

The Collectors' ^{1/6} Digest

APRIL 1959 VOLUME 13
NUMBER 148



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THE COLLECTORS DIGEST

Vol. 13 No. 148

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APRIL, 1959

Editor: HERBERT LECKENBY
12 Herbert Street,
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From the Editor's Chair

THAT LEAFLET. The leaflet which was enclosed with the C.D. last month has caused a great amount of interest, and lots of members have expressed their appreciation of John Davis' generous action. Well, I am pleased to say there may be more to come, for it is possible we may be able to have a selection of photos of personalities in the next Annual. However, more about it later.

* * *

JUST ONE. You will see from an advert that Tom Porter requires just one S.O.L. No. 58 to complete his collection of that publication. Just one! But some of you know how elusive just one odd number can be. So if there's anyone who can give a helping hand, you'll have the satisfaction of knowing you have helped Tom reach the end of his quest.

* * *

THE GREYFRIARS CUP. Well, the result of the second contest will be found on another page. It was a real contest and thanks are due to Bill Gander for what must have been a deuce of a task. Congratulations London! and we hope to have the pleasure of seeing Leslie Rowley, generous donor of the Cup, at home again shortly.

* * *

IN GLORIOUS JUNE. In two months time will appear No. 150 of our little magazine. My goodness! how time flies; it only seems yesterday when we were talking about the 100th number. Well, it is suggested in some influential quarters that we mark the half-way stage to the second century with a specially enlarged number. One suggestion is that we include one or two of the winning efforts in the Cup contest. More about it next month.

Yours sincerely,

HERBERT LECKENBY

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Collector seeks copies of "Felix the Hunchback" - "The Divorced Queen" "The Sea Sprite" and "Belle Vue" - in any of the various editions in Henderson's Weekly Budget People's Pocket Story Books. Offers to M. c/o the Editor of the Collectors' Digest.

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Blakiana.....

conducted by JOSEPHINE PACKMAN

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

In view of the fact that Walter Webb's series of articles ("Century-Makers") are lengthy and will run for some months, I decided it would be better to publish Margaret Cooke's article this month and start Walter's series in May.

I would like to thank all those who have written to me during the past few weeks to say that they are "rallying round" in regard to the Sexton Blake Library. We can only hope that our beloved Blake will survive.

JOSIE PACKMAN

* * * * *

THE PERIL OF BEING PAULA

By Margaret Cooke

Fifteen minutes before closing time one evening in 1956 a woman walked down the steps to the Malibu Club and called for a drink. She was young, beautiful, well-dressed, and desperately afraid.

Someone was trying to kill her! A fast car had been driven straight at her.....someone had tried to push her over the edge of a crowded platform at an underground station. These things could have been accidental - but she didn't think so. Each time she had seen a man's face, hard and mean, with cold, cruel eyes.

As she sipped her drink she saw the man again standing at the bar staring at her steadily. She rose and hurried out of the Club, stumbling on the steps in her haste. The man followed.

When she was twenty yards from the Club's entrance a black car swung into the curb, and the man seized her and tried to hurl her into it. As she struggled and kicked, another man's footsteps rang out on the pavement; then the Turk hit her viciously.

When she recovered, she was lying in the ill-lit street with her head on a stranger's arm. The man said that his name was Blake, insisted on seeing her home, listened to her story, agreed to investigate the attempts to murder and abduct her, but refused to accept a fee. As he left the flat she kissed him, impulsively but shyly - and shut the door softly, knowing that she had fallen in love with him. Sexton Blake looked thoughtfully at the closed door and smiled. He

walked home with a light step humming softly to himself.

So began the story of Sexton Blake, Detective, and Paula Dane, copy writer for an advertising agency, who became his secretary at the end of the case because she wanted to help other people; she wanted adventure and excitement; and she wanted to be near Blake.

She has certainly had the danger, adventure and excitement - "real Pearl White stuff" as Tinker put it.

Much of the danger came in the normal course of her work as Blake's secretary. She has faced death in many different lands at Blake's side and though she must have been afraid, has not panicked.

She went with Blake to visit a client in a sea cove one dark night, walking slightly behind Blake so that his bulk protected her from the wind. They walked carefully, in the light of Blake's torch, along a narrow ledge on the cliff. The bushes bent and crackled, a dark shape loomed over them - and Blake's shoulder crashed into her back sending her sprawling to safety on the path. She saw Blake turn and sway - then the man who had rushed out at them to push them over the cliff went past them, unable to stop - on and over, with a despairing scream, to the rocks below.

Later that same night Blake decided to return to London to visit a shady Night Club. Paula was driving the car at a pleasant speed along the road when Blake flung himself over her, wrenched the wheel from her hands, turned the car sideways and drove through the hedge, as a blazing car broke through the opposite hedge to burn itself out on the road! (Stairway to Murder, S.B.L. No. 399)

Sometimes Paula faced danger alone. In "Murder Down Below", Blake asked her to visit all the people in the village who owned a typewriter. Paula bought the vicar's typewriter for £10 and began to walk back to the Inn. The village idiot, sought by the police for murder, stepped into her path, smiled a vacant smile, and walked slowly towards her. Paula, too frightened to run, swung the typewriter above her head and hurled it at him. "Never", she said, "were ten pounds so unexpectedly well spent." ("Murder Down Below" S.B.L. No. 397).

When the suspects whom they had trailed across Europe to Mexico took separate paths and the trail was lost in a maze of tracks made by men and beasts in a jungle clearing, Blake decided that Paula, Tinker and himself would have to try different paths too. The suspects must be found, but as it was vitally important that they should not be alarmed he warned them that there must be "no noise, no shouting, no shots."

They crossed the clearing, entered the paths and lost sight of

each other. Suddenly Blake stopped and looked up at a small patch of sky. Birds were wheeling upwards, turning swiftly, noisily. He began to run. The birds were wheeling over Paula's path. She was in danger! He forgot his order about noise and smashed his way through the brush towards the other trail. He came out on to the path just in time to shoot a half-naked savage as he drove a curved knife down towards Paula. ("The Naked Blade" S.B.L. No. 409)

In the "Silent Witness", S.B.L. No. 375, Paula went for a walk in the fields while Blake visited a house in a country village. A mist rose suddenly before she could return to the inn - a cold mist which swirled and eddied about her, blinding the sight and muffling all sound. "Go away from Garford and take Sexton Blake with you" barked a queer, cackling voice out of the greyness about twenty minutes later. Paula lifted her skirt and ran.

