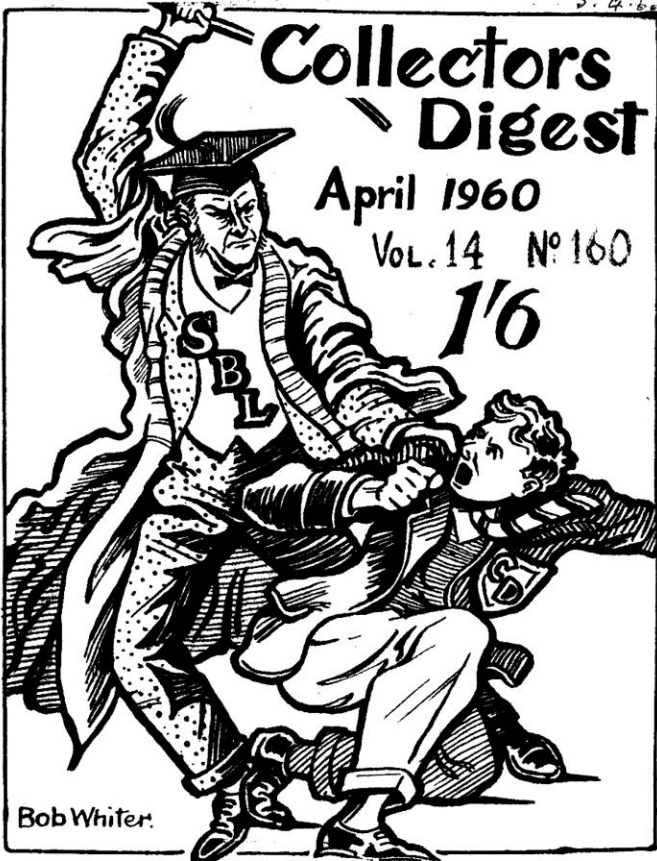


Collectors
Digest

April 1960

Vol. 14 No. 160

1/6



Bob Whiter.

BILL MARTIN

93 HILLSIDE : LONDON, N.W.10

CASH WITH ORDER

WORLD FAMOUS FOR OLD BOYS BOOKS

Phone: ELGar 3230

Cables: SUPERB USED, LONDON

POSTAGE EXTRA

The Original Green Penny Popular.
12 copies - complete run 121/132.
1915. 36/-

The Original Green Penny Popular.
14 copies - complete run 135/148.
1915. 42/-

The Original Green Penny Popular.
14 copies between 153/218.
1915/16. 42/-

Miscellaneous Parcel of Old
Boys' Books - Magnets, Gems,
Union Jacks, Boys' Friend, 50
copies. 75/-

An inexpensive hobby. Collect
specimen numbers of old boys
papers. I can supply examples
from Ching-Ching, Blueskin, Black
Highwayman, Island School, Penny
Pickwick, Boys of England, Boys
Comic Journal, Young men of
Great Britain, Boys of Empire,
Boys Leisure, Boys World, Boys
Standard, Young Folks, Nuggets,
Varieties, Jack Harkaway, many
others. 6/6 per dozen.

Collectors Digest Annuals, 1950,
1952. Price 10/- each. I wish
to buy ditto for years 1956 and
1957.

30 copies of The Magnet,
complete run 1654 - 1683. The
last copies ever published. 65/-

17 copies of the Small Gem.
numbers 1557 - 1575. 1937. 35/-

39 copies of the Magnet;
complete run 1457 - 1495. £5

The Woolwich Arsenal Mystery.
B.F.L. 1st series No. 27.
Sexton Blake Detective.

Across the Equator B.F.L.
1st series No. 124. Sexton
Blake.

The Rivals of St. Kitts. B.F.L.
1st series No. 46 by Charles
Hamilton.

Redfern Minor B.F.L. 2nd series
by Frank Richards School Story.

Xmas Gem. The Hidden Hand.

The Collectors' Digest

FOUNDED in 1947 by HERBERT LECKENBY

Vol. 14. No. 160

Price 1s. 6d.

APRIL, 1960

Editor:
ERIC FAYNE,
Excelsior House,
Grove Road,
Surbiton, Surrey.

* * * * *

From the Editor's Chair

BEND OVER, QUIZZLER! We have had on the carpet the gentleman who compiles our Quizzles, for he made a mistake in last month's puzzle. The answer to Clue Across "E" - "How Seven Boys and Solomon found their route" was intended to be "Dusty" but the answer to the Clue Down, "How Green was my Mother" was "The Boy's Friend", so that Clue E's solution should have started with an "D". Therefore, our Quizzler has been sent to Mr. Quelch's study, and we hope that he will emerge a sadder but a wiser Quizzler.

Nobody at this office detected the error, but one of our readers was brighter. The March C.D. could not have been in his home for long before LEN PACKMAN was on the telephone to us. He rattled off, not only the hidden words in the puzzle and the clue down, but also the correct answer to every one of the clues across. We thought it a pretty remarkable achievement.

Our Quizzles continue to provide entertainment for a large number of readers, judging from our weekly mail, and we shall include one each month when space permits. In future, however, those who like to compete for the souvenir prize will be asked to send in every answer in the puzzle, and not just the two answers previously asked for.

FAREWELL, JOHN BULL. So "John Bull" has gone from the counters and "To-Day" has taken its place. The reason for the change of name is not very clear, and we are sorry to see the breaking of yet another link with the old days.

Few papers can have had such an astonishing history as "John Bull". Its origin seems rather obscure, but tradition suggests that Horatio Bottomley, that colourful tub-thumping financier, persuaded Odham's Press, then a small concern, to publish it in 1906. In Bottomley's time, it was a political paper, and its policy often scurrilous, though its avowed championship of the "under dog" gave it a large sale in its early times. It may be doubtful whether, after the removal of Bottomley's dubious and flamboyant personality it ever had the same influence again.

Many years ago, the political flavour was removed from "John Bull" and it became a well-printed magazine of great integrity and interest. Almost from the first to the last, the famous competition "Bullets" appeared in the paper. In Bottomley's time, there was some doubt as to the genuineness of the contest, but "Bullets" lived on to provide entertainment for the thousands who had a flair for that sort of thing.

An institution has gone with the passing of "John Bull."

WHO'S SENTIMENTAL? Is the male more sentimental than the female? Or is it merely that the female likes tidiness and order, clearing the rubbish as she goes, while the male delights to have around him the accumulation of the decades?

For years we have been trying to get a peep at the girls' papers published just before the First World War. There was "The Girl's Friend", a companion to "The Boy's Friend". "The Girl's Reader," something of the style of the Boy's "Gem." An advertiser would eventually come by either of the boys' papers mentioned, but no amount of advertising has ever produced for us a copy of either of the girls' papers. Some years ago we managed to get a few copies of the $\frac{1}{2}$ d. "Girl's Home" but that was all. "The Home Companion", a woman's paper of the same period, is just as elusive.

True, now and again one can come across a few copies of "The School Friend" of the Twenties - but we suspect it was the boys who saved them. Sadly, we feel that the ladies make a clean sweep as they go. No wonder the mere male is terrified of Spring Cleaning time.

THE WHO'S WHO. By the time you read these lines, this office will be frantically at work, preparing the new Who's Who. You will have done your part of the job, by returning your completed entry forms; now it's our turn to take over. Many thanks to all of you for your support and enthusiasm.

THE EDITOR

CALLING ALL "MAGNETITES" TO JOIN UP WITH—

The GREYFRIARS GUIDE



HAMILTONIANA

W. L. CATCHPOLE - Hamiltoniana Writer

By W. O. G. Lofts

Readers who are familiar with the City of London may well know Threadneedle Street. Its biggest claim to fame is that it houses the Bank of England, and it is also well known for its many Insurance Offices, some of the largest in the world. It was to one of these large blocks of offices that I headed, not long ago, to interview a man who did a great deal of work for the Gem and Magnet in the late twenties and the thirties.

The uniformed commissioner led me up the carpeted stairs to one of the spacious offices, and a smartly-dressed silver-haired man rose to greet me. He told me all about his writings for the Magnet, Gem, Boy's Friend, Holiday Annual, Ranger, Pilot, Detective Weekly and other papers.

