

# THE COLLECTORS' DIGEST - VOL. 10, No. III

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MARCH 1956

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# The Collectors' Digest

Vol. 10. No. 111

Price 1s. 6d.

MARCH, 1956

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

## From the Editor's Chair

Mishap: Just when I was getting busy on last month's number I had a fall on an icy patch of road, and bruised my right arm and wrist rather badly. As a result, I found preparation, addressing the envelopes, etc. rather trying. Should I have missed anyone please let me know. It also meant I got into arrears with my correspondence. However, I hope to catch up soon.

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COMICS: Bill Lofts and others have suggested we have a "Comics Corner"; articles dealing with the real comics of course of pre-war days. Well it seems a good idea to me, and there's plenty of material to draw upon. So who'll make a start?

\*\*\*\*\*

REQUEST: Bill Martin gets scores of letters in response to his adverts. but very few contain stamped-addressed envelopes. He would appreciate it if you would slip one in when making an enquiry.

\*\*\*\*\*

DEATH OF TOD SLAUGHTER: That grand old trouper of the theatre, Tod Slaughter died suddenly at Derby on Sunday, February 19th.

Tod was, of course, best known for his "Sweeney Todd, the Demon Barber."

He at one time had a big collection of Victorian 'bloods'. He was also interested in Sexton Blake.

When he appeared at the "Empire", York, some time ago Jack Wood had an interesting chat with him. As they parted Tod said with a chuckle "Well, I must get across to the theatre to make some blood."

\* \* \* \* \*

"ANSWERS" IS DEAD: "Answers" started in 1888 as "Answers to Correspondents" folded up last month. Plans were to cease publication on February 25th with No. 3330, but owing to the

trouble in the printing trade it finished a week earlier. No hint of the coming demise appeared in that number, thus the Bill Lofts of the future may be set a problem "When did 'Answers' die?" The reason given in the newspapers some time before the fold up happened was "the ever rising cost of production".

"Answers" was not actually in our province, of course, but there were links. For about two years in pre 1914 days it ran short Sexton Blake stories and Sydney Gowing, whom many of our older members remember with affection as David Goodwin, wrote several of its famous serials under the pen-name, John Goodwin. Arthur Clarke and Leonard Shields were also two of its regular artists.

Yours sincerely,

HERBERT LECKENBY.

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MY COLLECTION, No. 10

By W.O.G. Lofts

It was 2nd September 1933, and it was my birthday; I was ten years old. I can remember the day as it it was yesterday. I saw displayed in the window of our local newsagents shop the cover of a new boy's paper which had the unusual name of "Hotspur". Its cover portrayed a huge eagle, and they gave away a black mask as a free gift for the first issue. I ran home to my mother, and asked her to buy me this paper as a birthday gift every week until I got too old to read this kind of book.

This was my first taste of boy's papers; previously I had read like other normal children the numerous comics which were on sale to the juvenile public at that time. Surprisingly enough some of my favourite comics were of the lesser known one's collected today, these were printed at Bath, and had such names as "Target", "Dazzler", "Rocket" and "Chuckler". My favourite school was Red Circle in the "Hotspur". I used to look forward to the adventures of Dixie Dale, Mr. Smugg, and a lazy boy with the name of Dead-wide-Dick. Unlike the characters in the "Magnet" and "Gem", the characters in this school did grow up, and even today this school is still featured in the pages of the "Hotspur". In those days nearly all boys that I came into contact with either at school or in play, seemed to read the Thomson papers, and there was no doubt that the "Wizard", "Skipper", "Rover", "Adventure"

and "Hotspur" were more widely read than the A.P. papers. I never used to read the "Magnet" or "Gem" much at that time, in fact the only boy that I knew of who did used to go to the Marylebone Grammar School, (where Harry Homer spent his schooldays). I never used to collect the papers then; we used to either exchange them with one another, or at the local bookstall where Gerald Swan (who is now a Big Publisher) first started his career. I think that I read the "Magnet" when I was about 10 $\frac{1}{2}$ , and rather liked the tales of Greyfriars. One main reason why I could not get on with the "Gem" was because of the difficulty in following the speech of "Gussy". I always used to find difficulty in following his words, no doubt due to my early age. I also knew of many boys who had the same difficulty. Often I used to feel sorry for Martin Clifford when I saw stacks of "Gems" lying unsold in the various newsagents. I used to think that Clifford would be out of work. Nowadays I would feel like writing "Dear Mr. Clifford, Please try and cut out Gussy's lisp, as I find reading through your "Gems" like a will-o-the-wisp."

I continued to have the "Hotspur" every week until I was called up for the Army in 1942. Up to this time I had never heard of Sexton Blake, and of course the "Union Jack" had finished before I had started to read boy's papers.

When I returned from the Far East in 1946, after doing service in India, Burma and Tibet, I first read of Sexton Blake in the libraries which appeared each month. They seemed to appeal to me more than the other American type of novels which were appearing then. I used to enjoy the stories so much that I used to go round all the local market places to pick up the back issues to read; when some of the very early numbers eluded me I wrote to the Editor of the Sexton Blake Library asking him to help me in obtaining my wanted numbers. He very kindly suggested to me to advertise in the "Exchange & Mart" as it was a good paper for one requiring any special wants. This I did, with some success, and I was amazed when I had copies of the 1st and 2nd series sent to me. I was under the impression that the library had only started in 1940 by the numbering on the front.

Who has not heard of Petticoat Lane, the famous London Market Place of world renown held each Sunday morning, where it is claimed one can buy anything from a pin to a rowing boat? I used to see hundreds and hundreds of old S.B.L.'s 1st and 2nd series at only a

few coppers each as late as 1951, and also refused many old Red Magnets at a cheaper price because I did not really collect them. To be quite truthful I did not know that there was any value attached to them and thought that I was the only person who collected such papers.

I bought many of the S.B.L's and sometimes a few Magnets. I also met a Mr. Gregg one Sunday who had collected every S.B.L. from the first issue 1915. He lived in Kensington Gardens Square, and died not long before I became acquainted with the C.D. I never knew what became of the S.B.L's as when I called to see him one evening I was just told he had died and that all his books had been disposed of by a West-end dealer.

