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MARY PICKFORD.

CHRISTMAS, 1919

JANUARY 1920

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COLLECTORS' DIGEST

FOUNDED IN 1947 by HERBERT LECKENBY

Vol. 16

Number 181

JANUARY, 1962

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SPECIAL FILM NUMBER

EDITORIAL



FRANK BUXTON



VERNON SMITH



FRED WHIFFEN



ROBERT CHERRY



HANK LEWIS

PEAL O' BELLS. Our Christmas Number rang the bell. In fact, it rang a Christmas peal of bells. Letters expressing the pleasure of readers fairly poured into this office, in greater numbers than ever before. It certainly seems to have been our star issue of 1961.

A large number received replies, but had I answered them all the Annual would never have got away, nor would our January issue have seen the light of day. It was just not possible to reply to everyone, but your letters were a real joy to me. My sincere thanks to all those who wrote. It made my Christmas.

Mr. Henry Webb's magnificent cover was praised to the skies. COLLECTORS' DIGEST is indeed fortunate in its splendid artists.

OUR 'SPECIAL' NUMBERS. This month we bring you another of our special issues - our "FILM NUMBER". Our cover is perhaps the most unusual we have ever presented. The magazine "PICTURES" was the first weekly published for the film fan. It was published by Odham's, who later issued a sister paper "The Picturegoer". Eventually the two papers were amalgamated under the name "Pictures and Picturegoer". As time went on, the word "Pictures" was dropped.

If anyone suggests that a film magazine was not an old Boys'

paper, we do not agree. We reckon that boys and girls bought them for all they were worth. By the way, in the room adjoining the editorial office the relief pianist is playing "Hearts and Flowers." It's a moving moment.

THE WHO'S WHO. The 1962 Collectors' Digest WHO'S WHO will be issued in the Spring. With this issue of C.D. comes to you the entry forms. We hope that every reader of C.D. will make sure that his or her name is included.

Much hard, intricate and tedious work goes into the preparation of the Who's Who, and it is only by using a systematic method that we are able to cope with it. THE FORM, enclosed with this issue, MUST BE FILLED IN AND RETURNED if your name is to appear.

The main details of yourself, at the top of the form, are included free of charge. Our usual pre-paid advertising rates apply if you wish to give further particulars of yourself or your collection. We hope that plenty of readers will wish to give extra information. Apart from making the work more comprehensive, it will help towards the heavy overhead costs of production.

To enable all our overseas readers to take part, the final date for receiving forms at this office is fixed as February 24th.

THE EDITOR.

* * * * *

RICHARDS and WODEHOUSE

The following item appeared in a review of the book 'Wodehouse at Work', in the Economist:

"This book has the fascination of the Wisden file for connoisseurs of ageless cricketers; of old Bradshaws for amateurs of railways; of scholarly cantrips that have made Sherlock Holmes (to which Mr. Wodehouse owed a lot) a bit of history; of back numbers of Chums, the Boys' Own Paper, the Captain, the Magnet and the Gem (that other octogenarian, Mr. Frank Richards, hardly gets enough credit here for his part in the Wodehouse story. When we are ancient history, some smart pundit may well prove that Wodehouse wrote Richards as well, or even vice versa.)"

ROY PARSONS, who sent us the cutting, comments: "The thought of Wodehouse and Richards playing Shakespeare and Bacon is an amusing one."

* * * * *

LET'S GO TO THE PICTURES

My pocket-money in the early nineteen-twenties, as pocket-money went (and mine went very quickly), was liberal. But I spent plenty on offerings to my literary tastes.

The Magnet and the Boy's Friend on Mondays; the Popular on Tuesdays; the Gem on Wednesdays; the Union Jack and the School Friend on Thursdays; a comic paper or two during the week to fill in the odd moments; a monthly, now and then. And, of course, the film fan magazines. They made my pocket-money look silly - especially as I felt cheated if I did not go to the pictures three times a week - Mondays, Wednesdays and Saturdays. Picturegoing in excess is the ruination of kids, did someone say? If so, I trod the murky road to ruin with a vengeance.