William Catchpole, as a boy, lived in Northamptonshire. One of his joys was reading the Gem and the Magnet, and it is probable that, in his youthful mind, he wished to become an author when he grew up.

On buying his Magnet one day - a red-covered issue, No. 399 dated October, 1915 - his eye caught the following announcement, written by the editor, Herbert Allan Hinton;

"Now you budding Authors! Can you write a Magnet story?"

That heading introduced a contest, with a prize of £15, for the best amateur 30,000-word story dealing with life at Greyfriars School. Prospective competitors were told that the winning effort would be selected by the Editor, in consultation with Frank Richards.

Young Catchpole was interested in this announcement, and

proceeded to put all his youthful enthusiasm into writing a story. His entry was in longhand, and covered 210 sheets of foolscap. He remembers counting the words to make sure they reached the exact total of 30,000 words as stipulated.

Some time later he was overjoyed to be notified by one of the editorial staff that his entry was considered to be excellent, and that he was a strong fancy for first prize.

His hopes were dashed, however, for in Magnet No. 418 it was announced that the first prize had gone to a Robert Langley, but he received a consolation prize, as a runner-up, of a leather-bound volume of Longfellow, which he still has in his library at home.

In an excellent article in the S.P.C. some years ago, Roger Jenkins correctly said that "the competition was nothing less than a search for substitute writers, so that, come what may, the war would not compel the Magnet to close down." Roger was also right in saying that Charles Hamilton had no part in the judging of the entries.

Shortly after Hinton launched the contest, he left the A.P. to go on war service, where he obtained a commission as Captain in the Coldstream Guards, and it was left to John Nix Pentelow, the war-time editor, to judge the many hundreds of entries received.

Mr. G. R. Samways, who was chief sub-editor at that time, recalls Mr. Pentelow shut up in his office, chainsmoking in an effort to find a budding Charles Hamilton. Whether the competition was a success is a question, though I know of at least three prize-winners who became well-known writers in other fields of the A.P.

On the strength of his success, William Catchpole started to submit short items for the Greyfriars Herald, and also made further attempts at full-length yarns for the Magnet and the Gem. For some reason, he did not receive much encouragement from the editor, and it was not until 1919 that he had a story published in the Magnet, this being No. 596, "Linley's Legacy." Disappointed at the lack of interest in his efforts, he switched to writing film stories, and he continued this type of work for about eight years.

In late 1926, chance meeting with Mr. C. M. Down, who was then editor of the Companion Papers, brought him back to the fold, and he began to write stories of Rookwood for the Boy's Friend - and at a later date he wrote for the Magnet and Gem, details of which writings will be disclosed later. Mr. G. R. Samways decided to take up competition journalism, Mr. Catchpole replaced him, and his greatest feat was the writing of all the Greyfriars Herald supplement pieces from then until the close of the Magnet in 1940.

Grundy of St. Jim's was a great favourite of his, and he wrote a

great deal about him in the Holiday Annuals, and in features in the Magnet and Gem.

Apart from this work in the Hamiltoniana field, he wrote prolifically for the Ranger, including many of the Will Hay stories, a series which was started by Charles Hamilton. As already revealed in the 1959 C.D. Annual, he wrote a few Sexton Blake tales for Detective Weekly under the name of "Roland Howard".

These days, he does not write fiction at all, but contributes to the press, articles on Insurance and Finance, and is considered by all his acquaintances to be a highly successful business man.

On behalf of many enthusiastic readers who enjoyed his stories and his Greyfriars Herald, features which helped so much to add to the atmosphere of the Magnet and Gem, I extend our very grateful thanks to Mr. W. L. Catchpole.

- - - - -

BILLY BUNTER - CHEF SUPREME

The Owl seems to be a regular feature in the National Press these days. In the Daily Mail, in mid-March, under the heading "Bunter's Stock-Pile" in inch-high letters, we were informed that Bunter is to present a cookery series on T.V. The "Mail" reporter wrote: "Most people know that the Owl of the Remove is crazy about food. Eyes glistening and waist bulging, he has been bursting out of T.V. sets at teatime with wild shouts of "I say, you fellows, GRUB!" But not so many people know that he is equally crazy about cooking it.

As Gerald Campion, actor and theatre club owner, he launches a new career as a T.V. cook on Southern Television next week. And then he hopes to give as much pleasure in the future as a gourmet as he has in the past as a glutton."

All Magnet readers, of course, know full well that Bunter is a superb cook. It is the one thing that he can do really well.

In the Daily Express of March 10th, a caption informed readers that a "Billy Bunter Play Wows the Russians."

It had no reference, however, to "Billy Bunter Flies East." It merely made the point that a light, happy-go-lucky type of play is the only one permitted in Moscow. Personally, we think they might do worse.

Both press cuttings were sent to us by Brian Doyle.

- - - - -

ECHO OF "RED, WHITE & BLUE."

Some years ago, in an Annual, Eric Fayne wrote an article under the title "Red, White and Blue." In it, he referred to a story in the Gem called "The Pluck of Edgar Lawrence" and drew attention to its similarity to the old school classic "Eric".

It appears now that the story in the Gem was written by Mr. Samways, and the following comment comes from the author:

"I can well remember the editor saying to me one day, I want you, Samways, to write a story, as an experiment, on the lines of 'Eric.' It's a queer thing, but although 'Eric' simply oozes with sentiment and sob-stuff, it remains a best-seller among school stories. I want to see how our readers will react to a story on the same lines."

Bill Lofts comments: "That is how 'The Pluck of Edgar Lawrence' came to be written for the Gem, and it is unfair to blame the writer for its maudlin sentimentality when he was simply carrying out editorial orders. Charles Hamilton often had to do the same. Plots were supplied to him, and he often had to write stories on subjects quite alien to his sympathies and genius.

Despite this, I think that the writer of "Red, White & Blue" should take a bow, for he accurately told readers that the story was based on 'Eric', little dreaming that confirmation of this would come from the author himself."

- - - - -

GOOD NEWS

Readers will be delighted to know that two new Billy Bunter books are to be published this year. "Bunter, the Bad Lad" was published by Cassell's on March 24th, and "Bunter Keeps it Dark" is due in August from the same firm. Both stories have appeared on T.V. in potted form.

- - - - -

"BUNTER, THE BAD LAD"

(Cassell's - 9/6)

Frank Richards

From the opening chapter, when Bunter makes the startling announcement that "Coker has laid an egg...." to the final chapter when Bunter complains that Coker has kicked him on his plump trousers, this, the 26th Billy Bunter book, provides a feast of fun to tickle the most jaded palate. In the intervening chapters, Coker insists that the sword of Sophocles is suspended over him, a predicament which is awful for Horace but joyous for the reader.

This fast-moving school story has Coker more in the limelight

then Bunter, and it will be no less welcome for that. There are some delicious cameos of the gimlet-eyed Quelch and the pompous Prout, and the various unexpected twists, as when Coker makes an amazing bargain with the frowsy Mug Parkiss, keep the reader on his toes from the first word till the last.

"Bunter, the Bad Lad" provides further proof of something that everybody knows - Frank Richards writes rattling good school stories. Buy it and find out for yourself. It can be obtained from any bookseller NOW.

LET'S BE CONTROVERSIAL

(In this series, Eric Fayne touches on certain matters of 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. 37. CLICHE

Way back, early in the century, Sir Henry Newbolt wrote a poem which commenced "There's a breathless hush in the Close tonight", while each verse ended with the words: "Play up; Play up; and Play the Game." I have always liked it for the picture it conjures to the mind of the cricketers fighting for victory as the setting sun casts a reddish glow over the tree tops.

Years later, about 1923, a paper called "Rovering" was published as a companion to "The Scout". In one issue of "Rovering" appeared a delightful poem called "The Rover's Choice." As a lad, I



learned it by heart, and I have never forgotten it. It told of an exile in a far country, recalling a cherished scene - "Home - and the cricket field, washed in the sun." He remembered the encouraging shouts of his schoolfellows: "Play up - play the game."

Ten years later still, the Western Brothers were intoning "Play the Game, you cads, Play the Game," and the old idealistic cliché became ignoble in a flash and smothered with mud. Thereafter a wit could cause a burst of hilarity in any company by asking his companions to "Play the Game."