My first connection with other people who had the same interest as myself in collecting boy's books was Tom Hopperton's "Old Boy's Bool Collector" which was advertised in the "Exchange & Mart" and through this I heard of the existence of the C.D.

When I had purchased my first few copies of the C.D. I began to feel rather annoyed at the repeated attacks on the writings of John Hunter, especially in the "Blakiana" section. I myself rather liked his stories and found all his happenings in stories true to life and interesting. So I wrote to John Hunter saying "That despite other readers' dislike of your stories, I like them". He wrote back and I shortly met him whilst on holiday at Worthing. Since then I have seen him often, and he is a very good friend of mine.

Now the important part of my story; what of my collection, what sort of collection has the man who writes such a lot of various articles on all sorts of papers. Well to start with my collection is like my articles, of various kinds. To start with I have Magnets from Number 2 and 3 upwards, some in each period of its run, about a hundred different number One's including "Wizard", "Hotspur", "Skipper", "Rover", "Adventure", "Red Arrow", "Vanguard", "Jacks Paper", "Rovering", "Union Jack", "Popular", "Modern Boy", "Modern Wonder", "Pals", "Boys Magazine" and many of the Victorian Era. Some various Lloyds "Bloods" Mint Xmas numbers of Comics, some of the "Horror Comics" which I keep in contrast to them. And hundreds of various libraries, many of which are unknown to readers of the C.D. These include "Target Library", "C.I.D. Library" (an imitation of the S.B.L.) which had stories in later issues of that master of fiction the late Gwyn Evans, "Wonder Library" published by the A.P. very similar to the

B.F.L. (An article will be in the C.D. shortly about this paper), Popular Library and many others far too numerous to mention here. I also have many books of data and jottings about most of the favourite papers of our youth, some parts published and some yet to be written. I have a complete list of every comic published since the first true comic was ever published "Ally Sopers Half-holiday" in May, 1884.

Mostly I am endeavouring to obtain a copy of every boys paper published. This I know is indeed a hard task, but I am still young, and I have plenty of time to get them. I do get great enjoyment from meeting other collectors in all parts of the country. I have met many who say I am the only collector of the C.D. Circle they have met. Any collector with a few hours to spare in the London Area is always welcome to come and see my collection of Boy's Papers, Comics, Manuscripts and various other interesting items.

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## BLAKIANA

Conducted by JOSEPHINE PACKMAN

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

It has come to something when the sales of the S.B.L. have to be boosted by garnishing the covers with lurid pictures such as grace the February issues. What a pity the A.P. no longer hold to their old-established policy of publishing only first-class material in their publications, instead of resorting to such transparently dubious methods.

Who said that browsing round bookstalls didn't pay dividends? A few weeks ago my husband broke his journey home from the Office to have a look around a bookstall. Believe it or not, he picked up 80 S.B.L.'s 2nd series between Nos. 170 and 250 and 26 between 600 and 650. He was told that they had had a lot more but "they had gone like hot cakes"! However, it appears that a number of people return their books to this stall when read, so that there is the prospect of more to come. In point of fact Len has already obtained a half a dozen or more as a result. It only goes to show that you never know your luck!

JOSIE PACKMAN.

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THE BEST - AND THE WORST

by W.H. Goodhead

PART THREE

The campaign opened for Blake in a spectacular manner. In the guise of Monsieur Jules Bontemps, one of the leading exponents of the theory and practice of Anarchism in Europe, he was naturally received with open arms by his Serbovian comrades. The fraternal proceedings were curtailed, however, in a dramatic manner. Comrade Karloff, amongst those present, was denounced by Comrade Levinsky, also amongst those present, as a British Secret Service spy, and was forthwith shot on the spot. This must have given Blake a severe jolt. Although not a spy in the strict sense of the word, his peculiar position would have been rather difficult to explain to his impetuous confreres. Fortunately for him, however, at this stage the building caught fire, and the witch hunt was abandoned in favour of a general "Sauve qui Peut".

In the ensuing melee, Blake managed to have a few last words with his dying compatriot, Captain Arthur Cray, D.S.O., M.C. Although the whole scene had a strong "Beau Geste" atmosphere, just what Captain Cray was doing there was never explained. On the whole, it was rather a puzzling little incident.

Wasting no time, Blake summoned Splash Page and Ruff Hanson for an immediate Council of War at the Hotel Orientale, the meeting place of Krakov's social life. Unfortunately, two fellow guests at the Orientale were Lou Tarrant and Colonel Tony, in their familiar disguise of charming widow and sweet little boy, and whilst doing a little free-lancing in search of loose jewellery, Tony overheard their conversation. Bringing his looting expedition to an abrupt conclusion, he wasted no time in informing Karl that his arch enemy was still in the land of the living. After hissing venomously, snarling furiously and allowing a smile of fiendish cruelty to twist his lips, Karl leapt into action, and catching Blake off guard for once had him kidnapped and incarcerated in the gloomy and impregnable fortress of Orlov Castle.

At long last, however, the net was closing round the Double Four. Although Blake was a captive, and booked for an early exit via a replica of the Iron Maiden of Nuremburg which Karl kept in his dungeons for such emergencies, in Ruff Hanson he had left behind him a more than capable lieutenant. His wits moving almost



as fast as his guns, he presented himself at the headquarters of the Revolutionary Council as a member of the I.W.W. and a bosom friend of Monsieur Bontemps. Apprising them of the situation and giving a practical demonstration of his powers of gun-play which probably endeared him to the comrades more than anything else, he was admitted to the Council with considerable acclamation.

The Council itself had its full complement of colourful and picturesque characters. There was Strogoff the giant, Sarnoff the drug - fiend and Levinsky the Levantine gun-man; but the leadership actually lay in the hands of Serge Droski and Red Rosa, Daughter of Revolt. Droski had, it seems, come up the hard way. Having served his apprenticeship as a Nihilist his active career had been brought to an untimely close when a bomb he was preparing for King Karl's predecessor had prematurely exploded and left him minus two legs. Although thus severely handicapped, it says much for his administrative ability that he was not only respected but actually looked upon with affection by his fellow workers.