If my mother went with me, she paid for the tickets, and bought the American Gums to chew during the evening, so all was well. On Saturdays, mum and dad both came, and dad bought the tickets. A skilful arrangement, as there was no half-price for kids on Saturdays.

But Mondays, if I went, I had to pay for myself. And I went. Sometimes I would make a collection of my mother's medicine bottles. The chemist paid me tuppence a dozen for them. For tuppence I could get in the pictures - a half-fourpenny. Seats were 2d, 4d, 6d and 1/-. I had strict orders that I was not to go in a lesser class seat than the fourpennies - I might pick up something - but tuppence provided a half-ticket, as I said earlier.

Monday evening. Homework dashed off during tea-time, or neglected altogether. The bottles sold. The Magnet and Boy's Friend purchased and tucked in my pockets. The half-fourpenny obtained.

And so, into the cinema with its air deliciously impregnated with the smell of oranges. The big picture was just ending. The continuous performance gave one the happy habit of seeing the end of the main feature before one saw the beginning. Not yet had come the Double Feature Programme, a curse which has seemed peculiar to English cinemas for so long.

The 6-piece orchestra played for the big picture - Clara Bow in "Down to the Sea in Ships". The orchestra also accompanied the Pathe Gazette, or it may have been the Topical Budget or the Gaumont Graphic.

The lights came on - click, click, click - one after the other. The orchestra gave place to the relief pianist. I loved her. Her name was Florrie. The lights went out - click, click, click - one after the other, and on the screen came the serial - Houdini in "The

Master Mystery." The heyday of the serial was over, but it was still enjoyed. Then a Mack Sennett comedy - Ford Sterling and Mabel Normand in "Cohen Saves the Flag." I rocked and rolled with laughter - I have never laughed so much since.

The relief pianist departed. A slide on the screen - Next week: Richard Barthelmess and Lilian Gish in "Way Down East." The orchestra came back.

And now the big picture is on again -

No ice-creams on sale, no trailers, no advertisements for soaps and detergents. All over in 2½ hours.

Out into the night air. A tram home. Toasted cheese for supper, and a browse over the Magnet as I nibbled. Mum, what do you think? The price of the Magnet's going up to tuppence! I shall need more pocket-money, Mum ---

Them was the days!

* * * * *

OUR NEW YEAR COMPETITION

Each of the following sentences gives a clue to a well-known character in Old Boys' Books. To help you, here are the numbers of characters from the various series, though not necessarily in this order: Greyfriars 3; Sexton Blake 2; St. Frank's 2; St. Jim's 2; Rookwood 2.

- | | |
|--|--------------------------------------|
| (a) Ill care for the aged man. | (b) A twinge for the senior. WINGATE |
| (c) Row with Ben over nap. | (d) Met shy boy! Who was he? |
| (e) Softly let me mingle. | (f) Defer sorting things out with |
| (g) Senior tells a dark lie. KILDARE | the Senior Service. REDFERN |
| (h) This boy sounds heavy after sunrise. | |
| (i) Ow! Lad becomes a strong man. WALDO | |
| (j) Reform him for a spoon. SNOOP | (k) Nail moth and dissect. |

Write as many as you can find on a postcard or a sheet of paper and post to the Editor. Closing date - JANUARY 20th.

A brand new book prize for your library will be sent to each of the two competitors who send in the most meritorious efforts.

* * * * *

WANTED: Magnets No. 28, 39, 648, 768, 933 and 1066 to complete set. Your price paid.

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

BLAKIANA

Conducted by JOSEPHINE PACKMAN, 27 Archdale Road, East
Dulwich, LONDON, S. E. 22.

Our editor has kindly sent me, for inclusion in Blakiana, one or two Sexton Blake short stories written for the O.B.B.C. inter-club Cup Competitions. Owing to their length they will appear in two or three instalments, and this month I am commencing with a two-part story.

Apart from this kind of help, I have received only THREE responses to my S.O.S. in the past TWO MONTHS! I do not intend to make any further appeals, for it seems I am only wasting my time. Sufficient to say: "No Material - No Blakiana!" (at least, so far as I am concerned), I have enough 'copy' in hand for a month or two; after that it will be up to you.

