

THE COLLECTORS' DIGEST

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DECEMBER 1956

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—THE COLLECTORS' DIGEST—

Vol. 11 No. 120

Price 1s. 6d.

DECEMBER, 1956

Editor, HERBERT LECKENBY,
12 Herbert Street,
Hull Road, York
or
c/o YORK DUPLICATING SERVICES,
12A The Shambles, York.

FROM THE EDITOR'S CHAIR

Wishing all the Members of the Brotherhood of
Happy Hours at Home and Overseas a very Good
Christmas and Prosperous New Year.

* * * * *

END OF A DECADE. At this time each year I review the past twelve months; on this occasion there's special gratification for this number sees the completion of the tenth year - 120 numbers promptly sent off and in addition that now famous No. 3A. A great achievement only made possible because the little magazine has such a band of staunch loyal supporters through thick and thin. I have dwelt on many of the events on previous occasions so here I will comment briefly on the past twelve months.

It has been my good fortune to be able to publish many outstanding articles, 'inside' news which has added materially to our knowledge of the books we think so much about, and there's more to come.

Once again the circulation has increased: it is now higher than ever before. Among new chums, several are overseas. There's been a sad side though for I have had to delete three names from the mailing list as King Death has taken them from our midst - Hugh Fennell, Percy North and George Grainger. In addition we felt the loss of Mr. H. J. Garrish and Mr. Ernest E. Briscoe who for many years worked for the papers we take a pride in collecting.

Then there was my own personal loss. Never shall I forget the letters which came to solace me following that tragic night in June.

Sometimes in the quiet of the evening I turn to them and read them over again. Morbid? No, I don't think so, for they hearten me and spur me on in the work I hope I shall be spared to do on into another decade.

* * * * *

THE ANNUAL. Now to the Tenth Annual. Every year I have been up against the problem of finding room for all the excellent articles submitted. This year my dilemma has been bigger than ever. It is impossible to increase the size so eventually I decided to leave out the "Who's Who" except for the details of the newcomers and the changes in addresses where old members are concerned. The "Who's Who" is a valuable feature but I think it will be agreed it can be dispensed with for once. My apologies, though, to those who have troubled to fill in the Questionnaire for nothing - anyway, you will have more straightforward reading matter.

As usual, a number have not yet sent in your orders, no doubt taking it for granted I should know they would want one. It would make it easier for my peace of mind, though, if I knew for certain. I've risked it and ordered a record number, but I can't afford to have any left on my hands, so you will act at once, won't you?

Bill of fare appears on another page.

* * * * *

BILLY BUNTER'S OWN. In reply to numerous enquiries, I regret to say there will not be a "Billy Bunter's Own" this year. When last in London I called at the premises of Mandeville Publications and found the place deserted and the name plate missing at the entrance. A pity but there were ominous signs last year.

* * * * *

And now, just to mark in a modest way, the completion of the tenth year, I am giving you four extra pages.

Yours sincerely,

HERBERT LECKENBY.

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BLOODS AND THE DRAMA

by Dick Milton

author of In the Days of "The Dreadfuls" etc.

In the early 'fifties,' 'sixties' and 'seventies,' several enterprising publishers, catering for youth, launched on the penny-number book market a series of sanguinary and highly sensational narratives dealing with all kinds and conditions of rogues, rascals, prison-breakers, highwaymen, pirates, fierce buccaneers and other adventurous spirits — their exploits and deeds of daring, evil and praiseworthy being illustrated with bold and vivid woodcuts, which, when seen through the shop window panes, whetted the appetites of boys from eight to eighty. Many of us of mature age can look back to those early days when publishers like Lloyd, Brett, Fox, The Aldine Co., and others, exhibited their tempting literary wares in the newsagent's front window, or on the railway bookstalls, to catch the eye of enthusiastic youths who, like myself, were born with a passion for thrilling romances and dramas.

When a "blood" became popular, and was of sufficient interest to deserve dramatisation, theatrical managers, London and provincial, swooped down upon the narrative, wrote a stage version and presented it nightly to packed houses. To enumerate only a few which, in my boyhood, I witnessed at Sadlers Wells, The Marylebone, The Pavilion, The Olympic, The Novelty, The Brit, The Standard, etc.: "Jack Sheppard" (eight versions, including Ainsworths'), "Cartouche," (the French rival of Jack), "Dick Turpin" (at several theatres and one or two circuses), "Sixteen String Jack," "Claude Duval," "Robert Macaire" (including Irving's Lyceum presentation), "Jonathan Wild," "Sweeney Todd" (I saw a dozen different versions of the sanguinary shaver), "The Dumb Man of Manchester," "Mary Price" (G.W.R. Reynold's romance), "Margaret Catchpole," the Suffolk heroine (I saw several versions, the best of all being Laurence Irving's production in 1911-12), "The Lyons Mail" (founded on authentic narratives, published in various cheap, highly-spiced periodicals), "Charles Peace" (adapted from the penny number publication), "Buffalo Bill," "Spring Heeled Jack," "Jack Rushton" or "Alone in the Pirates' Lair" (published in "Boys of England"), "Guy Fawkes," "Vidocq, the French Police Spy." The fore-

going melodramas were presented at the theatres enumerated above. But, during my wide peregrinations throughout the British Isles (covering a period of 40 years), I witnessed many unauthorised performances of plays founded on actual fact, i.e., "Dougal, the Moat Farm Murderer" (1904), "John Lee," the man they couldn't hang (1884), Doctor Crippen (1911), "Jack the Ripper" (1887), "Maria Marten" or "The Red Barn Murder" (1828). The dates given above are those on which the crimes took place. There were in the first and second decade of the 20th Century many portable theatres scattered around the countryside from John O'Groats to Lands End. The repertoire included every fearful crime story, murders on land and sea, which were performed to enthusiastic audiences - a different drama every night. And likewise on the Fit-ups, which visited various small towns and villages, where they hired the Town Hall, Assembly Rooms or other buildings which, of course, were licenced for stage plays.

I frequented scores of these itinerant booths and "Ghost Shows". At the latter were shewn weird and uncanny dramas of a spectral nature, the illusion being produced by a huge mirror fixed to the back of the small stage. The versatility of these wandering mummers was wonderful. They could enact any role in the pieces which nightly were performed, the bill, as I said, being changed.

Space precludes my enumerating other "blood" dramas which were staged on the "smalls." But I think that I have said sufficient to enable the reader to realise how the old-time drama was presented to our sires and to ourselves before we had need to use a razor.

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Note:- In the past, some of us (including myself) have been rather severely critical of some of the writers who stood in for the creator of the St. Jim's and Greyfriars stories. Well, as you will see, Bill Lofts has met one of them and got his point of view. It is only fair that he should be given space in our columns to express it.

I have also had several letters from Mr. Cook myself and one thing that has struck me is that maybe the 'stand-ins' were at a disadvantage because they were usually called upon for single stories where they had not room to develop a really dramatic plot in the manner of the master in his famous 'series'. (H.L.)

FRED GORDON COOK - BOYS' AUTHOR

(including "Magnet" and "Gems")

By W.O.G. Lofts.

