

THE COLLECTORS' DIGEST

VOLUME 13, NUMBER 145

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JANUARY 1954

FROM "THE SURPRISE" No. 23, AUGUST 6, 1922



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Price 1s. 6d.

JANUARY, 1959

Editor: HERBERT LECKENBY
12 Herbert Street,
Hull Road, York.

or

c/o YORK DUPLICATING SERVICES,
12A The Shambles, York.

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From the Editor's Chair

THE GLORIOUS TWELFTH. No, this hasn't anything to do with grouse; it, needless to say, concerns our Annual and there's no grouse where that is concerned, so far at anyrate.

The first report came, appropriately enough, from my first hobby friend Harry Dowler. Here's a little of what he said:

"Undoubtedly the finest Annual you have produced. The list of Blake authors and their true identity is alone worth the money. But everything else is tremendously interesting and informative. My hearty congratulations to you, your contributors and York Duplicating Services for a really splendid piece of work."

Well, a little later I set off for London heavily laden with Annuals but with a light heart.

London! Still one more heart stirring record for my book of memories. I won't dwell on it this time but I must say a few words about that delightful Sunday.

I was at Len Packman's for lunch and whilst there that great fellow, Marcus Johnson, rang up and offered to come along with his car and take us to the meeting. Gladly we accepted. Soon we were on our way right across London from Lordship Lane, S.E. 22 to Lordship Lane, N. 22. Gosh, what a meeting it was with a record attendance. Not the least of my pleasure was in meeting several fellows for the first

time; Roy Parsons (from Southampton), Max Sheldon, Eb Worsell (from Bristol), the Rev. John Dockerty and Arthur Moyses.

As I surveyed the packed room my heart was full. In a few remarks I recalled that when the London O.B.B.C. was formed someone said to me "It won't last long". That member died some years ago and I said that if he could look down into that room he might say "How wrong was I".

Well Ben Whiter will be telling you something of what happened so I'll say no more.

Part of the rest of my time was spent, especially at Eric Fayne's, planning next year's Annual.

Back home again I found stacks of cards and letters awaiting me. Occasionally I wonder what my Christmases will be like if I have grown too old to produce the Annual. Perish the thought!

ATTENTION! SEXTON BLAKE FANS. One of the March S.B.Ls will be of special interest for it was written by one of our own members Rex Dolphin, of Hyde Heath, Amersham, Bucks. Those of you who have read the early C.Ds and Annuals will remember his interesting articles and clever puzzles.

I am sure not only those who are particularly interested in the Sexton Blake stories but all our members will heartily congratulate Rex on his success, and hope it will be the first of many.

THOSE CHRISTMAS GREETINGS. My hearty thanks to all who sent them. They grow more numerous each year. My home looks like that of a big family. Well I have a big family haven't I? And they are scattered all over the world.

Yours sincerely,

HERBERT LECKENBY

WANTED: certain Magnets, Boys' Friend 3d. Library No. 319 and Picture Show No. 1. YOUR prices paid. Send lists to
 DAVID STACEY, WICKFORD, ESSEX.

WANTED: "Captain" volumes. Also any stories or novels by Gunby Hadath or John Mowbray. Also S.P.C. No. 33.
 R. GUEST, 5 RALEIGH GARDENS, BRLXTON HILL, LONDON, S.W.2.

CHANGE OF ADDRESS: From about January 17th Gerald Allison's address will be: 3 BINGLEY ROAD, MENSTON, NR. ILKLEY, YORKSHIRE. Would his many correspondents please note.

Blakiana

conducted by JOSEPHINE PACKMAN

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

Once again Christmas is over. Christmas is of course essentially a time for children, and those of us who either have or have had little ones derive much pleasure in giving them the same happiness as we ourselves received from our parents when we were their age. Nevertheless, we too, also derive much pleasure in reading our old Christmas issues of the papers of our youth and, through the memories they bring back, recapturing some of our own happy, carefree Christmases.

And so, on with the New Year. May your individual hopes and aspirations fructify in the sincere wish of your Blakiana conductress..

JOSIE PACKMAN

* * *

THE HANDS OF TIME

By Elizabeth (Bette) J. Pate

PART ONE

According to the ancient philosophers, Man, in his life span, passes through seven ages which cover his progress from the endearing innocence of babyhood to the doubtful wisdom of old age. And each page, as it is turned by life's events, leaves its mark upon his physical features and character. As Man grows older it is inevitable too that in retrospect he will remember his contemporaries framed as it were by the passing parade of events.

Doubtless, you, who have known Sexton Blake down through the years have nostalgic memories of this old friend as he was when first you met him - even now, in your mind's eye, you can see his face, his clothes, and even more important still, his character, as he was then - and to you he will always be linked in memory with events parallel with that first meeting. But, as Mr. E. S. Turner says in his book "Boys will be Boys"....."No disciple of Blake would claim that the master has remained unchanged since he began his profession", and we, who love and admire this great man, must, if we are honest, agree with Mr. Turner. Blake has changed, is changing even now and will change in the future - but then, so are we and the world in which we live..... the only constant thing being Change itself.

At various stages of the detective's career the Editors of the Sexton Blake Library, in their talks to the readers, have declared "Sexton Blake moves with the times", and to any student of "Blakiana" this well-worn cliché is a self-evident fact - Blake has always been the mirror of the times and in him we have seen the ideal man of the era through the eyes of the authors, well aware of public opinion.

As one grows older one becomes more acutely aware of the swifter passage of time, realising how fleeting is the pleasure of today, appreciating the past with all its treasures whilst enjoying the present with sharpened faculties. And every moment the inexorable ticking of the clock grows louder as time pushes the precious minutes from the future swiftly through the present, back into the past.

Through the years there has been a silent witness to the passing parade of events in the life of the great detective. Sometimes it has been foe instead of friend, when, in times of stress and danger the fleeting moments ranged themselves on the side of the enemy, but it has seen the daily comings and goings and it is to this witness that we must turn for the complete picture. He has seen the joys and sorrows, the triumphs and failures, shared the drama and suspense enacted in those famous rooms, all with complete indifference to the passage of the years, for he is Time itself!

The handsome grandfather clock, mellowed by the loving care of generations has marked the destiny of this famous man and now, as it stands in the dim hall in Baker Street, the sheen of the rosewood case catches and holds the shaft of sunlight filtering through the fanlight above the well-known door. In its early days the clock, a family heirloom much prized by the youthful Blake, had stood in the detective's rooms at New Inn Chambers and later in his office in Wych Street off the Strand. But for many years now it has been comfortably settled in the hall at Baker Street - somehow its antique lines had looked out of place in the detective's chromium-plated suite in Berkeley Square and he had returned it to its familiar place in the hallway of his flat... an old friend to greet him at the end of the day.