JOSIE PACKMAN.

* * * *

BYGONE DAYS ON BOYS' PAPERS

By George Richmond Samways

(Note - This is an extract from Mr. Samways' lengthy article, the bulk of which has already appeared in the Sexton Blake Library. I thank Mr. G. R. Samways and Mr. W. H. Baker for their permission - per Mr. W. O. G. Lofts - to reproduce this extract. J. P.)

Within a few years of leaving school, a fond boyish dream which I had scarcely dared to hope would ever be realised, was in fact fulfilled. I became a member of the MAGNET staff at the Fleetway House. How this came about is too long a story to tell in detail. Suffice it to say that ever since my schooldays I had been contributing light verse, and plays in rhyme, to the Fleetway House publications, especially the MAGNET and GEM.

My first prose contribution to be accepted was a football story in THE BOYS' FRIEND, entitled "The Grayshott Goalie." Oh, the thrill of seeing myself in print, in such distinguished company as Henry St. John, Arthur S. Hardy and Duncan Storm!

At Fleetway House I met in the flesh many of those authors and artists who had excited my youthful admiration. I also came into daily contact with the editors and sub-editors of the boys' papers flourishing at the time.

The UNION JACK, then in its heyday, was under the control of Lewis Carlton, who later became an actor, playing the part of Sexton Blake on the stage.

Succeeding Carlton as editor was Walter Shute, a genial and likeable young man, who wrote an occasional Sexton Blake story, but who was best known by his football yarns, written under the name of Walter Edwards.

It was Shute who quickened and intensified my interest in Sexton Blake. He was full of generous admiration for the stories of George Hamilton Teed, who in the opinion of many Blakians (myself included) was the finest of all the Blake authors. A Hamilton Teed story had a special vintage quality of its own and even after the lapse of half a century I can still read one with delight.

Walter Shute having decided to turn free-lance, Harold W. Twyman succeeded him as editor. An old school friend of mine, Twyman, with his natural journalistic ability and his analytical mind, was just the man for the job. Now, in semi-retirement in Surrey, I am sure he looks back with pleasure - perhaps a wistful nostalgia - to the days when he was at the helm of the UNION JACK.

The ever-growing interest in Sexton Blake led to the launching, in 1915, of the SEXTON BLAKE LIBRARY. Its first editor, W. H. Back, I remember very well; also the sub-editor, Len Pratt, who eventually became editor, and for half a century gave devoted service to the Amalgamated Press.

A story by Hamilton Teed - "The Yellow Tiger" - gave the SEXTON BLAKE LIBRARY a splendid send-off. A review of its subsequent history and vicissitudes of fortune, would require an article in itself. The little paper has enjoyed its boom periods, and survived its slumps; and today, in its new format, though it may have lost the support of some of the old "die-hard" school, it has gained a host of new readers all over the world. Long may it flourish.

* * * * *

"RAIDERS PASSED"

Whilst chatting to Len Packman on the 'phone the other evening, the conversation got around to the first issue of the current series of

the SEXTON BLAKE LIBRARY, entitled "Raiders Passed." At the time, I said to Len: "Oh yes, I remember having that issue when I was at school."

Although I didn't mention it to Len at the time, if ever I was asked which Blake story stands out in my mind the most I would immediately say "Raiders Passed." Why? Because I never read it!

To explain this rather extraordinary statement, when this issue was published I was at school, and copies of the A.P. libraries were becoming very scarce on the bookstalls. However, one of my form-mates was lucky enough to be able to have the issues, due to the fact that his father worked at the A.P. He was in the habit of passing on his copies to me after reading them. One morning whilst class was in session, he handed me a copy of "Raiders Passed" and whispered: "You can have that one, I've read it. It's pretty good."

I was just glancing at the cover, which I remember well, when there was a mighty roar from the form-master, a certain Mr. Wood, and before I knew what was happening he had confiscated my S.B.L. and I was treated to six of the best. Now, Mr. Wood could be likened to Mr. Quelch, for he was a beast - but a just beast! And so, throughout the past twenty years, this incident has remained in my memory, and strangely enough my Blake collection is still minus "Raiders Passed."