Foreword:

"Mr. Charles Hamilton's output of work for the Companion Papers was so vast, and the pressure upon him was such, that no Editor could amass more than about two weeks' supply of his manuscripts for the papers, which was far too little for the Editor's peace of mind. It was absolutely essential to have one or more trained understudies available who could take over the series in case of emergency. These writers' stories were held in reserve, and were only used when no copy from Charles Hamilton was available." (This was stated by Maurice Down, who was Editor of the "Magnet" and "Gem" for over twenty years until it ceased publication in 1940).

Some of these "substitute" writers have been known to us in the past, and recently I have had the pleasure of meeting several of them, foremost being Mr. Fred Cook, who not only gave me a lot of information about his work on the "Magnet" and "Gem" but also a lot of interesting data about his own writing achievements in the boys' writing field which I am sure will be of great interest to all C.D. readers.

Fred Cook as a schoolboy was weaned on the "Magnet" and "Gem;" he knew every character by heart and their associations, histories, study numbers; and could visualise every inch, nook and cranny of Greyfriars and St. Jim's. He attended the St. Marylebone Grammar School which, incidentally, is only a few minutes from where I live. Little did he dream that one day he would be writing stories of the

schools he loved so well, although he always had a hankering to be an author and see his name in print.

Upon leaving school he first worked as a junior clerk in a Chartered Accounts office; but having the itch to write he left not long after and started to write for "Chums" in 1918. F. Knowles Campling was Editor in those days. Also at this time he was submitting small articles for publication in the "Greyfriars Herald" which were all accepted by J.N. Pentelow - who was Editor at the time. When Pentelow left office and H.A. Hinton took over, he was invited to write full length "Magnet" and "Gems" for the reasons stated earlier. Hinton had stated to Mr. Cook how much he was impressed by his knowledge of the two schools, and after several stories paid him a very high compliment in stating that "he got nearer to the Hamilton style than any of the other 'stand-in' writers." Mr. Cook was also amazed when he learned from Hinton that Martin Clifford, Frank Richards and, of course, Charles Hamilton were one and the same!

His first Magnet story was in 1919, No. 591, "Weggie of the Remove" and he continued to write stories for both papers for many years. Also of course, still during this time, he continued to write for "Chums"; Tubby Haig's for Newnes, their comic "Merry Moments" and as a rewriter of the American originals of the "Nick Carter," "Buffalo Bill" and "Treasure Trove" Libraries (Pirates) of which Newnes had bought the British rights. This was, of course, the same office as the "Captain" with Reeves Shaw as Editor-in-Chief, and Augustus Baker as second in command. He was also the author of the "Stringer, the Demon Footballer" series in the "Boys' Realm" in 1921, followed by the "Teddy Heron's Schooldays" series. Mr. Cook was able to give me a lot of useful information about Authors and Pen-names who wrote for the above papers which I will disclose another time.

A great point of interest is that he confesses to having written several stories for the "Nelson Lee Library" in 1921 featuring St. Frank's; this disproves the theory that E.S. Brooks wrote all those yarns. It was at the express wish of Willie Back, a Director of the A.P. When he ceased writing for the "Magnet" and "Gem" he started to write a very popular series of school stories for the "Boys' Magazine" featuring the "Boys of St. Giddy's" and also a number of humorous yarns that were illustrated by a very well known comic artist in the "Daily Mirror" today, Jack Greenall, creator of "Useless Eustace" who has been drawing them for over 20 years. A very strange coincidence about these school stories was that when Mr. Cook had to drop out for

one reason or another, the series were so popular with readers that the editors concerned - Bernard Buley and Stanley H. Nelson - had to employ "substitute" writers to take over!

A very big surprise for myself was when Mr. Cook told me that he wrote stories for a boys' paper entitled "Toby" in 1926. I must confess that I had never heard of this paper before; but was even more surprised to learn that the editor, when stories written by Mr. Cook about "Madcaps of Merrydew" appeared, was none other than Gwyn Evans! The irresponsible Gwyn did not last long, but the paper itself had a run of over 10 years.

Besides a lot of now forgotten work for "Rover," "Adventure" and other Thomson papers, Fred Cook wrote a story in the "Detective Weekly" under the name of Bruce Chaverton.

Various pen-names used by Mr. Cook are as follows: Fred G. Cook, F. Gordon Cook(e), Fred Smeaton, Burleigh Carew, Vincent Owen and, of course, Bruce Chaverton. As any reader can now see, quite a varied and wonderful record of writing, one of which any writer would be proud.

Now regarding his work for the "Magnet" and "Gem." Much has been written in the past of the "substitute," "ghost," "ersatz" and even the very objectional word in Fleet Street jargon "hack" writers. It must be very clearly understood that the characters of Greyfriars and St. Jim's were the creation of Charles Hamilton; no-one could write about the characters as he could. His style was inimitable, and one can really understand his feelings to see the children of his creative mind being written about by other writers. All these other writers look, and still look on Hamilton as a genius, and the maestro of them all. Of all school story writers there will never be another such as he.

It must be remembered, however, that all these "Alternative" writers were all well known and established writers in their own particular fields, and they were keenly sought after by the Editors of the "Magnet" and "Gem" (Pentelow, Hinton and Down). None were obscured "hacks" who went begging cap in hand for such crumbs as might have been going from Room 53 at Fleetway House, neither does it detract from their reputations that they may have had to alter their own styles to imitate that of Charles Hamilton. To the contrary, it proved that these writers were very versatile. When Mr. Cook was invited by H.A. Hinton to write full length "Magnet" and "Gem" yarns, he derived much pleasure from it, as well as gain, but he still remained a consis-

tant "Chums" writer during this period and did not retire into limbo when such activities were discontinued.

As already stated, Mr. Cook's first "Magnet" story was "Weggie of the Remove" and after all these years it may not be possible to give a 100 per cent list of all his stories, although I may try later when he has had time to peruse through years of his work. In many cases the Editor used to alter the title as submitted to him, which made things more difficult still. But Mr. Cook can state with almost certainty that he wrote the following stories for the "Magnet" :- 591, 599, 607, 610, 618, 626, 634, 638, 641, 656, 657, 665, 669, 670, 675, 678, 685, 692, 699, 702, 713, 728, 767, 785, 801, 802, 817, 824, 833, 845, 850, 890, 895, 937, 944 and possibly others. He wrote about twice as many stories for the "Gem" and it is hoped to give a full list of them at a later date.

One evening, I, with Mr. Cook, paid a visit to Mr. Rossiter Shepherd, the very well known film critic of the "People."

Mr. Shepherd was able to give me such a vast amount of information about his own and other authors' work at the A.P. during the early 20's that I have not yet sorted it out. This will appear in future articles in the C.D. Mr. Shepherd also wrote many stories for the "Magnet" starting with "Sleepers of the Remove" No. 697, in 1921. A real mine of information is Mr. Shepherd, and I and Mr. Cook spent many hours talking about the old papers.

