receive a hearty welcome from Len Packman and his charming wife, and Eleanor who plays the piano so delightfully. Quite a number of other delightful people welcome me with open arms in London such as Charley Wright and his good lady, but this is not an article on my hobby friend, so that I must rather reluctantly deal with the title of my article.

Our little magazine the C.D. was started just over 8 years ago. I don't suppose that Herbert in his wildest dreams thought that it would grow as it has done. 100 Numbers! It's a terrific achievement, due to the tremendous enthusiasm and dynamic energy of one man with one unwavering aim, backed by real hard slogging work, often far into the night and through the night. That the C.D. has reached its HUNDRETH NUMBER is due to the mighty efforts of one man who lives mainly for one thing - Our Hobby! Very rarely in my life have I seen such tremendous concentration. For over 8 years our Editor has poured out practically every ounce of his undoubtedly strong constitution into this magazine of ours. The 100th No. is now in your hands, but believe me, it will reach a much higher number, and with a much higher number of readers.

So, while we read this 100th No. let us remember that the marvellous success of our little magazine is due to one man with a purpose, a definite aim to go forward, upward and onward, and ever onward.

* * * * *

March 8th, 1955.

Dear Herbert Leckenby,

Many thanks for your letter and the C.D. Yes, I note that the April issue is the 100th., which inevitably calls to mind "Eheu fugaces, labuntur. anni!" How time flies! It doesn't seem anything like nearly a decade since the first issue. As one grows older, it does seem that Father Time sometimes stamps on the gas!

'100 not out' is a good innings! But the C.D. is now well set, and I feel sure will go on batting. It is now an institution, and would be sorely missed if it failed to come up smiling every month. I look forward to it as I used to look forward to Guy Rayner's journals in the dim long-ago. There have been times when it has kept me lingering over the breakfast-table, and caused me to be late for my appointment with Bunter on the typewriter!

On the auspicious occasion of our favourite magazine's 100th birthday, I feel that I must say just a word or two to the readers. When I open my C.D. I feel that I am in a happy circle of kind friends, many of whom I can never meet, but all of whom I feel that I know as well as if we had all been at Greyfriars together. The C.D. is a bond of union among friends old and young, far and near: and may it continue ever unbroken. Here's luck to the C.D. and all its readers, and God bless them all.

With kindest regards,
Always yours sincerely,

FRANK RICHARDS.

* * * * *

CONGRATULATIONS FROM "THE STORY PAPER COLLECTOR"

Telling the story of "The Wonder" and "The Jester" in No. 20 of "The Story Paper Collector," Walter Dexter wrote: "The child was slow in learning to walk, but early in January, 1912, The Jester stood well on its own feet." That was after the double title, "The Jester and Wonder," had been used for the paper since 1902.

If "The Collectors' Digest" be considered in some measure the child of "The Story Paper Collector," due to its being launched in consequence of S.P.C.'s falling temporarily by the wayside in 1946 -- if that be the case, how different it is from that of "The Jester"!

"The Collectors' Digest" learned to walk immediately; and so well did it learn that it has now achieved one hundred issues in a few months over eight years! As against S.P.C.'s -- at this writing -- 53 issues in fourteen years.

Regular monthly publication of what is essentially an amateur magazine, of such bulk, over such a length of time, must surely be

a record hard to excel in all the annals of amateur journalism. This achievement rates most hearty congratulations to Herbert Leckenby primarily, but also to all who have helped in any way - contributors, section editors, and subscribers.

Looking back, one remembers the receipt of a copy of No. 1, a bold venture indeed into uncharted seas. For while one can always give a magazine away for nothing, the attracting of sufficient subscribers in what must remain a comparatively small group is another matter entirely.

A few months later there was a flurry of excitement in the exposing of the nefarious activities of certain individuals who victimized collectors with stories of trunks full of highly-desired papers. A very useful service was performed in this matter; one that fully warranted the launching of the magazine.

The end of the first year saw the appearance of the initial "Collectors' Digest Annual" - what appeared at the time to be a monumental labour, and probably was. Seven more have followed, each better than its predecessor, to delight readers in many parts of the globe.

As the one whose playing around with the types and press produced "The Story Paper Collector" and helped provide the incentive for the launching of "The Collectors' Digest," I would like to extend on this special occasion a simple message:

Well done, Herb; and may you long continue the good work!

---W.H.G.

* * * * *

(And here's two in verse. You won't begrudge me the space I've taken for these tributes on this special occasion will you? I'm only human. - H.L.)

Dear Herbert,

Friend and colleague too,
In our old Northern Section,

I think of you on your great day

With real and deep affection.

You've brought me happiness untold

and kept me Gay and Merry,

Congratulations, dear Old Boy,

Yours, most sincerely, Gerry.

"Ghost Papers"

By W.O.G. LOFTS

The first question one may ask is "What is a 'Ghost' paper?" Well it is a paper which has been recorded in articles and various lists of periodicals, and of which no present day collector has a copy, or come to that, has ever seen a copy! (That is as far as I am aware). To commence my story I have to go back quite a few years, when the collecting of "Bloods" was the main theme of collectors, and such ardent men as the late Barry Ono, and John Medcraft were in their prime. Many readers of the old "Collectors Miscellany" will remember the lists of "Bloods" which these two friendly rivals used to publish from time to time. Each month one used to find something "new" which was a rare item no other collector in the world had in their collections, some such titles as "Sawney Bean, or the Maneater of Midlothian" 1851. "The Skeleton Clutch or the Goblet of Gore", and lastly "The Vampires Dream, or Ten Different Ways to the Scaffold" 1855. All supposed to have been published by the famous "Blood" firm Edward Lloyd. When these two collectors died and their collections sold no trace of these rare "Bloods" were to be seen. Did they really exist or, were they as some collectors suggest invented to make other collectors jealous of papers which they knew they could never obtain? Incidentally I have now seen the remainder of the late Barry Ono's collection at the British Museum and no trace of these "Bloods" were to be seen there.

What now of periodicals, the late Walter Dexter has given me more "Ghost" papers to try and locate than any other writer of articles on boys' papers. In the "Chambers Journal" for December 1943, he wrote of number one's in his collection, which he bought as new on the day of publication. Firstly, "The Halfpenny Monarch" No. 1. March 6th, 1894. This was described as having 16 pages, nine were devoted to a complete story (Death Shot Dick was the first); six pages to comic pictures; and the final page to a story by a world famous author so as to ensure that the purchaser of number one would support the periodical. I have found proof that this paper did exist! This was widely advertised in the "Champion Comic" 1894, which was published at 3, Bouverie Street. (No publishers name is given). It contained such announcements as "The first number of 'The Halfpenny Monarch' went into three editions." "Read

'The Blue Dwarf' in No. 2 of 'The Monarch'." "Each number of the 'Monarch' is equal to a sixpenny novel" and so on. This carried right on until late 1894, when the announcements ceased; one could conclude that the paper ceased around that time, so it must have ran to about 24 issues. In December of that year the Editor of the "Champion Comic" in reply to a reader who wrote up to him about gift tokens which had appeared in "The Monarch" stated "The Monarch Novels" are now only issued at twelve at a time, bound in handsome red covers price 6d.

A new library was started around this time entitled "The Emperor Library", whether this took the place of "The Monarch" I would not like to say.

The second paper which he mentions is "The Excelsior Library". This was published by the well known firm of Trapps Holmes, who were at that time publishing "The Worlds Comic" and "Funny Cuts". Each number was a complete story price 1d. "Pure, healthy, and deeply interesting literature for the million" said the announcement on the cover; it had 32 pages. This paper also I have found definitely to have been in circulation. Number 1 was advertised as being on sale on Oct. 2nd, 1894, in both of these comic papers. I have at home in my records a list of 18 titles in the Excelsior Library as being advertised as on sale. Whether all these appeared or not I cannot say. One thing I would like to disagree with Walter Dexter on is that it was a boy's paper. The titles seem to suggest that it was a type of woman's paper. One such title was "Who is She? or, the "Girl with a Guitar".

The third paper is "The Boys Mail" undated, and was published by the same firm who published the "Amazing Library" which was devoted to the adventures of famous criminals. Walter Dexter states that the publishing date of this paper was around 1897 by the date of the signed illustration on the cover. Mr. Leckenby has shown to me a number 2 he has of a "Boys Mail". This is also undated and published by the same firm, but a clue is given in the "Editorial Chat" when the editor mentions about the Boys of that period 1907. Whether these two papers were of the same period I would not like to say, and how long these two papers ran is of course unknown. I would like to add that just because a paper is not listed in the British Museum Catalogues I don't think that it doesn't exist; to the contrary many papers I have seen in the collections of friends which are unrecorded in the British Museum.