Can the moral outlook of a nation be judged by its current clichés? True, there was some smugness in the popular phrases of the first quarter of this century, but I think their general influence must have been good. Bring to mind a few, long dead. "Playing the Game", "Straight as a Die", "True Blue", "Through Thick and Thin", "Shoulder to Shoulder", "True as Steel", "Honour Bright" and many more. Each one of these, in fact, was the title of a blue Gem. The Gem, indeed, made more of ideals than the Magnet did. A keen sense of honour, plus the golden thread of schoolboy friendship, was the keynote of the Gem.

It would be difficult to imagine a story of the nineteen-sixties with a title like "Honour Bright" or "Tom Merry's Legion of Honour", yet both these old tales still make excellent reading. There is no smugness or overstressed sentiment.

Yet, today, the word "Honour" has become almost something to chuckle over. A modern reader might openly carry a copy of the scorching story of Miss Dors or the wicked life of Mr. Errol Flynn, yet be ashamed to be seen with a story entitled "Honour Bright." Are we any the better because the old clichés have gone into the dustbin?

It seems that stories today must be in the modern idiom, whatever that may mean. A story must have a "gimmick" insist the publishers rather vaguely. Yet well-written old stories of sincerity and power continue to be best-sellers, while the yarns with gimmicks have a brief moment and are then forgotten.

"Bought Honours" of 1911, became "The Cheat" in 1934. Today it might be entitled "He Couldn't Care Less." The great guy would be the wide boy who thought up the swindle; the mug would be the square who refused to cheat.

"He Wanted to be Expelled" might become "Chip on his Shoulder." Down with School. "Dig this! My pal - he's only fifteen - gets twelve quid a week for doing nuffin."

"Playing the Game. Never heard of it. I'm an angry young man. Don't know the meaning of Frough Fick and Fin. I'm all right, Jack." Has something good gone out of life with the passing of those

school stories with their ideals, their Honours Bright, their Straight as a Die mentality? Something tells me that the nation, though it may never have had things so good, has lost something of great value to youth.

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

- - - - -

CONTROVERSIAL ECHOES

NO. 35. DID THE MAGNET DECLINE AND FALL?

ROGER JENKINS writes: "I feel that I, as the guilty party, ought to comment about the Decline and Fall of the Magnet. The history of the matter is this: The period 1935 - 1940 was intended to go into the 1958 Annual, but the pressure of other business was so great that I had to split the period into two, with the result that the titling of the two halves presented something of a problem. If no-one objects to the years from 1935 - 1938 being called the Autumn Years, he ought not to feel too unhappy about the title of the last article, though I will concede it might well have had a better title.

I do not think, however, that the title I chose is altogether indefensible. The decline was in the style of writing compared with that of the golden age, and the fall was the cessation of the paper in 1940. It may not have been a predictable fall, but the fact remains that the Champion, Triumph, Hotspur and Co., were not blitzed out of existence in 1940.

Still, the point is not one I should wish to make too emphatically, and if anyone wants another title for my article, may I suggest "The Winter of Discontent?".... or would that be even more unwelcome?"

CLIFFORD LETTEY writes: "I don't think Frank Richards was writing less well in 1940. If there had been no war, very likely the Magnet would have been alive today, and old readers would look back to that nostalgicly."

PETER HANGER writes: "Did the Magnet decline? NO, NO, one thousand six hundred and eighty three times, NO. When I read Roger's article I find that, in spite of the title, he didn't really think that the Magnet declined at all, and I find that you, too, are of the same opinion. I should like to challenge the myth that the good old Magnet declined."

GERRY ALLISON writes: "The Magnet certainly did not decline and fall. I wish I could quote from the enthusiastic letters I get from library

members who borrow the later issues. To them, the Lamb series is as great as the early masterpieces. To quote the hymn: 'His touch hath still it's ancient power'".

HARRY BROSTER writes: "I have read Magnets and Gems of all periods from the start till the finish. I have my views on which were the better yarns and series, but I do heartily agree with you that there was no decline and fall of the Magnet. It died the death of a hero. What appalled me more than the loss of these old favourites, was that when things became normal (??) and there was the required paper, instead of the Magnet and Gem we had all those monstrosities that desecrate the bookstalls these days."

FRANK RICHARDS (on an earlier topic) writes: "I really must take exception to Anthony Glynn's comments on Mr. Vernon-Smith's reference to American push-and-go. This is described as "Thoroughly silly" because the United States just didn't exist at the time British enterprise was getting to work. Mr. Vernon-Smith was referring to the foundation of the great rubber industry in the East, of which I think we all have reason to be proud. Can Mr. Glynn have forgotten that British enterprise founded that great industry in the nineteenth century, and that the existence of the United States dates from the eighteenth? Or does he suppose that George Washington, Paul Revere, Alexander Hamilton, etc., were contemporaries of Queen Victoria?"

WANTED: Sexton Blake Library - 1st series:- 11, 17, 37, 105, 109, 111, 198, 201, 219; 2nd series:- 293, 296, 306, 422, 474, 495, 520, 667, Boy's Friend Library:- 1st series: 10, 68, 102, 105, 107, 165, 229, 246, 669. 2nd series: 396. Union Jack: 689, 690, 691, 693, 695, 702, 703, 704, 721, 722, 725, 727, 732, 733, 736, 740, 743, 746, 749, 751, 752, 1041, 1064, 1098, 1388, 1390.
MRS. J. PACKMAN, 27 ARCHDALE ROAD, EAST DULWICH, LONDON, S.W.22.

WANTED: The Popular - 127-135, 137, 138, 141-145, 147-159, 161-163, 166. 169-171, 174-184, 186-188, 190, 191, 193-201, 203-205, 207-211, 220-229, 231, 311, 313, 314, 316-318, 320-322, 325-334, 336-343, 345-347, 349, 350, 353-357, 359-161, 380, 381, 388-398, 404, 406, 411-415, 418, 428, 449, 451, 452, 454-456, 459-463, 465, 466, 469-488, 499, 518, 544, 545, 547-551, 556-558, 560-566, 568-571, 572, 577, 578, 581, 591, 596-599. S.O.Ls - 60, 68.
DR. R. WILSON, 100 BROOMFIELD ROAD, GLASGOW, N.1.

BLAKIANA

Conducted by JOSEPHINE PACKMAN

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



In the MAILBAG section of S.B.L. No. 445 ("Mission to Mexico") 'Martin Thomas' has quite a lot to say about the lack of material on the modern Blake to appear in the pages of BLAKIANA. My husband has already answered this letter fully, and Mr. W. Howard Baker, the editor of the S.B.L. has kindly promised to publish this reply in one of the next issues of the Library. I do not therefore propose to take up the valuable space allotted to me by dealing at great length with what might be termed a controversial matter. There are, however, two things I would like to point out, for the whole argument actually rests upon these two vital factors. Firstly, the C.D. as a whole was (and presumably still is) produced primarily for those who are no longer in their youth but who delight in reading about and/or collecting the papers

of their boyhood, papers which - with but one or two exceptions - are no longer published. Secondly, articles on the modern Blake cannot appear if the material is not forthcoming! The solution here is for those who desire to read more of the modern Blake to furnish the material for publication. On this second point I would like to make it quite clear that all such modern material received by me has been published either in the pages of BLAKIANA or used by the Sexton Blake Circle in their feature THE MAN FROM BAKER STREET in the C.D. Annual, and no article has been 'put on ice.'

JOSIE PACKMAN

CENTURY-MAKERS

(And a few other interesting statistics)

BY WALTER WEBBINSTALMENT THIRTEENDEATH OF AN ARTIST

Those whom the established reader had come to regard as the 'regulars' of Blake fiction were by now very irregular contributors indeed, for several of the more popular writers had dropped out. Robert Murray, for one, had written his last story of Blake in the preceding year, a very inferior effort published in "D.W." in July. C. Malcolm Hincks had followed suit in the following month of the same year. Gwyn Evans had gone too, leaving a very decided gap in the ranks, whilst G. H. Teed, clogged by indifferent health, was soon to be lost to us for ever from a complaint diagnosed as that which, forty-seven years earlier, had sent Alfred Harmsworth, the barrister father of Lord Northcliffe, to an untimely end.