As stated earlier, Mr. Cook very kindly gave me some names of "Alternative" writers on the "Magnet" and "Gem" who have not, I think, been known before; these with names already in my records now read like this:-

- John Nix Pentelow - First Editor of the "Magnet" and school story writer.
- G.R. Samways - To my knowledge only wrote "Magnets" and "Gems," went to school with Mr. Twyman.
- Michael Poole - Writer of all types of stories, also Anthony Thomas.
- Hedley O'Mant - Sub-Editor of the "Magnet," also as Hedley Scott, author.
- H.W. Twyman - Editor of "Union Jack" and other papers.
- Rossiter Shepherd - Crime reporter "Daily Express," Editor of "Picturegoer," now film critic of the "People."
- H.A. Hinton - Editor "Magnet" and "Gem" and many other papers. Also the famous Prosper Howard. Killed in railway

- accident some years ago.
- Noel Wood-Smith - Second in command to Maurice Down and very clever inventor. Writer of U.J. yarns, wrote many under name of Norman Taylor.
- Stanley Austin - Foremost writer of all "Subs"; claims to have written between 200-300 "Magnets" and "Gems."
- R.S. Warren-Bell - Editor of "Captain" and well known Author; wrote several yarns in the early years for Pentelow. Died 1921.
- Kenneth Newman - Editor of "School Yarn Magazine" and B.B.C. writer.
- E.S. Brooks - Famous as writer of Nelson Lee and St. Frank's and really needs no introduction to C.D. readers.
- John Wheway - Wrote one or two yarns, but his fame is that he has written nearly all the Bessie Bunter stories for the Girls' papers.
- W.E. Stanton Hope - Has written quite a lot of Blakes, and his output of stories has covered many fields.
- H. Clarke-Hook - Son of the famous S. Clarke-Hook, and a writer for women's papers; also did a lot of work for "Chums" under various names.
- Fred Gordon Cook - Of course now needs no introduction.

Clive Fenn did not write any yarns for the companion papers; this was by his own statement in the 3rd C.D. Annual. This is not of course claimed to be a complete list of all the "Alternative" writers. Some stories were submitted by individual writers whom today it would be almost impossible to trace.

In conclusion, I should like to quote from Mr. Cook: "I wonder - ah! - I wonder if Charles Hamilton would unbend so far as to meet us all together, and let us be friends, and have a good old natter, so that the long disowned "ghosts" could have at least the pleasure of meeting the maestro and the opportunity perhaps of clearing up some misunderstandings."

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Blakiana...

Conducted by JOSEPHINE PACKMAN

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

Browsing through an old copy of "The Stage" Year Book (1916) the other evening, I came across the following item in the "Plays of the Year":

SEXTON BLAKE ON THE EAST COAST, a detective sketch
in 3 scenes, by J. Russell Bogue. January 18th

Sexton Blake	Mr. James Duncan
Tinker	Mr. Lee Gilbert
Pedro	Himself
Sir Wm. Shronhoest	Mr. Chas. A. Carlile
Reginald Martram	Mr. G. Lewes
Police Officer	Mr. A. Douglas
Lady Martram	Miss Carlotta de Yonson

Strangely enough, this was put on at my local theatre - Camberwell Palace.

Well, we do know that there has been at least one real bloodhound named Pedro!

As already stated, next month's Blakiana will contain the first of the series of "Memory Teasers." I hope you will like them.

I take this opportunity of thanking all those who have sent me material for Blakiana and letters throughout the year, and I look forward to your continued support in 1957.

Finally, to all my readers I express a sincere wish for a "Merry Christmas" and a "Happy and Prosperous New Year."

JOSE PACKMAN.

* * * * *

INTERESTING EXTRACTS FROM "THE BLAKE LEGEND"

("Crime Parade" No. 5)

by E. L. Childs

If any detective of fiction can challenge the popularity of Sherlock Holmes, surely it can only be Sexton Blake.....

For nearly sixty years the interminable case-book of Sexton Blake has been rummaged by syndicates of successive authors.... There is no closed shop in the Sexton Blake industry. Anybody who feels inclined to add to the legend is free to try. Turn to "Sexton Blake Library" in the FLEET STREET ANNUAL and you will find that the publishers say:

"The same central characters - Sexton Blake and Tinker - are invariably used, and it is therefore advisable for the writer to familiarise himself with the personalities of these."

Over a hundred authors have written Sexton Blake stories. Some of the names under which they have written are known to be pseudonyms; others have that pseudonymous look about them. It is rumoured that famous authors have written for the series under assumed names in order to make some ready cash - which would account for the literary calibre and sound plot construction of many of the tales....

Obviously, all that is now connoted by the name Sexton Blake had to be built up. At an early age he became hawk-like, aquiline, and acquired the habit of putting on his dressing-gown in order to think.... Clearly, too, he needed someone to look after him, someone old enough and respectable to be called a housekeeper.... Hence Mrs. Martha Bardell, with her genius for mispronunciation and malapropisms. It was a happy stroke, too, to furnish him with a bright boy assistant instead of a bovine creature like Dr. Watson....

To complete the census of the Blake menage we must mention Pedro. This sleuth-hound, though definitely a well-bred animal with an unimpeachable pedigree, might, it seems, from "higher criticism" of the Blake summum, have been either a bloodhound or a bulldog. He was sent to Blake with £100 by a well-wisher who hid his identity under the name of "Mr. Nemo"....

Thus equipped and befriended, Blake was able to settle down to his ordained task of combatting, inter alia, the Brotherhood of the Yellow Beetle; the Criminals' Confederation; George Marsden Plummer, the Scotland Yard renegade; Leon Kestrel, the Master Mummer, whose real features no-one knew; Mr. Mist, the Invisible Man; Dr. Satira; Paul Cynos; the reincarnated Prince Menes; Zenith the Albino; a variety of numerical groups such as the Black Trinity, the Double Four and the Council of Eleven.... and a lesser but equally interminable rout made up of German spies, Soviet spies, anarchists, mad scientists, hooded terrors, crooked lawyers, American racketeers and human bats....

Is the Sexton Blake saga inexhaustible? Miss Dorothy Sayers was

probably thinking of Sexton Blake when she wrote that detective blood-and-thunders were "the nearest approach to a national folk-lore.".... As we all know, Conan Doyle, either from perversity or the drying up of his ideas, finally killed off Sherlock Holmes (though he resurrected him later on). But Blake, who is the creation of no one author in particular*) is immortal.

(*Note:- As is now well-known to readers of Blakiana, the writer was wrong in this statement, for Sexton Blake was created by Harry Blyth. Another thing that should be pointed out to the reader is that this article was written long before the new Blake menage and operational headquarters came into being. J.P.)

* * * * *

MEN OF MYSTERY

by Walter Webb

In the second issue of the "Sexton Blake Annual," Mr. H.W. Twyman, the "Union Jack's" liveliest editor, writing under the same title as the above, gave some very interesting biographical details of a number of authors whom he had, during his term of office, commissioned to write Sexton Blake stories.

It was a most informative article, though far from complete, for whilst it dealt with most of the better known writers from the early twenties to the late thirties, it hardly appeased the appetite of those of us whose memories go a little farther back. As Mr. Twyman's editorial activities on the "Union Jack" lasted between 1921 and 1936, he could hardly have been expected to write with certainty of what occurred in the paper prior to his taking over, of course, and his predecessor, Walter Edwards, having passed on, the ranks of likely informers are now practically non-existent. Probably S. Rossiter Shepherd, the well-known film critic and one-time editor of "Picture-goer," who was Mr. Twyman's assistant on the "Union Jack," could give any further information on the subject.