A year ago I offered a £1 for any copy of the "Excelsior Library" or "Halfpenny Monarch" without receiving one reply. Other "Ghost Papers" which I have no details of are "The Champion Library" published by Charles Fox 1885, "Comic Boys Paper" May 1891, "The Champion" series 1891, "Broadsheet Novels" issued by the A.P. in the 1930's, these were supposed to have been stories written by Gwyn Evans, that brilliant writer of Blake yarns, and the Comics "Frolic" 1895, "Sunshine" 1930's. Mr. Walter Dexter was supposed to have given away all his copies of number ones mentioned to the Red Cross sales, during the war, so what has become of them I dread to think.

Another thing which used to mislead collectors as to the length of a paper's run was the lists of titles of papers which were in circulation a few years ago. Whoever used to compile them used to add the title as given for next week's story when in fact it never appeared in print. One title for instance was a story by Berkley Gray in No. 590 "Thriller" when in fact this title never did appear. One collector in fact insisted that this No. had appeared because he had seen it listed. What would "Magnet" fans say if someone had told them that there was a No. 1684 entitled "The Battle of the Beaks" because they had seen it listed.

During the last few weeks two cases have been solved to my satisfaction of "Ghost" papers. Firstly, Mr. Percy Smith of Lincs wrote to me and asked me if I could get him details of Aldine Wild West Library No. 67, as all collectors of this series have only 66 numbers in the set, (including the British Museum). I at once thought that perhaps he had seen this number advertised as being on sale when in fact it had never appeared in print. When I wrote to him about this, he replied that he was certain it had done so, as he had in his collection No. 68. He in fact sent me the copy along to prove it. The second case is of two papers belonging to the late Harry Stables. When I was checking Herbert's lists of Boys Papers as published in the C.D. Annual 1953, I noticed that he gave the run of "Boys of the Empire", Melrose, as 155 issues. As all the collectors of this paper have only up to 153, I was interested to know where he had obtained these extra numbers. He replied that "Harry Stables" had them in his collection. When Harry died, and his collection was being sold, the first thing that I asked Herbert for was these two copies. Although Herbert searched the whole collection from top to bottom, he could not find them

and I began to doubt that they had ever existed. Just after I had prepared a rough draft for this article, Herbert wrote to me enclosing these two copies, saying he had found them behind an old bookcase. I have now these two copies in my collection, and they must be the only two copies in the world today.

One of the modern mysteries of "Ghost" papers was as recent as 1950. For this interesting information I am indebted to Anthony Baker for his keen interest in all types of periodicals. He noticed in certain copies of Basil Story's "Boys World" an announcement that "Boys Life" would be incorporated with this paper. Having not seen a copy of "Boys Life" on sale to the public, Anthony wrote to the publishers asking for details of this paper; he received the most amazing reply, which went like this: Dear Sir, Thank you for your letter, as I believe you know, the "Boys World" ceased publication. "Boys Life" has simply been incorporated in the imprint to safeguard copyright, and has not had no independent existence as far as I am aware. Best Wishes, Reg. Sheath. (Greyhound Owner). Thank you Anthony for killing that Ghost, perhaps collectors of the future would be seeking copies of the "Boys Life" 1950.

I had some experience myself of a "Ghost" paper some time ago, perhaps some of you remember it. I was informed that an advertisement on the back page of a book, advertised a paper called "The Sexton Blake Investigator" 1874, price 1d. Despite an offer of £10 in the "Exchange & Mart" for any copy of this paper I again received no reply. Did this paper really exist, or was it advertised and never appeared in print? I would like to point out that none of the papers mentioned in this article are in the British Museum Catalogues. Secondly, no collector who I have come in contact with has ever seen a copy, let alone having one and this includes the big three, Bill Martin, Tom Lambert and Ronald Rouse. If any collector has a copy of the "Ghosts" mentioned or, knows of any one who has, I would be most grateful to them, and perhaps they would hear of something to their advantage!

Finis

(Note: Regarding Bill's comments on Boys' Life and Boys' World there's a similar instance in "Reynold's News". It embodies in its title "Sunday Citizen". There has never been such a paper but Reynold's hold the copyright should they ever decide to launch it. - H.L.)

BLAKIANA

Conducted by JOSEPHINE PACKMAN,
27, ARCHDALE ROAD, EAST DULWICH, LONDON, S.E.22.

Herbert Leckenby has kindly allowed me extra pages for this 'special' issue. Even so, Walter's and Len's articles have combined to slightly exceed the quota. However, I think everyone will agree it would be a pity to cut them, and to make up for it I must make my remarks as brief as possible. Brief as they must be, I feel I must pay tribute to Herbert for the wonderful job he has done - in spite of many, many difficulties - in producing a hundred numbers of the C. Digest. To a lesser degree a tribute should also be paid to Maurice Bond, for had it not been for him we should not have had Blakiana. So I say 'thank you' Herbert (and Maurice) for both the C.D. and the friends I have made through the medium of that grand little magazine.

I am pleased to say that several good chums have recently sent me articles (see 'Forthcoming Features'). I am also promised something from the pen of another old friend, one whom we have sadly missed - Rex Dolphin. If a few more of my chums (and Blake lovers) will 'rally round', I shall truthfully be able to say that Blakiana, since I have taken it over, has never been so flourishing.

Next month I shall have something to say about a forthcoming feature by Derek Ford. Incidentally, Derek pays a nice tribute to Victor Colby's article which appeared last month. It certainly was 'the goods', and another of Victor's efforts is at the moment on some ship England bound from all those thousands of miles away.

Walter Webb's sequel - THE MEN BEHIND PLUMMER - is, I can assure you, something to which you can all look forward.

JOSEPHINE PACKMAN.

* * * * *

PETER CHEYNEY AND HIS WORK IN THE UNION JACK
by W.O.G. Lofts

Peter Cheyney, the well-known author of detective fiction, died in 1951 at St. John's Wood, London, at the age of fifty-five.

He left a small fortune - £52,864. 8s. 6d. to be exact. Yet how many readers of this magazine know that in the mid-twenties, when such prolific authors as G.H. Teed, E.S. Brooks and Gwyn Evans were turning out stories for the 'U.J.' and 'S.B.L.', he wrote a story for the 'Union Jack' entitled 'The Clue of the Yellow Moccasin'. He asked his friend, Gerald Verner (who at that time was writing for the Amal. Press under the name of Donald Stuart) to submit it for him to H.W. Twyman, the editor of the U.J. This he did, but Twyman rejected it as 'unsuitable for this paper'.

At that time Cheyney was a poor man - just one of the many struggling journalists who were submitting stories for the Fleetway House publications. Incidentally, the rate of payment in those days was £1.5s.0d. per thousand words, the writer of a full-length S.B.Lib. story (50,000 words) receiving £62. 10s. 0d.

Nothing daunted, in spite of this early rebuff, Cheyney personally approached Twyman with a new idea for the 'U.J.'. This was late 1926, and the idea was for a new feature - 'Tinker's Notebook' - to be written by Cheyney, with the expert assistance and advice of Ex-Detective Brust of Scotland Yard. The idea appealed to Twyman and the feature duly appeared, the commencing date being 5th Feb., 1927 (U.J. No. 1216). Cheyney, however, was not long connected with it (until about U.J. No. 1288), and no doubt this was by reason of the poor rate of pay, for he and Brust received only £3. 3s. 0d. a week between them for all the time and work involved.

Readers who are unaware of the feature 'Tinker's Notebook' may like to know that this was a sort of diary-cum-notebook, in which Blake's outstanding cases were recalled and commented upon. In addition there were articles on finger prints, poison tests, dust analysis and so on. The Notebook was a chatty and authoritative guide to Detective Science, supposedly written 'by a boy, for boys' - Tinker being the personification of every Office-boy who read the 'Union Jack'. Tinker, of course, was Cheyney.

At a later date the A. Press were only too pleased to publish two of Peter Cheyney's serials in their publications 'Thriller' and 'Detective Weekly', both stories featuring his, by this time, famous character 'Lemmy Caution'.

It really is remarkable how a number of the foremost writers of detective fiction today started their career by writing for the A. Press. Some such names are Berkeley Gray and Victor

Gunn (E.S. Brooks), Gerald Verner and Leslie Charteris (world famous for his 'Saint' stories. It has also been strongly rumoured that none other than G.K. Chesterton tried his hand at writing a Blake story. He is, of course, famous for his 'Father Brown' stories.

I have often wondered whether Cheyney did write any Blake stories in later years, perhaps under a nom-de-plume, although, against this I know it has been said that he never wrote any stories other than under his own name.

* * * * *

NOTE: The information given above comes from 'Peter Cheyney, Prince of Hokum' by Michael Harrison, published by Neville Spearman. A very interesting biography. H.L.

* * * * *

THE MYSTERY OF MICHAEL STORM
by Walter Webb

"He was a real mystery-man whom nobody ever really knew", was a reply typical of the many I have received during a pursuit of information concerning the past literary activities of Michael Storm, detective, school and mystery story writer of the early 1900's. The mantle of mystery which enveloped the personality of Storm during his career with the Harmsworths became his shroud in death; the only thing about him emerging with any degree of clarity being his ability as a writer, for in both the juvenile and adult fields of fiction, he had few equals.