It had seen the first client enter his rooms, a prosperous Victorian gentleman, immaculate in frock coat - who had glanced momentarily at the imposing clock, checking the time on his own silver turnip watch as he glanced round impatiently for the detective he had come to consult.

For a brief moment the hour and minute hands on the face of the clock were one, and then latter moved swiftly on its journey into the last days of December, the stately hour hand following more leisurely, in no real hurry to enter into the New Year - for this was 1893, an

age of leisure when Britain was monarch of the seas and there was all the time in the world.....the clock ticked slowly and the pendulum swung its dignified measure.

In that Penny-Farthing era we were introduced to a man who was the epitome of the ideal Victorian Englishman - rather staid, a little pompous at times but always the soul of discretion, and the accent was on honour, the old-school tie and behaviour as befitted a "pukha sahib" of the Empire. To us, accustomed to the casual camaraderie of modern life he appears a little cold and unfriendly, even snobbish.....not the very humane, warm personality we came to know in later years. But then we must remember he was a rather solitary type in those far off days before the warmth of Tinker's cheery companionship thawed out his icy reserve. British to the backbone, he was rather melodramatic in his speech; but this too was in accordance with the times, for it was the age of the stage drama and realism was yet to come to the theatre. Hal Meredith, or to give him his real name, Harry Blyth, created the first image and introduced us to Sexton Blake in "Marvel" No. 6, published in December, 1893, and it is through his eyes that we first saw the detective - as yet unknown but stepping even then on the first rung of the ladder of fame.

"Sexton Blake belonged to the new order of detectives. He possessed a highly cultivated mind which helped to support his active courage. His refined, clean-shaven face readily lent itself to any disguise and his mobile features assisted to clinch any facial illusion he desired to produce."

An illustration showed him as a tall, well-built man, wearing a high-crowned square bowler hat, long double-breasted overcoat, gripping a cane walking stick in gloved hands. His nose was straight, chin firm and side levers of hair came down to the base of his ears. His attitude was thoughtful and dignified.

And later, in Halfpenny Marvel No. 33 Blake, in no uncertain words, defined his business ethics and as he spoke we could almost hear Rudyard Kipling applauding in the background whilst the bugles sound the call to duty. He states "If you look for any dishonourable work at our hands you may spare your own words and our time (this in a very curt manner). We do not interfere in disputes between man and wife nor do we pursue defaulting clerks. But if there is a wrong to be righted, an evil to be redressed, or a rescue of the weak and the suffering from the powerful, our hearty assistance can be readily obtained. We do nothing for hire here; we would cheerfully undertake to perform without fee or reward. But when our clients are wealthy we are not so unjust to ourselves as to make a gratuitous offer of our

services." Blake in this flowery speech is not using the Royal plural as he was in partnership at the time with a French detective, one Jules Gervaise.

To present day readers Blake's methods then seem crude and his triumphs at times most mysterious....the startling denouncement where he brought the rabbit out of the hat was in keeping with the literature of the day - Blake was presented as the wizard of detection, to startle and mystify the reader - the day when the reader was taken on the trail, step by step, or into the laboratory to share the mysteries of scientific investigation was yet to come. The C.I.D., with its headquarters at Scotland Yard had been established a few years earlier in 1878 by Sir E. Howard Vincent, and whilst Blake's early relations with this establishment were cordial he did not then enjoy the privileges and assistance granted to him in later years.

Blake's attitude to the fair sex in those picture-postcard days was always that of the pure and gentle knight...."sans peur et sans raproche"....he might rescue the damsel in distress but even when there was a hint of heart interest in the beginning he had no time for gentle dalliance....like a priest, Blake was wedded to his profession.

The clock ticks faster as we move into the new and vastly exciting twentieth century, whilst the pendulum has a rhythmic swing reminiscent of the "can-can".

And so, whilst the Empire mourns the passing of a great lady and draws breath preparatory to stepping out of the staid Victorian age on to the merry-go-round of the Edwardian era, we find Blake in this transition period stepping as it were from the slow, dignified hansom cab to the daring new horseless carriage - the latter endangering life and limb by its reckless speed of 10 m.p.h. Some suicidal types were even speaking of flying like a bird - "sheer nonsense, of course", said the dying Victorian...."Well, you never can tell", said the more daring Edwardian.

Newly installed in his sanctum at Baker Street the detective was then in the process of sorting the wheat from the chaff so far as assistants were concerned. And as the first three, a Chinese, "Wee Wee", "Griff" and Wallace Lorimer bowed gracefully into the wings, Tinker came centre stage to share the spotlight with the man who later was to become fiction's most famous detective, and by Blake's side he played his role with cheery, irrepressible spirit and courage. In 1903 he became an integral part of the Baker Street menage, filling an important and two-fold role as Sexton Blake badly needed a foil for his rather austere nature and someone to prevent him becoming pompous.

Still rather melodramatic in speech, the Sexton Blake of those

days was always mysterious, usually bewildering, judging by present-day standards - and the man of many disguises....some so obviously false and stagey that now we wonder how the reader of those days ever believed such melodramatic situations. But then, this was the age not only of the gay music-hall but also of tear-jerking drama on the gas lit stage, where there was room only for the heavy shadings of black or white and characters were very definitely either good or bad...never any doubt in a Blake story of those days as to who was the hero of the story (and the villain, with an appropriate name was always black and hissable!). No time then for half tones or the subtle characterisation of later days.

And the grandfather clock, in his new home in Baker Street, watches the evolution, marks time and waits.

Blake's outward appearance has changed somewhat, he is leaner but still clean shaven...the portly Victorian gentleman has disappeared and now we see him dressed in the narrow stove-pipe trousers of the Edwardian era, with the shorter jacket and high-winged collar then so fashionable. Dark hair, slightly curling in front, dark piercing eyes and a rather beaky nose above a granite chin show how Blake, even then, was slowly evolving into the hawk-eyed aquiline-featured detective we came to know so well in later years.

In his exhausting profession his main solace was his beloved pipe (a meerschaum of course, as smoked by the best detectives), and already he had fallen into the habit of donning his old crimson dressing gown as an aid to deep thought.

And the Baker Street household had now become eminently respectable as a housekeeper had appeared on the scene - the inimitable Bardell, who was to bring, albeit unconsciously, many amusing moments to the famous pair.

In those far off days, when Science as we know it today was a very precocious infant, regarded by the man in the street as half-brother to mediaeval black-magic - the ever active mind of the detective was following with interest the new science of identification by fingerprints. Pioneered by Herschel who first used them for this purpose in Bengal in 1877, the system had been introduced into England in 1880 by Foulds and developed in its present form by Sir Edward Henry and Sir Francis Galton. By present day standards the detective's scientific knowledge was very meagre, his equipment sparse and elementary, but he was laying the foundation of his future as a scientific crime investigator.