Red Rosa, on the other hand, was everything - and more - that a female Bolshevik should be: about twenty years of age, slim and graceful in her carriage, face exquisitely moulded, devoid of make-up, and vivid crimson lips. As Ruff summed it up: "Some class, this jane. A kisser like a pomegranite but soft. A peach all right". Although holding a high executive rank on the Council, Rosa was by no means averse to taking part in an active capacity. It was she, indeed, who was to present Karl and his prospective wife with the bomb which was to express the Movement's official disapproval.

Before the Royal Nuptials could be so fittingly celebrated, however, and before Hanson and his associates could formulate a definite plan of action, the tide at last turned decisively against Karl. The Army, tired of seething, at last simmered over and marched on Krakov. Immediately, almost the entire population, under the leadership of Strogoff, Droski, Rosa and of course Ruff Hanson, formed itself into a fighting mob and swarmed on Orlov Castle. Ironically enough, the only loyal section of the armed forces seemed to be the police force, but after a brief but sanguinary attempt to ambush the Revolutionaries, they were swept aside and Karl, left with only his immediate entourage and the castle garrison, found himself at last at bay, with only a raised drawbridge between himself and the vengeance of his long suffering subjects.

Accordingly, Karl prepared to make a last ditch stand (bearing

in mind, of course, that there was a secret exit from the castle known only to himself). Unfortunately for him, however, although the Serbovien army seemed to lack a number of things, it did include heavy artillery in its equipment, and Orlov castle was soon under heavy fire. After a particularly heavy spell of bombardment, in which the ranks of the Double Four were further depleted by the permanent loss of Tiny Tony and Carfax Drewe, Karl, realising that his career as a monarch had definitely reached its conclusion, decided to desert the remnants of his loyal garrison and escape with Samson and Lou Tarrant.

Here, however, Blake stepped in and dealt the coup de grace. In true Prisoner of Zenda fashion, having escaped with comparative ease from the Iron Maiden, he lowered the drawbridge and confronted the Ace and the remnants of his crew in the moment of their escape, holding them at bay with a Mills bomb.

Meanwhile, the siege of Orlov Castle had been brief but bloody, losses on both sides being considerable. Both Droski and Strogoff had been mortally wounded, and it was left to Ruff Hanson to rally the rebel forces for the final charge over the drawbridge.

So impressed by his courage, resource, and above all his gunmanship, were his comrades, that when Droski, with his dying breath nominated Ruff as his successor, he was accepted with wild enthusiasm. His only potential rival, Red Rosa, had from the beginning cast a very favourable eye on her rugged, new-found comrade in arms, and there is every indication that Ruff avowedly no ladies man, reciprocated the sentiment more than somewhat.

Ruff's brief, hectic but entirely successful career in Serbovia is well worth a brief recapitulation. Starting as an American undercover man, he had been a member of the King's Private Bodyguard, revolutionary leader and finally President in approximately a fortnight, and without being able to speak a word of the language.

With the Ace, Lou Tarrant and Samson under a triple guard, and with President Ruff Hanson willing to waive all extradition formalities, the British public, who had been given a graphic description of these proceedings by Splash Page via "The Daily Radio", were fully justified in anticipating what promised to be the most memorable trial of modern times.

The Ace, however, though bereft of his throne and therefore his immunity from the law, had yet a card, and a deadly card it

was, to play.

During all the trouble and turmoil in Serbovia, one member of the Double Four, Scarlatti - master illusionist and impersonator, had remained behind in London, holding a watching brief over the Ace's affairs in England. On receiving the news of Sexton Blake's triumph, the organising of the rescue of the Ace became all-important, and showing a skill, daring and organising ability worthy of a far better cause, Scarlatti began to plan the Ace's sensational escape.

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THE BABBLINGS OF BARDELL

by Victor Colby

It was 1915, and Mrs. Bardell was upset. She shook her fist at the inoffensive bust of the immortal Vidocq which graced a pedestal.

"I wish that was the Kaiser, alive an' in the flesh", she declared. "Wouldn't I pinch 'is nose for 'im! Oh, these wicked Germans and the Alleys, and the whole blessed lot of 'em! A setting at it, and blowing one another to bits with bombs and shells and suchlike as if they was Kilkenny cats and dogs. The Powers should intervene an' stop the war. It's disgraceful their looking coolly on while millions of soldiers are rushing into arms, an' falling in 'eaps on the gory field of massage". She departed, slamming the door.

"A queer woman, Tinker!" murmured Sexton Blake.

"U.J. No. 589. "Private Tinker - A.S.C.")

Mrs. Bardell was doing her early morning dusting and cleaning when Blake came in from the street.

"Lor' sir", she exclaimed, "when did you go out? I thought you were still abed."

"I've given up sleeping", Blake replied, "it wastes such a lot of time".

Mrs. Bardell sniffed disgustedly. "Out after them crooks again I suppose", she remarked. "Why they don't keep respectable hours like other people, I can't understand. Trapesin' about all night with them jimmies. Flyin' in the face of Providence, I calls it".

Later there came a prolonged ringing at the doorbell, and presently Mrs. Bardell's voice expostulating with the caller.

"Mr. Blake's engaged with that Defective Suspector Coutts of the Criminal Indigestion Compartment, and can't see no one".

(U.J. No. 1422 "Mr. Midnight")

# HAMILTONIANA

Compiled by HERBERT LECKENBY

STILL BEING QUOTED: The following para. appeared in the "Record Mirror" February 8th:

"Paul Whitsun-Jones gives again his goofy caricature of an Oriental Chief of Police. He trots tremulously about his nimble rotundity reminding one of the classic Greyfriars cliché: "Bunter's fat little legs fairly twinkled as he sped across the quad". Thanks to Cyril Banks for the cutting.

\* \* \* \* \*

## Northern / Midland Quiz

This proved rather difficult to judge for whereas Northern took the questions collectively, four Midland members submitted separate efforts, in several instances differing.

However, after a little brow wrinkling I decided that Northern came out rather easy winner thus: Northern: 13 points, Midland  $8\frac{1}{2}$  points. Evidently the questions were rather tough.