Although he is known to have written some Sexton Blakes, the cloak of anonymity has been drawn so closely and impenetrably that for the past 45 years or so, those stories have remained unknown, although sought after from time to time. Now, however, the folds have been loosened, the cloak thrown wide, and it is possible, at long last, to be able to put his name beneath the titles of those tales he wrote for the UNION JACK LIBRARY.

Many theories have been put forward regarding Storm's other identities. The suggestion that he was also Duncan Storm, author of the Bombay Castle stories is, of course, incorrect, an inspection of the styles of writing definitely proving this;

another, that Duncan Storm was Michael's wife, is possible, although Duncan could hardly have been the lady's actual name.

Michael Storm is best remembered for his tales of those two schools he created many years ago, Abbotscrag and Ravenscar, and the character of Nigel Dorn, the private investigator. Into one of the stories he wrote of Abbotscrag, that ancient pile set amidst the narrow, winding lanes, the rich, red soil and rolling green meadows of the South Devonshire countryside, Storm wrote very probably the only words of Sexton Blake ever to appear under his name. It is interesting to recall that occasion, so here it is, extracted from the issue of the MARVEL, dated week ending 11th January, 1908, issue No. 207, containing the story "The Overthrow of Blundell's".

Mr. Wellcott, the mathematical master, and Mr. Davidson, master of the Sixth Form, were about to leave the school in search of two boys who had broken bounds. Mr. Davidson had decided to take his dog, Spot, along to assist them in the search.

"Good gracious!", said Mr. Wellcott. "You are as bad as Sexton Blake!"

"Ah, so you read him, too, do you?", said Mr. Davidson.

"I confiscated one during an algebra lesson one day," confessed Mr. Wellcott with a grin, "and I've been a confirmed subscriber ever since."

"I hope you returned it to the bereaved youth", was all Mr. Davidson's comment, as he whistled to his dog and led the way into the cold, star-lit night.

Possessed of a powerfully descriptive pen, Storm was not niggardly when giving a pen-picture of his characters - not for him the Murray Graydon style of introduction, a terse "he was a tall man, with a fair moustache" - to quote a typical Graydon example - no, Storm would give a most minute description of his character from the length and formation of the forehead to the size and mobility of the feet. In this matter of description Michael Storm had no equal; no other Blake author, alive or dead, has bettered him in this respect - not even Hamilton Teed, his nearest rival and the man whose style so nearly matched his own. Storm's

career as a writer - in so far as the Harmsworth papers were concerned, at any rate - was of very short duration, and at the time of his death he was engaged in writing a serial for one of the famous weeklies controlled by that equally famous personage, Hamilton Edwards. With the opening chapters of that serial already in print there was naturally a great deal of perturbation caused when no further chapters were forthcoming, and a hurried S.O.S. was sent out to Cecil Hayter to finish the story off. The author of the Lobangu and Sir Richard Losely stories had to digest copy of all previous chapters, and so well did he round off the serial that nobody excepting those immediately concerned guessed that there had been any change of authorship. Certainly, no reader of that particular paper knew of the substitution.

But, the perturbation just referred to was not confined alone to the particular editor of the periodical who ran that Storm serial - it was shared by the editor of the UNION JACK, for, just prior to his death, Michael Storm created a character who at once caught and held on to the imagination of the Sexton Blake fan to such an extent that his exploits were related over a period of nearly thirty years, by not one author but four or five others.

It is nearly 47 years since that famous character first appeared, and for exactly the same length of time his creator has remained undiscovered. In the light of what I have just found out, I have the utmost confidence in naming Michael Storm, author of the Abbotsrag, Ravenscar and Nigel Dorn stories, as the originator of that famous crook character and sworn foe of the man from Baker Street - George Marsden Plummer!

Some explanation is necessary here, for in the last issue of the C.D. Annual I was quoted as saying that Lewis Carlton wrote that historic first story of the character, "The Man From Scotland Yard", and was therefore the originator. An unfortunate slip-up on my part, due to the fact that in striking the trail of the Plummer author I happened first on that of the "ghost writer" instead of the original. Carlton "ghosted" for Storm when the latter's death was established, and, as a matter of fact, is responsible for more Plummer stories than any Blake follower realises, and many of those now credited to John W. Bobin (Mark Osborne), should bear his name in collectors' lists.

Storm wrote only five Plummer stories; the first, second, fourth and fifth were published, but, for some unaccount-

able reason, the third was either rejected or lost. The fourth, which was entitled THE SWELL MOBSMAN, began with Plummer just returning to consciousness following an exploit shared with Rupert Forbes, a crook of similar calibre, in which each was equally responsible for the kidnapping of two young girls. Having just completed a coup against the Bank of England, they had subsequently quarelled over the disposal of the girls and during an escape from the police Rupert Forbes had imprisoned Plummer in a submarine, a traitorous act which had saved Plummer from certain capture. To the mystery which surrounded Michael Storm was yet another - what happened to that particular story which led up to the events contained in THE SWELL MOBSMAN? And here is another unexplained point: when the first Plummer story was published, editor William Back announced in an editorial aside that another would follow in a few weeks' time. A few weeks! It was one year and a half - precisely 80 weeks later - before the second Plummer story was published, an astonishingly long lapse for which no editorial explanation was forthcoming. Illness of the writer could hardly have been the reason, for Storm wrote several non-Plummer tales between the period of the first and second stories of the character. The fifth and last Plummer story by Michael Storm was entitled THE PROBLEM OF THE YELLOW BUTTON (U.J. No. 334), for, without doubt, the following exploit of the infamous criminal, published in a story called THE MYSTERY OF ROOM 11 (U.J. No. 342) was written in a different hand. This story, by the way, is notable for the reason that it introduced for the first time the crook known as John Marsh.

It is quite clear that UNION JACK No. 357, containing the story PLUMMER VERSUS BLAKE, began a new series of Plummer stories written by "ghost" writers after Michael Storm's death had been definitely established, but the identities of these particular gentlemen have no part in this record, which concerns only the work of Michael Storm during his lifetime.

Into his first story for the UNION JACK, which, incidentally, was that which introduced Plummer, Michael Storm featured, also for the first time, a Scotland Yard man well known to old readers of Sexton Blake. He was Detective-Inspector Martin, of the C.I.D., a big, bluff, red-faced officer, whose relations with Section Blake were not always of the most cordial nature.

The next story Storm wrote - and this was probably his

From the LONDON SECTION O.B.B.C.



— HERBERT LECKENBY —

On behalf of the London Club: the incomparable C. H. Chapman pays tribute to the incomparable Herbert Leckenby.

Every success story requires the presence of the right man with a good idea at the proper time, and it is no exaggeration to say the 'C.D.' was originated by Herbert and that its success has been due to his enthusiasm and untiring energy.

Good for him!

BREEZE BENTLEY

"Never shall I forget my first letter from Herbert - so full of welcome to a new member - and never shall I be able to thank him enough for putting me in touch with so many friends."

B. HONEYSETT.

"I have known Herbert only a few months, but in that time I have become aware that I owe him a great deal for his guidance and help in the Hobby we all love."

HARRY BROSTER

"Apart from being Editor of our own 'C.D.', Herbert has become an institution among us Old Boys. Many of us have never met him, but we all know him as 'Our Herbert'.

JIM HEPBURN

"Congratulations, Herbert, on the Centenary Number. Had it not been for your untiring effort the Hobby would never have started."

CLIFF BEARDSSELL

"Our heartfelt thanks go out to Herbert today. He has done so much for us and for the Hobby. A friend among friends."

ERIC HUMPHREYS

You have opened the RAINBOW door,
To the old BOY'S REALM of yore,
You're a WONDER and a MARVEL, Leckenby!

Your BOY'S JOURNAL, the "Digest",
Which you manage with such zest,
Pleases old and MODERN BOY, Leckenby!

PLUCK another hundred forth,
O great WIZARD of the North,
GEM-like and MAGNETic Herbert Leckenby!!!

W. T. THURBON.

TO HERBERT by Jack Corbett

To those who love the books of youth
One thing all will agree,
The one who worked to prove their truth
Is Herbert Leckenby.

* * *

And through his zeal and happy task
A brotherhood is born,
What more of him just could we ask
Upon this happy morn?

* * *

The morn that heralds our "C.D.",
Is ninety months plus ten.
O good man Herbert, may you be
Long with us, and your pen.

* * *

Each one of us who love to read
Of spacious bygone days,
We share the joy this old book lore
Gives life a golden phase.

* * *

So Herbert lad, well done, well done,
No words can ere express,
We only know our hearts you've won
In lasting happiness.

* * *

These verses, 'tho they speak for all,
Will need no one confirming 'em,
So good luck Herbert, on the ball,
From all of us in Birmingham.

* * *

1 0 0 N O T O U T !