Later in the case she answered the 'phone and was asked to meet a woman who could give her information about the case, but not over the 'phone - people could listen-in on a country exchange - Paula must meet her at a certain spot in a nearby lane.

As Paula walked through the village she tried to think what clues Blake had discovered - (he wouldn't tell her) - but she watched her surroundings carefully, remembering the incident in the mist.

She reached her rendezvous and stood in the middle of the road, a slim figure plainly visible against its moonlit surface. A rifle shot 'cracked' behind her, a bullet shrieked past her right ear, another past her left. Paula sank down in the road and put her head in her hands. The cackling voice which had disturbed the silence of the mist yapped "a bullet to the right! A bullet to the left! The next one will be found in the middle! You see if it is not."

Paula has never been the stooge for Blake which the old writers made of Tinker. She has always been a fully adult, intelligent companion, able to keep pace with Blake's own mental processes - if she knows all the facts.

Some of her most dangerous moments have been caused by her determination to find out for herself what was going on. During Blake's absence, owing to injury, in the "Silent Witness", Paula spoke to Tinker by 'phone and was advised by that young gentleman to stay where she was and 'think'. Blake would not stay in hospital long, said the one who knew him best.

Paula thought. The blackmail letters were composed of words typed on various makes of typewriters, British and foreign. The person who had cut them out and stuck them on to the letter must have

received correspondence from abroad in the course of his business. She knew someone in the village who had an export business in London. Could he be the culprit?

She caught the tea-time train to London and searched the office without telling Tinker what she intended to do. Blake had a fixed rule that all members of his staff must 'phone the office before undertaking any mission alone so that they could be rescued if anything went wrong. Paula wanted to test her own theories without help.

She found the evidence she wanted and left London for Garford - without reporting to Tinker. She was waylaid at Garford by the suspect, who had seen her leave his office, taken by car to his home... and saved from a particularly unpleasant death by Blake, still very groggy from his injury.

After that experience Miss Paula Dane learned to defend herself, judo fashion, and began to manhandle the manhandlers. She was abducted in a particularly audacious fashion by two men and a girl from under Tinker's very nose when she was acting as his assistant whilst Blake was abroad. Tinker traced her kidnappers to their lair but was ambushed, interviewed by the gang and given order about calling off all police action or else - Paula would suffer. Tinker, who had no intention of asking for police help talked quietly and calmly waiting for the mistake which would enable him to turn the tables, knowing that Paula would play her part nobly. She did.

One of the kidnappers moved up to her to lead her to the room prepared for her "stay in their care." Paula grabbed his arm, pivotted, and threw him feet first at the girl who was holding a gun. They landed in a heap of twisted, flailing limbs on the floor. Paula dived for the gun to take them captive - Tinker dived for Paula, dragged her out of the house to the car and headed for home and freedom; but once she was safe at home in her flat, however, he returned to the fray, cracked the case single-handed, and was told by Coutts, "This country is going to be just a little cleaner, thanks to you."

Sometimes Paula experienced danger because she didn't expect it to come in such public places. She allowed children to bury her in sand at a beach picnic, and two murderous old hags piled more sand on her so that only her head remained unburied, and this was covered with a towel. She owed her life to Tinker's keen eye. He spotted the towel, lifted it - and yelled for Blake and Kirby. The three men 'scrabbled like rabbits in the sand.' ("Murder in the Sun." S.B.L. No. 412)

None of them expected that danger would strike in an express train

when Blake took his two companions to Scotland, to investigate the sudden death of an old friend, He stood in the corridor talking with Tinker while a drowsy Paula stayed in the compartment idly watching another passenger - twirling a silver pencil between his fingers as he wrestled with a crossword puzzle. It all seemed so innocent and peaceful. Blake and Tinker returned to their seats and went to sleep too. Blake woke up as Paula opened the carriage door - and stepped out. The other passenger was leaving the compartment with an evil grin on his face! Blake was too busy dragging Paula back to safety to stop him.

He left Paula in Tinker's care in Edinburgh while he continued the journey and Paula went to Edinburgh Castle, walking with a set white face, not looking round, apparently unaware that Tinker was following her closely, alert and ready for any eventuality. She climbed to the semi-circular look-out of the castle top, and then on to the parapet. The horrified Tinker rushed forward to drag her down, and, straddling the wall, clinging to the parapet with his knees, seized her arms while she fought against him. Then his hands were torn away from Paula by the man who had been in the railway carriage the night before.

Tinker pushed him away, but he forced his way back between them. Tinker had to let Paula go free. She straightened up on the wall. Tinker shouted an appeal to a crowd of tourists, eluded the Scotsman's clutch, and caught Paula again, sending her sliding down to safety at a soldier's feet.

Even the the Scotsman tried to push her back into danger, but the soldier reached her first. The Scotsman attacked Tinker furiously. Tinker lost his balance and crashed inwards to the roof. The Scotsman fell outward into space - to the road below. Paula was safe once more.

Paula is not always so helpless, however. In "The Frightened People" (S.B.L. No. 418) it was Tinker who fell into trouble and Paula who saved the day by disarming three thugs, saving another man, looking into the gang's car and rescuing Tinker. As he said to Blake afterwards: "Real Pearl White Stuff."

* * * * *

Flash! The biggest scoop in the history of Blakiana!
Our Sleuth, Bill Lofts, has succeeded in obtaining the authentic authorship of every Sexton Blake Library from Number One (1st series year, 1915). More details of this will appear later!!