In addition to the fact that Allan Blair became the seventh author to pass the century mark of Blake stories, 1937 is noteworthy for the reason that the names of three famous crime novelists appeared on the covers of the S.B.L. for the first time. When characters such as The Toff, Inspector West and Doctor Palfrey are mentioned, the name of (106) JOHN CREASEY, who created them, springs immediately to mind. It was twenty-four years ago, at the age of twenty-eight, that the famous writer wrote his first Blake story, which was entitled "The Case of the Murdered Financier", but he could not be induced to write many more after that. All told, he penned five S.B.L.'s. A practically unknown writer (107) C. VERNON FROST, came along in May and promptly disappeared into the blue again. Then "Mr. Raffles", otherwise (108) BARRY PEROWNE, dropped in, stayed a little longer. In which to contribute four novels of the famous gentleman cracksman, then he, too, was never heard of again - at least, not in the Blake field. The next contributor was persuaded to stay for quite a long time, and rarely has a writer been so welcome in the Blake field as he. Easily the tallest of the Blake crowd - he stood over six feet five inches in height - (109) ANTHONY PARSONS was to write consistently well for the Library for nearly twenty years and help to keep it going during its most difficult period - the second World War. A man who liked to travel, Anthony Parsons was an officer in the Indian Army during the 1914-18 conflagration, and saw service both in India and Egypt. For a time after making his debut, he took over the character of Gunga Dass, but he is chiefly remembered for his conception of that famous pillar of the yard, Superintendent Venner.

The following month saw the appearance of a name on the cover of an S.B.L., the owner of which was an authority on Scotland Yard, its methods, and anything and everything appertaining to crime. He was (110) GEORGE DIINOT, at the advanced age of fifty-four making a belated entry into the arena. As the author of that interesting publication of 1925 entitled "The Romance of the Amalgamated Press", he subsequently became a director of that famous firm. Like Barry Perowne, he stayed just long enough to contribute three novels to the S.B.L. and then sought other fields.

There were ten reprints published in 1938, three more than the previous year and only one newcomer. He was (111) HEDLEY SCOTT, who had written serials of another detective, Ferrers Locke, for the "MAGNET" years earlier. Like so many others, his stay was very brief - in all, he only wrote two Blakes. Not a single recruit in the S.B.L. in 1939, in which no fewer than fourteen reprints were published. Worse still, modern authors were given access to old manuscripts or stories by dead and gone authors for modernisation, and appeared under their original title with the present author's name on the cover. This policy was also followed in 'Detective Weekly', which had recalled Sexton Blake into its pages in December, 1937 and was reprinting old "U.J." stories and S.B.L. novels, the latter in abridged form and set up in very small type. January 28th, 1939, saw the opening instalment of a serial adapted from the radio play "Enter - Sexton Blake", written by the playwright (112) BERKELEY GRAY, who was, as ~~is~~ generally known, none other than our old favourite, EDWY SEARLES BROOKS. This ran in the 'D.W.' for twelve weeks. Only four months previously this story had been published in its entirety in the S.B.L. under the title of "Three Frightened Men." It was then said that the play had been adapted from this, but when the serial began it was stated that it had been adapted from the play. However, it was definitely a reprint from the S.B.L. novel and established a record, for nowhere in the whole history of Sexton Blake stories has a reprint followed so closely to the publication of the original.

Two months later that well-known radio personality (113) ERNEST DUDLEY, introduced Mr. Walker, the junk man, into a Sexton Blake story. Mr. Walker was a popular B.B.C. character for some time just prior to the outbreak of war. Making one of his rare excursions into the pages of the BOYS FRIEND LIBRARY, Blake was featured on Government duty on India's north-western frontier six weeks later in a novel entitled "The Flaming Frontier" which introduced yet another new writer, (114) JOHN BREARLEY.

Did Sexton Blake ever appear in "THE THRILLER"? He did on one

occasion only, and even this was not intentional. In partnership with a Western character known as the Phantom Sheriff, he starred in a serial entitled "The Trail of the Missing Million" which lasted from February 25th to March 25th and was originally intended for publication in a boys' weekly, "WILD WEST" but when this paper abruptly ceased it became amalgamated with THE THRILLER. Authorship is doubtful because, apparently, one or two writers were engaged in turning out stories of the Phantom Sheriff, Rex Hardinge being one, and an author named George Holmes another. The Phantom Sheriff was in reality an engaging young millionaire rancher named Kit Halsam, and was featured with Sexton Blake and Tinker in Rex Hardinge's serial "The Fatal Formula" which ran in the "D.W." between July 1st and August 12th.

The dying days of the DETECTIVE WEEKLY, hastened by the war, saw two new Sexton Blake authors in its pages before the break-up, (115) DONALD BOBIN and (116) EDWARD HOLMES, the latter writing the story of the radio play "A Case for Sexton Blake", which ran serially for several weeks. May 25th, 1940 saw the last of Blake's weekly appearance, and can be accurately written off as a disastrous year and not entirely from a military point of view, for, in its passage, it saw the wiping off from the covers of the S.B.L. many names which had adorned it over a great many years. But, first, the details of the positions of the leading authors up to the end of 1939, which saw England once more at war with Germany: G. H. Teed (299); Gilbert Chester (142); Anthony Skene (122); Allan Blair (105); Robert Murray (103); Gwyn Evans (100); E. S. Brooks (97); Coutts Brisbane (93); Lewis Jackson (63); Rex Hardinge (60); Pierre Quiroule and John G. Brandon (53).

There was no material change in the situation until June, 1940, then came something to remind us that there really was a war on. Two volumes a month were chopped off the usual output, so that instead of getting 48 books as usual that year we only had 34, a reduction of 14 issues. As there were twelve reprints amongst these, it meant a total of 22 original novels, the leanest year since Edwardian times.

Mention of THE THRILLER just now recalls the passing of an artist who not only drew many sketches for the old U.J., but who was responsible for the cover designs of all the earliest S.B.L.'s including that very fine first number published in September, 1915. Not only this, but he illustrated many of the early NELSON LEE LIBRARIES from 1915, and then every one of the St. Frank's stories until THE THRILLER came along, when he left off drawing for the N.L. to devote all his time to the new paper. He was ARTHUR JONES, who, for nearly fourteen years, illustrated without a break a total of 566 S.B.L. covers from issue No. 1 in September 1915 to No. 184 in March, 1929, which meant that he

drew all the 382 covers which comprised the first series and the first 184 of the second series.

Arthur Jones had his critics, but in one thing he stood supreme. He could convey the chill atmosphere of the eerie, the lurking figure of evil intent as no other artist ever could, and his death was a big blow to THE THRILLER, to which weekly his sinister drawings were ideally suited. He was essentially as much a part of that paper as ERIC PARKER was to the "U.J.", and with his passing all the personality cozed out of it.

Every picture tells a story, and there is none more tragic than that portrayed on the cover of THE THRILLER No. 537, for this was Arthur Jones's last cover design, the work of an artist whose fingers were even then beginning to stiffen in death, as the decline in artistic merit of the portrayed characters seems so poignantly to reveal, though, strangely enough, the inside illustrations are up to standard. Of all those connected with the Sexton Blake drawings, Arthur Jones is the only one who can lay claim to having been commissioned to illustrate novels by such famous thriller writers as Edgar Wallace, Leslie Charteris, Sydney Horler, Peter Cheney, Gerard Fairlie, etc., and in a wartime letter to me the editor of THE THRILLER pointed out that not one of his readers missed "poor Arthur Jones as much as I do!" from which comment it will be realised to just what extent the success of THE THRILLER depended on the work of that artist.

Unhappily, the passing of Arthur Jones was to be but the prelude to other tragic departure.....