Well, he's still here and batting well. He may have lost his opening partner, but he's reached his century.

You are very surprised at meeting him for the first time, for, like Oliver Goldsmith's schoolmaster in "The Deserted Village," you marvel that so small a head can carry all he knows.

Who is this man? He is small in stature, but big in heart. Scores have seen him but hundreds know him.

He loves this hobby, and we love him for the work he puts into it. We may criticise him, but he bears it all patiently, and never criticises us.

He burns his fingers smoking endless cigarettes and burns the midnight oil preparing the C.D. and the Annual.

He can talk knowingly on cricket, football or "the hobby", and an hour in his company seems like ten minutes.

He would be an asset to any national "daily", but we couldn't spare him.

LONG MAY HE BE SPARED TO CARRY ON HIS INNINGS, IS THE FERVENT WISH OF

THE MERSEYSIDE BRANCH OF THE O.B.B.C.

Frank Case, Jim Walsh, Frank Unwin, Jack Morgan, Norman Pragnell
Peter Laffey, Bill Horton, John Burke, "Turpin Switzer", Bill
Windsor, John Bartlett, W. Chillingworth, F.W. Francomb, Elsie
Webster, Peter Webster, Eric Coldwell, Chairman Don Webster and
all.

CONGRATULATIONS,

HERBERT

best for the U.J. - was THE MASTER ANARCHIST (No. 238). Storm introduced W. Murray Graydon's famous Scotland Yard character, Inspector Widgeon, into this one. THE MOUNT STREET MYSTERY (No. 262) was another effort by the same writer, and in this Storm reverted back to Inspector Martin again. It is not known that Michael Storm was responsible for one of the U.J.'s Double Christmas Numbers, but there is no doubt that he was responsible for that which was published on the 5th December, 1908, and which appeared in No. 269 issue under the title of THE GHOST OF RUPERT FORBES. Rupert Forbes, as already stated, was a crook character of the calibre of George Marsden Plummer, and a short story featuring him also appeared in the pages of the PENNY PICTORIAL, the particular issue of which was No. 491, published 24th October 1908, under the title of THE MYSTERY OF THE EGYPTIAN BONDS.

No. 273 saw Michael Storm back in the U.J. again with a story called THE VENDETTA, and again in No. 277 with THE ROAD HOG, both stories which described how Sexton Blake rendered no little assistance to Inspector Martin in the solving of two intricate cases. An interval of six months, and then Storm popped up again with THE BLUE ROOM MYSTERY (No. 299), a story well illustrated by A.H. Clarke, whose work was so rarely seen on the pages of the Union Jack that it was quite an event when it did appear. Three weeks later saw the publication of the long waited second Plummer story, IN DEADLY GRIP (No. 302), in which Storm brought in Sir Richard Losely, the famous character created by Cecil Hayter. The following week it was the versatile Storm again with Blake solving the case known as THE STEPNEY MYSTERY (No. 303). No. 312 was the next issue to feature the Abbotsrag and Ravenscar author, now nearing the end of his contributions to the paper. Title - THE MYSTERY OF THE SCARLET THREAD. Next came the Plummer story, THE SWELL MOBSMAN (No. 315), followed immediately by THE JEWEL THIEVES (No. 316). Christmas week of 1909 saw Storm, as was the case the previous yuletide, contributing another worthwhile effort, THE GREAT CONSPIRACY (No. 324).

About this time Michael Storm must have passed on, for, as events were to prove, only two more stories were to be published written by him. Early in 1910 came FOUND DROWNED (No. 329), and a few weeks later his last Plummer story. Fifteen stories in all, with THE MASTER ANARCHIST, in my opinion, ranking as his best

Sexton Blake story, did Michael Storm write during his very brief career as a chronicler of the exploits of the famous private investigator of Baker Street.

We have been told that nobody knew Storm, but one old Blake writer, at least, might have been able to have disclosed some interesting facts had he been alive today, and that man was George Hamilton Teed, famous as the creator of Yvonne, Rymer, and a host of other well-remembered characters. For the reasons why this was probable the reader is referred to the sequel to this article, entitled THE MEN BEHIND PLUMMER.

* * * * *

FORTHCOMING FEATURES IN BLAKIANA

The Men Behind Plummer	...	...	...	...by Walter Webb
Consulting Room Chat	...	...	...	...by Derek Ford
This New Age of Sexton Blake	...	...	...	...by Derek Adley
The Babblings of Bardell	...	...	...	...by Victor Colby

* * * * *

T H E D O G D E T E C T I V E

by Leonard Packman

The 100th number of the Collector's Digest being in itself a special event, it is fitting that Blakiana should mark the occasion by saying something about the 100th number (New Series) of the UNION JACK, dated 9th September, 1905. That particular issue was indeed of a special nature; not so much by reason of the paper (in its new series) having reached its century mark, but because it was the issue in which Sexton Blake's four-footed assistant, Pedro, made his debut.

Bearing in mind the story was written 50 years ago (before the world had 'advanced' in scientific discovery, and thus laid the foundation stones for man's own ultimate destruction - vide atom and hydrogen bombs), "The Dog Detective" is quite a good yarn, for the author, W. Murray Graydon, was putting out some very good work round about that time. I cannot speak so well of the illustrator, whose work I do not positively recognise (although I have a good idea), for poor old Pedro looks to me very little like

a bloodhound. Incidentally, by the time the U.J. had reached No. 231 (Pedro's Trail) the old fellow was a real bloodhound, most admirably drawn by H.M. Lewis.

To relate the story - one of murder, with Pedro finally catching the murderer - would, I feel, be of but little interest to the present reader. As for how Blake became Pedro's master, this has already been related by Walter Webb in the C. Digest (No. 91, July 1954). However, here is an extract to show how Murray Graydon focused the spot-light on the sagacious animal:

(Page 5) A hoarse, muffled sound was heard at a distance, ringing on the night air. It drew nearer and nearer, repeated at short intervals, and swelling ever louder - a sound that was strange indeed for London.

"What is it?" exclaimed Inspector Widgeon.

"Must be a dog", suggested Constable Rook. "But I never heard one give tongue like that".

"It is a dog, and I know the breed", declared the detective. "It is coming this way. Now it has turned into Lime-tree Walk. By heavens, I believe I know what it is after!"

The noise was very close. Deep-tongued, raucous baying echoed on the air, faster and more impatient. The three men looked at one another.

"A bloodhound on the scent!" cried Inspector Widgeon.

"Right", said Sexton Blake.....

..... The creature dashed through the hall, nose to the floor and leapt into the room on the left. Sexton Blake closed the door and followed. The great bloodhound was crouching by the body of the murdered man. The brute lifted its head, showing formidable teeth, and growled angrily at Sexton Blake who fearlessly approached. "Come, old fellow", he said, "don't you know a friend?"

The dog sniffed at the detective, fawned upon him for an instant, and then squatted by the corpse there was a pathetic, almost human look in its big eyes, as if it wanted to speak.....

In concluding this little, commemorative article, I would say that when speaking of 'Sexton Blake' I always include Tinker and Pedro. It is for that reason I rarely glance at the modern Sexton Blake Library. If Tinker can remain the youthful assistant

of Sexton Blake, I see no reason why Pedro should to all intents and purposes be 'a thing of the past'. As Harry Homer would say: "Viva Pedro!"

 HAMILTONIANA (concluded from page 122)

the adventures that ensued.

Paris, Venice, Naples, Rome and Tunis all had their quota of laughs and thrills for the Greyfriars chums in 1934. Their host was Bunter the billionaire. The fly in the ointment this time was Tiger Bronx, an American gangster, who was after Bunter's suddenly acquired millions. Needless to say he was foiled at the finish.

Huree Jamset Ram Singh's homeland, India, was the setting for a host of exciting experiences in 1926. Mook Mookerjee the Indian junior's English language teacher was featured in this grand series.

Yachting with Mauleverer was the setting for 1922 (two travel series this year). France was visited, with the sinister Gideon Gaunt hovering in the background, trying to kidnap Mauleverer and hold him to ransom.

With the exception of an occasional trip across the channel to France, this, I think, is the full quota of travel stories. We at home who never get further than the Isle of Man in the summer, can always take a trip with the Greyfriars chums practically anywhere, at any time, at (ahem!) 2d. a copy, and who knows, maybe Frank Richards will some day give us "Behind the Iron Curtain", with the Greyfriars chums.