Looking back we tend to think of the Edwardians as gay and care-free - a society unshadowed as yet by the threat of the first World War

holocaust- yet the Blake of those years was a rather sober person of serious mien...even his patriotism seemed rather overdone. One thing noticeably missing in those early stories is humour, although Tinker's atrocious slang does cause us to smile now as we view it in retrospect. There was little of the friendly back-chat of later years - Blake was very much the aesthetic, dedicated to his profession, and Tinker a quaint Cockney figure yet to be moulded into the loyal, courageous and fun-loving individual who was to win so many friends by his own love of people in the years ahead.

The clock ticks ominously....the pendulum pauses....stops as the world holds its breath at the horror of 1914-1918....then, in tempo with the world, the pendulum goes mad and swings wildly as the hands move giddily into the gay Twenties.

(End of Part One)

* * * * *

HAPPY 100TH BIRTHDAY, SEXTON BLAKE!

By V. E. Colby

I am sure that all Blake lovers everywhere will join me in wishing him all the very best on the occasion of his 100th birthday.

Unfortunately the exact day of Blake's birth is unknown, but we were told in $\frac{1}{2}$ d. Union Jack No. 125 ("How Sexton Blake Won His Spurs" by W. Shaw Rae) that in September, 1878, Sexton Blake, not long out of his teens, played a heroic part in saving the lives of passengers of the ill-fated saloon steamer "Princess Alice" when it was rammed and sunk by the cargo boat "Bywell Castle" in the lower reaches of the Thames. Blake, then, was "not long out of his teens" in the year 1878. Let's say 21 years of age.

His birth-year, on that basis, would have been 1859, and his 100th birthday this year of Grace, 1959.

Greetings and congratulations are tendered accordingly!

* * * * *

APOLOGY!

It is regretted that in preparing Blakiana last month I omitted a line from Miss Margaret Cooke's article "To Old Friends - and Their Friends". The omission is on page 340. Paragraph two should read as follows:-

"She has learned to understand Blake's moods and motives, to be generous when his work brings him into contact with other women who

who find him attractive, and to work with other members of his staff, particularly with Tinker, now Junior Partner in charge of all cases in the north, and Head of the Records, Dark Room and Laboratory department at the Berkeley Square offices."

S.B.L. REVIEWS - JANUARY, 1959

A Cry in the Night! (No. 421)

Peter Saxon

What secret did the boyishly attractive Carol Francis possess that she should be so brutally murdered in order that it would remain her companion in death? Driving through the lonely and remote country lanes of Essex one night, Blake sees her huddled mutilated figure bathed in the powerful headlights of his Jaguar, and rushes her with all speed to a roadhouse called the Scalded Cat, in order to get medical aid.

But during his urgent summons to the hospital, a person unknown creeps furtively to Blake's car, and thrusts a small knife into the doomed girl's throat, sealing for all time the lips which should have divulged the secret within her. A singularly dastardly crime which, since it occurred in his own car when she was under his sole protection shook Blake, teak-hardened as he was to all forms of criminal savagery, to a mood of irrevocable determination to hound down her killer.

He is one of a group of characters who frequently patronises the Scalded Cat, a sinister night-club with a resident band known - appropriately enough - as Ron Boddy and his Boddysnatchers, who thresh frienziedly every night for the entertainment of its clientele in rock 'n roll. The climax to this case-book is terrific, and the tension taut in the building up of it. Normally, Peter Saxon takes Blake out of the country to some of those far away spots beloved of G. H. Teed in the old days; but for a change keeps Blake on home soil here.

In the writing of thrillers, this fellow Saxon has certainly set a high standard - yet how consistently he keeps up to it!

Rating.....Excellent

Consider Your Verdict (No. 422)

Rex Hardinge

A dirty evening in Plymouth, with the elements so bad that the Blake organisation, tough as it is, is glad to break off the engagement temporarily and stream thankfully into the stalls of the Alhambro Theatre. But the battle is soon to be resumed, with Blake, Tinker and Paula hitting the crime trail again; for the act they are just in time to see, performed by an illusionist named Max Merlin and his wife, Claire, ends in tragedy. The victim - Merlin; the cause of death -

poison. Suicide? Murder? Without doubt, the latter, as Blake quickly ascertains.

From the moment when he sees Claire continuously shooting apprehensive glances towards a short, thickset man, seated in the stalls and sets Tinker to shadow him when the curtain is prematurely rung down, the action never flags. Claire is no angel and as number one suspect her background does nothing to improve her chances of establishing her innocence. But Blake turns his back on the seemingly obvious, and transfers his unwelcome attentions to various male characters, all evincing interest in Claire and all of whom had their reasons for hating Merlin. Blake's deductions in tracking down the murderer are masterly, convincing too.

Rex Hardinge, sole surviving writer of the U.J. days, returns to the pages of the S.B.L. after an absence of nearly 3 years. In stating that this is one of the best and most conscientiously written novels he has ever written, I am swayed neither by sentiment nor past criticisms of the immediate pre New Order publications, and my verdict in so far as this novel is concerned needs no considering whatever.

Congratulations Rex Hardinge, and a very welcome return!

Rating.....Excellent

WALTER WEBB

* * *

FOOTNOTE: A supporting feature in the volume is an article on the Sexton Blake Circle. By the time this acknowledgement appears it will have been read by everyone who still finds an interest in the modern Blake, and can be interpreted as nothing less than a genuine desire on the part of the editor to co-operate to the fullest extent of his power in giving us an S.B.L. better than every before. W.W.

* * *

T H E Y E A R I N B R I E F

BETTER, BRIGHTER and MORE INTERESTING than ever before! What other verdict could there possibly be after one has read the fare offered in the 1958 volumes of the S.B.L.? To have improved on the high average of 1957 was no mean achievement; but that is exactly what W. Howard Baker and his talented little coterie of writers did during the past twelve months, in providing a well-varied programme of a standard which I, personally, have not enjoyed so much since first taking up the Library many years ago.

Frank Unwin went over the past year's S.B.L.'s pretty thoroughly

in his article for the Annual and since being in almost complete agreement with what he said therein, there is no point in my duplicating his remarks here. As he so truly remarked, it was a year of consolidation for Blake, and I am in entire agreement with him in naming "The Sea Tigers" by Peter Saxon as the hit of the year. If ever a novel deserved the dignity of stiff covers and a purchase price running into shillings instead of pence, this one certainly did.

One new author was introduced to the selected little band of Blake writers in 1958 - Edwin Harrison, who bids fair to become a popular contributor.