UNION JACK TITLES - YEAR 1915 (JANUARY - JUNE)

No. 586	The Case of the Missing Reservist (Plummer)	M. Osborne
No. 587	The Millionaire Traitor (Plummer)	M. Osborne
No. 588	The Case of the German Colony	G. H. Teed
No. 589	Private Tinker, R.A.S.C.	W. M. Graydon
No. 590	The Case of the Concentration Camp (Plummer)	M. Osborne
No. 591	The Mystery of the Banana Plantation (Rymer)	G. H. Teed
No. 592	The Holding of the Kana Pass (Losely)	C. Hayter
No. 593	Plummer's Dilemma (Plummer)	M. Osborne
No. 594	The Coniston Diamonds (Council of Eleven)	G. H. Teed
No. 595	Abdulla the Horse Dealer	A. Murray
No. 596	The Case of the Poisoned Telephone (Wu Ling)	G. H. Teed
No. 597	The Army Contract Scandal (Yvonne)	G. H. Teed
No. 598	The Great Re-Mount Swindle	
No. 599	The Vengeance of the Eleven (Council)	G. H. Teed
No. 600	The Case of the Agent from Austria (E. Maitland)	M. Osborne
No. 601	An Officer and a Gentleman	W. M. Graydon
No. 602	The Case of the Canadian Brothers	A. Murray
No. 603	The £10,000 Insurance Case	A. Murray
No. 604	The Case of the Turkish Bonds	W. M. Graydon
No. 605	The Abbey Mystery (Losely)	C. Hayter
No. 606	The Case of the Nihilist's Daughter	M. Osborne
No. 607	The Quest of the Grey Panther (Wu Ling)	G. H. Teed
No. 608	The Mob Leader	A. Murray
No. 609	The Mystery of the Mosque (Plummer)	M. Osborne
No. 610	The Clue of the Khaki Cloth	A. Murray
No. 611	His German Brother	W. M. Graydon

(Number 586 is dated 2nd January, 1915 and Number 611 is dated 26th June, 1915.)

Note: Number 599, dated 3rd April, 1915, is the Easter Double Number.

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S.B.L. REVIEWS - APRIL, 1959

The Violent Ones (No. 427).....Peter Saxon

This is the story of the heroism of a British agent in Cyprus during events immediately precedent to the acceptance of the terms which have now brought peace to the strife-stricken island. It is the story, too, of how Sexton Blake, with but a single ally, a Turk named

Salim Pasali, played a major part in smashing a conspiracy which would have materially added to the terror and bloodshed already prevailing there. In short, it is Blake versus Eoka, when, accepting the assignment Craille has asked him to undertake, the principal of Sexton Blake Investigations lands in Nicosia determined to rescue Peters, the missing agent and one of Craille's most valued men, and aid the British Security Forces in their fight to prevent more arms and ammunition getting into the terrorists hands. Craille can offer little substance on which Blake can base plans for counter measures. The name of the terrorist leader mentioned by Peters before his disappearance, and the fact that a large consignment of war weapons by which Eoka can continue their campaign of death and destruction is to be landed from a submarine of a nationality all too apparent somewhere along the coast. Just where, only Peters knows, so it is imperative that Blake finds the missing agent before he is tortured by the terrorists into disclosing the name of the man he is working for - an admission which would sign his death warrant and foil all Blake's efforts to rescue him.

Not a novel for the squeamish; it's forthright stuff, told in the typical Saxonian manner with no frills but thrills aplenty.

Rating.....Excellent

* * *

Time for Murder (No. 423).....James Stagg.

The incidents in this novel, which heralds the return of James Stagg after exactly a year's absence from the pages of the S.B.L., takes place almost entirely in the Isle of Wight, moving into the cathedral city of Winchester, one-time capital of England in the days when Alfred was King, only to stage the climax, which occurs within the historic old court-room of Winchester Assizes.

Alan Hayes, a young doctor, is arrested in Sexton Blake's Berkeley Square office, charged with the murder by strangulation, of his sweetheart, Shelley Glanville, and sent for trial. This and other murders, involving several young people who had recently gained recognition through having their names published in the local papers, coincides with the escape from Parkhurst Prison of a particularly dangerous convict.

Blake takes up the case, and the story has all the appearances of being no more than an averagely good one until the action moves out of the Isle of Wight to the Assizes at Winchester, and then in one of the best described courtroom scene I have ever read in a Sexton Blake

novel, the murderer is unmasked by Blake, following a demonstration by Tinker and Paula at the request of counsel for the defence, when, in order to press home a point in favour of the accused, Tinker undertakes the pleasant duty of kissing his chief's lovely secretary - the only real kick he got out of a particularly tedious round of investigations, in which he and the girl had to undertake all the spade work.

A pleasant novel...entertaining, with a particularly well-told climax.

Rating.....Very good

WALTER WEBB

GREYFRIARS CUP COMPETITION 1959

R E S U L T

In the manner same as last year, the four entries were received in sealed envelopes with no marks of identification and lettered "A" for Midland, "B" for London, "C" for Merseyside and "D" for Northern and sent on thus to Bill Gander. It was suggested to him that the judges read the stories relating to one school first, allotting points to each in order of merit and totalling the points at the completion of the judging.

This method was adopted and here is the result:-

<u>School</u>	<u>A</u>	<u>B</u>	<u>C</u>	<u>D</u>
Greyfriars.....	15	20	15	20
St. Jim's.....	15	20	20	15
Rockwood.....	20	20	15	15
St. Frank's.....	15	15	15	20
	—	—	—	—
Total Points.....	65	75	65	70
	—	—	—	—

A close finish indeed -

"B" London.....	75 points
"D" Northern.....	70 points
"A" and "C"	
Midland & Merseyside.....	65 points

Bill Gander comments "You will notice that some of the "A" entries would have run to more than four pages if they had been typed on regular-size paper, instead of foolscap size. Even more so if the

story had been broken up into paragraphs as Frank Richards would have done. But this last observation applies to at least some of the other entries. Perhaps four pages was not quite enough space to allow?

These remarks are quoted mainly to stress the importance of keeping to the rules and for the guidance of Midland and Merseyside Clubs when they to draw up the rules of the Competition for 1960.

As a point of interest, it appears that the most difficult story to write was the St. Frank's one, only one club, the Northern, scoring full points here."

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HAMILTONIANA

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compiled by HERBERT LECKENBY

On Saturday, March 7th, there appeared a most interesting leader in "The Times" with a headline "Billy's the Boy". This is not the first time Bunter, for of course he was the Billy referred to, has been the subject of a leader in "The Times". On this occasion I have an idea that it may have been inspired by our Midland Club's appearance on T.V. recently. For, on that occasion, one of the team was asked if he thought Bunter was more famous than the Fat Boy of Pickwick Papers. He replied with an emphatic 'Yes'. Well as you will see from the reproduction of the leader that its writer evidently agreed.