 AVAILABLE: MAGNETS, GEMS, HOLIDAY ANNUALS, NELSON LEES, UNION JACKS, SEXTON BLAKE LIBS., MARVELS, POPULARS, ILLUSTRATED POLICE BUDGETS, Very rare, FAMOUS FIGHTS, (POLICE BUDGET & SHUREY'S ED.) Very Scarce. BOYS MAGAZINE, JESTER & WONDERS, CLAUDE DUVALS, ROBIN HOOD LIBS., DICK TURPIN LIBS., YOUNG BRITAINS, ADVENTURES, ROVERS, SKIPPERS, COLLECTORS' DIGESTS AND ANNUALS, CHATTER BOX, WIDEWORLDS, PRIZE, CAPTAIN (Many early vols.), PICTUREGOERS 1921-31, FILM PICTORIALS, All kinds of POUND FILM ANNUALS, BOYS CINEMAS, AMERICAN MECHANIX, ETC. ETC. Wanted scarce PENNY DREADFULS, Good prices pd. S.A.E. Please. RONALD ROUSE, 3 St. Leonards Terr. Gas-Hill, Norwich.

Hamiltonian

Compiled by Herbert Leckenby

* * * * *

We will get straight down to the articles this month. First, the one which Roger Jenkins has already given as a talk to the London and Northern O.B.B.C.'s. It is longer than the articles we usually have in the monthly, but we can take advantage of the extra pages and I am sure you will all agree it is worth it.

* * * * *

IN THE REMOVE FORM-ROOM by Roger M. Jenkins

Over the course of years I have read school stories by a variety of authors: there was J. N. Pentelow with his unmistakable painstaking style, pointing out the moral, underlining it, and then repeating it - yet at times he could inspire you and carry you with him to the heights; there was Edwy Searles Brooks, whose paper, the Nelson Lee, turned itself into a school story paper almost by accident and lapsed from grace on occasions afterwards - yet at times, as in the Ezra Quirke series, he was unsurpassed in his line; there was P.G. Wodehouse who would sometimes bore you to tears over "The Head of Kays" but could also transport you to the magic realm of delight with such serials as "Mike"; there were R.A.H. Goodyear, Alec Vaughn, David Goodwin - but what need to list all these familiar names? They all had their merits and their demerits. To my mind, they all lacked this one virtue, the virtue which should surely be predominant in a school story - frequent and convincing descriptions of scenes in the class-room.

Let me begin by saying at once that it must be no easy task to fit such scenes into the framework of the story. The scene in the classroom must be interesting, but it must also be relevant. It is, I think, a high tribute to Charles Hamilton to say that he managed this task so successfully. There were more classroom scenes at Rookwood than at St. Jim's, but it was at Greyfriars that he really surpassed himself. Pictures of Mr. Quelch in the Remove form-room have been drawn by Magnet artists so frequently that I

am sure everyone of you can visualise the scene in your mind's eye at once.

What sort of scene you visualise depends upon what your favourite period of the Magnet was. In Magnet No. 89, for instance, we see the juniors sitting on forms with the front of their long communal desk rather resembling a fence. A fortnight later the scene changes; the forms are now arranged in tiers rather like an old university lecture-hall, whilst on the platform Mr. Quelch has a fine mahogany-looking desk with drawers down each side (this must have been thought too good for the form-room, for it disappeared later and in its place there was a more ordinary sort of affair altogether). The elevation of the desks at the back also disappeared as well and, as the years went by, the artist would vary the lay-out at times by setting the desks in rows facing the north, west, and south of the room, while Mr. Quelch would complete the square by facing east. Other refinements appeared - a blackboard, a wastepaper basket, a cupboard, maps on the wall, etc. But the items which remained constant from the beginning to the end were the old-fashioned, bench-like forms and desks. None of the single fumed oak desks and shiny tubular metal chairs and all the other tinsel and glitter of the secondary modern school for Greyfriars! You felt that Colonel Wharton and Major Cherry as boys had probably sat in and carved their initials on the very same desks, and their fathers before them.

The curriculum was as time-honoured as the equipment. Like all good Victorian form-masters, Mr. Quelch taught his form nearly every subject (except nasty foreign things like French, German, and mathematics). Science - quite rightly - never reared its ugly head at Greyfriars. But it is a mistake to assume that all form-room lessons described in the Magnet were Latin lessons, with Bunter committing egregious howlers with Virgil and Horace, which were beyond the understanding of the average reader. It is true that Latin lessons predominated, but most youthful readers of the Magnet could enjoy the fun even if the precise extent of Bunter's enormities in translation were beyond their understanding. My favourite is, I think, "the armed man and his dog" as a translation of "arma virumque cano". (I can even remember, in an ill-judged moment, gaily suggesting this translation to the Latin master as we began Book One of the Aeneid at school - I was soon made to understand that Latin was not the proper subject for jokes

that didn't emanate from the Latin master!)

But there were other lessons at Greyfriars beside the Latin lessons. English was sometimes mentioned; you may remember the time when Levison returned to Greyfriars and, in Magnet No. 797, he was supposed to be in love with Bessie Bunter, of all people. The English lesson was used by playful Removites to quote famous passages from verse on the subject of love in general. History lessons were even more frequent; you may remember the time in Magnet No. 1565 when Bunter forgot the date of the Battle of Hastings, and a piece of paper with the date 1066 was passed along to him under the desks (unfortunately, it got turned upside down, and Bunter assured Mr. Quelch that 9901 was the date in question). A famous geography lesson occurred in Magnet No. 1607, when a jumping cracker was ignited and thrown at Mr. Quelch, who made the startling announcement that the German name of a certain Czechoslovakian town was "Yaroop!" (This was a bad week for Mr. Quelch. In the same number his chair in the form-room collapsed as he sat on it, and his cane stuck to his hand. This was all the work of Gilbert Tracy who was immured in the punishment room, but had managed to obtain a duplicate key which enabled him to emerge by night and leave a trail of destruction behind him with complete immunity from suspicion.) Another lesson on the curriculum was ancient history, but this was a rare bird indeed. No doubt Scripture was yet another, but I do not seem to recollect reading about this - probably it was thought not to be suitable for inclusion.

The atmosphere in the form-room would often act as an indication of the direction of the plot. If Wharton or Vernon-Smith, for instance, were in a mood to defy authority, what more enthralling episode could there be than one in the form-room, with the rebellious junior bearding the lion in his den, as it were? If Bunter decided to strike a new note, it would often be sounded first before Mr. Quelch in form, as in Magnet No. 593, when Bunter's political convictions took a sharp turn to the left:-

"You don't seem to know what o'clock it is", said Bunter.
 "I've been thinking it out. I'm going to call on all the other fellows to follow my example. I'm not standing any more of it. I believe in liberty."

"Liberty?", stuttered Mr. Quelch.

"Liberty, equality and fraternity", said Bunter cheerfully.

"Jack's as good as his master, you know, if not a little better. Isn't everyone in the world equal to everybody else?"

"Eh?"

"I've been reading it up. I think there isn't enough freedom in this country", said Bunter. "The Bolsheviks are the men for my money."

Revolution was rooted out with the aid of a cane on this occasion, but at other times Mr. Quelch met with a doughtier opponent, as in Magnet No. 1289, when he accused Wharton of concealing a detention paper, and Wharton appealed to the Head. In the form-room, Dr. Locke was able to elicit the fact that Bunter was the real culprit:-

There was a brief pause. Dr. Locke was far too tactful a headmaster to call a master over the coals in the presence of his boys. But nobody in the Remove doubted it was to come later. Quelch had made a mistake - such a mistake as a form-master was expected not to make. Obviously he had been hurried into it by his prejudice against a certain member of his form.

"So far as Wharton is concerned, therefore, I think we may regard the matter as being at an end, Mr. Quelch?" said the Head at length.

"I-I think so, sir", said Mr. Quelch, in a stifled voice.

But though Wharton scored here, his hasty temper played into Mr. Quelch's hands later in the story, and he was punished. It is interesting to note that, though rebels scored now and again, Mr. Quelch's authority was never impaired for long.

There was no end to the pranks Bunter played in form. He has hidden in cupboards, attempted to hypnotise Quelch, found his jaws stuck together with toffee and so unable to answer questions, and - best of all - he has driven masters mad with his ventriloquism. Mr. Quelch soon rumbled to this, but Mossco never found out. There was nothing that didn't happen to poor Mossco, and the ragging inevitably ended in chaos, as in No. 1536:-

Mr. Quelch's grim glance turned on Mossco. There was a gleam of scorn in his icy eyes. A master who could not handle boys had scant respect from Henry Samuel Quelch.

The class-room looked as if a hurricane had struck it. Mossoo sat in the midst of the wreck like Marius in the ruins of Carthage. He sat and rubbed his nose and the back of his head and spluttered. Mr. Quelch very nearly snorted at the sight.

"Can I assist you, Monsieur Charpentier?" he asked, unable to keep an inflection of sarcasm out of his voice.

"Mon Dieu!" Mossoo tottered to his feet.

His face, already crimson, was dyed a deep red, under the steely eyes of the Remove master. Mossoo did not like to realise that he was an ineffectual little man. But he had to realise it, under Quelch's cold glance.