\* \* \* \* \*

WE'VE A HUMOURIST IN OUR CIRCLE: Last month I announced that I had received two mysterious and amusing letters. Well, since I have had three more. The five of them were on show at the Leeds O.B.B.C. meeting and caused no little hilarity, in fact the biggest laugh heard there for months. There was also admiration for the artistry of the unknown writer (or writers) that I was urged to give them as much space as possible in the C.D. for the benefit of the fraternity as a whole. Well, I was all for it, so here's the story.

When I get my mail each morn I can usually tell from whom they come even when the address is typewritten. There were two on January 24th I could not recognise: one typewritten on a good quality foolscap white envelope, the other neatly addressed in handwriting. I opened the foolscap one first, then opened my eyes in surprise. It bore a printed heading, Greyfriars School, with address, 'phone number and members of the staff. The type for the name and address was "Old English" just the very sort that would have been used if Greyfriars had existed - a perfect touch. The letter was signed H.S. Quolch. I opened the second - it was signed - H. Vernon Smith. And not to keep you in suspense any

longer here they are in full:

GREYFRIARS SCHOOL

Telephone  
and Telegrams:  
Courtfield 242.

Friardale,  
Near Courtfield,  
Kent.

24th January, 1956.

Dear Mr. Leckenby,

I trust that you will excuse the liberty I am taking in seeking your assistance in a matter which is of great interest to me, and which, I dare hope, may prove of some small interest to your goodself.

You will doubtless be aware that I have been engaged for some years in writing a "History of Greyfriars School". This work is now approaching the period from 1908 to the present day, a phase of Greyfriars history in which I feel that I have myself played a small part.

Under such circumstances even schoolmasters are apt to evade the impartiality necessary when dealing with the subject. I like to think well of all, colleagues and boys alike, with whom I have dealings in my every-day life; nevertheless, to paint my characters correctly I would undoubtedly give occasion for offence. Mr. Prout would, for example, be somewhat embarrassed to learn my precise appreciation of his boorish ramblings in Common Room. Mr. Hacker would most certainly object to a colleague's analysis of an uncertain temper in the form room.

The ascendancy of a more detached point of view over my own, when dealing with these and other matters of a similar nature, is obvious. It is to this end that I seek your help.

You are, I understand, very well acquainted with the Greyfriars School life. Like myself, you love and understand the scene I have known for almost fifty years. Mr. Leckenby, you are eminently suitable to be my collaborator in this enterprise.

If you can agree to join me I shall be very happy to forward you copies of correspondence from the school archives. These letters should prove an additional aid to your own retentive memory.

I shall await with interest an indication of your agreement. Come, Mr. Leckenby, let us together write Chapters CXXX to CXLV, the final but not the least glorious pages of a "History of Greyfriars School".

Yours very truly,  
(Signed) H.S. QUELCH.

\*\*\*\*\*

Greyfriars School,  
25 January.

Dear Mr. Leckenby,

I happen to learn (though please do not ask how) that Quelch was enlisting your aid in writing the last chapters of his pet "History of Greyfriars".

My own opinion is that this dreary work should be spiced up a bit, and I am the fellow to help in that spicing up!! For obvious reasons no acknowledgment to source would have to be attributed should I supply you with this type of material. The credit can be all yours!!

So if you want new light thrown on Prouts "adventures" in the "Rockies"; Hacker's miserliness; Loder's route at midnight to the "Three Fishers"; "Bunter Court" or Price's fate with the gee gees, then I'm your man!

Do not reply to the school - Quelch sees all our letters - but address me c/o "The Cross Keys". A friend there will keep any mail till I can pay a visit.

If you can recognise a good thing when you see it try "Winsome Winnie" in the Rookham Stakes at 3.15 next Friday at Lantham. I got that tip right from the horses mouth!

Come, Mr. Leckenby, (as Quelch would say) let us together, you and I, pep up the last remaining chapters of that dreary work a "History of Greyfriars School".

Sincerely,  
(Signed) H. VERNON SMITH.

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Later came two more letters, one from Bunter, needless to say illiterate and with many blots, and the other from Fisher T. Fish offering his help, at a price. Then a further one from Mr. Quelch saying he was aware of his pupils impudence and that they had been accommodated with five hundred lines apiece. I regret I cannot find room for these but I can assure you they are all in character.

Well, I am sure you will agree that our genius has a merry wit and has got right into the skin of Mr. Quelch, also that he

is the hand behind those other characters. And in the manner of Sexton Blake I'll try a little deduction, thus:

The Quelch letters were done on a typewriter (if not by himself by a lady confederate) in a good class business office or Government Department; judging by the envelope probably the former, and that they were posted on the way home to another part of London. Further, the three handwritten letters, though there's a clever attempt at disguise, were done by the one and the same hand.

Anyway I invite whoever is wearing the gown of Mr. Quelch to reveal himself so that I can congratulate him on a real work of art, and to thank him for providing quite a number of laughs for fifteen members of both sexes who had got together in Leeds on a wintry evening.

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DO YOU REMEMBER?

By Roger. M. Jenkins

No. 16 - Boys' Friend 3d. Libraries Nos. 288 & 328

Charles Hamilton wrote only two stories centring around Highcliffe, but each was a veritable jewel and both have now become collectors' items. They were published in the Boys' Friend monthly library in 1915, a year in which the Magnet and Gem were in a state of relative decline, but there can be no doubt about the excellence of these two stories, which were never surpassed by anything else the author wrote in the earlier days.

No. 288 entitled "The Boy Without a Name" appeared on New Year's Day, 1915, though it had been written before the outbreak of war. There was nothing remarkable about the plot - a new boy named Clare arrived at Highcliffe on a scholarship. His antecedents were unknown, and he had been brought up by a sea captain. Ponsonby (surely the most villainous schoolboy Charles Hamilton ever depicted) led a campaign against him, in which he was abetted by the snobbish Mr. Mobbs, who toadied to all boys who had wealthy or aristocratic connections. This is sufficient to form the basis of a very readable story, one might suppose, but why should it have been rated by Charles Hamilton as one of his very best? The secret lies in the presentation of the character of Rupert de Courcy, the Caterpillar.

The Caterpillar was one of the most fascinating characters Charles Hamilton ever created, and was quite wasted at a minor school like Highcliffe. Now and again Magnet readers would catch

another glimpse of him, but he was never allowed to play such a large part again. Cardew of St. Jim's was his nearest counterpart, but Cardew was not always presented in a sympathetic light. The Caterpillar was the friend of the reader from first to last, perhaps because his enemy was Ponsonby the villain, not Tom Merry the hero.