The four stories in the order in which they are printed gave me my greatest reading thrills, and these I consider the four best stories published in 1958:

- | | |
|----------------------------|----------------------------|
| (1) "The Sea Tigers" | (2) "The Evil Eye" |
| (3) "The House on the Bay" | (3) "Nine O' Clock Shadow" |

These were written by Peter Saxon, Martin Thomas, Arthur Maclean, and Jack Trevor Story, respectively. I also much enjoyed Arthur Kent's novel "Stairway to Murder" and consider the cover of that particular issue the best drawn of the series.

Best supporting item - editor W. Howard Baker's straight-from-the-shoulder editorial; a frank admission of future S.B.L. policy which was unique in that no previous Blake editor would have been courageous enough to have spoken in such fearless terms. Yet it gave the true Blake fan a feeling of comfort, for it was an encouraging sign that at last the S.B.L. was out of the danger zone and sailing full steam to safety.

By the evidence it has been touch and go, the struggle arduous and, at times, discouraging; but in giving the Blake reader better value for his 10d. today than he got for his 4d. in pre-war days, the editor has put the little magazine on its previous firm footing again. An even better circulation could have happy results - a SEXTON BLAKE ANNUAL for 1959 for example! A happy thought, but a by no means improbable one, being entirely dependent on continued support and faithful co-operation, a combination from which springs the life-blood of all published work.

And now, into 1959 with - let us hope - a continuation of the present top level novels, with, perhaps, a little more support from James Stagg, and that veteran of many old boys' stories - John Hunter.

**

HAMILTONIANA

**Compiled by HERBERT LECKENBY

The "Daily Sketch" of December 18th devoted the greater part of a page to an interview with Frank Richards by Herbert Kretzmer. Here are a few extracts:

Referring to the play at the Palace Theatre, Frank Richards said: "Haven't been to London since the war. I shall never go to London again - not even to see old Bunter on the stage. Old Bunter" he chuckled nodding his head "who'd have thought he'd last so well? Makes me laugh sometimes it really does." "I'm a very old man, I can't last much longer. But" he prodded his pipe defiantly into empty air - "it's absurd to worry about death. When death comes, why, I'll feel like I'm changing trains in a long journey. That's all there is to that."

"I think a lot about God and the life to come. I've written a book on religion. Nobody wants it, all they want is Bunter. They won't let me be serious."

There was also the interesting statement that Miss Edith Hood had been his housekeeper for 30 years.

Herbert Kretzmer finished his statement like this: "I said good-bye to this marvellous and alert old man, who built a school out of the imaginings of his unique talent and filled it with boys who can never die - because they had never really lived."

"Good-bye" he said, sitting very quietly by the fire. "Goodbye, my boy, goodbye".

(Well let's hope the grand old man was wrong in one respect - when he said "I can't last much longer". We can't have him changing trains yet. H.L.)

* * * * *

BILLY BUNTER'S MYSTERY CHRISTMAS: The play at the Palace Theatre is creating a lot of interest. It has twice been mentioned on sound radio. On December 19th there was an interview with the lady producer. She said it would be quite up to date with a plot concerning the theft of atomic plans.

Then on December 23rd Barbara Hooper had a word or two with Gerald Campion who had just finished a dress rehearsal watched by an audience of children. Miss Hooper asked if Bunter wasn't dated. Mr. Campion emphatically denied that declaring that Bunter was as popular with the present generation of children as those of 50 years ago. He gave some amusing extracts from letters he had received to prove it.

He also told of a correspondent who had asked for the loan of some of his garments for a fancy dress affair. The request came from an elderly lady.

Many of our members will be going to the Palace Theatre. If I get any of their opinions in time I'll try and get them into this issue.

* * * * *

LET'S BE CONTROVERSIAL

(In this series, Eric Fayne touches on certain matters on interest to students of the Hamilton papers. He gives his own views superficially. If you will write to him, expressing your opinions on the topics he discusses, he will summarise readers' views in a future issue).

No. 22. TO BIND OR NOT TO BIND

That is the question which most of us have asked ourselves from time to time. We have, of course, ample proof that copies carefully done up in parcels will retain their pristine freshness in amazing fashion, but the great destroyers are rusting pins, which rot the paper around them, and leave unsightly marks wholesale.

In my own collection I have two thousand copies bound so far, and, slowly but surely, I am wading through the remaining two thousand and more - slowly, on account of the cost; surely, because I am certain it is the only method of preserving them.

The papers lose their individuality and charm when they are bound. The tendency arises to regard the bound copies as cherished possessions over which to gloat through the glass doors of a bookcase. Once your papers are bound, they cease to be intimate friends. You accord them a dignity which they never had when they accompanied you to bed, or when you sprawled with them on a settee or took them as companions on a train journey.

It is a mistake to put too great a number to a volume. The larger the volume, the less intimacy you have with the contents. I have a volume which contains 73 Gems - a book which is as unwieldy and unfriendly as a volume of the Larger Oxford Dictionary. I have two fat volumes, each containing 50 Magnets. To nurse one of these before the fire is, literally, to have Mr. Prout or Billy Bunter on your lap.

It is my practice at present to have my Gems and Magnets bound by hundreds - 3 volumes to the hundred. The cost is about £5 10s for the binding of the three. Even here, the books are too big - they would be far more satisfactory if bound in 4 volumes to the hundred - but that would bump up the cost. My advice to binders is, if you can possibly afford it, keep your volumes fairly small.

Is there any wisdom in having indifferent copies bound? I can only say that binders can do an amazing job in preparing and making the best of copies which are far from "mint". But common sense is necessary. With poor copies in expensive binding you have one ruined by the other.

Further, I advise you to check your volumes carefully when they return from the binders. Some years back I was browsing over some volumes which had been delivered to me many months earlier. Three copies had been omitted. The company found the missing copies, and rebound the books at their own expense - but I was nearly put to a great loss by my own carelessness not examining the volumes at the time of delivery.

I have been collecting for nearly thirty years, so that a large part of my collection consists of papers which I purchased week by week from the bookstalls. Is there any difference in the outlook of a collector who acquires his papers in this way and one who, with well-lined pockets, says "the sky's the limit" and buys his collection "en masse"?

Why do we collect? For the love of the old papers? For the pride of possession? For the sake of collecting? "Perm" any two reasons from three and we may find what makes the average collector tick. Certainly, the "sky's the limit" man milks a limited market, and inflates costs fantastically.

Inevitable and sad. Inevitable, because such things happen with all popular collecting, whether it comprises paintings, cigarette cards, or Magnets and Gems; sad, because it brings "big business" into our beloved hobby, and those with a giant love for the papers but a pigmy pocket to meet expenses are prevented from acquiring even a tattered collection.