For some reason or other, it always fell to the lot of Mossoo to take the detention class. This was, if anything, a bigger riot than the normal French lessons. Mossoo's one ambition was to have peace and quiet at all costs, and it was not unknown for fellows to tiptoe out of class when he was writing on the blackboard. He would then effect not to notice that anyone was missing. Of course, Bunter never knew when to stop; in Magnet No. 1563 Mossoo turned round just as he was half-way to the door. The lure of a hamper at Cliff House impelled Bunter to go on, not retreat, and he ended up by dashing out of the class - an exodus which even Mossoo could not feign to be unaware of.

Greyfriars saw some major tyrants in its time, in the form of new headmasters, all of whom appeared in at least one form-room scene. Do you remember the odious Mr. Carnforth, or even worse the tyrant Jeffreys and his henchman Schwartz who became Remove form-master for a short time during the first World War? There was an amusing scene in the form-room in No. 501 when Jeffreys took the Remove for a lesson in history on the period of James II, and every answer he got from the form mentioned the unmitigated scoundrel, Judge Jeffreys. Mr. Brander was another such tyrant. Do you remember when, in Magnet No. 1171, he delivered an ultimatum to the rebels that everyone who failed to turn up in the form-room would be expelled? Only Fisher T. Fish was weak-kneed enough to submit and, as he was the only one there, he had to take the full brunt of Mr. Brander's impotent rage and fury. On this occasion, Fishy was not quite so smart and spry as he had fancied.

Not all of Mr. Quelch's substitutes, however, proved to

tyrants. The mysterious Mr. Steele, for instance, whom Vernon-Smith felt certain was the Courtfield Cracksman, was a worthy substitute for Mr. Quelch. All sorts of odd things happened in Steele's time - drawings of burglars being arrested would appear on blackboards, and a pan of ink would be arranged over the form-room door as a booby-trap for the master. In No. 1145 this fell on Fishy instead of Mr. Steele, and the Remove were ordered to mop up the mess themselves. Smithy - the culprit - objected:-

"May I mention, sir, that we are not sent to Greyfriars to do housemaids' work?" said the Bunder coolly. "I object, sir, and I am sure my father would object."

The Remove caught their breath.

"Indeed", said Steele. "Were your father here to express objections Vernon-Smith, I should certainly listen to his opinions with respect. As Mr. Vernon-Smith is not here, the question does not arise. As for your personal objections, they are of no moment whatever."

Bunter also discovered grounds for objecting to the new master:-

"I-I say, sir, Mr. Quelch used to take a fellow's word", gasped Bunter. "Especially mine, sir."

"That will do, Bunter. Turn out your pockets at once!"

"I-I'd much rather you took my word, sir!" gasped Bunter. "Quelch always did, sir! Quelch would have thought it ungentlemanly to doubt a fellow's word, sir."

Whether present or absent, Bunter has been the occasion for many an amusing scene in the form-room. From the splendid Bunking of Bunter series comes this extract from Magnet No. 875, when the stage was all set for a flogging in the form-room, but the intended victim had selfishly spoiled the fun by not turning up.

"I am sorry, sir, but he is certainly absent", said the Remove master.

"Is this possible, Mr. Quelch? I informed Bunter that I should be here at this hour to administer his punishment. Is it possible that the boy has ventured to absent himself, at the risk of wasting my time?" exclaimed the Head in astonishment.

The Removites dared not grin.

It was only too possible that Bunter had not taken the great value of the headmaster's time into consideration at all!

The Head was cross, and we are told that Gosling gave a grunt of disappointment. Bunter was present and willing, however, on another occasion, when he had high expectations of winning a prize for Latin Verse in Magnet No. 1159. He had copied out one of Linley's exercises, mistaking it for Linley's own composition:-

"This paper -" Mr. Quelch shook the offending paper in the air, and his gimlet eyes seemed to bore into the wretched Bunter. "This paper is a copy of a well-known composition -"

"Oh crumbs!"

"A composition so celebrated that it amazes me that you should fancy, Bunter, for one moment, that I was unacquainted with it!"

"Oh!"

"Apart from the dishonesty, the unscrupulous impudence of this attempt, an attempt at what I can only describe as fraud -"

"Ow!"

"Apart from that, I am amazed at the folly, the crass stupidity, of such an attempt!" boomed Mr. Quelch. "Is it possible, Bunter, that you imagined that your form-master was unacquainted with the Odes of Horace?"

"Eh?"

"This paper -" almost roared Mr. Quelch "- is a copy of the tenth Ode of the second book of Horace!"

"Oh crikey!"

"And you have had the impudence, the crass stupidity, to attempt to palm it off on your form-master as your own work!"

The most interesting scenes in the form-room were, naturally enough, those in which the lesson was interrupted for some reason or other. Once again, and naturally enough, Mr. Quelch did not approve of interruptions. It is to be feared that there were many things that Mr. Quelch did not approve of, including the way in which Bunter always kept staring at the form-room clock, as in Magnet No. 1565:-

But if other fellows' eyes glanced at the clock, Bunter's

did not merely glance at it - they turned on it continually! The clock seemed to draw his gaze like a magnet. Had that clock been a thing of beauty and a joy forever the Owl of the Remove could not have gazed at it more earnestly.

Quelch did not approve of this kind of thing.

What was the use of a form-master handing out valuable historical information if his pupils, instead of listening attentively and absorbing the same, only counted the last minutes till he shut down?

On one celebrated occasion, Bunter even went so far as to put up his hand and make the valuable suggestion that the clock had stopped! Mr. Quelch was not particularly gratified to learn that time passed on leaden wings for his pupils when he was teaching his form.

And here, I am afraid, my review of incidents in the Remove form-room must be brought to a close, before you all start looking at your watches to see if they too have stopped. I was sorely tempted to extend the subject to include incidents which happened in the immediate vicinity of the class-room - for example, the Greyfriars custom which allowed a free period to any form whose master did not turn up to take the lesson within a specified period of time (one of those little touches which helped to convince you that Greyfriars was a really old school with strong traditions) - but I should have found myself talking here all night. I hope, at any rate, I have been able to persuade you that for ingenuity, diversity and convincing narration, no other author could approach Charles Hamilton in his descriptions of scenes in the class-room, and that the finest examples of his work in this particular field are to be found within the pages of the Magnet. For me, at least, no Greyfriars story is really complete without one scene in the Remove form-room.

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THE THRILL OF THE CENTURY

by ERIC FAYNE

First, I lift my glass to do honour to a remarkable man - our Editor - whose hard work and tenacity of purpose have brought

about this wonderful achievement - the Hundredth Number of THE COLLECTORS' DIGEST. May he be blessed with long life and excellent health, that he may be still sitting in the Editor's Chair when Number One Thousand is reached.

Secondly, may I browse over Number One Hundred of some of the grand old papers which gave birth to The Collectors' Digest and to which it is a permanent memorial.

In the case of the GEM, No. 100 was really No. 149, for, when the Magnet was born, the Gem started again as No. 1. The Hundredth Number of the ld. Gem was a poor specimen, sad to relate. The familiar blue cover was there, of course, and there were some excellent illustrations by R.J. Macdonald, who had only been working on the Gem for a few weeks at that time. But the story, inappropriately titled "KILDARE OF ST. JIM'S", was a strangely short and feeble effort by a substitute writer, in which three members of the Grammar School - Carpenter, Snipe, and Larking - played a trick with "Tom Merry's Weekly". As the eight chapters of this feeble affair only occupied half the Gem, no less than twelve pages were devoted to a massive instalment of the serial by John Tregellis, "Britain's Revenge".

The Magnet's No. 100 was a special Double Number, price One Penny, and contained "NUGENT MINOR", telling of the arrival of that troublesome young man at Greyfriars. An excellent tale of the serious type. The issue was completed with an instalment of "ONE OF THE RANKS", a serial, author unnamed.

THE PENNY POPULAR reached No. 100 on September 5th, 1914. The issue contained "Ratty's Love Affair", an abridged version of the Gem story in which the New House-master fell in love with Edith Glyn; "The Message from the Sea", a Sexton Blake story; and "Rory's Foe", a tale of Jack, Sam and Pete.

THE SCHOOL FRIEND attained No. 100 early in April, 1921. The Cliff House story, ostensibly by Hilda Richards, but nothing to do at that time with famous Frank, was "THE GIRLS WHO CHANGED PLACES". In the centre of the paper was the "Island Memories" issue of the Cliff House Weekly, recalling an excellent Desert Island series of Cliff House stories which had recently ended.

Well, there they are. It will be seen that none of them had anything particularly memorable to offer in the way of celebrating reaching the Century. But each one is worth its weight in gold in the treasure chest of the collector.

HARRY WHARTON AND CO., WORLD TRAVELLERS
by Gordon Thompson

Surely Harry Wharton and Co. must have been the most travelled schoolboys in fiction. Let us then take a brief survey of their wanderings:

First the "Dark Continent" - Africa; four times here. In 1922 they went to the Congo with one-eyed Captain Corkran (Bob Cherry's cousin), in search of buried ivory. For a brief period Bunter was King of the Cannibals, owing to his making the tribes idol "talk" with his ventriloquism. The Sahara was next, 1924, searching for Ali Ben Yusef, with Major Cherry in command this time. In 1931 with Vernon-Smith and his father to Kenya, for a time they were prisoners in the hands of Ludwig Krantz, slave trader. The following year they journeyed to Egypt with Lord Mauleverer, with the rascally Kalizelos striving to obtain from Mauly his ancient Scarab, which finally turns out to be the hiding place of "The Eye of Asiris" - a fabulous diamond.