The nobodies of Highcliffe (sons of solicitors and doctors who had to work for a living) were too much under Ponsonby's influence to chum with Clare, and it was left to de Courcy to invite him to share his study in this typical manner: "At all events, I shall find you an interestin' study. I shall watch your manners and customs and habits, and so on - it will be as amusin' as keepin' rabbits, and much less trouble. After a term or so, I shall have a real insight into the ways and doin's of the brainy workin' classes". (De Courcy could be equally disconcerting to others: "You see, Franky wasn't trained like us, dear boy. Franky was brought up accordin' to the stern morality of the workin' classes. He'll never get over it. He might know you for a thousand years, Pon, old scout, and he'd never take to gamblin' or smokin' or drinkin' or tellin' lies. It's a matter of trainin'.) Acquaintance ripened into friendship, and in the end the Caterpillar had the satisfaction of knowing that Clare was the son of Major Courtenay, the rich uncle of whom Ponsonby had hitherto entertained high expectations.

It is interesting to note how the contemporary Magnets dealt with this situation. No. 344 which appeared in September 1914 mentioned the arrival at Highcliffe of a new boy named Clare, but the circumstances were quite different: he was not a scholarship boy and his arrival aroused no antagonism. This could not have been our Clare. No. 374 dated April 1915 refers to Courtenay's earlier difficulties, however, and is the first obvious reference in the Magnet to "The Boy Without a Name".

No. 328 of the Boys' Friend Library entitled "Rivals and Chums" was that rare bird - a sequel which lived up to its predecessor. Courtenay had now become ~~fox~~ captain, and Ponsonby was full of hatred for the newcomer who had supplanted him. To add to the fun, Mr. Banks had installed a roulette game in a house in Courtfield, to which the Caterpillar was irresistably attracted. In this story Charles Hamilton devoted more space than he ever again permitted himself to an explanation of roulette, the various systems of the punters, and the way in which de Courcy realised, stage by



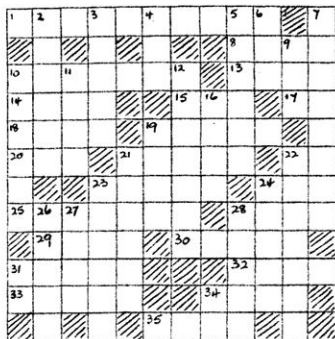
stage, that it was impossible to beat the bank. Ponsonby reached the nadir of his infamous career when he informed the police about Mr. Banks' gaming house the night he knew de Courcy would be going, and then sent Courtenay after him, hoping that they would both be arrested together. Needless to say, all his plotting came to naught, and the story ended with Courtenay determined never to trust his cousin again.

This pair of stories illustrates, perhaps better than any other, the essential quality of timelessness in Charles Hamilton's writings. He was not concerned with topicality, the latest invention, the newest fad: all these become stale, weary, and unprofitable overnight. Topicality dates, the latest invention is soon an everyday matter not worthy of comment, and the newest fad becomes old-fashioned in a moment. These two Highcliffe stories on the other hand, are timeless because they deal with human nature in its varying facets; since human nature never changes, they remain as intriguing today as they were forty years ago. This it is that "The Boy Without a Name" and "Rivals and Chums" bear witness to the fact that Charles Hamilton wrote not for the moment, but for all time.

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MAGNET TITLES (Cont'd): 1543, Menace from the East; 1544, The Greyfriars Crusoes; 1545, The Boy Who Couldn't Run Straight; 1546, Coker Takes Control; 1547, Coker's Big Idea; 1548, Skip of the Remove; 1549, The Outcast of the School; 1550, Bad Lad Smithy; 1551, The Big Bang at Greyfriars; 1552, The Schoolboy Slouth; 1553, The Runaway Schoolboy; 1554, Skip's Lucky Break; 1555, Bunter's Orders; 1556, My Lord Bunter; 1557, King of the Castle, 1558 The Wraith of Reynham Castle, 1559, Lord Bunter's Bodyguard; 1560, Bunter's Big Blunder; 1561, Billy Bunter's Rich Relation.

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REQUIRED "MAGNET" 1025, also about Thirty Numbers "BOY'S FRIEND" Green Weekly for Years 1916, 1921, 1922 and 1923 to complete volumes for binding. Also interested in "BOY'S FRIEND" Weeklies for years 1916/1920 and 1924 to end. HIGH CASH PRICES OFFERED also CONSIDER OFFERING RED "MAGNETS" (pre 1914) and "ROOKWOOD" S.O.L's in EXCHANGE or PART EXCHANGE. R.H. HUNTER, CAIXA POSTAL 366, SANTOS, ESTADO DE SAO PAULO, BRAZIL.

FOR EXCHANGE ONLY: 50 "GEMS" between 1934/39, 4 "POPULARS" (2nd Series). List on application to: B. MORLEY, 4 DANETHORPE VALE, SHERWOOD, NOTTINGHAM.

"COLLECTOR'S DIGEST" PRIZE CROSSWORD. No. 1

Set by Eric Fayne.

We hope that solving this puzzle may provide you with five minutes' amusement. Just to add to the interest, a postal order for 5/- will be posted to the sender of the first correct solution opened by the Editor.

If you do not wish to cut your C.D., make a careful copy of the square.

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ACROSS 1. Could be a mere valet of Greyfriars.

8. Tom Merry & Co. had the wind up over the Alps in 1939.  
 10. Masters swim around in the Ryll and the Sark. 13. Harry Wharton sometimes had one with Mr. Quelch. 14. A hundred had, in Africa. 15. Add to it from George Kerr. 17. See 31 down.  
 18. It might be thus. 19. Dixon of the old detective tales.  
 20. Gore loses his horse. 21. To be silent, as Mons. Charpentier might express it. 22. The start and finish of Greene. 23. Could this describe one of Frank Nugent's worries? 24. This, in Kerr, is to make a mistake. 25. An acquaintance of Sexton Blake. 28. Bunter likes his well-laden. 29. Major Cherry's came from his army days. 30. See 7. 31. Fish should be accustomed to this. 32. This fellow has a long nose, and is three-quarters strange. 33. Lincoly, that hard worker, loses his tea, and helps to make the wheels go round. 34. Nipper is the noted one at St. Frank's. 35. See 7.