It may be remembered that just over five years ago, Arthur Southway, of South Africa, was fortunate enough to obtain from A.Press the names of the authors of well over a hundred first series "S.B. Library" stories. The inclusion of such names as W. MURRAY GRAYDON, E.S. BROOKS, MARK OSBORNE, and ANDREW MURRAY was expected, and did not occasion any surprise, but there were several names recorded in that list which failed to ring a bell in the memory of even one Blake

enthusiast or, for that matter, in any collector of the numerous other old boys' papers.

Let us take the case of E. ALAIS first. Who was this writer? Never in the long history of the "Union Jack" was his name ever mentioned in its pages, and, as far as I am aware, neither was it ever printed in any of the companion papers. Tentative enquiries at Fleetway House brought forth the information that ALAIS, who used his own name, was a relative of J. HARWOOD PANTING, a well-known writer of the early years. Further enquiries amongst various editors and authors failed to bring anything definite to light, but one editor, indulging in a bit of theorising, suggested that if Alais was indeed a relative of Panting it was very likely that he was ARNOLD PANTING, a son of the elder man and a brother of PHYLLIS PANTING, who edited various women's publications, now forgotten, and who is now Mrs. Digby Morton. I have some recollection of seeing a photograph of the Digby Morton's produced in the pages of the "Radio Times" a year or so ago in connection with an advertisement for something or other. Arnold Panting, who, it is believed, edited the "Boys' Friend" at one time, was killed in the first World War, yet if Alais was actually the real name of the author, he and Arnold Panting can hardly have been one and the same person. Certainly, the publishing dates of Alais's stories in the "Union Jack" and "Sexton Blake Library" do not indicate to the contrary, for a story by him was published in the latter publication in 1922 about four years after Panting's death. Even so, this is no proof, for that story may have been written several years before, and, perhaps, was a reprint of a Blake serial, as was an earlier Alais tale for the Library, like that published on 20th March, 1916, under the title of "The Case of Convict 308," (S.B.L. No. 7). This ran for several weeks in "The Dreadnought," during the year 1913, under the heading of "The Man Who Changed Places."

Another unfamiliar name was that of O. MERLAND, the 'O' standing for Oliver. In only one instance was Merland's name mentioned in the "Union Jack" and that was in connection with a story he wrote for a half-penny issue - No. 137 - which was published as long ago as 3rd December, 1896, under the title of "The Lost Explorer." He wrote five novels for the "S.B.L." in the twenties, introducing the far from original and entirely unnecessary character of Topper into the stories. Topper, it may be recalled, was employed by Blake as an extra assistant. Of the numerous editors and authors contacted, only one remembers him at all and then only vaguely as being a very aristocratic-looking man who wore a monocle - a somewhat older edition of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy,

the swell of St. Jim's, one imagines. Obviously, Merland used pen-names as his own was hardly ever seen in print in the boys' weeklies, but what these were nobody knows.

Mystery also surrounds the name of the ill-fated L.H. Brooks, who wrote quite a number of S.B.L.'s in the twenties and was also an occasional contributor to the "Union Jack" in the same era. If the name of the author was ever published in a boys' weekly I have never heard of it, and it would appear that all his work was reproduced under a number of pseudonyms. I have a shrewd suspicion that Herbert Britton was one of them. It is probable that Brooks, like many other boys' writers, was kept busy in the women's market, and may also have been one of the band of men who churned out weekly instalments of school tales for the network of girls' story periodicals - "School Friend," "Schoolgirl's Own" and "Girl's Crystal" etc. - for his style of writing was ideally suitable for that type of yarn. In sampling one of his stories the reader becomes aware of a somewhat remarkable fact, for the style of writing is amazingly similar to that of the other Brooks - the better-known Edwy Searles. If any editor needed the services of a ghost-writer to undertake E.S. Brooks' work due to indisposition and wished to rest assured that the substitution would remain undetected, then L.H. Brooks would be the ideal choice. L.H. Brooks, it must be unhappily recorded, died in tragic circumstances five years ago.

Two other mysterious authors of Blake stories were a man named REYNOLDS and another named JONES. The only Reynolds recollected at Fleetway House was Warwick Reynolds, the artist; of Reynolds the author not a scrap of information was forthcoming. In any case, he only wrote one story, "The Mawpeth Millions" (S.B.L. No. 316, 1st series), so he is not important.

On the other hand, Jones was remembered quite well. If he was the man of that name who wrote S.B.L. No. 345 (1st series) entitled "The Secret of the Bucket Shop," then he was Mr. J.G. Jones, who wrote as Ambrose Earle, and was a popular contributor to most of the old papers. He went blind and died many years ago. Some of his stories were written in collaboration with other writers in his twilight years, probably due to his failing vision.

MICHAEL STORM has been mentioned in these pages before, yet the mantle of mystery still remains. Mr. Garrish once told me that Michael and Duncan Storm were one and the same. A well-known editor has remarked: "Michael Storm and Duncan Storm were always a mystery. They were a mystery even unto themselves and will probably remain a mystery."

Other correspondents have written in similar vein, equally unenlightening. Could it be that the author's full name was Michael Duncan Storm and that his wife, who is believed to have been an authoress, used the name of Duncan Storm? (?Julia. J.P.)

Looking down a list of all the well-known old-time crook characters who opposed Blake in the past, one comes across the name of the Hindu arch-criminal, Gunga Dass, and immediately thinks of the man who created him - H. GREGORY HILL. A writer who knocked about the world quite a bit in his time, and knew India particularly well, very little in turn is known about the man himself. Even editors who have published much of his work confess to knowing nothing apart from his name.

Many will agree that too much of Blake lore is "wrapt in mystery." As, however, many unlikely happenings have occurred in the past, it is not too much to hope that the mystery of the MEN OF MYSTERY may yet be solved in the not-so-distant future through the energetic endeavours of those researchers to whom the name of Sexton Blake has meant so much.

THE COLLECTORS' DIGEST ANNUAL, 1956

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LIBRARIES THROUGH THE YEARS	RED WHITE AND BLUE
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 STACEY, BEECHES, WICKFORD, ESSEX, URGENTLY REQUIRES THE FOLLOWING:)
 MAGNETS Nos. 343, 344 and 392 and any numbers between 535 and 543; Boys' Friend, 3d. Library No. 319; Picture Show No. 1; Penny Popular (New Series) Nos. 1 to 4, 8 and 9. Good prices paid.

HAMILTONIANA

Compiled by Herbert Leckenby

Bunter in the "House" again. Cassandra of the "Daily Mirror" commenting on the resignation of Sir Edward Boyle from the Government said:

"Sir Edward, known affectionately as 'Bunter' because of his striking physical similarity to that famous character...."

Some of these days we shall have to assemble all these references to the immortal Greyfriars and St. Jim's characters. They would make very interesting and amusing reading.