* * * * *

SEXTON BLAKE LIBRARY TITLES AND AUTHORS (1st Series)
(continued)

No. 65	Salvage of the Sea.....	W. M. Graydon
No. 66	The Bungalow Tragedy.....	W. J. Bayfield
No. 67	Daylight Robbery.....	(Glory Gale)..... J. W. Bobin
No. 68	The Broken Trail.....	(Lawless)..... A. Murray
No. 69	The Island Mystery.....	(A. Dexter)..... J. W. Bobin
No. 70	The Station-Master's Secret.....	A. Murray
No. 71	The Hidden Menace.....	(Glory Gale)..... J. W. Bobin
No. 72	Outcasts.....	(Kew, Carlac, Lawless)..... A. Murray
No. 73	The Secret of the Mine.....	A. S. Hardy
No. 74	Across the Divide.....	A. Murray
No. 75	The Mystery of the Grey Car.....	J. W. Bobin
No. 76	A Convict by Proxy.....	(Lawless)..... A. Murray

No. 77	The Crimson Mask	A. S. Hardy
No. 78	The Five Diamonds	W. M. Graydon
No. 79	The Riddle of Riverdale (Gilbert Brand KC)	J. W. Bobin
No. 80	The Bathchair Mystery (Nelson Lee, Nipper)	A. Murray
No. 81	The Fourth Theory	W. J. Bayfield
No. 82	The Record of the Case	W. M. Graydon
No. 83	The Problem of the Derby Favourite	J. W. Bobin
No. 84	Settler or Slaver (Kew, Carlac, Lawless)	A. Murray
No. 85	The Masquerader (The Bat)	R. M. Graydon
No. 86	The Red Heart of the Incas (Kestrel)	J. Lewis
No. 87	A Sheep in Wolf's Clothing	W. M. Graydon
No. 88	The Mandarin's Seal (Lawless)	A. Murray
No. 89	The Mystery of the "Agony" Advert (G. Gale)	J. W. Bobin
No. 90	The Case of the Transatlantic Flyers (Kestrel)	J. Lewis
No. 91	The Red Crescent (Lawless)	A. Murray
No. 92	The Boy Without a Memory (Plummer)	J. W. Bobin
No. 93	The Case of the Seaside Crooks (Lawless)	A. Murray
No. 94	The Affair of the Demobilised Soldier	W. J. Bayfield
No. 95	The Kestrel Syndicate (Kestrel)	J. Lewis
No. 96	The Matador's Fortune	J. W. Bobin
No. 97	The Case of the Mysterious Jockey	W. M. Graydon
No. 98	The Ex-Soldier Employment Swindle (Kew, Carlac)	A. Murray
No. 99	The Clue to the Charred Diary	W. J. Bayfield
No. 100	Unjustly Branded (Dr. Lepperman)	R. H. Poole
No. 101	Dark Secrets	W. M. Graydon
No. 102	The Clue to the Burmese Dagger (Nantucket)	A. Murray
No. 103	The Stolen Partnership Papers (Plummer)	J. W. Bobin
No. 104	Loot! (Kew and Carlac)	A. Murray
No. 105	Five Years After (Reprint of U.J. No. 165)	W. M. Graydon
No. 106	The Chink in the Armour (Kestrel)	J. Lewis
No. 107	The Branded Spy (Topper)	O. Merland
No. 108	The Head-Hunter's Secret	A. Murray
No. 109	Link by Link (Plummer)	J. W. Bobin
No. 110	The Case of the King's Spy (Granite Grant)	W. W. Sayer
No. 111	The Jewels of Wu Ling (Kestrel)	J. Lewis
No. 112	The Changeling (Lawless)	A. Murray
No. 113	The Case of the Bogus Ingots	W. J. Bayfield
No. 114	The Hand that Hid in Darkness	W. M. Graydon
No. 115	The Affair of the World's Champion (Kestrel)	J. Lewis
No. 116	Blood Brotherhood (Lawless)	A. Murray
No. 117	The Avenging Seven	L. H. Brooks

ODDS AND ENDS

By Gerry Allison

THE TRUE AND THE UNTRUE. The other evening, after a gruelling day, I sought my usual form of relaxation - a story by Charles Hamilton. It happened to be "Lovell's Luck" in No. 823 of the "Boys' Friend", a yarn which I had never read before. It began:-

"I'm not going to stand it!"

Thus said Jimmy Silver ——

I had read those ten words only, when a cold shudder went down my back. "It's a sub-story!" I muttered through my teeth. And it was, right enough, and a grim example.

You may recall that in a recent C.D. Bill Lofts quotes Mr. G. R. Samways as saying that there is no sure way of detecting a sub-story, and that he "defies anyone, however expert, to distinguish a closely modelled non-Hamilton story from a genuine Hamilton."

With all due respect to Mr. Samways, this statement is pure balderdash. Anyone with a knowledge of English, and a love of Charles Hamilton, can tell the true from the untrue immediately. I did it in ten words! Mr. Samways might as well say that he would defy a jeweller to tell a paste stone from a real diamond. But how glad I am that most of my collection are diamonds.

HAMILTONIA. A correspondent writes: "How much longer is the Hamiltonia section of the Collectors' Digest going to concern itself with defunct magazines such as the Magnet and Gem? The modern generation wants articles about Greyfriars on T.V., and the new Bunter books, etc. Why live in the past? And why should the organ of the Old Boys Book Clubs devote so much space to the old boy's books. BRING IT UP TO DATE!"

FOR SALE: N.L. 1st New. 82/87; 113/123; 140/152. 2nd New 92/4; 98/101; 150. 1/6 each. 2 bound volumes 2nd new 51/63; 113/125 - 10/- each. C.D. monthlies 1954, 1956/7, 6d. each. What offers for Monster 17, Captain No. 25, 1911, Modern Boys Annual 1932. Chatter-box 1924. CHURCHILL, 103 SIDWELL STREET, EXETER.

FOR EXCHANGE: Gems, S.O.Ls, Populars, Various other books. Write: B. MORLEY, 4 DANETHORPE VALE, SHERWOOD, NOTTINGHAM.

Nelson Lee Column

Conducted by JACK WOOD, 328 Stockton Lane, York.

THE
NELSON LEE
 LIBRARY—1½¢
 A GRAND FOOTER YARN THIS WEEK!



MISSING FROM THE MATCH

OUT ON WEDNESDAY.

This month I have little fresh news to impart, so we can go straight into the second of Charles Churchill's surveys of noted stories from the past, and enjoy recalling Fatty Little.

- - - - -

FIVE-STARRED SINGLES OF THE
NELSON LEE LIBRARY

No. 2 - by Chas. Churchill

On October 18th, 1919, No. 228, we were introduced to one of E. S. Brooks' most humorous characters, Fatty Little. St. Frank's had been transferred to the Turret College in London, while the College House was being rebuilt, and this was the final story before the school returned to its old precincts.

In the first chapter, the boys are amused when a car draws into the school courtyard, and a massive gentleman steps out. He is the fattest man they have ever seen. In conversation with the boys, he mentions that he is arranging for his son to join St. Frank's as a scholar. The

amusement grows when he announces that his name is Henry Little, and his son's name is James.

Mr. Little descends upon the Head, who becomes worried as there is no chair capable of accommodating his stout visitor. However, it is arranged that Little Junior shall join the school that day.

Later, a car again draws into the courtyard, weighed down with

Mr. Little and son. Let me now quote Nipper's own description of Fatty, in chapter one:

"Mr. Little beamed. Beside him stood a second edition of himself - an edition in miniature, so to speak. And yet he wasn't so miniature after all. James Little was proportioned in exactly the same way as his father. His smooth pink face had precisely the same jolly expression, and his eyes twinkled merrily. A tuft of fair hair escaped from under his topper, which, in spite of its size, seemed too small for him.

I took to the chap at once, for he looked the soul of good nature. His Eton suit bulged everywhere, although it was the largest Eton suit I had ever set eyes on. His figure closely resembled a barrel, and his arms were as fat as any ordinary fellow's thighs. I couldn't guess the size of his collar - his neck simply filled it."

The juniors are amused at the new boy's conversation, as he frequently includes eatables in his remarks, like "By chutney!" and "Who the currant bun are you?" He soon earns respect, as it seems impossible to gain any physical advantage over him. Even the redoubtable Handforth's punches have no effect whatever. His method of retaliation is to walk forward and collide with his tormentor, who is sent flying by force of weight. He is not prepared to put up with insults, for when Fullwood sneers at him, he grasps Fully and spansks him.