I am indebted to Frank Case for the cutting. Here it is:-

"THE TIMES" - March 7th, 1959

"BILLY'S THE BOY"

"It is better for Britain," declared an M.P. recently, "to have a few more Billy Bunters than the kind of hunger which was caused to many children before milk in schools," but leaving out the more serious implications of the remark, it may be doubted whether Billy himself would agree. For Billy has achieved a fame even greater than that of the other fat boy so often found asleep in the pages of Pickwick Papers and, although not given to introspection and easily to be diverted from any train of thought by the sight of the smallest and staliest jam tart, he may well by this time have come to the conclusion that he is unique in the true sense of that must abused word. Earnest students both at home and from overseas have not yet worked out the social

status of Billy's family, what income bracket it comes into and how many second cousins he has - after the manner of those who, after prolonged research, declare that Holmes went to Cambridge and Watson was a bigamist. But Billy has long burst out of the modest medium which first contained his ample form and has stomped his way into larger worlds and brighter lights.

Billy indeed, may claim to be the most famous schoolboy in fiction. To be sure, the fiction is not on any particularly high level and Billy himself would hardly feel at home in *The Oppidans*, for instance, but then, it is doubtful whether *Greyfriars* is represented at the Headmasters' Conference. Billy, however, has the great advantage of seeming to go on for ever. He is, in that, at one with the engaging pupils that gathered at Mrs. Hippo's knee to learn their alphabet, Tiger Tim, Joey the Parrot and the other members of the delectable animal tribe who may, if the term be not too strictly interpreted, count as schoolboys.

There is always Tom Brown, of course, but Tom was created once and for all time, the hero of a book not a perpetual serial story. The picking of a first eleven of school novels is a fascinating occupation and the lists of shrewd selectors would surely find a place for *The Bending of a Twig*, *The Loom of Youth*, and *The Lanchester Tradition*. But who remembers the names of the characters or, where the second of those three is concerned, realizes that it is possible to discern in the captain of cricket the formidable features of one who was destined to lead England? The novels of school life of Mr. P. G. Wodehouse form a not unworthy or inconsiderable part of that master's work, although the number capable of answering "Gethryn" in reply to the question "who was the prefect in *The Prefect's Uncle*?" is probably not large. Hugh Walpole's *Jeremy* has many admirers, but, when it comes to universal popularity, Billy is undoubtedly the boy.

* * * * *

LET'S BE CONTROVERSIAL

(For a change, Eric Fayne turns the spotlight on comments made by the famous, the not-so-famous, or even the infamous. He gives his own views superficially. If you will write to him, expressing your opinions on any of the topics he discusses, he will summarise readers' views in a future issue.)

NO. 25. SOMEBODY SAID (First spasm)

"WHAT POOR FISH CHARLES HAMILTON'S ROTTERS BECOME WHEN THEY REFORM!
THINK OF LEVISON, LUMLEY-LUMLEY, TALBOT, AND EVEN BULSTRODE AND

BOLSOVER MAJOR!" (Gerry Allison - C.D. Annual, 1958)

I fancy the writer had his tongue in his cheek when he wrote that comment. I doubt whether he intended us to take it too seriously.

True, I preferred Levison as the clever young scamp, though I would not, at this stage, have willed things to be different from what they were. The reformed Levison was colourless in comparison with the character he was in earlier days, but he featured later in so many first-class series that it would be ungenerous to regard him as a poor fish.

Lumley-Lumley, originally, was too evil - an overdrawn character - but I found the stories of his reform, telling of his friendship with Grimes, the grocer's boy, altogether charming and full of promise.

The promise was never fulfilled, for Lumley was lost in the overcrowded aquarium. In that, Lumley was certainly a sad fish.

Talbot only reformed by abandoning his housebreaking proclivities. Less glamorous as a schoolboy than as the "Toff", he never became a poor fish, though he was an unfortunate fish, in that his murky past caught up with him so often. But the serious Talbot, the oldest boy in the Shell, with his deep and loyal affection for Tom Merry - a friendship stronger on his side than on Tom's, it is reasonable to believe, for Tom had his own close pals - never disgraced the aquarium.

As for Bulstrode and Bolsover Major, they figured so seldom that it hardly mattered what sort of fish they were. Bulstrode faded out before Bob Cherry had his famous barring-out, which is quite a long time ago. If Bolsover ever reformed, I don't know in what way. He was always a poor fish from the first time I met him.

"WHAT A PITY THE 'BOY'S FRIEND' WAS NOT PUBLISHED THE SAME SIZE AS THE MAGNET AND GEM!" (Frank Hancock in a letter to Echoes)

I can't really subscribe to that sentiment, though I only knew the "Boy's Friend" during the Years of Conquest - the Silver Years, and, of course, the golden years. I knew all its drawbacks. It had to be folded to be carried, and, in consequence, deterioration began as soon as you bought it; the size made it difficult to preserve, and so copies are scarce today; it was expensive to bind, and a bound volume is an ugly monster on necessarily huge shelves of any bookcase.

Yet its very size and colour of its paper never varied; they gave it individuality and character. Of its type, it stands alone among the Companion Papers. I, personally, would never have wished it to be any different from what it was. Like the giant comics of yesterday, a paper of the size of the Green 'Un has passed away for ever, but

it has left behind an evergreen memory of a serener age, when even periodicals had character, dignity and charm.

....WE MUST TAKE THE CURRENT WHEN IT SERVES, OR LOSE OUR VENTURES..."
(Shakespeare)

The March News Letter of the London Club contains the following item: "The Chairman spoke of the forthcoming T.V. feature in the BBC programme 'To-Night'. He said that the onus had been passed to our worthy colleagues of the Midland Birmingham Club, as the telecast was to be mainly Greyfriars plus plenty of William George Bunter."

The underlining is mine. If that item means what it seems to mean the inference is that the London Club felt inadequate to take on the telecast - because the subject was Greyfriars. If such is the case, I am a wee bit sad for London.

I congratulate the Midland Club for their initiative in taking over the matter and handling it so well. I think it regrettable that the BBC did not take steps to publicise the programme to those who would obviously be interested. I missed it, because I had no idea that it was taking place. Probably many others of our fraternity missed this treat, too, because nobody troubled to let them know about it.

That's just how I look at things! I may be wrong! Why not write to me and let me have your views?

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CONTROVERSIAL ECHOES

No. 23. WAS THE MAGNET'S "MR. LAMB" SERIES A COMPLETE SUCCESS?