- DOWN 2. Lovell at home. 3. Where the Northern Branch leads!  
 4. Force. 5. Exhausted, and ends up with a holiday. 6. Eggs, but no concern of Fisher T. 7. (with 30 & 35). How Martin Clifford's work was once described. (five words, 3, 5, 5, 1, 3).  
 9. Herr Gans wasn't one apparently. 10. Miss Meadows had one in

the Backwoods. 11. Speed from which Bunter ate. 12. The reverse of a schoolboy lark. 16. New House impersonator. 19. A report from 25. 21. Surely the prince of assistants. 22. He wrote prolifically of Sexton Blake. 23. Tom Merry's pal seems to be singular. 24. Bloomer made by Kerr or Figgins. 26. He put Billy Bunter down the well. 27. The umpire put it on. 28. A superstitious object. Shades of "Rose Marie"! 31 (with 17) Hazeldene lacks a back one. 34. Definitely masculine part of the Shell.

Solution, and name of prize-winner in our next issue.

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## Nelson Lee

### Column

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By JACK WOOD,  
NOSTAW, 328, Stockton Lane,  
YORK.



I don't know about anyone else, but I am writing this month's Column in surroundings as snowbound as anything which ever appeared in the pages of the Companion Papers.

Snow everywhere, and more falling with a persistency which would have done credit to Edwy Searles Brooks at his most descriptive. Shades, indeed, of the familiar Christmas numbers!

What with the weather and the effects of the printers' dispute, I seem to have been rushed off my feet lately, so I hope my correspondents will excuse me if I seem longer than usual in replying to any letters. In the circumstances, I am very grateful for articles, both received and promised, as it will be a month or two before I can find the leisure for the necessary research to continue our tour of the St. Frank's countryside.

Herewith, then, the first of a number of enjoyable articles I

have in hand and a warm welcome to an old friend.

THE STRENGTH AND WEAKNESS OF EDWY SEARLES BROOKS

by Frank Urwin

This is not a comparison between Frank Richards and Edwy Searles Brooks; their individual styles are so different that comparison would be ridiculous, as ridiculous as comparing the styles of Stanley Matthews and Tom Finney, or Len Hutton and Dennis Compton. Frank Richards has his countless admirers, so has Brooks, together with many who dislike his work intensely. Much of what I have to say will not meet with the agreement of my very good friend, Norman Pragnell, although Norman will be the first to acknowledge my great affection for the St. Frank's stories, and I should like, if possible, to stimulate some friendly argument between the Nelson Lee stalwarts of the Old Boys' Book Club.

My very first Nelson Lee was a school-adventure story, and as Brooks excelled at this sort of thing, perhaps that is why the N.L. became my first love. Brooks possessed a very lively imagination, to say the least; he had the gift of surprising the reader with a totally unexpected outcome of some situation, a gift which was so sadly lacking in some of his contemporaries, and, although I have always been a fervent admirer of Frank Richards and all his works, I do not remember reading one single yarn of his which contained an ending that did not conform to my expectations. Brooks very often gave me that extra thrill. His power of description was vivid, and this, coupled with his lively imagination, helped even his lost-worlds to become almost real. I must confess, though, to my very solid and realistic brain, much of this type of work was far-fetched, and very often Brooks was carried away by sheer enthusiasm from a grand adventure-story to such a height of fantasy as to make the yarn rather ridiculous. It is, however, so easy to criticise from the ripe old age of 39; the fact remains that at the age of 14 or 15 this was a fault of Brooks which added spice to the stories. Certainly, no yarn of his ever descended to such a shambles as the recent Quatermass II, much as so many people profess to have enjoyed it. At 14 we always enjoyed the impossible and the supernatural, and we accepted it because we were schoolboys sharing in the hair-raising adventures of Nipper and Handforth and Nelson Lee and the others.

E.S.B.'s "lost world" masterpieces were not so impossible when one considers that even now there are experts who still believe that somewhere in South America there lies a Lost World, completely cut off from civilisation by high mountains and huge swamps. Because I consider this very far-fetched does not mean that such a place does not exist, perhaps rather the reverse, in fact.

When Brooks concentrated on school stories he soon discovered that he was really expert at this, too. Perhaps it was natural that St. Frank's College, in Sussex, fascinated me far more than Greyfriars and St. Jim's, even though today there is nobody more thoroughly attached to these schools as myself. His gift of characterization was immense, his moulding through the years of such magnificent characters as Handforth, Reggie Pitt, Fatty Little, Archie Glenthorne and Vivian Travers was the work of an expert of his craft. One could imagine almost exactly what Handy looked like even without seeing his picture. The ancient walls of St. Frank's were more real to me than those of any other school in fiction.

Yet I wish to write about his weaknesses also, and among his greatest weaknesses was Nipper. Now there are many of Brooks' greatest admirers who consider Nipper to be his finest creation, and I most respect their opinions. To me he was a first-class bore, a "smart Alec", a youth who possessed more knowledge of all and sundry than was reasonably possible, and one who was never at fault, whose judgement never failed him. Many a good story has been completely ruined for me by the sickening complacency of the great Nipper, and this was even worse when the yarns were "told by Nipper himself". One other weakness of the school yarns was the amazing reformation of Ralph Leslie Fullwood. A more despicable and cowardly character has never appeared in schoolboy fiction, with the possible exception of the notorious Pon., and yet here was Fullwood in so short a time becoming one of the models of the St. Frank's Remove. Rather too much to swallow, I'm afraid. Just imagine Pon. becoming a model of virtue in a matter of weeks! Brooks was rather impulsive, like his great Edward Oswald Handforth, and Fullwood the Good was not nearly so great a character as Fullwood the Rotter.