There is a mystery about Fatty, however, for just after his arrival, a doubtful character named Montgomery Ford appears at the school, and endeavours to get an interview with the fat boy. Little refuses to acknowledge him in public, but manages to slip a piece of paper, obviously a message, to Ford.

Later, Nipper and Co. visit a cinema, and, to their surprise, Fatty appears, accompanied by Ford. They take seats nearby, and hold a whispered conversation. After a while, they depart, and Nipper, his suspicions aroused, follows them to a nearby hotel. He spots them at a window, and manages to approach near enough to hear what is said.

Briefly, the situation is that Ford is trying to lure Fatty into running away from school to appear in a circus. Fatty had done so on a previous occasion from his former school, but repented when he found the circus a fifth-rate affair. His father had discovered him and decided that St. Frank's would be a better environment than his old school.

Ford had spotted Fatty in London, and was trying to get him to repeat his action. The attraction for the fat boy is the picture Ford paints of a renovated circus, high pay, and unlimited "grub". Fatty,

although the soul of honour in most things, is always sorely tempted in the matter of food. To Nipper's consternation, Fatty agrees to leave school that night and meet Ford at Paddington station at eleven o'clock to take the train to Bristol. Fatty then leaves the room. After his departure, Nipper learns the truth, for a confederate of Ford's enters the room and the precious pair, unknowingly, give the game away. Actually the circus is due to depart from Bristol en route for South America, and Ford discloses that Fatty would get very little money, for the circus is really on its last legs.

Nipper returns to school, and tells Nelson Lee all about it. The schoolmaster-detective arranges to be at the station, with the police, to arrest Ford as he entrains. He also tells Nipper to keep awake that night and prevent Fatty from leaving the dormitory.

When the vital hour arrives, Fatty gets out of bed, walks up and down for some time, pondering, and then returns to his bed. His common sense has prevailed. Nipper, highly pleased, gets up, and to Fatty's surprise tells him how the plot is known and that Ford is to be arrested. They decide to see the outcome of the affair and this is lucky, for Nelson Lee and the police, on their way to the station, get delayed by a traffic accident, and arrive on the platform just as the train is steaming out.

However, all is well, as Nipper and Co. guessing something has gone wrong, grab Ford at the last minute, and detain him in the waiting room. Nelson Lee and the police take over, and the scheming Ford is removed to other spheres.

Fatty duly became one of the most popular members of the Remove, and an important one, too. In the future he was to be invaluable in times of rebellions or in camping out for he was an expert cook, as his one interest in life was food and anything appertaining to it. But -

"By Gravy! What an appetite he has!"

WANTED: Any issues of MONSTER LIBRARY. C.D. Nos. 1 to 48, C.D. Annuals Nos. 1, 2, 3, 4. Condition must be reasonable. S.P.C. Nos. 1 to 43. A. J. SOUTHWAY, P.O. BOX 4, BEACONSFIELD, C.P. SOUTH AFRICA.

WANTED: To COMPLETE SET. S.O.L. 58. Also Boy's Friend Green 'Un - 762, 764, 780, 1042, 1257, 1264, 1294, 1295, 1296, 1297, 1298. Nelson Lee 2nd new series: 151 and old series most numbers before 132. T. W. PORTER, OLD FIELDS, CORNGREAVES ROAD, CRADLEY HEATH, STAFFS.

WANTED: Holiday Annuals 1920 to 1926. State price. J. HUGHES, 16 NORMAN STREET, EAST BRISBANE, AUSTRALIA.

CUP CONTEST

The Midland Club came a worthy second in the Contest. Here is a delightful item from their entry.

YULETIDE RENDEZVOUS

by Dick Penfold

It was the Eve of Christmas, and Nicholas lay in bed, looking up at the damp, dark patch on the cottage ceiling. A patch almost as dark as his own mood.

He had been confined to that bed longer than he cared to remember, and, as money was scarce in that household, there wasn't even a thought of a happy morrow. A drowsiness crept over him.

Suddenly there was a tap on the door, and a cheery, boyish face, framed in a crop of fair, curly hair, appeared. At once, the room took on a new meaning.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo", breezed the newcomer.

"Bob Cherry of Greyfriars School," gasped Nicholas.

"Cheer up, I've been sent to collect you," said Bob. "Come with me." In the twinkling of an eye, Nicholas was passing through the rickety cottage gate, to where a taxi waited.

"Meet my chums of the Remove" smiled Bob, ushering him inside. No introductions were really necessary. That handsome, dark-haired boy with the manly bearing was none other than Harry Wharton - no wonder he was the chosen Captain of the Remove. Next, Johnny Bull - a blunt, stolid chap, thought Nicholas. Probably took a lot of understanding. What a nice, quiet, friendly boy Frank Nugent proved. Out of a shadowy corner a dark face grinned invitingly.

"The pleasurefulness is terrific" said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, softly.

As they sped through the lanes, Nicholas's spirits rose. "Where are we going?" he asked.

"Just wait and see," laughed Bob.

Eventually, an old building, complete with clock tower, showed amidst the trees. "It's Greyfriars" yelled Nicholas, beside himself with excitement. His spirits sank. "Surely it's closed for the holidays?"

"Just where you're wrong, old boy," said Harry Wharton. "Remember, this is specially for you."

Honk! Honk! went the horn as the lodge came into view. That figure with the keys. Gosling himself! Not too well pleased, either.

"Young varmint!" he grumbled. "Not even a bit of peace on Christmas Eve." As the taxi drove into the quad, he turned back to where a glass of hot toddy awaited him in his lodge.

The taxi halted, the boys tumbled out, and, grabbing Nicholas by the arm, bundled him into the School House.

Joy of joys! Everything was just as he had imagined. The quad, the playing fields, the passages lined with studies.

Surely he knew that tall figure. "Hello, kid! You're new here, I think. Have fun." George Wingate, School Captain.

Nicholas swelled with pride at being singled out.

The great moment arrived - Study No. 1.

"Welcome!" said Harry Wharton. Nicholas paused on the threshold. The picture was complete.

There at the table sat Bunter, the fat Owl himself. His figure assumed even more enormous proportions than Nicholas had ever visualised. Little wonder, looking at the remains of a "snack" he had just put out of sight.

"If that fat idiot has plundered the tuck boxes we've been saving for our midnight feast, I'll slay him," growled Johnny Bull.

"I say, you fellows, as if I would," squeaked Bunter, beating a hasty retreat.

Outside, the threatened snow had been falling steadily. "Come on," yelled Bob. "Time for some fun before prayers."

Away they tramped to join others already engaged in a snow battle. Never had Nicholas known such glorious abandon. All too soon the warning bell went, and, as they filed into chapel for prayers, he had a feeling of misgiving as he caught the Headmaster's eye. Strange, Dr. Locke didn't query his presence there. Nicholas's thoughts wandered. Would he be able to visit all the places he had read about so often? Courtfield Common, Popper's Island, the old Tuck Shop?

Soon Greyfriars lay in darkness - the boys of the Remove, to all intents and purposes, asleep. The scene changed.

The dormitory became a hub of excitement. Hampers were unloaded, and fun waxed fast and furious by the light of candles. Everyone failed to notice the door open, and a blaze of light revealed Mr. Quelch. "Upon my soul, what is the meaning of this? And who, may I ask, is that strange boy?"

They realised that the Remove master's austere presence had descended upon them. Nicholas, with a sinking heart, crouched lower on the bed. Someone shook him.

Out of a mist a voice said: "Wake up, Nicholas - it's Christmas Day," and there beside him stood his mother. He was back in the

cottage bedroom. On the bed beside him was a parcel.

"Happy Christmas after all. Just look what I have for you." Eagerly he tore away string and paper, and there, before his eyes, was a beautiful, brand-new Holiday Annual. "You'll never guess who kindly sent you that," said his mother.

Nicholas smiled, a little secret smile.

"Oh, yes, I can," he said.

- - - - -

(Next month we shall disclose the name of the writer of the above pleasant little fantasy. The writer of last month's Cup selection was Geoffrey Wilde of the Northern Club)

 ARE YOU SELLING MAGNETS before 1297, GEMS before 1290, S.O.L's before 262, NELSON LEE's before 296? Write, state price
 J. HUGHES, 16 NORMAN STREET, EAST BRISBANE, AUSTRALIA.