* * * * *

And here's another striking coincidence. The reproduction of the Gem Christmas Number on the cover this month was photographed for the purpose by a friend of Eric Fayne's, and Eric told me that the name of his friend and old boy of The Modern School, Surbiton, is actually Martin Clifford. The Christian name is pure coincidence having no connection with the Martin of Gem fame.

Now here's Eric's review of that famous Christmas story:

THIS MONTH'S COVER

By Eric Fayne

One of the most famous issues ever published of the Gem Library is brought to mind by the picture on the front of this month's Collectors' Digest. The cover shown is of the Christmas Number for 1913, dated 23rd November, 1913. The illustration, by R.J. Macdonald, depicts a thrilling incident in the extra-long St. Jim's story, "THE MYSTERY OF THE PAINTED ROOM." This very fine tale was the forerunner of many yarns of kidnapping which Charles Hamilton was to write in later years, but its fascinating, eerie atmosphere can seldom, if ever, have been surpassed. It is indeed a Gem classic, and the issue was the very first Gem to have a cover printed in colours.

This 52-page Christmas Number (for 2d.) was completed with "The Showman's Double," a story of Tomsonio's Circus, also by Charles Hamilton (probably reprinted from "Pluck"), an instalment of the serial, "The Corinthian," by Brian Kingston, and a dice-game called "THE RACE TO THE TUCKSHOP," designed by H.A. Hinton. Years later, readers often

confused this game with the title of a Magnet story...

When "THE MYSTERY OF THE PAINTED ROOM" was due to be reprinted in the Gem in the middle-thirties, much unskilful abridging was being carried out on the old stories. To avoid the mutilation of this masterpiece, I suggested to the Editor that the story should be published in two issues, running from cover-to-cover. The suggestion was adopted, but to spin out the second part, a sequence was written in by an inferior writer, who rather upset the balance of the story, though, generally speaking, it was probably the lesser of two evils.

* * * * *

THE LAST MAGNET CHRISTMAS

By Roger M. Jenkins

"Dear Willian" wrote Mr. Bunter in Magnet No. 1661, "I have made arrangements for your Christmas vacation which will, I think, be a very novel and beneficial experience for you. As your brother Sammy and your sister Bessie will be away, I have made this arrangement with a view to you only. As it seems unlikely that you will have any time to spare, I may request your form-master to excuse you the usual holiday task on this occasion."

Bunter was highly elated with this prospect, and indulged in visions of a succession of parties and shows which would be made all the more delightful by the absence of Sammy and Bessie. In the meanwhile he informed Wharton that he wasn't able, after all, to give him any of his time over the holidays, and went off to Bunter Villa in high fettle.

Unfortunately, Mr. Bunter's plans somehow failed to appeal to his son, for they concerned digging an acre of ground to grow vegetables as a war effort. Mr. Bunter kindly promised to mark out the exact amount of land to be turned over each day: as he explained, "In war-time everyone must expect to exert himself. All useless expenditure must be cut down. Luxuries must be dispensed with." (Mr. Bunter paused to select another cigar and light it.) "No selfish indulgence of any kind, William!" he continued. "Spartan simplicity and hard work must be the watchword." Only a hearty, if untruthful, assurance that he promised to accept Wharton's pressing invitation to visit Wharton Lodge enabled Bunter to escape the novel and beneficial experience his father had planned for him.

Mr. Quelch had been kidnapped in No. 1660, but this fact was not

allowed to impinge upon the gaiety of the Christmas festivities at Wharton Lodge which were described in Nos. 1662 and 1663. The latter number did, however, see Bunter stumble upon Mr. Quelch's prison in a gloomy cell beneath the Moat House, and as a result he joined his form-master as a fellow-prisoner in that dreary place. In No. 1664 it became clear that they were not exactly congenial companions: Mr. Quelch became quite cross when he looked round for some food, only to find it all gone ("I-I think perhaps there's a cat about the place, sir"), and he grew even more bad-tempered when Bunter remarked that the Remove were getting on well with their new master and were not at all anxious to see Mr. Quelch return. But the Remove master was a kind-hearted man, and he thoughtfully set Bunter a Latin exercise to occupy his mind: he even produced his pocket edition of Euripides (which had fortunately been on him when he was kidnapped) and offered to tell Bunter something about that celebrated Greek dramatist, but it seemed that Bunter's thoughts were wholly occupied in conjecture about the next supply of food, and Mr. Quelch gave up the unequal struggle for Bunter's attention. It may be added that, although Mr. Quelch remained a prisoner for the whole of the Spring Term, Bunter was released in No. 1664.

The early part of the war was a curious period, both in reality and within the pages of the Magnet. Such rationing and restrictions which were then in force were more of a token than a necessity, and though there was a black-out, there was no shortage of food. Consequently, the 1939 Christmas saw little change in the celebrated tradition of the Magnet. Harry Wharton & Co., were enjoying their thirty-second yuletide as members of the Remove, and it would have been a poignant moment for all readers had they known that Nos. 1662-1664 would constitute the last Christmas numbers of the Magnet. To the collector who can pick and choose, however, there is an added spice in having Mr. Quelch introduced in holiday time, whilst the ghosts, skating, and fancy-dress ball related in these three copies, together with the usual concomitant jokes and thrills all represent a sequence of tales of the usual high standard. The old paper assuredly had no occasion to feel ashamed of its final Christmas numbers.

* * * * *

SOLUTION OF C.D. "TREASURERS" No. 1

The Treasure in this puzzle was "St. JIM'S". The first correct solution came from Clifford Smith, St. Anne's-on-Sea, to whom a postal order for 5/- has been sent.

GEMS OF MARTIN CLIFFORD

(cont'd)

by George Sellars

The second story in this great series narrates how the "Professor" contrives a cunning plot to disgrace Talbot at St. Jim's and forces him to return to the gang. Meanwhile, Marie has promised "The Toff" that she will never allow her Father's orders make her break the law again. Talbot and Marie had always been good friends and undoubtedly "The Toff's" influence had much to do with "The Little Sister of the Poor's" reformation. Marie warns Talbot that her father is determined to get him back as the gang has fallen upon evil days since he left, and that "The Professor" will use force if necessary. That is exactly what happens and Talbot is kidnapped by the "Professor" and his confederate "Nobbler," and held a prisoner. Marie's father makes a final attempt to persuade "The Toff" to return to his old life again, but fails to do so. At St. Jim's, John Rivers in the night robs the Head's safe, leaving evidence behind to prove beyond doubt that Talbot is the guilty person. "The Toff" is allowed to escape from his prison easily enough now, for "The Professor" has made no mistake in his rascally cunning scheme to dishonour the lad and compel him to return to the gang. The reception he receives when he arrives at St. Jim's is worse than he ever dreamed of anticipating. The juniors had never seen Dr. Holmes look so angry. Almost stunned by the torrent of bitter words that came from his Head Master, the unhappy lad turns blindly away; he was condemned, adjudged, guilty, an outcast once more, and not one friend there to say a word for him. Tom Merry hurried after him in the dusky quad. "The Toff" had one loyal chum at least in the whole School. "Talbot old chap, I trust you, I believe in you - always," said Tom as he gripped his chum's hand. "Good-bye Tom, Believe in me, that will help me. Good-bye." The best pal a chap ever had and the outcast walked away into the darkness of the night.