RAY BROWN writes: "I remember with affection the papers I first collected, and these were the Lamb series. I kept them all through the war years, reading and re-reading them countless times, and, probably due to the length of the series, I always found something fresh in them.

I had not the benefit of reading the earlier Courtfield Cracksmen series, so the Lamb saga was the one for me. As well as remembering the series as a whole, I recall brilliant individual yarns such as the very first one where Vernon-Smith meets Slim Jim in somewhat awkward circumstances, and the one where Wibley impersonates Mr. Quelch. I have chuckled over this one many a time.

Keep up Let's Be Controversial. I find it most interesting."

ROGER JENKINS writes: "I am interested in the way in which you

divide the Lamb series into two parts. I think that this is quite a justifiable attitude, and I have always had a soft spot for the last Magnet Christmas and, in particular, the scene in which Bunter shared Mr. Quelch's prison for a while.

Even so, I can never rid myself of the feeling that it was an interminably long series. It may be that the shrinking size of the Magnet tempted the author to make up for lost space lengthening the span of the series itself. But, whatever the reason, it cannot stand comparison with the Courtfield Cracksman series of 1929/30, despite the similarity in themes. In the earlier series there were two aspects, instead of the usual one, and the plot developed so entertainingly with so many twists and turns that the reader was never given a chance to feel bored. In the Lamb series the identity of the criminal was so obvious and the plot so static that one soon began to wonder how long it would take for things to work themselves out. And, of course, Vernon-Smith in 1940 had lost most of the elusive charm that he had possessed ten years earlier. All in all, I have never been able to regard the Lamb series with much enthusiasm."

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THE UNPLEASANT MASTERS AT THE HAMILTON SCHOOLS

By Roger M. Jenkins

No. 3 - Mr. Horace Ratcliff

Odious as Mr. Selby was, one could find excuses for him - his form was troublesome and his health was poor. And in addition there were a few occasions when the Third Form master showed some signs of humanity. But Mr. Ratcliff, the detestable housemaster of the New House at St. Jim's, was never presented in the Gem as anything but an unreasonable tyrant from beginning to end. He was to a large extent nothing but a cardboard figure, over-drawn and unbelievable.

Despite these defects of characterisation, however, there were many entertaining tales about Mr. Ratcliff. As early as the series in Nos. 28 - 32, when the school was spending the summer holidays aboard the S.S. Condor, there was a very readable account of how his temporary headmastership led to serious trouble with the boys. Further trouble occurred in No. 212, the first barring-out story in the Gem: Kerr touched Mr. Ratcliffe's nose with a red-hot poker, and the housemaster had to go on holiday until it had ceased to look unsightly.

There were numerous other stories relating how the juniors paid out Mr. Ratcliff for his severity. They were always - continued page 103

QUIZZLE NO. 5

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

The letters in the numbered squares, if placed in sequence in the lower grid, will spell out a stout defender of St. Jim's.

CLUE DOWN: A. Cherry, Kebble and ten more, make out man at the helm (7, 8)

CLUES ACROSS:

- A. Price is his evil genius.
 B. According to Lowther, it answers "Why?"
 C. Manners Minor or Coker Minor.
 D. Do the Rookwood cricketers keep their bats here?
 E. Mr. Quelch gives his blackboard a rest.
 F. The Rio Kid's enemy, curtailed, provides the sound of Mr. Selby's gown.
 G. No doubt it's heavy on the Court-field road.
 H. Mellish -though it sounds like Baker of the New House.
 I. Levison sounds sincere.
 J. Is it possible that Bob makes her cry?

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

- K. The Modern prefect has Bunter at heart.
 L. Lovell Minor, with respect.
 M. These garments of Bunter's are chequered.
 N. Gussy's honours were, in a Blue Gem.
 O. Metaphorically, we liked the books of this better than those of today.

* * *

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

* * *

RESULT OF QUIZZLE NO. 4

Solution to clue down - "The Rookwood Match" Hidden words -
 "The Island in the River Sark"

First correct solution received from David Lancake, 104 Heathcote Road, Manchester 18, to whom 5/- has been sent. 10 points earned for the Northern Club.

Totals - Northern 20 points, London 20 points.

* * * * *

UNPLEASANT MASTERS - continued from page 101

amusing, but the housemaster never seemed to be an understandable human being in any of them, and none of them were among the first rate tales in the Gem.

In addition to being housemaster of the New House, Mr. Ratcliff was also master of the Fifth Form. The Fifth were seniors and were not supposed to be caned, much to the annoyance of their form-master, but it is on record that more than once he rapped Cutts' knuckles with a pointer. "Cutts' feelings, when he had had his knuckles rapped like a fag in the 3rd Form could not have been expressed in words" said Ch. Hamilton in Gem No. 858. "But, Mr. Ratcliff cared nothing for his feelings. Indeed, having found solace in rapping Cutts' knuckles, he had proceeded to rap St. Leger's and then Gilmore's. The Fifth Form had been on the verge of mutiny when classes fortunately came to an end. Since then Mr. Ratcliff had lunched, and indigestion had followed. His nose was red and his eyes had an unpleasant glitter in them." This inimitable pen-picture of Mr. Ratcliff is a perfect portrait in miniature.

But if the Fifth were relatively immune from the wrath of Mr. Ratcliff, the juniors in the New House felt the full force of it, and the series in Nos. 586 - 589 provides a full-length picture of the housemaster which is more than adequate. Mr. Ratcliff's nephew Bartholomew arrived at St. Jim's and proceeded to make himself hated and despised throughout the school by acting as tale-bearer. Mr. Ratcliff's desire to show every consideration to his nephew provided a sound foundation upon which the story could proceed, and there were a number of satisfying touches that helped to bring the housemaster to life now and again in this series. But, what with Mr. Ratcliff's persistent bad temper on the one hand and Bartholomew Ratcliff's utter detestability on the other hand, it was difficult to remain convinced for any length of time.

It may be that here lies the real reason for the failure in

presenting Mr. Ratcliff as a convincing character - the motivation for his actions was seldom as clearly explained as it was once or twice in the series about his nephew. He was always bad tempered, and there were rarely any occasions when Martin Clifford went out of his way to provide any particular reason for this irritableness. Nevertheless, Mr. Ratcliff did at times star in a first-rate story, like the one in Gem No. 858. A banknote for £10 was missing, and Mr. Ratcliff accused Cutts, though in fact it had been hidden by Figgins. To Mr. Ratcliff's dismay, the missing banknote fell out of his Livy when he opened that book in the Fifth Form classroom.