And now, twenty years later, comes the sequel!

A few weeks ago I paid a visit to the school where my young daughter is now attending, and after looking through some of her work I proceeded to the assembly hall, where the headmaster of the junior school was waiting to have a chat with all the parents in turn. My turn came along, and at the very moment I confronted the headmaster we both said, almost in one voice, "I remember you"! For there, standing in front of me, was my old master, Mr. Wood!

We chatted like old pals, and he remarked that it was strange I hadn't seen him before in the Green Man (the local). After we parted I saw him telling other parents and teachers that he was teaching the daughter of one of his old pupils. He seemed quite pleased about this, but it was obvious that the incident of "Raiders Passed" had made no impression on his memory.

I wonder if he destroyed it or read it himself? Even after all these years, I didn't dare to ask!

DEREK ADLEY

* * * * *

"REMOTE CONTROL"By Stanley Smith

Accidents happen!

And one happened to Sexton Blake!

A young man - by name, Dwight David Fallenbacher - makes a brief appearance in this chronicle. His name is enough to denote his age and nationality. He was usually known by his proud father - an officer of the United States Air Force stationed in Norfolk - as Junior. On this particular spring day, young Junior was on a visit to London with Momma and Pop. The latter had business at the War House and had left his son and heir with Momma while she had a look at the shops.

Dwight David found the shops very boring. Momma was showing great interest in a window display of furs and could not be made to take an interest in the more important things to be seen around. After all, furs can be seen anywhere! But where else can one see big, red buses, policemen with helmets and all the cars going along on the wrong side of the road?

In the shop, a slim sales-lady kept Momma busy. The door was open and the big world of London beckoned!

Junior vanished!

What a lot to see! Buses, the Underground, those funny traffic lights, shops with goods displayed right out on the side-walk! Fruit! Yes, he was a bit hungry - and those bananas look very good!

Thus the stage was set! A boy, a bag of bananas, a hunger - and Berkeley Square.

The second luscious fruit tasted even better than the first. Junior threw the skin over his shoulder. It landed with a faint "plop" on the steps leading to an imposing doorway beside which a brass name-plate bore the words, "SEXTON BLAKE INVESTIGATIONS."

* * * * *

The trim Aston Martin drew up by the kerb.

"Not worth garaging it," thought Sexton Blake, "I'll only be a few minutes, anyway."

Locking the door, he took long strides across the pavement.

"Paula should have those papers ready by now. I'll collect 'em and get along to the Insurance Company at once."

He strode forward and on to the steps.

"What the - !"

His left foot went completely in the opposite direction from that intended. Balance gone, Sexton Blake fell in a distorted heap on the steps on his own office!

"S'Matter, gov? 'Ere, let's give yer a 'and!"

First to reach the fallen detective was an old friend. One-armed Jim had been selling papers on the corner ever since the offices had been built, and the staff of Sexton Blake Investigations were valued customers.

With his one arm he tried to raise the recumbent figure.

"No, don't! I think my ankle's gone!"

Sexton Blake made an effort to get up and sank back.

"Ring the top bell," he gasped, "and ask whoever comes to send down Tinker - er Mr. Carter."

"Right gov! Now you lay quiet"

Miss Pringle was first to appear. Without hesitation, she took complete charge.

"Ring again" She ordered Jim. "Three times! That should bring Mr. Carter."

Now, Mr. Blake, let's have a look at you!"

Her deft fingers explored the outstretched foot.

"No - no break!" she announced. "But it feels like a very nasty sprain. Ah, here

you are Mr. Carter - and Marion, telephone Dr....."

.....

Sexton Blake sat back.

"Thank you, Paula," he said, as he lifted his bandaged foot on to the footstool provided. "Put those crutches out of my sight till I have to move again! - and Tinker, carry on with the jobs on hand. It looks as if I shall be stuck here for a few days at least."

Two days had passed since the fall.