* * * * *

THOSE EARLY GEMS: SOME STRAY THOUGHTSby E.V. CopemanPART 1: 1/4d. SERIES (1907/08)

THIS is by no means intended to be an exhaustive survey of the Charles Hamilton Stories in the early GEMS. Rather is it meant to be just a collection of random jottings, odd thoughts that come to my

mind as I thumb through some of these "vintage" issues.

The oldest GEM I have been privileged to see is No. 25, dated 31/8/1907. The St. Jim's story, which begins on the front cover, is called TOM MERRY'S CAMP and it starts with these words: "St. Jim's was in a state of excitement. The whole school was in a buzz of discussion from end to end.... Only one topic had interest for the boys of St. Jim's - junior and seniors, School House and New House alike... Tom Merry had been expelled! Tom Merry, the hero of the Shell, the most popular boy in the School House at St. Jim's and the formidable rival of Figgins and Co., of the New House, had stood that day before the Head in the crowded Hall, and listened to the sentence of expulsion." Quite a start, wasn't it? Just a slight indication of the good things to come - good things that have spread now over half a century because of the genius of Hamilton. (This story, incidentally, like many another, was reprinted many years later in GEM No. 1277, where it was combined with its forerunner, No. 24.)

The sub-title of the GEM in those early days was "A COMPLETE STORY FOR EVERYONE, AND EVERY STORY A GEM," and I'll wager the readers agreed with that slogan!

The first illustration to TOM MERRY'S CAMP shows a number of juniors and easily recognisable among them is Arthur Augustus D'Arcy; Gussy in a straw hat, high collar, dark coat, fancy waistcoat and striped trousers - no Etons, but with the famous monocle well in evidence! I don't know the artist; Herbert Leckenby can no doubt put me right.

On the front page of the next issue (No. 30: A REGULAR RASCAL) is a sketch of the Terrible Three "broke to the wide." Manners and Lowther, more or less in the background, are wearing blazers, but Tom Merry himself has an Eton jacket and looks remarkably like C.H. Chapman's early drawings of Harry Wharton! But as this was published on 5/10/1907, the artist can scarcely be accused of "borrowing" Wharton's face, for the Captain of the Greyfriars' Remove hadn't yet appeared in print!

In many of the 1907 and 1908 GEMS there is a small advertisement which reads: "POLLY GREEN IS IN THIS WEEK'S GIRLS' FRIEND, PRICE ONE PENNY." Beside the words is a picture of an old-fashioned girl with a terrific mop of hair. I'm wondering who she was.

The serial seems to have been given little space (often not more than one page) though always there was a picture at the top. STORMPOINT by Maurice Merriman featured Rex Allingham, Jim Fisher and Bob Bouncer, the chums of Stormpoint College. I wonder if Maurice Merriman

realised then that the other school stories appearing in those same issues were destined to well and truly outlive their generation?

In No. 36 (16/11/1907) there commences a new serial, *TEMPEST HEADLAND*. It is described as "the only new and original school tale" written by S. Clarke Hook. One of the characters in this yarn is a black boy, which, when you recall that S. Clarke Hook was the creator of Jack, Sam and Pete, isn't really surprising. What is surprising, however, is that the black boy should have been given the nickname of "Snowy White Adonis Venus"! "A most appropriate name," one of the other boys declares, "We wanted one that would give some impression of the kid's natural beauties." And the black boy (who apparently has lost his memory after nearly drowning during a storm off the headland) has no objections. His verdict is: "Sounds mighty fine name dat." In that same issue, the St. Jim's tale was *D'ARCY'S ROMANCE* (reprinted in No. 1247 as *LOVELORN GUSSY*).

TOM MERRY'S CHRISTMAS (23/11/1907) was double-length. The first picture shows a snow fight (how many snow fights over the years in Hamilton stories?). And there is a picture of Miss Priscilla Fawcett at the beginning of Chapter 10; her face under the long curls looks angular and stern and very mannish, yet the caption reads: "The kind old face of Miss Priscilla beamed upon Tom Merry and Co. from the easy chair, showing that she was as happy and pleased as anybody." The dancing juniors in the ballroom, and their partners with their trailing skirts, look festive enough, but the one junior whose partner is not included in the picture looks extremely funny as, to all intents and purposes, he cavorts round the floor entirely on his own! *TEMPEST HEADLAND*, by the way (at least, for its earlier instalments) seems to have been allowed more space than Merriman's story. In this same issue there is an advertisement regarding Part 4 of the *HARMSWORTH HISTORY OF THE WORLD*, then being published fortnightly. "Well worth its published price of sevenpence per fortnightly part -- one halfpenny per day!"

Ferrers Locke is featured in No. 40 in a story called *STONY BROKE*. There is a good little sketch above the beginning of Chapter 8 which shows something of the meanness of Mellish. In many later (and possibly far better) illustrations, Mellish was not so precisely defined but in this picture he is an obvious little rat.

And, to me, it was quite a thrill to see the simple drawing which showed me for the first time (on Page 1 of No. 42 dated 28/12/1907) *FIGGINS' FIG PUDDING*, one of the early "classics." (cont. on page 346)

OLD BOYS' BOOK CLUB

LONDON MEETING, 18th November, 1956.

Despite the absence of Chairman Len through illness and Ben (Hon. Sec.) who had duties elsewhere, a very informal and cosy meeting was held at hosts Roger Jenkins' and David Harrison's sanctum at Kensington. Roger took the chair and welcomed newcomer Tony Riley after expressing regret at the above officers' absence.

Bob Whiter then read items of interest from the correspondence, following with the Treasurer's report which together with the minutes of the previous meeting were duly signed and adopted. Roger's entertaining letter quiz was won by Bob Whiter with Laurie Sutton coming second and Bill Lofts a good third. Librarians gave their reports and the date and venue of the Christmas meeting were fixed for 16th December at Cherry Place, Wood Green.

Discussions were then held re the programme for this event. Members were next treated to a jolly good film show by David Harrison followed by Alan Stewart's coloured slides taken on his recent world cruise. Memories were awakened of various Magnet series and Fang Wang when scenes of Singapore and Hong Kong were shown, not to mention the South American series when Madiera and Rio came into view.

Thank you Roger, David and Alan for a thoroughly enjoyable meeting.

BOB WHITER.

* * * * *

NORTHERN SECTION MEETING, 10th November, 1956

York was well represented with Stanley Smith, Miss Margaret Jackson, Jack Wood and myself forming a quartette in an excellent attendance.

It was "Discussion Night" with eleven subjects up for debate and my word how we debated. However, thanks to the able ruling of chairman Stanley Smith, the cutting short of refreshment time and by carrying on until we had just time to catch our trains, we got through and without losing our tempers.

The subjects, nicely varied and set by Gerry Allison, included "Is there too much Bunter?", "What do you think of the new Sexton Blake Libraries?", "Which character did you most dislike at St. Jim's, Greyfriars and Rockwood?", "Should one bind one's collection?" and

"Have you any suggestions for improving the C.D.?"

Rather surprisingly, perhaps, the majority thought there was too much Bunter. As for the dislikes, Trimble was an easy first for St. Jim's, with Price and Lattrey leading for the other schools.