"Is that the ten-pound note, Mr. Ratcliffe?"

"Dear me! It - it certainly appears so!" gasped Mr. Ratcliff, utterly taken aback and confounded by this unexpected happening.

"You accused me of stealing it. It was in your Livy all the time. You put it there and forgot. And you accused me!"

"I - I - I -" Mr. Ratcliff spluttered.

"Apologise!" snapped Cutts.

"What - what?"

"I demand an apology!"

"You insolent rascal, sit down!" shouted Mr. Ratcliff.

Cutts did not sit down. He stamped across to the door.

"Where are you going, Cutts?"

"I'm going to fetch the Head!"

"I command you - " roared Mr. Ratcliff.

Cutts did not heed. He strode out of the Form-room, leaving the Fifth in an excited buzz, and Mr. Ratcliff in a state of utter dismay and apprehension.'

Needless to say, Cutts got his apology - before the whole school. It is only fair to record that Mr. Ratcliff was not wholly to blame, and Cutts was far from being the injured innocent in the story. Perhaps it was so successful simply because it was a story without a hero, and because Mr. Ratcliff's unpleasantness was kept within reasonable bounds. This may have been the key to the proper use of Mr. Ratcliff as a character, but if so it was discovered too late in the history of the Gem for it to have been of any use. At all events, to the collector Horace Ratcliff appears for the most part to be a strange flaw in the St. Jim's diamond, a case of extreme characterisation in what is the most restrained of all Charles Hamilton's schools. It is a strange mystery - and one which seems to defy all attempts at solving it.

Old Boys Book Club

LONDON SECTION. Thanks to Len Packman and Ben Litvak, there was one of the best sales and exchanges we have had for a considerable time at the Hume House meeting on Sunday, March 15th. Even Alan Stewart turned up with something to sell, and the display of "Magnets, "Gems", "Holiday Annuals", "Chums" volumes etc., was good to see. Hosts Len and Josie Packman saw to it that we had an enjoyable time and with Frank Vernon-Lay back in the chair, after his recent bout of 'flu, it was a very happy gathering. One of the highlights was Don Webster's impromptu subject for discussion, "Improbable or Impossible". This proved to be very enjoyable as was Eric Fayne's Greyfriars Cup effort. Jimmy Iraldi's "Desert Island Books" and comments went down well and caused happy laughter. Another castaway to give his choice was Eric Lawrence, unfortunately unable to be present. The best wishes of all present go out to Eric for a speedy recovery and that he had all his "Desert Island Books" available for reading during his indisposition.

Other items enjoyed were quizzes, talks and discussions plus a good feed dispensed expertly by Josie and Eleanor Packman. Five weeks to wait for another visit to Bob and Laura Blythe at 2, Oxford Place, Press Road, Neasden, London, N.W.10., on Sunday, April 19th. Kindly let Bob know if you are intending to be present. Time for call over so home we all went well pleased with our Hume House visit.

UNCLE BENJAMIN

NORTHERN SECTION MEETING, MARCH 14th, 1959. Another Northern "Star" has arisen, to wit, Geoffrey Wilde! We do find 'em in the north. At this meeting he took for his subject - Claude Hoskins. How could he build up a full length talk on such a "lesser light" of Greyfriars? you might say. "Ah well!" you should have heard Geoffrey Wilde. It was real top o' the bill stuff; a sure smash hit. Frequently he had to pause in his remarks to allow the laughter of his listeners to subside. What's more, he finished on a high note with some delicious musical accompaniments. Yes, indeed a very successful debut before another gratifying attendance among whom we were pleased to see David Lancake again. Geoffrey also put on a deuce of a Quiz. Bill Williamson and Gerald Allison tied for first place. A toss of a coin added to Bill's collection of prizes. Next meeting, April 11th the Annual General Meeting. There's no need to say it's important.

HERBERT LECKENBY, Northern Section Correspondent

MIDLAND O.B.B.C. MEETING HELD 23rd FEBRUARY, 1959. There was a truly festive atmosphere at this meeting. Tom and Beryl had previously promised us another "Study feed" - but when the rest of us turned up (there were nine besides Tom and Beryl) we had a very pleasant surprise. They announced their engagement. Just as we wished them all the best so will, I am sure, all their numerous friends in the other three Clubs. To add to this pleasure we also were able to welcome two new members. Mr. Bradbury and Mr. Bond, both of Birmingham. Two very valuable acquisitions to the Club, in particular, Mr. Bradbury who is a fervid Nelson Lee fan and had by the way, given to the Club library three hundred Nelson Lee Libraries. Norman did not detract from the happy note of this particular meeting by introducing as his contribution to the night's programme a talk on what is generally ignored somewhat, in our circle, England's particular national hero or at any rate, one of them - Robin Hood of Sherwood Forest. As he said he had dealt at some length on America's own particular favourite Buffalo Bill in previous programmes and he thought it was time we heard about our own Robin Hood. We were enthralled to see displayed a representative number of the old "Aldine" Robin Hoods dating from 1913 to 1924. We all enjoyed this item of Norman's and as with his other contributions, asked for more in a future programme. Then followed the feed which included a toast of congratulations to Tom and Beryl given by George and endorsed by all the rest. There was no more items, we had commenced the night with a quiz set by Tom and subsequently won jointly by treasurer and secretary, the night finished on a very friendly note with a free for all chat in which our new member, Mr. Bradbury enlightened us on his first encounter with old boys books and his particular preference to Nelson Lee.

W. H. BROSTER.

(Yes, I am sure all members will want to join in, and congratulate those two stalwarts of Midland on their engagement. H.L.)

MERSEYSIDE SECTION MEETING - 8th MARCH. As Frank Case remarked at 10 p.m. ("What a grand meeting, the time has simply flown over!") Which just about summed up the feelings of all those present: Don Webster, Frank Case, Jim Walsh, Bill Windsor, Norman Pragnell, George Riley, Eric Coldwell, Bill Greenwood and Frank Unwin. Apologies were received from Bill Horton and Cec Hardingham. We opened with another "brain-searching" and educative Classics Quiz, entitled "Red, White and Black", which tested members knowledge of the classics to the limit, and won again by those two "savants", Frank Case and Jim Walsh, who came first and second respectively, with George Riley a useful

third. Then we enjoyed the now customary debate: "That Charles Dickens spoilt his novels by (a) introducing far too many characters and (b) grossly over-exaggerating his main characters." Half an hour was allocated for this, but we could easily have gone on all evening: it was all very stimulating.