It's just my point of view. What's yours?

* * *

CONTROVERSIAL ECHOES

No. 20. PET AVERSIONS.

ROGER JENKINS writes: "You seem to have mentioned all my pet aversions in Hamiltoniana, except the one relating to nomenclature. Most of the characters bore very apposite names, but some of the tradespeople reminded one of Happy Families; for example, Miss Bunn, the baker's daughter. This was carried to extremes in some cases: for example, Dr. Pillbury, the school medico, and Mr. Tiper, the printer. Are there such names in existence? I always felt that the stories had degenerated into a comic strip when names of this kind were mentioned.

There is another small point of criticism which arises out of what you said about the tales of snobbery. I have sometimes thought that social classes depicted in the stories were a little too extreme: the

emphasis was on the upper classes, whose sons went to Greyfriars. The great mass of middle classes, whose sons went to the local grammar schools were just not represented in the stories. There was probably no place for them in the plots, but there is no doubt that their absence accentuated the unpleasantness of the upstart stories and the tales of the scholarship juniors".

MRS. VERA NICHOLLS writes: "My pet aversions are as follows:- the stories in which a form-master takes a bitter and unjustified dislike of a scholar. Mr. Quelch, in particular, soon formed a bad opinion of Harry Wharton. One would have expected a man of his experience to be a better psychologist.

How could anyone who knew Loder so well make such a favourite of him as Mr. Prout did at one time? Form-masters who do not give their pupils a fair deal are sadists and liable to warp the characters of their charges. Strangely, I enjoyed very much the Wharton versus Quelch series and the friendship of Prout and Loder, but I did dislike the treatment of a young boy who was unable to protect himself.

I hope you will always find something to be controversial about." DON WEBSTER writes: "My pet aversion is Billy Bunter, closely followed by Fish, whose Americanisms I detest. I also dislike the type of sporting stories in which the characters make huge scores, quite unlikely for youngsters in school games."

GEOFFREY WILDE writes: "The sulks of Hazeldene, the escapades of Dicky Nugent, the sometimes seemingly incessant routine of japes that goes on at St. Jim's, and the sporadic (and hardly likely) outbreaks of sporting ambition on the part of the various dingy seniors tend to put me out of patience. I have an aversion too, to the intrusion of local characters into holiday series, particularly where they are extreme or heavily typed characters like Ponsonby and Coker. It would be interesting to see the actual statistics of occasions on which these two have cropped up in Greyfriars holiday stories, set in widely varying parts of England and Europe. The improbability of this is something one overlooks once or twice in favourite series, after which it can become maddening.

I fully sympathise with your feelings regarding class distinction in the stories; there are one or two themes of what I might loosely call the "moral" kind that affect me in the same way. I know Charles Hamilton was anxious to avoid the "goody-goody", and it must be admitted that on examination these tales prove to be well and sincerely written, but they always leave me with a feeling of having skated over thin ice.

The portrait of Hacker in the 1937 series, I think, most pleasingly studied and adapted to the theme. In context I find the

washing-up incident acceptable, but the man could never have lived it down, of course. Since he was to play his part in later Greyfriars stories, things should really have stopped a little short of this extreme indignity - there I agree with you.

ERIC FAYNE adds: Professor Balmcrumpet certainly rather smacks of the comic paper. But long, long ago, my Sunday School superintendent was a Mr. Diable, so anything seems possible.

* * *

RESULTS OF DECEMBER COMPETITIONS

Answers to ASK ME ANOTHER No. 5.

1. It was the last Gem of the familiar size, and red, white and blue cover. 2. Xmas at sea, 1936. 3. Jimmy Silver's home. 4. Valentine Outram. 5. "Flip". 6. Lovell. 7. "Tom Merry's Christmas", reprinted as "St. Jim's for Merrie Christmas". 8. Wun Lung. 9. The "Bunter in the Attic" series, 1933. 10. The Cedar Creek chums. 11. Holly. 12. Lattrey.
5/- has been sent to Jack Wood, 328 Stockton Lane, York, who has earned 10 points for Northern. Totals:- Northern 20 points; Merseyside 20 points; London 10 points.

Solution of QUIZZLE No. 1. Clue down. "A Merry Christmas". Hidden words: "Christmas Double Numbers". 5/- has been sent to Leonard Packman, 27 Archdale Road, London, SE.22., who has earned 10 points for London.

* * *

Here's Bill Lofts "on the trail" again.

HARRY WHARTON - WORST BOY AT GREYFRIARS? Part 1

By W. O. G. Lofts

When was the submarine "Starfish" sunk? When did Gracie Fields divorce Archie Pitt? When was Miss Unity Mitford shot?

"What on earth has this to do with Harry Wharton" the reader will certainly ask. "Nothing" is the reply. But in finding out the date of when the above events happened, enabled me to glean the information required to make this article complete.

One of the most popular and regular features that our editor likes to feature in "Hamiltoniana" is the news items that have appeared in the current newspapers and magazines relating to anything connected with the writings of Charles Hamilton. These are, of course, present day extracts from the press, and so for a change I would like to give

continued on page 20

QUIZZLE No. 2

A		1	2						
B			3						
C			4						
D	5	6							
E	7								
F	8								
G	9								
H		10	11						
I		12	13						
J			14						
K	15			16					
L	17	18							
M	19	20	21	22					
N	23		24						

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18
19	20	21	22	23	24			

The letters in numbered squares, if placed in sequence in the lower grid, will spell some of the most famous schoolboys in the world.

CLUE DOWN: A. A famous Frank Richards' character, from first to last.
(7, 7)

CLUES ACROSS:

- A. Rookwood prefect.
 B. What Kipps and Cromwell have in common.
 C. Town near Greyfriars.
 D. Fatty Wynn takes a maiden on the field.
 E. Direction for Greyfriars prefect.
 F. Study next to Cardew's.
 G. Where the boys hand their coats.
 H. Nossco, Mr. Mobbs, Archie Popper - he takes them all on.
 I. There is one at Huckleberry.
 J. How Redwing might go afloat with his Dad.
 K. New House botanist?
 L. Talbot is away after a meal.
 M. Mornington tried to do this, from the captaincy. (2 words 4 & 5).
 N. Means, perhaps, Tom Merry, Manners and Lowther.

Write on a postcard, the words in the lower grid and the answer to the Clue Down, and post to the Editor. 5/- for the first correct solution received. 10 points to club branch, if any.

* * *

WANTED: Magnets - 771, 773, 774, 799. S.O.L's - 60, 65, 68.

$\frac{1}{2}$ d. Gems - 16, 23, 29, 37. Gems - 279, 359, 364, 433.

B.F. Library - 237 King Cricket; 334 The Jungle Patrol; 383 After Lights Out; 497 Adventure Creek.