The South Seas were visited twice; Tom Redwing was bequeathed a teak disc whereon was the plan of a hidden treasure (1927). This was coveted by Mr. Vernon-Smith's valet, Soames. Many exciting adventures were experienced before the treasure was finally dug up. In 1938 there was another trip South, with Lord Mauleverer, finally culminating in the discovery of Mauly's cousin Brian, as a beachcomber.

The U.S. was also visited twice; in 1929 they went to Hollywood to make a picture, incurring the enmity of Myron Polk, No. 1 Heart-throb. Finally Harry Wharton ended up as "The School-boy Sheikh". Mr. Fish, son Fisher T., and Coker, were also prominent in this series.

Texas was visited in 1938, to Mr. Vernon Smith's Ranch. A rascally foreman Barney Stone was featured in this series, also the Rio Kid. This was the last travel series but one.

China was also visited twice, in 1930 and 1937. On both these eventful trips Wun Lung was eventually rescued from the clutches of his dubious relatives. In the former series, mainly through the strenuous efforts of Ferrers Locke.

In 1936 Brazil was visited, going to see their former class-mate Jim Valentine. This time diamonds were the cause of
concluded page 112...

Nelson Lee

Column

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* * *

By JACK WOOD
NOSTAW, 328 Stockton Lane,
YORK.



What better way of celebrating the centenary of this column than by a message from the famous schoolmaster-detective himself?

Herewith, therefore, a portrait of Nelson Lee taken from No. 422 of the Small Series of the Nelson Lee Library and drawn, I presume, by that noted artist, Arthur Jones, whom we always so intimately associate with Nelson Lee stories. Certainly, he did all the drawings in the N.L.L. from No. 9 in the Small Series until well into the first New Series.

He had a typical drawing for No. 100 Small Series of Lee and Nipper, witnessing an assault in the fog on Blackheath.

No. 100 was the third in a new series of yarns from Nipper's Note Book and was "a strange and singular episode" entitled The Clue of the Twisted Ring. It was, therefore, related by Nipper, but was "prepared for publication by the Author of the Green Triangle Series". Chapter One set off to a cracking pace with Nipper and his gov'nor returning on top of a bus from Blackheath where they had been "inquiring after the health of a certain gentle individual who was wanted for embezzlement, fraud and a few other little complaints. We'd collared the joker, too, and had handed him over to the police. Not much of an affair - tame, in fact".

On the way home the bus broke down and so the Gray's Inn Road pair left the bus and began to walk across the heath. Rain

began falling and, sheltering, Lee and Nipper saw an assault on an elderly man who turned out to be Professor Marcus Walton, of Myrtle House, West Road, Blackheath. The professor was wearing a curious

twisted sapphire ring, and was assisted home. Myrtle House proved to be an eerie, odd establishment, with bones and stuffed animals on the walls and as ornaments, and a secret room with all kinds of safety gadgets to protect its secrecy.

After a stormy interlude when, on regaining consciousness, the professor mistook his helpers for those who had assaulted him, he explained that he had discovered how to manufacture sapphires and was experimenting on rubies. He had sold his sapphires to Henson and Wilding Ltd., of Bond Street; Rudolf and Son and other firms.

Checking up later with the first-named firm, Lee is commissioned to investigate a robbery at the firm's Birmingham premises. While in the Midlands he realised that Walton is a crook and

that his manufactured gems are really re-settings of stolen gems. So back to Myrtle House and more excitement.



They trapped Walton in his secret laboratory, but the crook escaped by hurling a crucible of molten gold at them and dashing out of the room, closing the patent doors after him and leaving the detective in a sealed room with flames spreading all round them - - a scene which provided Jones with a striking cover picture.

Fortunately Walton had left behind him his patent development of oxy-acetylene apparatus, with which Lee burnt open the street door, thus effecting a last-minute escape. Walton was eventually captured and got 10 years' penal servitude.

That was the end of the story. Not an outstanding story, maybe, but reasonably readable and a pleasant break in the series of Green Triangle, Jim the Penman and Eileen Dare adventures. After all, the Library was still in its infancy and there were to be some eight other centenary numbers before the end, 16 years later.

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Here, for a moment, let us look at other people's views of the Nelson Lee and St. Frank's story. First, a newcomer to this column, F. Vernon Lay, tells us

WHY I PREFER READING ST. FRANK'S STORIES TO THOSE OF GREYFRIARS,
ST. JIMS & ROOKWOOD

The first and foremost reason for my preference is that when reading the best St. Frank's stories I find it easy to forget I am reading a story and am soon engrossed, but with the others I am conscious all the time that it is only a story. The boys of E.S.B. are only boys, not men masquerading as boys, and there is far more action and movement and much less so-called talking than in the bulk of Hamilton's work. It would be simple to learn parrot-like whole chunks of Hamiltonian patter, which while it may fill up the page and entertain some, merely bores me after I have read it the first time.

The many adventure series of St. Franks have never been surpassed and represent for me, sheer escapism. I do not expect them to be true to life or even feasible, so long as they are not absurd. Since they were written so many of the ideas which seemed then so far-fetched, have now a foundation of possible fact, the

latest being the development of 3D films foreshadowed in the Mystery of Raithmere Castle. The building up of situations and plot and above all, the zest of the narration, put E.S.B. in a class by himself, and this is borne out by the popularity of his published works after he ceased to write St. Franks stories.

It was in the early twenties that I first read the Nelson Lee, but today, after thirty years, I can still remember some of the stories in vivid detail and the impression they made is iradicable, whilst all I can remember of Greyfriars and St. Jims are the names of some of the principal characters, and Rookwood, I am sorry to say, is lost entirely. The various series contain all the ingredients that appeal so much to boys who never grow up. I mean, of course, buried treasure, cannibals, gladiators, secret passages and panels, jungle life, camping - the list is endless. Add to this scrapes and duels with criminals and detection in the best Sherlock Holmes' tradition - well, I ask you, what more can an old boy want!

My Favourite St. Franks' Character and Why

This is not an easy statement to make, but after much deep thought I find that the series to which I return time and time again, is the Ezra Quirke, Magician, one, and therefore, I must in all fairness nominate Ezra as my favourite character, although he is more of a villain than a hero. This series is worthy of permanent recording and the development of the personality of Quirke and his hold over his school mates, has always fascinated me. I know of no parallel series of such gripping intensity in any other boys' books. I would be quite prepared to believe that the creation of Ezra Quirke by E.S.B. had a profound influence on the lives of quite a number of his readers.

* * * *

Walter Fleming, another newcomer, also tells us

WHY I PREFER THE ST. FRANKS' STORIES

My first introduction to the St. Franks' Saga was in the beginning of 1927. New Series No. 38 to be exact, dealing with the adventures of the St. Franks boys in Northestria.

Now, why do I prefer these stories? Mainly, I think, be-

cause they were a little different from all the other School stories of those years. Mr. Brook did not mind drawing upon his imagination, and what a vivid imagination it was. The net result was to transport me, and doubtless thousands of others, to either St. Franks, or some far away place.

When reading his stories I could always imagine myself as one of the crowd there, actually taking part in that particular episode. Again, the the large numbers of stories, there was always the element of mystery to quicken the pulse, and bring into play the detection instinct in most of us.

His many characters were always so well portrayed, and his ability to put a thrilling touch to most of the popular sports made his work outstanding. In my own opinion, Brooks' sports stories were as good as, if not better than, most of the sporting writers of that day.

When I think of the number of stories he wrote, I am amazed at the constant high standard of his work, and how varied the plots were! Whether he was writing of school life, sporting adventures, or stories set abroad in such widely different places as Australia, The Amazon, or the Wild West and the fantastic lost cities which the St. Franks' boys and I found from time to time; they always had that authentic touch.

The background material to his stories helped a lot in making his stories so readable. It was always there without being too obtrusive, and I could always imagine the scenes without too much mental exertion on my part.

Now for my favourite Character

Well, without a doubt, it is Edward Oswald Handforth. Hearty, impulsive, nearly always doing the wrong thing, but somehow getting through and yet sometimes having that flash of inspiration.

Kind-hearted and generous to a fault, full of courage and yet when really necessary, ready to admit his faults. How I wish I could have been like him and how, when reading the St. Franks' stories, I imagine myself in his place.

I think of all the Brooks characters, Handy stands out as a very real character, and I am truly sorry that, today, we cannot follow his further adventures.