Norman Prganell provided a rather novel and entertaining quiz with a bias on modern literature, and which was ably won by George Riley, with Don and Frank Case jointly second, and Bill Windsor third. We were then entertained by the "Desert Island Books" choices of Frank Case, Don and Norman, and the meeting ended with a very hilarious few minutes during which Jim Walsh and Eric Coldwell and Bill Windsor discussed their "Pot Aversions in the Old Boys' Books."

The next meeting is on Sunday, 12th April, at 6.30 p.m. We hope to have Herbert Leckenby with us at the May meeting. Good show!

FRANK UNWIN

THE GOLDEN HOURS CLUB. A good attendance at the new clubrooms on Friday, 13th March proved that the date hadn't put a jinx on the Club. In fact it had worked in reverse as we had the pleasure of welcoming another new member, Mr. Arthur Crooker of Merrylands, Sydney, a staunch Hamilton fan. Syd Smyth, as Chairman, formally opened the meeting at 6 p.m., after the members had enjoyed a very pleasant half-hour of informal chatter, inspecting some very interesting books Bill Hall had brought along. After a bundle of Magnets had been divided equally between members, correspondence was read by the Secretary - a letter from Harry Broster aroused much interest as it gave details of the Midland Club's appearance on T.V. - Arnold Keena then announced that he had received an offer from a commercial T.V. station for an appearance of club members on a book programme. When it was decided to accept this opportunity for publicity, Stan Nicholls and Bill Hall were selected by popular vote as the ideal representatives for this type of show. Greetings to the club members from Bill Gander in Canada were then conveyed by the Secretary.

The members then settled down to be entertained by Arnold Keena as he discoursed on his favourite topic "The History of Comics" assisted by an amazing list of statistics supplied by that walking quiz master, Bill Lofts. Arnold had brought along a wonderful selection of papers to illustrate his lecture and these were passed around for the members to enjoy whilst he was speaking. When the clock struck eight it was with reluctance that the members returned from the enchanted land conjured up by Arnold's happy little discourse and made their way into the mundane world again. BETTE PATE - Hon. Secretary

NELSON LEE COLUMN

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

Phone: 25795

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Another long letter this month from the indefatigable Bill Lofts throws more light on the mystery of Charles Wentworth, author of the "interim" Blue Crusader stories. Bill writes that the yarns in question were old ones, re-written by someone on the editorial staff, "believed to be Alfred Edgar, who was then editor of the new size Boys' Realm."

Bill's information is that Brooks was at loggerheads with Edgar concerning the policy of the Nelson Lee Library which Edgar had taken over from Harold May in 1928, making changes which Brooks did not like.

Brooks further protested against his St. Frank's characters being used with the Blue Crusader stories which "to my mind was a little unjust. It had been decided to amalgamate the small Boys' Realm into the Nelson Lee Library, and what more could an editor do to boost the Nelson Lee Library than by having the lovable St. Frank's characters with the Blue Crusaders for a short while to enable readers to sample their adventures?"

What ever the differences of opinion, there were obviously two sides to the question, and as Bill points out, Edgar was the editor and should dictate policy. May had given Brooks a pretty free hand, but Bill suggests that in fact sales were declining before Edgar took over, and not only when, as has been suggested, he succeeded May. Anyway, after about 18 months, Jimmy Cauldwell took over from Edgar.

Edgar, of course, was a prolific writer, and is well-known in the theatre as Barre Lyndon, author of the Amazing Dr. Clitterhouse, and of 'L' for Leather (a play about one of Edgar's favourite subjects, motor cycle racing). Lyndon is now in Hollywood; maybe Bill Lofts will have better luck in contacting him than I have had, despite several attempts. What about it Bill?

* * *

And now, an interesting article from newcomer to our circle, Tony Glynn, of Manchester. Glad to have you with us Tony.

HOW I DISCOVERED THE "N.L.L."

By Tony Glynn

I wonder if I am something of a curiosity among Nelson Lee enthusiasts.

Unlike most collectors who know the "N.L.L." from the days when they bought it week by week, I lived through my boyhood at a time when the library was already a thing of the past - I was only four years of age when it ceased in 1933. Nevertheless, the "N.L.L." is part of my boyhood and a very pleasant part, too.

It happened this way:

I was born in November, 1929, and my generation was the last to know the "Magnet" and "Gem" while they were still living entities. My parents frowned on what were generally termed "bloods", but they knew the Magnet and Gem from their own days and I was more or less encouraged to read them. The "Magnet" was my favourite and I read it weekly through most of 1939 up until it ceased to be in 1940. Thus, I formed a tremendous enthusiasm for the kind of schoolboy literature served up by Frank Richards. In the paper shortage days of the war, I longed for fiction of that kind in vain.

I distinctly remember my very first encounter with Nelson Lee and the boys of St. Frank's. This was in 1941 when I discovered an old number of the "Schoolboys Own Library" in a school desk I occupied when my class changed rooms. The story concerned the boys of St. Frank's on a caravan holiday; many years later, I was to discover it was a reprint of a series which appeared in the "N.L.L." in 1923, but I had never heard of the "N.L.L." at that time.

Some unknown benefactor had left exactly the kind of story I enjoyed inside the desk and I devoured it, longing for more when I'd read it.

But there was no more to be had. This was the time of the war-time blight on juvenile reading matter and the "Schoolboys Own Library" like the "Magnet" and "Gem" belonged to a more peaceful and ordered time.

Then, I discovered the "N.L.L." - several copies, published before I was born!

This was about the winter of 1942 and I was at a secondary school by that time. Life for a schoolboy of 13 in wartime England was not too bad - it was the era of "Spam", the catch-phrases of "ITMA" and the black-out. There was a tight austerity to which we'd all grown accustomed. My main grouse was the lack of reading matter of the kind I sought.