DR. ROBERT WILSON, 100 BROOMFIELD ROAD, GLASGOW, N.1.

* * *

an item of Hamiltoniana that appeared in the London "Star" early in 1940; this being at a time when the Greyfriars stories were still being published by the Amalgamated Press.

This item of news which concerned Harry Wharton, certainly stirred up a great amount of interest amongst the "Star's" Greyfriars enthusiasts, and this cutting which enabled me to write this article came into my possession via my good friend Mr. H. W. Twyman well known now to C.D. readers as editor of the former "Union Jack". Mr. Twyman whom I see quite often at his country cottage, is a very methodical man. Readers of Sexton Blake are of course, aware of his famous index file, which is kept up to date with scissors and paste by Tinker. This index contains newspaper cuttings of any events relating to crime which may be useful to Blake in his investigations at some future date. Well, like Blake, Mr. Twyman has a similar index file going back for many years, which has proved very useful to him in his present sphere of writing for the American crime magazines.

In the early part of 1940, Mr. Twyman spotted in a column of the "Star" readers replies to an article that had appeared earlier quoting Harry Wharton. Having worked in the "Magnet" office at the start of his career at the Amalgamated Press, and also having written several of the substitute Greyfriars stories, he took some interest in the column and though this did not deal with crime and was not a normal procedure of his, he cut it out for his own interest.

Nearly twenty years later he came across this cutting and knowing of my interest in Greyfriars, gave me the item of news in the hope that I may be able to trace what had been written earlier, and perhaps make an article out of it.

This newscutting which contained a sort of daily column, was a daily feature in the "Star" - this being written by the widow of a former employee of that paper who had died in poor circumstances. His widow wrote every day happenings in the life of her family, and the column was entitled aptly enough "Mother". As Mr. Twyman did not paste the cutting in his index file the column was undated, but on the back were three short items of news already mentioned at the start of this article. Now if I could find the approximate date of these happenings it would be fairly simple for me to trace back through the newspaper files at the British Museum and find out what had been written previously.

In getting the date of these events which was February, 1940, I am indebted to Trevor Adley, young brother of Derek who so kindly took on this task by persuing through his local reference library. Once having found this date it was a straightforward task for me to locate the issue of the "Star" in question. The first extract which was dated January

18th, 1940, was very interesting indeed to me and it ran as follows:-
 "Mother Dips into the Past". "I have a boy friend. He is so entertaining that last night I stayed up to nearly midnight to learn more of his exploits. He's quite famous too, all the best people know him. His name is Harry Wharton, and he's the worst boy at Greyfriars. I've only just met him, although for several weeks past I've had my eye on an enormous pile of what I carelessly termed 'tuppenny bloods'. Frequently I've threatened to heap them round the dust bin, to be salvaged as waste paper. 'If only you'd read good books' I've said again and again to the boys, but so far I've been unsuccessful, my children simply refuse to read "Dickens" "Thackeray" and "Scott". Is it because the pace of life is too swift, too violent, too uncertain, for the slow digestion and appreciation of the classics? I am sorry that my boys refuse to partake of the rich feast spread before them, the wireless and the cinema are a doubtful blessing to children today, for they think that anything can be attained by pressing a switch. However, to return to Harry Wharton. It was sheer curiosity that made me pick up one of these small paper-backed volumes, and for an hour or two I was transported to a make-believe war-free world.

'D' said accusingly 'You can't rob the kids of those books now you've gorged on them'. In fairness, I suppose I can't, if I could only get hold of No. 340 to see what happened to Harry - was it ever discovered that he was the culprit who emptied a bag of flour over Quelch's head?

'Mother' was of course referring to the "Schoolboys Own Library" No. 337 entitled "The Worst Boy at Greyfriars" part of the reprinted famous "Magnet" series. 1285-1296. 1932. As to be expected the readers replied in no uncertain manner, and this will be dealt with in the second part of this article next month.

* * *

THE NEW TOM MERRY BOOKS: These new stories, recently published by Spring Books, are absolutely first-class. Youngsters of all ages should be delighted with them, and, at 2/6 a piece, they are wonderful value for money.

Both yarns star Cardew, which would seem to be slightly faulty planning, but Cardew has many admirers and no reader will be disposed to complain. To the adult collector it can be said that both stories have very great appeal, comparing well with the Gem's finest. This Cardew is not, perhaps, exactly the same character we used to know, but there are welcome flashes of his old attractive mannerisms.

The two stories are extremely well told, and the pace is fast

but smooth. Just mildly irritating is the use of the expression "old boy", in the dialogue. It occurs quite a few times in these tales, as in other recent offerings from our favourite author. "Old man", "old bean", yes - but boys do not really address one another as "old boy". However, it is a very minor point.

"DOWN AND OUT" by Frank Richards. One of the very best of the author's post-war stories. Yarns introducing the upper forms have almost invariably been of high quality, and this one is no exception. Cutts makes a welcome return to the limelight, and even Monteith is mentioned. An extremely well developed school story, with pleasant cricket sequences it cannot fail to delight.

"CARDEW'S CATCH" by Frank Richards. Topical enough, in its way, the theme of the bank robber, who dons and doffs his disguise in the wood, is familiar to old readers. Nevertheless, the tale develops on fairly novel lines, and it is entertaining throughout. Both stories are strongly recommended to all St. Jim's fans, and to anybody who enjoys a rattling good school yarn.

LETTER BOX.

Frank Richards' Friendly Bout with Roger Jenkins.

December 8th, 1958.

Dear Herbert Leckenby,

Thanks for the C.D. I think the "Controversial" series is its most attractive feature at present, and I follow it with much interest. But, though I will not repeat my former remarks on the subject of dogmatism, I will say that it does seem to me a mistake to state an opinion as a fact. For example our excellent Roger tells us that, in the last numbers of the old Magnet, "the standard of the performance was unaccountably slipping". This may have been so. I would not state as a fact, but only as my own opinion, that it was not so. Roger's opinion is as good as mine. But really and truly an opinion is not an indubitable and unassailable fact. Opinions differ; facts don't. From the innumerable inquiries I received, and still occasionally receive, about the last series so unluckily cut short by Hitler's antics, I venture to believe that Roger's opinion is very far from general. Be that as it may, it does seem to me that, while criticism should be as free as air, the critic should not say in effect.

I am Sir Oracle, and when I ope my mouth, let no dog bark!