Good old Handy! How many put him as their favourite character, but I, though I liked him as much as most, would agree with an earlier correspondent, who places Nipper in premier position. Without him St. Franks would not have provided the opportunities for the Handys, the Archies, the Brownes, the Pitts and the rest, to shine.

OLD BOYS' BOOK CLUB

LONDON SECTION

The first Spring Meeting at "Cherry Place," Wood Green, on Sunday, March 20th was graced by a distinguished visitor, Jim Deasy of Dublin. Also present was a new member, John Carey. Roger Jenkins, chairman and librarian of the Hamilton section of the library, gave a very satisfactory report of the previous month's working. He stated that the Stacey series of the "Magnet" had been purchased and a full list of other new purchases would appear in the April issue of the club's news-sheet. Furthermore, Roger, who was the winner of last month's quiz, conducted his effort as per custom. He stated that it was compiled mostly from memory and those present agreed that it was a good job he had not access to his collection as it was a very hard quiz. However, the old firm filled the places as Bob Whiter won it and Bob Blythe was second and Len Packman with Charlie Wright in third place. Impromptu talk was given by David Harrison. This was very well received and the good wishes go to David from the Club for a successful cricket season. After a very good service at the tuckshop by Eileen Whiter and her sister Kathleen, Eileen conducted her two team quiz competitions. Two teams of seven a side competed in these very enjoyable games; in the latter a pack of Lexicon cards was used. Hostess Eileen is to be congratulated on her good work towards making this a very enjoyable meeting. Another good feature was the amount of papers and books for sale.

The April meeting is to be held at Bill Jardine's residence at Woodingdean, Brighton, on Sunday, 17th. Bill was present and extended a hearty welcome to all. Frequent trains from Vic-

toria station at excursion rates. Meeting commences at 4 p.m. sharp. Here is a chance to see the Nelson Lee country in the Spring.

UNCLE BENJAMIN

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NORTHERN SECTION MEETING, 12th MARCH, 1955

J. Breeze Bentley presided over a company a little below average: no visitors from afar this time, unfortunately.

Secretary Norman Smith informed us that as a result of adverts in the Leeds evening papers, five requests for information about the Club had been received, and there were good hopes that at least three would become members and attenders of the meetings.

Regarding the April meeting, it was pointed out that the date as arranged would be Easter Saturday. After some discussion it was decided to adhere to it, as there would be disadvantages if it was rearranged. The April Meeting is the Annual General one with election of officers. It is hoped therefore, to have a big attendance.

Then we got down to a great Quiz, the combined work of a number of postal members. In all there were about 100 questions. Members formed trios in an attempt to solve them. Pity was those who set the questions were not there to see the excitement they had caused. Messrs. Breeze Bentley, Gerry Allison and that 'dark horse' Bill Williamson, won by a short head with 71 correct.

Another interesting Quiz followed to bring to a close a very pleasant evening.

Now, Northern members, do please make a special effort to get to the Annual General Meeting, April 9th.

HERBERT LECKENBY

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MIDLAND SECTION MEETING, 28th FEBRUARY, 1955

Probably the severe weather kept away some members and this was certainly a pity as the dozen people present enjoyed yet another of Mr. Ingram's superb talks of Greyfriars. After formal business had been disposed of and we had welcomed yet another new

member (Mr. G.L. Chatham), we settled down to hear about the "Blades" of Greyfriars. These talks need no recommendation to those fortunate enough to have heard one and fifty minutes went all too soon. Tonight we heard about Loder, Price, Hilton, Vernon Smith, Skinner, etc.

Here we find the same skill and craftsmanship in the delineation of character to which Jack had drawn our attention in earlier talks describing Dr. Locke and Messrs. Prout and Quelch. How aptly the names are chosen also.

Mr. Ingram concentrated mainly on Vernon Smith and read three extracts from "Magnets", showing so very clearly that, although not for nothing was he nick-named the "Boulder": yet he was good at games, and would own up to his misdeeds and not allow an innocent man (even Bunter!), to suffer for them.

Other "Cads" include Hazeldene - weak, unstable and a complete contrast to the Boulder: Stephen Price - a rather older Hazeldene: Hilton - a "Mauly" gone wrong and among the fags, Wingate Minor and Nugent Minor occasionally got their Majors into trouble.

We applauded very heartily this splendid talk and echo Jack's concluding hope that there is a literary Valhalla where the Blades can smoke a quiet cigarette and back an occasional winner (never in the stories did they succeed in doing this latter!), and where the Prefects cease from troubling and the Quelches are at rest.

Variety is said to be the spice of life, so we concluded the evening with two or three miscellaneous items which have become recognised features of our club nights.

EDWARD DAVEY

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MERSEYSIDE SECTION MEETING, 13th MARCH, 1955

This was a quiet, though enjoyable, meeting, thirteen members being present. Now that spring(?) is well on the way it is inevitable that we shall be seeing less of some of our members, although it is to be hoped that they will endeavour to attend whenever they possibly can. The winter meetings are, naturally, the most enjoyable; it is not always easy to attend a meeting on a

beautiful summer evening, and, who knows, we might possibly get one of those this year! We hope, however, that members will do their utmost to make the summer meetings just as attractive as the winter ones by turning up as regularly as possible.

What little business there was was dealt with by Don Webster who is doing Frank Case's secretarial work for the time being. Jim Walsh introduced a new competition which is likely to prove most enjoyable - "Winnits", based on the old "John Bull" competition, "Bullets". Bill Horton provided the winning effort and Jack Morgan was a good second. Let's have some more of this in the near future.

This was followed by a St. Frank's competition - "Hidden Names", and Mr. Laffey was the winner, with Don Webster not very far behind. The meeting ended with an interesting little quiz devised by Jack Morgan, and so the evening came to a very enjoyable end. During the evening there was a sale of some of the books which have been read by all, in order to clear the shelves for the purchase of some new ones.

The next meeting will be on Easter Sunday, April 10th, at 7 p.m., when we shall have the pleasure of the company of Frank Case. Incidentally, we on Merseyside heartily wish York City a safe passage in the semi-final, and may they make Herbert Leckenby a happy man by being the first Third Division team to win the F.A. Cup.

FRANK UNWIN

FOR SALE, AND WANTED: MAGNETS, GEMS, LEES, MARVELS, S.O.L., BOYS' FRIEND LIBS., BUNTER AND TOM MERRY BOOKS, ROVERS, HOTSPURS, Etc. F. Bottomley, 48 Downhills Park Road, London, N.17.

CAN ANY READER oblige with GEM 1663 please? Also have you any S.O.L's for sale? Coverless ones not objected to - C. L. LETTEY, 27, HEATHER CLOSE, KINGSWOOD, BRISTOL.

THE "CHAMPION" PASSES. The "Champion" was merged with "Tiger" on March 19th. Thus dies the last of the A.P. Boys' weeklies. It had a long run for it started January 28th, 1922

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LETTER BOX

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IN REPLY TO MANY QUERIES

March 15th, 1955

Dear Herbert Leckenby,

Thank you for your letter. Yes, "Tom Merry and Co., Caravanners" is a new book, fresh from the Mint. Figgins and Co. are rivals on the road; and Billy Bunter also turns up for a few chapters. It will be published soon by Spring Books Ltd.* who publish the Tom Merry books now, though Mandeville's are still doing the annuals. Whether half-a-crown or 3/6 is not yet settled I hope the former.

With kind regards,
FRANK RICHARDS

*Note: The address of Spring Books is Andrew Dakers Ltd., Spring House, Spring Place, London N.W.5.

WANTED: H.A.'s 1920, 1923, 1924, 1925, 1935: S.O.L.'s 19, 257, 259, 261, 301, 304, 331, 334. B.F.L. 3d LIB. 46, 67, 237. Condition important. REV. A. G. POUND, 68 FINNAMORE ROAD, BIRMINGHAM 9

AVAILABLE (CASH OR EXCHANGE): MAGNETS, GEMS, S.O.Ls., POPULARS, SEXTON BLAKES, NELSON LEES, UNION JACKS, MARVELS, TURPINS, ROBIN HOODS, BUFFALO BILLS, BULLSEYES, PLUCKS, BOYS' FRIEND LIBRARY, BOYS FRIEND WEEKLYS, BOYS REALMS, BOYS CINEMAS, BOYS MAGAZINES, DEFECTIVE WEEKLYS, HOLIDAY ANNUALS, BOYS OWN ANNUALS (7/6d each) CHAMPION ANNUALS (5/- each), Many COMICS 1880-1900, S.A.E. please. SATISFACTION ASSURED. Offers of Books welcomed.

T. LAMBERT, 347 GERTRUDE ROAD, NORWICH.

WANTED: Boys' Friends, Robin Hoods, Union Jacks. FOR SALE: Robin Hoods. F. MACHIN, 38 ST. THOMAS'S ROAD, PRESTON, LANCASHIRE.

WANTED: Magnets and Populars. G. H. RANSOM, 207 BASINGSTOKE ROAD, READING, BERKS.

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