E.S.B. was never better than in his Christmas Numbers. Nobody else could hold a candle to him at this. His Christmas series featuring the eerie Ezra Quirke was the finest of its kind I have read. Again, his accounts of the inevitable ghostly visitations

were often very far-fetched, but who cares for this when the snow is piling up outside on Christmas Eve, and the wind is moaning, and you are sitting by a blazing fire with the Christmas Number in your hands and a dish of fruit, and nuts and mince-pies at your feet. Talking about surprise endings, it would have been wonderful if, just for once, the Ghost of Raithmere Castle, or the Phantom of Glenthorne Manor, or the Spectre of Handforth Towers had turned out to be — a real ghost!

I have always considered Nelson Lee himself to be Brooks' greatest creation, so much so that had he concentrated on this character in purely detective-yarns he would have proved to have been as big a success on the market as Sexton Blake. Lee was a superb character; when I was a boy he was my hero, not Dick Turpin, or Buffalo Bill, or Sexton Blake, or the Rio Kid. But what a waste of talent when he finally took up the hum-drum profession of house-mastering, and ultimately head-mastering at St. Frank's. St. Frank's, mind you, would not have been the same without him, and yet I cannot imagine such a famous detective, with a heart craving for excitement and adventure, settling down permanently to a life of boredom in the heart of the country. Admittedly there were excitements to break the monotony for him, and then there were the Great Flood and the Great Fire, but here again Brooks demonstrated a weakness of his — impulsiveness. On the other hand, he showed his great gifts again in the creation of the lovable Lord Dorrimore and the strong, shrewd Umlosi.

I have attempted to show some of E.S.B.'s faults, as well as his great qualities. So many people are blind to the faults of their heroes and idols. Brooks certainly possessed his share of faults, sometimes very annoying ones. Don't allow this, however, to blind us to his great gift of being able to write, with equal success, a school-story, a school-detective story, a school adventure story, or a purely detective story. And if, by some wonderful chance, all the pre-war periodicals were to appear in the shop-windows again, I would again be one of the first in the queue, perhaps slightly behind Norman Pragnell, not for the Magnet, nor the Gem, but for the good old Nelson Lee. For, despite my criticisms, Edwy Searles Brooks will always be my favourite school-story writer, and St. Frank's the finest school of them all.

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(NOTE: As will be seen from the London Club report, Frank Lay

is in touch with E.E. Briscoe the artist who drew those splendid sketches of schools in the Nelson Lee Library. Developments will be watched with interest. H.L.)

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## Old Boys' Book Club

### LONDON SECTION

A snowstorm did not deter an excellent and distinguished company of members attending chairman Len's abode at East Dulwich on Sunday, February 19th, after an interval of eight months, last meeting here was in June of last year. The host back to normal good health is to be congratulated on a very fine and happy meeting during which much was accomplished. Highlight was Charlie Wright's reading on "Memories and Highlights of the London Club". Great applause greeted the reader at the conclusion. Hamiltonian section of library was reported by Roger Jenkins to be doing good business. Frank Vernon-Lay gave a good account of the Nelson Lee section, full list of what can be borrowed will appear in the club's newsheet. He stated that the popular Ezra Quirke series has quite a demand and finally he gave the good news that he has finally located E. Briscoe, the famous artist of the "Nelson Lee and the Gem". Following a good quiz that was compiled at the meeting by Bob Whiter a very good general discussion took place as to future programmes and in this matter very good progress was made. Many thanks Josie and Len for a very enjoyable meeting even if we had to go home in the snow with the South London vistas reminding us of the wintry scenes of the various quads and the famous Triangle at St. Frank's. Next meeting at Wood Green on Sunday, March 18th, 4 p.m.

UNCLE BENJAMIN.

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### NORTHERN SECTION MEETING, FEBRUARY 11th

Despite the cold weather and the snow, a crowd of fifteen gathered round a cheerful looking fire in the Club Room.

Business matters were soon dealt with and we then settled back in our chairs to listen to Herbert give his talk on "Myself and the C.D." Herbert started his talk long before the C.D., back in the pre-war days when he used to correspond with about another half dozen collectors. He told us how these had gradually increased

and when the S.P.C. was suspended owing to the illness of Bill Gender the C.D. was started as a kind of stop gap. But, as Herbert continued, it was such a success that it was decided to carry it on as a regular monthly magazine. All the joys, thrills, trials and tribulations would take too long to tell here, but let us hope that Herbert will write an article on it for a future Annual. All too soon Herbert leaned back and announced that as it was now eight o'clock he thought he ought to close. Of course, we didn't agree with him, so interesting had his talk been, no one had noticed how the clock was going round.

After refreshments, we had our yearly Bunter Drive, the winners this time being Stanley Smith, myself and Miss Jackson in that order.

All too soon it was time for the library to be packed away and for us all to depart our various ways until next month.

Next meeting, March 10th - Roger Jenkins' annual visit. A big attendance is hoped for.

R. HODGSON,

Hon. Sec.

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MIDLAND SECTION MEETING, JANUARY, 30th

There were two major items on the Agenda for this evening; namely the Northern Quiz, and our Headmaster's defence of Hamilton stories.

The usual preliminaries disposed of, we were soon stuck into the quiz. The stuckfulness was terrific, although with the exception of a few real teasers the questions were very fair and reasonable and indeed interesting. Much amusement was caused by helpful prompting by, of all people, our Big Beak.

After refreshments we gathered again to hear Mr. Ingram's reply to Treasurer Norman. Mr. Ingram began with a few general remarks on the excellence of Frank Richards' work, and claimed that it had stood the greatest of all tests; the test of time.

But the best way of demonstrating literary merits is to let the authors speak for themselves; so Mr. Ingram intended to give two comparative readings showing how Finemore and Richards made their respective headmasters conduct a judicial enquiry.

Unfortunately time only permitted of one reading. We have heard much recently about Teddy Lester's Schooldays, so this reading related how Dr. Balshaw of Slapton School enquired into a case of alleged theft by Teddy Lester.



We are to hear the other reading as to how Dr. Locke enquired into a charge against Bunter at a later date. But quite clearly Dr. Locke would never outrage the canons of natural justice in the way Dr. Balshaw did. On no more "evidence" than an anonymous letter Teddy was already assumed to be guilty. On a much less serious matter of breaking bounds Teddy was asked several times to name his companions. Definitely not Greyfriars style, either to assume a man guilty until he is proved innocent or to encourage sneaking.

But we must wait a while to hear how Dr. Locke "grills" Bunter.