Roger may be right, of course. I wouldn't state as a fact that he isn't. Only as my opinion. Always yours sincerely, FRANK RICHARDS

Old Boys Book Club

LONDON SECTION. The 1958 Wood Green Christmas meeting must have been very gladdening to our Herbert, who as is his happy custom, travelled down from York, heavily laden with "C.D. Annuals" to attend. A record attendance of 35 were there to greet him. A very happy gathering with all the Yuletide enjoyments, very suitable Festive Season catering by Eileen ably assisted by sister Eileen not forgetting Olive of the Wright clan, who served the mince pies etc., round. Alan Stewart present after his globe trotings, looking very happy, who would not with the amount of Tom Merry books, Bunter Annuals and "The Hiker" being distributed, not forgetting Herbert handing round the "C.D. Annuals"? The true Christmas spirit prevailed with chairman Len's happy opening remarks and our Herbert's few appropriate words. All the four clubs were ably represented, including Brian Honeysett from the Leeds one. Beryl and Tom came from Birmingham; a good quiz from the former, and, as usual, the double numbered Don of Liverpool and London had his usual spot in the proceedings. The "Rag" feed was excellent and with the Rev. Dockery saying grace, we all settled down to a good tea and an enjoyable time afterwards. Next meeting at 27, Archdale Road, East Dulwich, London, S.E.22 on Sunday, January 18th. This is the tenth Annual General Meeting and will one and all who hope to attend let Len Packman know. 'Phone NEW Cross 7449 after 5.30 p.m.

UNCLE BENJAMIN

NORTHERN SECTION CHRISTMAS PARTY, DECEMBER 13th, 1958. Honestly, I think it was the liveliest in our history, from 4.30 to 9.30 there was never a dull moment. First a sumptuous tea, a big bouquet here for Mrs. Allison for all her hard work. I am afraid we are apt to take all that preparation for granted. Thanks are due, too, to Margaret Jackson for a delicious cake. We had the pleasure of welcoming David Lancake, our new member from Manchester. I had assured him he would feel at home in five minutes, I had over-estimated, it was more like one minute. There was just a score of us altogether, including six ladies, and my word in the games and quizzes they made a bold show. Points were awarded in the various events and prizes given to those who had the largest totals. First for the men was Bill Williamson, no one was surprised at that, he must have won as many prizes at Hyde Park Road as Billy Wright has international caps. Geoffrey Wilde secured the second and Mrs. Harry Barlow the ladies prize. Frank Hancock entertained us at the piano and to Gerry Allison, of course, goes the credit

for arranging the ding-dong programme. Yes, altogether a night to be remembered. Next meeting, January 10th. Roger Jenkins will be paying his annual visit, a right good start for the New Year. It's a long way from London to Leeds so we must show our appreciation with a bumper attendance. HERBERT LECKENBY, Northern Section Corres.

MIDLAND O.B.B.C. MEETING HELD 24th NOVEMBER, 1958. For all the fog and it was one of the worst this winter so far, quite a goodly number of the regulars sat back to enjoy a nicely varied programme. Making up for the unavoidable absence of Jack Ingram and the two Winifreds we had once more John Tomlinson and Joe Marston, from Burton. After certain business matters had been disposed of we turned to the entries for the Greyfriars Cup Competition. The writer who has the job of producing the "New Popular" was able to report excellent progress. In fact better progress than was expected in view of the peculiar conditions under which we had to "labour". After all, we are only amateurs and to have to maintain a "set" length which in many cases meant writing and re-writing and most of us with only a limited amount of spare time, was no trivial matter. At any rate, we have four rattling good yarns all ready for dispatch, all very nicely typed by Madge Corbett. The main feature of the programme was another well thought out and highly amusing talk by Ray Bennett; "The reminiscences of an amateur collector" Ray gave us incidents from his experiences since he started collecting the favourites of his boyhood days; Magnets, Gems, Boys' Friends were dealt with in addition to Nelson Lees and Sexton Blakes. As a change Ray also gave us some very good memories of the "Scout". Next we had a chance to bombard Leslie Welch (Sorry, I mean Jack Corbett) with questions on Hamiltoniana. He was holding his own well when I left early to catch my connection. I am informed that the meeting finished on a good note by Ted Davey reading the second chapter of "The Secret Seven" by R. S. Warren Bell. HARRY BROSTER - Secretary.

O.B.B.C. (MERSEYSIDE SECTION) Owing to unforeseen circumstances the usual Christmas meeting had to be postponed and a few members gathered for an informal discussion as to the future policy of the Club. The usual meeting will be resumed next month, on Sunday, January 11th at 7 p.m. when all members are asked to return books for stock-taking. By the time these notes are in print our entry for the "Greyfriars Herald" Cup will be on its way and we are hopeful of finishing higher than last year. Merseyside send best wishes to all fellow-clubs for a Happy New Year. As the January Meeting will be the 100th it is hoped that all members will make an endeavour to attend. One item for discussion will be future programmes and policy of the club. D. B. WEBSTER

NELSON LEE COLUMN

by JACK WOOD, Nostaw, 328 Stockton Lane, York.

Phone: 25795

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Best wishes to all our readers and contributors for 1959. With the coming of the New Year, it is our intention to provide a well varied programme in the months ahead.

Changed circumstances at St. Frank's will only permit our resident correspondent, Jim Cook, writing to us once every two months, for the time being at any rate. Jim has done a wonderful job in 1958, and I'm sure all Old Franciscans are very grateful to him for news from the old school. His next letter will appear in March.

Next month there are more Random Recollections from an old friend, Jim Sutcliffe. Jim also wants to know who exactly was Charles Wentworth. He tells me Brooks denied being that particular successor to Arthur S. Hardy so maybe someone can give us the answer to this query. Here's hoping! Herewith, Jim Cook's latest news from St. Frank's.

I have been to see the Head! Dr. Stafford, fresh and alert as ever, welcomed me when I reached his study. Nelson Lee was there too, standing with his back to the fire. And so was Nipper. Everything in that room exuded cheerfulness. There was an atmosphere that quickly banished the gloom of the wintery conditions outside and I immediately felt at ease. The Headmaster nodded to a deep armchair.

The famous Housemaster-detective did most of the talking, explaining how Lord Dorrimore had insisted my acting as chronicler of the St. Frank's history and of my recent participation in the rescue of his Lordship in the Kalahari Desert. "I understand, Mr. Lee, that this affair in Africa has a sequel?" I asked.

"Yes, indeed", he replied. "Those ex-Nazi officers never reached their intended destination, after all. The Police reinforcement from Johannesburg arrived a little late to collect them. When eventually they got to Tsane where we had left the Germans in the hands of the small force of native police, it was only to learn that the whole population of Tsane had risen up in wrath and after dragging the German officers into the desert had put an end to them in their own particular way!" "Then the War Crimes Commission will write them off their records". said Dr. Stafford. Nelson Lee nodded.

"Yes, the only evidence left are the bones the vultures left!" "I say, Guv'nor", exclaimed Nipper, coming up. "The story about our

adventure was played down a great deal. Why was that?"