Regarding the C.D., Stanley made an interesting suggestion, that we have a Question and Answer column on the lines of the late John O'London's. I am all for it, so it's up to you.

Gerry made a request that the C.D. be published once a fortnight, no doubt knowing the answer before it was given - that though the compliment was appreciated, its Editor must decline though the spirit was willing.

Yes, it was a very lively evening. We must have another Discussion Night soon, Gerry. The big advantage is that everyone can join in.

8th December - the Christmas Party. It was decided not to go to a restaurant this year, instead stage the proceedings at the Club Room at 5 p.m. prompt. A bumper attendance is hoped for.

HERBERT LECKENBY, Northern Section
Correspondent.

* * * * *

MIDLAND BRANCH MEETING, 29th October, 1956.

We were glad to see a marked improvement in the attendance and things would have looked normal except for the absence of our respected "Headmaster" Mr. Jack Ingram whose duties would curtail his attendance till the New Year. This caused much regret which was tempered with the fact that the New Year was not so far off, and Jack would be with us again.

After formal business which consisted mainly of arrangements for the usual Christmas party, reference to meetings of the Committee, we concerned ourselves with the library which is arousing much interest amongst the members. Miss Russell had quite a few items of interest for loan and a few members promised further additions. These items were, I am glad to say, not only confined to Hamiltonia and a good sign that our sphere of old boys' books is to be widened. There were a few books for sale and amongst them a ½d. Gem which was finally raffled instead of being sold. Though this was won by Roy Bennett he promptly put it up for sale and it was bought by George Chatham at a price which would have petrified the usual "dealers."

The main programme was by Tom Porter, the first of a two meeting item. Tom told us this story in his own words with only the minimum of reference to the text, of a discovery by "Pon" of Highcliffe of a

secret passage from the Friar's Oak to the Remove boxroom. The use made of this for raids, dramatic midnight alarms, further funny antics by Bunter all made up a yarn which, as Tom said, had a bit of everything in it. We are all waiting for the sequel next month. This great item was followed by a quiz set by the writer which was eventually won by Tom Porter. Altogether a very enjoyable and interesting meeting.

W.H. BROSTER,
Secretary.

* * * * *

MERSEYSIDE SECTION - SUNDAY, 11th November

The November meeting was opened, as usual, by the reading of the October minutes by the Secretary, followed by Don Webster giving the financial state of the branch. It was with great pleasure that we heard there was a strong possibility of Frank Unwin being with us again in the new year. The club sends Frank its best wishes and hopes to see him soon. Considerable purchases of new books were announced and the Library table was covered by more series than have been seen for a long time. Our thanks to Don for some new Greyfriars stories. After the clatter of business had died down leaving Bill Horton with a pocketful of silver, the quiz, presented by the writer, was then tackled.

Departing from the conventional idea the Secretary presented a straight-forward question and answer competition covering every angle of interest to lovers of Old Boys' Books. Questions ranged from the collapse of many books in May 1940 to the names of artists who illustrated our favourite schools. The competition was nobly won by Don Webster (showing the advantage of an all-round knowledge of old boys' books), with George Riley second and Jim Walsh third. Two of Victor Gunn's novels were presented as prizes.

Jack Morgan was kind enough to show us a copy of a new magazine called "Pluck," which, judging by the cover, is the nearest approach yet to a pre-war boys' book. Without close investigation, the inner contents look as though they leave a lot to be desired.

After tea, a discussion was opened by the Chairman on the various artists who illustrated boys' books. It was agreed by all that the illustrations in the present-day comics and boys' books were very inferior to those we knew thirty or forty years ago.

The final item before dispersing was the December quiz. Among other suggestions was one that we should all think up the greatest anomaly (or impossibility) that we had read in an old boys' book.

These would then be voted on and discussed at the December meeting.

Next meeting: Sunday, 9th December, 7 p.m. sharp.

NORMAN PRAGNELL, Secretary,
Merseyside Branch.

NELSON LEE COLUMN

by JACK WOOD

328 Stockton Lane, York.

* * * * *

As this is my last column of 1956, may I take the welcome opportunity of wishing all my readers the merriest of Christmases and the happiest of times in 1957. At the same time, I want to thank all my correspondents for all their co-operation during the past year; I hope sincerely that they, and others, will be equally co-operative in the future.

And now to this month's article. I find it difficult to decide what to draw from the great storehouse of Leeana on this occasion for there is so much that might be written. Brooks, however, was always topical, and his stories of St. Frank's could usually be linked with the current newspaper headlines. Therefore, I think I ought to say something about a Christmas series. But which?

After some thought, I decided it might be topical in more senses than one to recall the famous series in which St. Frank's went Communist for a short period. The series began during the last week of November, 1921, and wound up in February, 1922, and was a series which found St. Frank's in a ferment over the Christmas period with the juniors at loggerheads over the merits of a drugged headmaster, Dr. Malcolm Stafford, and Mr. Hugh Trenton, a traitorous, scheming science master.

Trenton was the head of a gang which was striving to inculcate the doctrines of their very extreme brand of Communism in the schools of this country. Schools in the North and the Midlands readily swallowed their rum ideas, and so important was St. Frank's regarded in their plans that Trenton himself came down to Sussex where his suave charm rapidly won the confidence of the boys of St. Frank's and paved the way for discrediting the Head.

Thanks to the application of his newly-discovered drug, ZAXZOL,

Trenton caused Dr. Stafford to lose the confidence of his schoolboys, and his post as headmaster. Trenton was promoted and thanks to a message apparently from the Head but in reality written as a joke by Reggie Pitt, the school adopted Communist schemes of activity.

How well Brooks foreshadowed an era so familiar to many of us. Timothy Tucker, as the Communist idealist, was well to the fore in the stories, but it was the bullies and the less notable "types" who soon took command and dominated the life of the school. It was Kenmore, Grayson, Armstrong and the like, who applied the rule of force and brutality, and made for an unusually adult series.

Trenton, of course, failed to take into account the activities of Nelson Lee, the famous housemaster-detective. Thanks to Lee and the staunch band of Loyalists, the fever of Communism was allowed to run itself out against the solid commonsense of the British public schoolboy. Naturally, Trenton had to be exposed, and this was done in a highly dramatic chapter handled with all Brooks's brilliant command of action and characterisation. Yet plausibility was never lost in a strong series.

And now to something eminently suited to the season of abundant food and drink, colourful decorations, parties and for a comfortable chair in front of a roaring fire — a short quiz. There are no prizes but, I hope, plenty of amusement. Answers next month. All the questions are connected with Nelson Lee and, mainly, within the St. Frank's stories.

1. Who created Nelson Lee and Nipper?
2. What was the title of the first Nelson Lee story, and when and where did it appear?
3. Who was Lee's other ward, and which school did he and Nipper attend together?
4. What was the title of the first Nelson Lee serial?
5. When, how and why did Nelson Lee and Nipper come to St. Frank's?
6. Who was Lee's predecessor as housemaster? Of what House?
7. Whom did Nipper supplant as captain of the Remove?
8. What were the titles of the first Nelson Lee Library and the first St. Frank's story?
9. What were the House colours when Nipper arrived?
10. What were they at the end of the St. Frank's saga?
11. Under what names were the following better known? Clarence Augustus Jerome Marchant; Hubert Alaric Cavendish; Richard Rossiter; Spencer Fitzhugh Cambridge.