EDWARD DAVEY.

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MERSEYSIDE SECTION

12th February, 1956

The main topic for discussion was the forthcoming Exhibition of Old Boys Books to be held at Bootle Art Gallery and Museum from April 9th - 21st. The Chairman stated all arrangements had been made and Mr. Hardman, the Director of the Library had confessed to reading Nelson Lee in his youth, and would assist us in every possible way. Final details will be discussed at next meeting.

The latter part of the evening was devoted to a "Find the Link" Quiz, which was not so easy as it appeared. It was pleasing to see Jim Walsh a winner again, but only by the narrow margin of one point over Pat Laffey. The Club are very anxious to secure some new books for the Library (particularly S.O.L's). Can any reader assist? If so, a line to Don Webster would be answered quickly. Next Meeting - SUNDAY, MARCH 11th - 7.0 p.m. prompt.

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S A L E : "YOUNG BRITAINS" Nos. 51 to 87 and 103 to 128 (All consec.)  
 "BOYS REALM", New Series, Nos. 2 to 40 (1927) (Consec.)  
 "SKIPPERS" 49 copies 1932-40  
ALL GOOD CONDITION 6d. each. Post Extra.  
CHAMPION ANNUALS 1938, 1940, 3/6 each and postage.

W A N T E D : "YOUNG BRITAIN" No. 32, Jan. 17th, 1920,  
 Nos. 185 to finish of series.  
NEW SERIES Nos. 1 to 16, 19, 29, 35, 37, 39 (1923-24)

J.R. SWAN, 3 FIFTH AVENUE, PADDINGTON, LONDON, W.10.

## LETTER BOX

APPRECIATION

c/o Royal Mail Agencies (Brazil) Ltd.,  
Brazil, South America.

10th February, 1956.

Dear Herbert,

Very many thanks for your two letters dated the 28th Jan. and 5th Feb.

Although I do not now require the extra copy of "C.D. Annual" (owing to the original one having turned up) I must thank you very much indeed for the kind offer contained in your first letter when, on receiving my "S.O.S.", you immediately offered to have an extra copy made up for me. This is the sort of thing one has grown to expect from you over the years but just in case you should ever think that all this is taken for granted, please accept my assurance that so far as I am concerned, this is definitely not the case. One doesn't write much about these things but believe me Herbert, I was deeply touched by your utter devotion to the hobby and readiness to help a fellow collector and I am very grateful. I shan't say any more on this subject but I really mean this - and thanks again.

Yours sincerely,

RONALD HUNTER.

(It warmed my heart on a wintry day. H.L.)

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CAN YOU HELP?

14, A.M.Q., R.A.F.,  
Custon, Newcastle on Tyne.  
31.12.55.

Dear Sir,

I have been advised to write to you by Mr. John Derry of Nottingham. He suggests that you might be able to help me in a rather difficult quest.

Early in 1934 I had a story accepted by Thomson's of Dundee, and it was published in one of their boys' papers (Adventure, Rover or Wizard) sometime during that year. The title used was 'Jerry's Jolt from the Blue'.

I never managed to see it in print, although I did try. I should like very much to obtain a copy of the paper containing the story and I would pay a good price for it.

I know it would not be easy to trace, but I should be extremely grateful if you could get me a copy or suggest any means of getting one. I have already tried Thomsons without success.

I am hazy about dates, but think that it could have been any week in 1934.

I hope that you may be able to help me and look forward to hearing from you.

Yours faithfully,

J.L. McDUFF.

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RATHER LATE IN THE DAY

63 Fifth Avenue,  
Queen's Park,  
London, W.10.

Jan. 9th.

Dear Mr. Leckenby,

I work at "W.H. Smith & Sons" and perhaps the following incident which happened last week would make a "Par" for the C.D. Whilst serving on the bookstall a man came up and asked quite calmly for a copy of the "Magnet". I thought, (as you must think) he must be either insane or pulling my leg, so I called the manager and the customer repeated his demand to him. On being told the Magnet ceased publication in 1940, he seemed quite astonished. He then asked if there was another publication like that, e.g. the "Gem" or "Popular". On being told again that those papers ceased publication long ago he went away quite mystified. I do not know whether you will believe this or not but I can quite truthfully say that it really did happen!

Yours sincerely,

R.V. GARTH. (Mr.)

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"OFFERS INVITED FOR A CLEAN COPY OF THE MINIATURE "MAGNET" of 1911.  
THOMSON, 58, BOSWALL TERRACE, EDINBURGH.

FOR SALE: Boys' Friend Libraries, 1st series, 2/3 each. 2nd series  
1/4 each. Post Free. J. HEPBURN, 1 SIXTH AVENUE, BLYTH,  
NORTHUMBERLAND.

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IT SURPRISED FRANK RICHARDS!

February 25th, 1956.

Dear Herbert Leckenby,

I was very much interested in Bill Lofts' letter in the latest C.D. Hinton certainly was a writer as well as an editor, but I did not know that he was "Prosper Howard". It is curious that he never told me, for he often discussed the matter with me: I remember that he put that name on my story "The School Under Canvas", explaining that extraordinary proceeding by saying that it was to give Howard a "leg-up": and on another occasion he made me write a "Grammar School" story to be inserted in a series then running, to "give a spot of life to it". From which I certainly couldn't have guessed that he was the author himself. Authors are not often so modest about their works!

With kindest regards,

Very sincerely,

FRANK RICHARDS.

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THOSE 'ANNUAL' SUBS. I left this par. until the very last moment in the hope that I should be able to report that the thirty subs. outstanding last month had all come in. Unfortunately they hav'n't, for just half have been paid. However, if we can make the same progress during this month I'll start writing my next chat in relieved and happy mood.

Just a word about another 'Annual' matter. There seems to be a pretty strong body of opinion that it is unwise to publish the voting figures. Well, I agree that there's something to be said for this point of view so we'll drop them. Personally, I did feel rather embarrassed about publishing them last month, but it just happened that way.

I hope, however, that you will continue to send in the forms with the more comments the better, for they are all useful to me. I can also assure contributors that every article received strong support and there was hardly any criticism, except that the usual too much or too little on some particular topic, which goes to prove that you can't please everyone hundred per cent.

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