"What exactly do you mean by that, Nipper?" Dr. Stafford said.

"Well, all the reports were restricted by censorship by the South African Government. Obviously there had to be some clamp-down otherwise news about a gold mine being worked illegally - and profitably at that - may have caused consternation, to say nothing of trouble all round," explained Lee. "That included me as well!" I said.

Nelson Lee smiled. "I vetted your version, of course, and I am glad you did not mention the massacre that took place outside the mine."

He was referring to the time just after we had smashed down the wooden shanties that housed the Germans. The two huge motor vehicles had been used to ram these huts and the ex-Nazis had come running out, their guns blazing in all directions. Unfortunately a crowd of natives had managed to escape from the mine at the same moment and as they emerged had run slap into the guns. This part, together with some other details was extracted from my narrative. But I have now been allowed to divulge the fact. We sat talking for some time and finally we got down to my stay at St. Frank's. Owing to my many commitments in London I found I could no longer remain at the old college as I had done in the past year. Consequently we should all be short of news. All those who loved St. Frank's would be cut off, as it were, from the events and happenings at the famous old school.

"No, No, that must not be!" exclaimed Dr. Stafford. "Now that I have returned to a civilised domain I want St. Frank's to be publicised to the saner elements of this world. I desire people to know about us for we here at St. Frank's represent all the goodness that is gradually falling from an elevation our forefathers worked so hard for. Mr. Lee Mr. Cook, Nipper, the outside world to me is a clamour of nonsense. I have tried to live with it but have failed miserably. It is a world no longer true, no longer reliable. It is a world I no longer understand."

There was silence in the study for a few seconds. We saw the grand old Head sit down in his chair and perhaps, realising he had opened his heart to his thoughts he began to polish his glasses. It was a simple speech he had made but it was sincere and it was right! This brave old world that is passing us is shedding its skin all too swiftly. The new covering is armoured with a hard indifference, a brittle front of safety and a disregard to beauty.

So that you can be kept informed about St. Frank's Nipper has stepped into the breach. He is going to chronicle the events as they occur and I am to visit the old school once a fortnight to gather all the news for you. I shall get my information from him. So, dear old Dr. Stafford, we shall still be with you. And you will be with us in

spirit.

Nipper tells me he has not been able to repay the girls of the Moor View School for their great jape they played on Archie Glenthorne. While Joan Tarrant is strictly outside the circle of friends, Irene Manners has complimented her and in a letter to the captain of the Remove suggests St. Frank's had better keep on the qui vive!! If it is so easy to spoof the Remove the way Joan Tarrant did then what if Irene and Co., start getting ideas?

Already Nipper is being accused of sitting on the fence. Handforth has been particularly noisy in clamouring for reprisals, but as Vivian Travers pointed out you have to tread warily when dealing with girls! A point Nipper hasn't overlooked! But I think you can trust the Remove to think of something to wipe out that awful stain Joan Tarrant has left. They had better hurry. Christmas has heralded its coming with some slight falls of snow. A thin carpet covers the old Triangle and the branches of the chestnut trees are topped with a white mantle. The famous old school will soon be empty. The boys will be going away, for the autumn term ends and Christmas holidays are the main topic.

I have been overwhelmed with invitations for the Christmas holidays and it has been very difficult refusing such popular chaps as Sir Montie Tregellis-West, Jimmy Potts, Vivian Travers and the Duke of Somerton. They are all going to spend the Yuletide vacation at the home of Reggie Pitt in London. Later on Jack Grey, Fatty Little, the Hon. Douglas Singleton, Tommy Watson, Solomon Levi, Ralph Leslie Fullwood and some others are all meeting together at Handforth's residence. I am not quite sure exactly how Archie Glenthorne is faring after his affair with Joan Tarrant. I don't think he has quite got over it! And of the many other juniors and members of the Fifth and Sixth, no doubt they have planned their various ways of celebrating the holiday.

For the first time, it must be the first time, Nelson Lee and Nipper, Dr. Stafford, Lord Dorrimore are staying at St. Frank's!!! I understand it was Dorrie's idea and it seems such a fantastic suggestion that Nipper cannot see any sense in it! Even Nelson Lee is mystified I don't say St. Frank's will be dismal or gloomy, it could never be that even at Christmas time with all the boys away, but for Lord Dorrimore to suggest such a thing is a little bewildering.

The sporting Peer is all for noise and gaiety. And for warmer climes. I don't think Umlosi is coming. Is it because Dorrie is at last slowing up? Nobody seems to know. And as I have been asked to stay on I will be here for Christmas. The very first.

I do know that the headmaster had intended staying with his sister,

Honoraria Lady Dexter, in London, so I am puzzled more than ever why Lord Dorrimore should prefer the Head to stay on at the College - to say nothing of Nelson Lee and Nipper. There's one thing about it - there will be a calm at the old school such as I have not yet experienced. All the time I have spent here the four Houses have at all times been inhabited. Mr. Lee expresses the hope that the cathedral solitude that will hover like the vastness of space on St. Frank's will have a salutary effect, otherwise it is proposed to duck Dorrie in the fountain.

I am sorry my letter is so short. To tell you all that happens here would require a daily edition of the Collector's Digest. It is almost Christmas, all the boys have departed now, St. Frank's has 'broken up' and the corridors, the studies and the common-rooms are strangely quiet. A robin, alighting on the steps of the Ancient House wonders at the emptiness and the silence. I watch him from the window of my bedroom as he pecks at imaginary seeds on the stone floor. Then Mrs. Poulter's black cat, also in doubt about the uncanny stillness emerges from the Ancient House and stares at the bird. The seconds hang on time. The robin stands as though transfixed. The cat wriggles its haunches preparatory to springing. Snow softly descends and a flake settles on the nose of the cat. The tension is broken. The bird flies away, the black cat with a shake turns round and disappears.

It is a good omen. A promise of good luck. And on that happy note I will leave you. My letters will of necessity only be sent you once every other month and not monthly as hitherto.

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WANTED URGENTLY: Sexton Blake Libraries 1st series Nos. 17, 105, 109, 197, 198, 201, 202.

Sexton Blake Libs. 2nd series. Nos. 8, 25, 102, 111, 129, 213, 236, 243, 272, 293, 296, 306, 422, 474, 495, 520, 667.

Boys Friend Libs. 1st series. Nos. 10, 68, 102, 105, 107, 165, 229, 246, 669.

Boys Friend Libs. 2nd series. Nos. 393, 396

Union Jacks. Nos. 881, 1041, 1098.

MRS. J. PACKMAN, 27 ARCHDALE ROAD, EAST DULWICH, LONDON, S.E. 22.

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