12. Who was Lee's greatest criminal opponent and for a time Head of St. Frank's?
13. Who were the Housemasters at St. Frank's and which were married?
14. Who was the Magician of St. Frank's?
15. Who were: The Serpent; The Rotter?
16. What was Mr. Suncliffe's ruling passion? Mr. Pagett's?
17. Which fifth former died?
18. Which Removite's father was a noted Secret Service agent?
19. Who was the last Head of St. Frank's?
20. How many St. Frank's boys have sisters at Moor View?
21. Who was Lee's lady assistant?
22. Who was the Bootboy Baronet?
23. Who was the Rancher Earl?
24. Which St. Frank's juniors have played professional football?
25. Who was the vegetarian Housemaster?

Good Hunting! Full marks mean you are an ardent Leeite. Fewer than half marks, you've been missing a lot of good reading!

SALE OR EXCHANGE for "Magnets" and "Gems" 11 vols. "War of the Nations," 6 vols. "Popular History of the Great War."
 B. MORLEY, 4 DANESTHORPE VALE, SHERWOOD, NOTTINGHAM.

WANTED: Knockout Comics, Nos. 1-800; Many U.J.'s; S.B.L.'s (1st, 2nd and 3rd Series); Detective Weekly and all other papers which contain Sexton Blake stories (Penny Populars etc.). Have you any to offer? Highest prices paid.
 VICTOR COLBY, 8 BERESFORD AVENUE, BEVERLY HILLS, N.S.W., AUSTRALIA.

GIVE YOURSELF A CHRISTMAS PRESENT! Have that favourite series carefully and inexpensively bound. References available.
 L.F. ASHLEY, 23 MOUNTJOY, BRIDPORT, DORSET.

FOR THE LAST TIME,
 HAVE YOU
 ORDERED YOUR ANNUAL YET?

THOSE EARLY GEMS (SOME STRAY THOUGHTS) cont'd from p. 339

In No. 43 (TOM MERRY'S DOUBLE: 4/1/1908) there is an interesting advertisement for a new book; its name: TOM MERRY'S CONQUEST, which was No. 38 of THE BOYS' FRIEND 3d. LIBRARY. On the cover of this BFL (though completely unrecognisable from modern standards) is a close-up of the Terrible Three.

Ferrers Locke is again to the fore in No. 45 (FIGGINS & CO.'S FAILURE - 18/1/1908).

Rather a strange feature about this little batch of first series black and white GEMS is that in No. 46 appears the following notice: "NOT NEXT WEEK, NOT THE WEEK AFTER -- BUT THE WEEK AFTER THAT!!! THE GEM LIBRARY WILL BE ENLARGED TO 1d." (This ties up with Len Packman's article, "THE GEM REPRINTS" in C.D. Annual, 1949, where he lists Nos. 1 to 48 as the "½d. Series"). Yet every copy of these early issues beside me as I type this is printed "EVERY THURSDAY -- ONE PENNY." Close inspection shows that the printed word "HALF" might have been in front of "PENNY" on the original block but it has been completely blanked out, leaving a gap. Can anyone throw any light on this? Were these early GEMS 1d. in Australia and ½d. in England? No. 43 (THE PETS OF ST. JIM'S - 8/2/1908) shows no price at all!

PART 2 (1908/1910)

PASSING over to the second series of the GEM I'd like to make comments on just a few of the early blue cover issues. I haven't seen nearly as many of these early stories as I would like but I'm still hoping!

With the advent of the blue covers, certain changes were made. The cover became a genuine cover with a full-size picture, the story itself commencing inside. (A thought occurs to me now that perhaps the ½d. GEMS I have been looking through have at one time or another had their outside covers removed, though I don't think so. There again I would welcome information. And whereas in the early series most of the tales included the caption: "A TALE OF TOM MERRY'S SCHOOLDAYS" under the story title, this was dropped after No. 48 and the numbering recommenced from No. 1 to harmonise with the MAGNET. In the early copies of this second series, however, the phrase: "COMPLETE STORIES FOR EVERYONE, AND EVERY STORY A GEM" was still in evidence.

Worthy of a special mention is one of the early serials. It was BRITAIN INVADED, "a powerful and stirring war story" dealing with the German Invasion of Britain (fortunately not prophetic). The author
(cont'd on back page)

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THE ABOVE DUPLICATES IN EXCELLENT
OR MINT CONDITION FOR EXCHANGE.

WRITE TO: DANIEL O'HERLIHY,
17220 GRESHAM ST.,
NORTHridge,
CALIFORNIA, U.S.A.

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of this serial was not named, but obviously it is a reprint of the story of the same name which ran in the BOYS' FRIEND in 1906 and was therefore written by John Tregellis. It featured Captain Sam Villiers of the Greyfriars School Cadet Corps (though this was not the Greyfriars which was then beginning to make history in the MAGNET).

In GEM No. 49, dated 16/1/1909 the St. Jim's story, TOM MERRY IN THE ROCKIES, was illustrated by H.M. Lewis. Lewis was later associated with Hamilton stories in the SCHOOLBOYS' OWN LIBRARY and did the pictures for quite a few of the Rookwood and St. Kit's yarns. In this early GEM, however, his work strikes me as being particularly good, with clear bold outline and good shading. The front cover depicts Gussy meeting an Indian Chief and inside are more pictures particularly of Gussy and Skimpole among the Redskins. "Dear me!" says Skimpole in the large picture on Page 3, "It is annoying to be captured like this! Yet I am glad it has occurred. This is certainly wild life in the Rockies!" And on Page 11 the way Lewis shows Skimpole interviewing The Hawk (the Blackfoot chief) is really grand. "Pray excuse me," says Skimpole, blinking at the Indian through his big spectacles, "I should like to have a few details if possible. I am writing a book of travels and I should like to put in some Indian manners and customs." Skimpole is shown solemnly standing hopefully with notebook and pencil waiting for the Redskin Chief to speak. Going over to the story itself, Hamilton's description of this interview is particularly good. Skimpole, rather to the Indian's surprise, addresses him as "Mister Hawk." The Hawk says, "The red chief understands. The young white brave with the four eyes wishes to spread his fame to the white people who dwell in wigwams of stone far beyond the big sea water... He would hear the red chief recount some of his great deeds on the warpath and on the trail of the bear and the bison." Skimpole says, "Exactly. Do you go on the warpath now?" The Hawk replies: "It is many moons since the Hawk has raised the scalps of his enemies." Skimpole shudders but is still keen enough to ask: "Have you any scalps about you at the present moment — besides your own, I mean, of course?" The Indian says "The Hawk does not carry the trophies of war on the trail of peace but the Hawk will tell the story of his fighting." Skimpole listens avidly and the Indian is so carried away that he begins giving violently practical demonstrations and Tom Merry & Co. are called upon to rescue Skimpole before things go too far. It is all very well done. (To be continued)