15/- each offered for the following Magnets - Nos. 648, 740, 742, 768, 771, 773, 920, 921, 933, 952.

Write: LOFTS, 56 SHERINGHAM HOUSE, LONDON, N.W.1.

FOR SALE: Chums 1912, 1914, 1915, 15/-. 1916, 1917 12/6. 1932-33, 1933-34 7/6. Thriller 250 copies. Nos. on request 1/- each. Postage extra. Will exchange for C.D. Annual 1947, 1948, 1956, 1957, 1958. ; S.B.L. early 3rd series. Also recent Pater Saxons.
 A. S. MATHIESON, 1c, Civil Airport, WICKY, CAITHNESS.

MRS. JOSIE PACKMAN thanks the large number of readers who have written her letters of great encouragement, following the publication of the criticism of "Blakiana" by Martin Thomas.

DON WEBSTER. We are glad to learn that Don Webster, the popular chairman of Merseyside, is now out of hospital, and recuperating at his home. Once again, we wish him a speedy return to perfect health.

"THE FOGHORN" Congratulations to Frank Unwin on his delightful Merseyside News Letter. It is packed with interesting items, and anyone who would like to subscribe and receive it regularly should drop a line to Frank.

BEYTHE PATE, Secretary of the Australian Club, informs us that the meeting arranged for March 18th was cancelled. The next meeting will therefore be held on April 8th, when it is hoped there will be a large assembly.

Sexton Blake Today

NEW S.B.Ls REVIEWED BY WALTER WEBB

MARCH - 1960

THIS MAN MUST DIE! (No. 447)

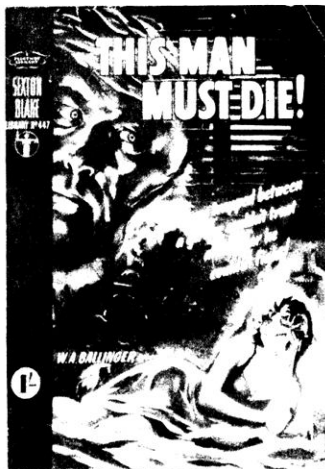
W. A. BALLINGER

He who passes sentence is Craille. The intended victim...Matt Rayner, an American newspaperman. His executor...Sexton Blake, eminent British detective and Counter-Espionage Operative. On the face of it, nothing less than a premeditated act of cold-blooded murder. Until you knew the facts. When Blake learned them he knew, as did Craille, that the American must not be allowed to live. For Rayner was a Communist spy and the taking of his life would be the salvation of many others. Thus Blake would be performing a public duty in successfully carrying

out his assignment...as his profession has always demanded of him.

This is a chapter of the long-drawn out Korean war, centring around a pocket of British Commonwealth resistance at Sunch'on and the attempt by Rayner to obtain plans of the minefields and artillery positions around the British contingent there, in order to pass them on to the enemy. In this particular instance, an obscenely fat, big-time gambling boss in Tokyo, named Yoshinori Okimura. The impact of this novel is tremendous and not since Peter Saxon's "Last Days of Berlin" in December, 57, have I read a more enthralling narrative.

Rating.....Excellent



Concerns the bizarre happenings amongst a small community of residents that make up the population of Bissett Heath. When Blake and Paula commence investigations at the request of the local Women's Institute, their enquiries are not restricted to a series of horrific murders only. Blake's mission becomes primarily to destroy the evil that, having its origin in Bissett Heath, menaces the progress of the entire human race. As one delves further into this story the impression that it could be developed into a really good horror film grows stronger with each succeeding chapter.

Martin Thomas, master of the situation macabre, turns in another "Evil Eye" performance and gives Paula Dane her first featured role in 1960. Paula's encounter with "The Thing" is one of the many highlights of this eerie story.

In complete contrast to its companion volume in everything save quality, this one is equally palatable and even if, ordinarily, you do not care for stories of the super-natural, you cannot fail to admire the way the author handles his theme and, above all, his masterly presentation of Blake.

Rating.....Excellent

* * * * *

THE TRAIL OF CRAILLE

By Frank Unwin

Eustace Craille must now be a very old man. He was quite old during the war; his skin was described as looking even older - dried and creased like fine ancient parchment. His hands were skeletal; his lips blue and very thin; but the voice was vigorous, and the mind active and incisive.

Craille, chain-smoker of aromatic Egyptian cigarettes, is Head of British Counter Intelligence, and, as such, was responsible for some of the most perilous missions of Sexton Blake's life. The old man must have had tremendous faith in the detective's ability, courage and unswerving loyalty. He knew his Blake. Remember that epic which told of the tigers of the sea: the U Boats, and how Blake brought to book the traitor aboard HMS Caledonia, who was bringing death and destruction to those who sailed the icy Arctic waters in the winter of 1941-2? Was this Blake's greatest achievement? Remember that other thrilling epic of the last days of burning, dying Berlin, the last hours of Adolf Hitler, and perhaps the detective's most dangerous and desperate mission, to outwit the Russians in his quest for the German plans for a rocket

with an atomic warhead?

Then there was the fantastic assignment to Italy in order to defeat a master-criminal in the race for the dead Duce's fabulous treasure-ward. Toughest of all, you may think, was the super-human task Craille gave Blake in Occupied France, 1942: the destruction of the German defence installations near Dieppe, and the unmasking of a traitor in the Resistance Movement just before the heroic British landing at Dieppe. It was here that we first met the brave Louise, Miss Pringle to you.

Sexton Blake never refused a Craille assignment, even though the odds against success were sometimes fantastic. "It is because of Craille and of men like him that we will win this war," thought the famous British detective in July 1942. How right he was - and how modest! They say that fortune favours the brave, and Blake came through almost unscathed, and ready for further tasks in the service of the country he loved, and the old man he admired. What about Blake's posting to a patrol of the Long Range Desert Group, those bold buccaners of the desert, and the unenviable task of rooting out the traitor working for Rommel at the very heart of G.H.Q. in Cairo? Only the detective's timely intervention saved the gallant L.R.D.G. from total destruction.

France, Italy, Germany, the Arctic Ocean, North Africa! And then to Singapore and the House on the Bay in pursuit of Gupta, a human fiend. "Find him!" was Craille's cryptic signal. "Find, and bring to justice!" Blake obliged, and meted it out, too. Never before had it given him such satisfaction.

Did Eustace Craille enjoy a well earned retirement after the war? Not a bit of it. The old man was not yet finished with Britain's greatest sleuth. His skeletal grip fastened on Blake yet again during the Cyprus Terror, and this time the assignment was to rescue a fellow-agent - and prevent another island blood bath. And now this amazing old man has cropped up again, but this time with a difference. Tinker, of all people, has received his first direct assignment from the chief of Britain's Secret Service - to Mexico, to help combat the forces of chaos and rebellion. How well he succeeded! His chief and Craille, must be proud of him. Eustace Craille, certainly, must now be a very old man. He has served his country well, and he has never had a finer agent than Sexton Blake. Somehow, I believe we shall hear a lot more about him in the future. Most of us can't wait. Even now, he might be planning a further, even more hazardous mission for the great detective as he puffs away at yet another Egyptian cigarette.

Long may he live!

OLD BOYS' BOOK CLUB

MIDLANDS

Meeting held 29th February, 1960

There were only eight of the regulars at the meeting, but as these included Tom and Beryl Porter, it was a happy one, though we strayed from conventional old boys' books for part of the time. This, through the medium of a tip-top film show by George Chatham - the north-west coast of Wales, the Anglesey and Portmadoc area, with all the wonderful scenery of Snowdonia and Cader Idris. Especially good were the night shots of the sea. Also, we saw again, in full colour, the Coronation decorations of the City of Birmingham. Very interesting, too, was a film of a journey by rail from New Street to Sutton, taken from the train - quite a novelty.