That winter, I went into a second-hand magazine shop where I used to buy comic papers and, while browsing there, my attention was caught

by a little heap of magazines of small format. The cover illustrations were sufficient to tell me they contained school stories and I was on them like a shot. The red title lettering said: "The Nelson Lee Library", awaking memories of the isolated copy of the "Schoolboy's Own Library" I had found earlier.

I forgot how much the shopkeeper charged for those hitherto unknown papers, but I bought as many as I could afford at the time; then went back for the remainder of the stock when I had more spending money. I suppose there were about a dozen in all. They were dated 1927, 1928 and 1929.

Never shall I forget the first of those "N.L.L." stories I ever read ('though I do not have it in my present collection); it was vintage 1927 and concerned a great flood at St. Frank's. It was the opening of a series on this theme and I distinctly remember a scene in which the boys were stranded on a roof - can anyone supply me with the number of this 1927 series? - I longed to read the rest of the sequence, but only had the opening yarn.

Some of those happily discovered stories were in sequence, however. Among them were the 1928 numbers: "The St. Frank's Ice Carnival", "Handforth the Detective" and "The Mystery of Edgemore Manor", as well as the Christmas series of 1928 and some of the Australian cricket series of 1929. In addition, there was the 1929 bank holiday number in which Handforth became smitten by a pretty girl who picked his pocket at Lords (number of this one, please, you knowledgeable folk, I'm still seeking it); and an isolated number concerning the return to St. Frank's of the sacked Forrest. This, I think, was dated 1929 and I should be happy to know the numbers of the series.

Such were the first "N.L.L." stories I ever read and, although it had then been defunct for more than a decade, the "N.L.L." became a treasured part of my schooldays. I liked Handforth and Co., far more than the Famous Five. Archie was one of my favourites and I even took to Irene and her friends although I was critical of girls in boys' stories at that time.

The pace of E. S. Brooks' writing always held me and, now that I have reached a more discerning age I can see that his steady control of narrative had much to do with the appeal of his work.

Time and again, during those wartime boyhood days, I read the stories in those few magazines and longed for more in vain - I'd never heard of dealers. Eventually, I gave them away to a school friend and was never to see a copy of the "N.L.L." again until I was a grown man. But I never forgot Nipper, Handforth, Church and McClure and the rest.

In the summer of 1949, I was a 19 years old army corporal. I was about to spend a weekend on duty, a cushy enough number but rather boring since it entailed spending a whole weekend in a small office, and I asked a fellow N.C.O. if he had anything I might borrow to read while on duty. He generously came up with a newly published book he'd just bought. It was E. S. Turner's "Boys will be Boys"!

A whole weekend of reading this avidly awoke my interest in boys' books - and brought back memories of the "N.L.L." Then and there, I determined that, once I was settled in civilian life, I would become a collector.

I was 22 before this was possible and, although no longer a boy, I found a great amount of enjoyment in making the acquaintance of St. Frank's and its boys again. I was able to re-discover some of those numbers I first found in the bookshop during the war and some of the earlier "lost civilisation" yarns of the 'twenties.

I like to think it would have pleased Edwy Searles Brooks had he known, when he wrote those yarns I discovered in 1942, that they would bring pleasure to a boy not yet born in drab hours of a future war - and make him a St. Frank's enthusiast long afterwards!

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FOR EXCHANGE: Penny Green Popular No. 1; Boys Friend Library (3d.) Nos. 23, 28, 393; Nelson Lee (1d.) Nos. 22 and 29 (1½d.) 212, 258, 262, 263, 289, 290; 1d. Nugget No. 279; S.O.L. No. 186 (Xmas Number) 94, 95, 97; Schoolgirls Own Annual (1924); Magnet No. 14, Xmas Double No. 513. Also some odds - all good condition. Definite offers given preference.
23 MOUNTJOY, BRIDPORT, DORSET.

WANTED: Sexton Blake Libraries - 1st series 11, 17, 37, 41, 105, 109, 111, 197, 198, 201, 202. 2nd series 102, 111, 213, 236, 243, 272, 293, 296, 306, 422, 474, 495, 520, 667. Boys Friend Libs. 3d. 1st series 10, 68, 102, 105, 107, 165, 229, 246, 669. 2nd series 393, 396. Union Jacks 881, 1041, 1064, 1098, 1179, 1180.
MRS. JOSIE PACKMAN, 27 ARCHDALE ROAD, EAST DULWICH, LONDON, S.E.22.

WANTED: S.O.L. No. 58.
TOM PORTER, OLD FIELDS, CRADLEY HEATH, STAFFS.

BUNTER OUT OF BOUNDS by FRANK RICHARDSReview by Jack Wood

The latest in the Bunter series, number 24 on the dust jacket, is a pleasant story strongly reminiscent of the famous Popper Island barring-out series in the Magnet some years ago. This time, Bunter after being detained for eating in class has a cake confiscated by "Henry". He recovers it in his inimitable style, only to find that Fishy has also visited Mr. Quelch's study to recover his famous "leettle account book" and, in the process, up-ended Quelch on his own study carpet.

Bunter, of course, cannot avoid the temptation to boast of an exploit with which he is wrongly credited, and, equally naturally, does so in the hearing of an irate Quelch. Bunter's escapades to avoid the inevitable flogging until the right man is caught by Smithy and the Famous Five make enjoyable reading as always, and the welcome Chapman illustrations add to the attractions of another pleasant work from the Master. But surely, Dr. Locke would not have drawers on the wrong side of his desk - or are they merely ornamentations?

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LETTER BOX OF INTEREST TO GEMITES

320 Blue Bell Hill Road,
Thorneywood,
Nottingham.

Dear Sir,

I was interested in the interview with your club on "Tonight", the other week. I noted that both the "Magnet" and "Gem" were mentioned. I have several volumes of the "Gem" dating from 1908 to 1912. Do you know of anyone who would be interested in these. I enclose a stamped envelope for your reply, if you would be so kind.

Yours sincerely,

(MRS) M. E. BRADY.

(I asked Mrs. Brady for more details and in reply she said volumes are as follows - Vol. 2 27-48 (1907-8) Vol. 4 27-99 (1908-9) Vol. 5 60 - 88 (1909) Vol. 7 134-187 (1910-11) Vol. 8 188-241 (1911-12)

They have no covers and unfortunately Vols. 2 and 4 have the first page or so missing. Vol. 2, of course, will be 1d. numbers. Anyway, Mrs. Brady will be grateful for offers. H.L.)