A quiz of 15 items, by Beryl Porter - Hamilton and St. Frank's - was won by the Secretary. This was followed by Madge Corbett's selection of "Desert Island" books, which were (1) A song book. (2) A book of Folk Songs and Spirituals. (3) Complete Shakespeare. (4) A Bible, which, as Madge said, has everything that is required in any book. (5) "The Rope" by Lord Douglas. (6) An early C.D. Annual, with Who's Who. (7) Volume of 14 Magnets - "Harry Wharton's Downfall" (8) The Magnet "China Series."

Last, we had the library raffle, won by George Chatham, and a Cryptogram game from Tom Porter. Norman Gregory was the first to get this correct. There were the usual discussions of club business, and it was, for all the small attendance, a jolly meeting.

Next meeting: March 28th in Room No. 5, Chambers of Commerce.

HARRY BROSTER - Secretary.

NORTHERN

March 12th at 239 Hyde Park Road.

Sixteen members again at Hyde Park Road. The minutes and the Treasurer's healthy report were soon dealt with together with the correspondence. The Annual Meeting with the Midland Club cropped up and it was suggested that it might be possible this year to have a meeting at Manchester between Midland, Merseyside and ourselves.

Martin Thomas's letter in the S.B.L. was read out by Jack Wood and then discussed; the opinion reached was that the C.D. dealt with

Old Boys Books and we do not consider the present day S.B.L. could come under this heading. Josie Packman must put a tremendous amount of work in preparing Blakiana and it does not seem fair that an amateur magazine should be criticised so much by a professional writer. In any case, it was pointed out that excellent reviews were given each month so the writer of the letter had really nothing about which to complain.

After this we settled down to hear Geoffrey Wilde on "Greyfriars and the Criminal Fraternity." Geoff took us through the highways and byeways around Greyfriars and helped us meet the tramps, bank robbers, crooked schoolmasters and various other unsavoury characters who roamed that evergreen portion of Kent. Geoff wound up his most enjoyable talk with an exciting chapter from the Valentine Compton series.

To wind up the evening's programme we had a game set by Gerry on Rookwood characters.

Next month is the Annual General Meeting on April 9th.

R. HODGSON

- - - - -
LONDON

One of the highlights of the March Neasden meeting, host Bob Blythe of the complete "Nelson Lee Library" collection, was the reading by the Chairman, Len Packman, of Berenice Thorne's fine article "Babbling on Brooks" from S.P.C. number 72.

Other enjoyable items were Eric Fayne's "Jigsaw Puzzle" in which the six winners were David Harrison, Roger Jenkins, Len Packman, Eric Lawrence, Millicent Lyle and Ben Whiter; Roger Jenkins' "Square Puzzle"; "Desert Island Books" by Alan Stewart, who gave a humorous reading from one of his choices; a fine quiz by Eric Lawrence and the reading of one of the Merseyside's Greyfriars Cup Competition efforts. The latter was greatly enjoyed.

Good progress was reported by Bob Blythe of the list of "Magnet" titles, and with our Hamiltonian librarian, Roger Jenkins, giving a good account of his month's progress, the company of 23 had an enjoyable time.

Next meeting was fixed for Sunday, April 24th at a venue to be decided later on. Thus, another happy meeting to go down into the records.

- - - - -
UNCLE BENJAMIN

MERSEYSIDE

Report of meeting held on 20th March, 1960

For some time it seemed touch and go as to whether our Chairman,

Don Webster, would make this meeting, but fortunately he did so, and his presence together with the welcome return of Frank Case, made the evening a happy one.

After the Chairman had made his opening remarks, in which he congratulated Frank Unwin on producing the Club News-letter ("The Fog-horn") for over 12 months, and the financial statement had been given, we tackled a Quick Cross-Word set by Don, and in no time George Riley had solved it.

We then had a preliminary discussion on the rules etc., for the forthcoming "Greyfriars Herald" Cup Contest, and this was followed by the writer reading a St. Frank's yarn up to a certain point, leaving the rest to be filled in by those present. Some amazing solutions were received, but the judge ruled that Bill Windsor was first, with Frank Unwin second and Frank Case third.

After refreshments, library, etc., we had a final "quiz" from Frank Unwin in the form of "Rhyming Couplets" which was won by Don Webster, followed by Bill Windsor and Jim Walsh. Thus ended a pleasant evening, and we are all looking forward to the next one on Sunday, April 10th at 6.30 p.m. prompt.

N. PRAGNELL - Hon Sec.

SOUTH AFRICA WINS THE OVERSEAS QUIZZLE PRIZE

Result of Quizzle No. 15. Solution to Clue Down: "My Brother Frank." Hidden words: "No respect for a fellow's trousers." First correct solution received from Charles Van Renen, Box 50, Uitenhage, Cape Province, South Africa, to whom a Book Prize has been sent.

Result of Quizzle No. 16. Solution to Clue Down: "The Boy's Friend." Hidden words: "From Baker Street to Berkeley Square." First correct solution received from Frank Lay, 52 Oakleigh Gardens, Whetstone, to whom a Book Prize has been sent.

ANOTHER UNUSUAL HOBBY

In a recent article in this magazine, reference was made to people who collect bottle labels, and cheese labels. We now learn of one of our readers who collects Christmas cards, mainly Victorian. Recently a photograph of Mrs. Vera Nicholls of Leeds, accompanied by a lengthy article appeared in a Northern newspaper. Mrs. Nicholl's has succeeded in amassing a collection of more than 100 rare cards, some of them more than 100 years old. Eongratulations to our reader, and best wishes for good collecting.

Yours Sincerely

(INTERESTING ITEMS FROM THE EDITOR'S LETTER-BAG)

FRANK RICHARDS. Many thanks for the C.D. - a really excellent issue. I must have missed "Round Britain Quiz" on the occasion mentioned on page 77, and I am very glad to find Gilbert Harding's remarks recorded in the C.D. And it is very pleasant indeed to read of the dear little girl writing verses about Billy Bunter.

Did you note that a horse named "Billy Bunter" won the £.15 at Wye on Monday? I was much amused to see it. He cannot have been carrying so much weight as our Billy.

D. A. CHANDY (India). In 1920, when I was ten years old, I started reading the Magnet and the Gem. I took them until about 1930. Now I have no copies at all - all were destroyed by white ants long ago.

Much of the advertising matter in the Digest is over my head. I wonder what is meant by "Blue & White Magnets" and "Multicoloured Gems." And what on earth are SOL'S?

I am afraid that D'Arcy, and not Billy Bunter, is my favourite character. Going through your magazine I came across another old favourite - Sexton Blake. I remember Zenith, the Albino, and Rupert Waldo, the superman. The latter was my particular favourite. I wonder if any issues featuring these two are available.

I interested my daughter in Billy Bunter and Gussy, and I have obtained for her most of the post-war Bunter and Tom Merry books.

BRIAN DOYLE (London). Has anyone ever written a piece for the Digest contrasting the writing, plots, etc., of the new Bunter books with the old Magnet stories? If not, it would make a very interesting article by, perhaps, yourself or Roger Jenkins. I'd have a go myself, if I had all the books, but, unfortunately, I only have a couple. Also, how about a feature on the outstanding covers of the Gem and the Magnet?

TOM PORTER (Cradley Heath). I have just looked at the number - No. 159. It is quite staggering to realise that with the next issue it will be 5 years (260 issues of the Gem and Magnet) since we were hailing the celebrated double, 100th number. How we all looked forward, in the early months of 1955, to the approach of that landmark. Now, we are more than half-way to our 200th number - in August 1963. It will be a proud moment for you when that issue appears.

VIC COLBY (Australia). Re the Martin Thomas criticism, I feel a sense of proportion should prevail. Blake has been going strong for 66 years, the new look only 3 years, yet the new look already has one of the seven pages of the C.D. devoted to Blake. One in seven is much higher than 3 in 66, so I feel they aren't doing so badly.

I'm interested in the new look, but the old look has greater scope for articles. Everyone has access to the new S.B.L., we know the authors, everything is fresh, and there is no mystery. The information on the old look is important, because of the scarcity of copies and knowledge.

JOHN TOMLINSON (Burton-on-Trent). Is there any news of any new Tom Merry books on the way? It is a long time since one appeared.

(We know of no new Tom Merry book at the moment, we regret to say, but a new Bunter has just been published. - Ed.)