Yesterday, Mrs. Bardell had flatly refused to allow Blake out of the Baker Street penthouse. Today with many misgivings she had allowed him as far as "that there office!"

It was, at least, an opportunity of catching up with work. Tinker was busy in the laboratory, Paula clearing up records of past cases. Blake, sitting back with as much comfort as his leg would allow, got to work with the dictaphone.

"RRRRRRR"

"Yes, Marion?"

"Mr. Coutts to see you, sir"

"Right! Send him in at once!"

The door opened. The figure of Chief Detective-Inspector Coutts seemed to fill the room.

"What's this?" he demanded with mock severity. "What have you been up to? We heard about it at the Yard and I came over as soon as I could."

"Just one of those things!" Blake replied. "Anyway, it's better already and I'll be in full circulation shortly."

"Better bel I could do with your help at the present, too!"

"What's up? Tricky case?"

"Well, it's

"Look here, we're just going to have elevenses. Let us all hear about it. Perhaps we can help!"

He spoke into the intercom.

"Marion," he said, "bring all the coffees in here today - and bring some of those sweet biscuits Mr. Coutts likes."

(To be concluded next month.)

SEXTON BLAKE LIBRARY TITLES AND AUTHORS (3rd Series)

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YE OLDE CYNIQUE INN

FRANK CASE saw the New Year in at our famous Olde Inn. After all the celebrating was over, and 1962 was safely launched, this is what Frank wrote in the Visitors' Book:

"Puns are the lowest form of humour - except when you first think of them yourself."

WANTED: Penny Populars old series 278 to 285. Please state price.
J. R. JARMAN, BRUDENELL, LEAS ROAD, MANSFIELD WOODHOUSE, NOTTS.

WANTED: GEMS 407, most issues between 412 and 500; most issues between 772 and 879; 935, 953, 956, 975, 980, 986, 985, 989, 990, 992, 993, 998, 1129, 1150.
ERIC FAYNE, EXCELSIOR HOUSE GROVE ROAD, SURBITON, SURREY.

WANTED: S.O.L'S Nos. 60 & 68. Modern Boy No. 239, Magnet Nos. 829, 862 - 865, 867, 868, 869, 874, 879, 884, 896, 897, 900. DR. R. WILSON, 100 BROOMFIELD ROAD, GLASGOW, N.1.

NELSON LEE COLUMN

CONDUCTED BY JACK WOOD

This month it is our pleasure to present, for your enjoyment, Harry Broster's St. Frank's story which helped to win the Cup for the Midland Club. The story is slightly abridged.

THE ST. FRANK'S WEEKLY

HANDFORTH ON THE TRAIL;

or, The Comedian of the Remove!



A Side-splitting Yarn of Handy on the Stage.

By EDWY SEARLES BROOKS

HANDFORTH MINOR PUTS THINGS RIGHT

By HARRY BROSTER

The St. Frank's holiday-makers, under the charge of Nelson Lee and Lord Dorri-more, were at Ment, on the Riviera. It was a numerous party, including many of the Moor View girls, and on the trip out it had been a merry one. Never had Handforth been so happy. Never had he been so much in the company of Irene Manners. It had been wonderful - till they reached Ment.

Then there was a fly in the ointment:

two flies, in fact, in the persons of a couple of young American tourists, Justin and Bud. Good dancers, fine swimmers, imposing in appearance, these two captured all the attention of Irene and Co. The ohummy atmosphere departed. Everywhere that Irene and Co. went, Justin and Bud went with them. Handforth was beside himself with misery - and the rest of the St. Frank's boys were in no better shape.

That was the situation when Willy Handforth arrived.

.....

Willy had been in Switzerland with his parents, and it had been arranged that he should join Nelson Lee's party at Ment. And when Willy arrived, he was astonished at what he saw.

Two groups. Ted and Nipper, and the other St. Frank's fellows in a group on their own. In the second group he saw the girls, with those two strangers, Justin and Bud, in their midst.

The keen eyes of the St. Frank's third-former swept from one group to another. Ted, looking fairly down in the mouth, Ted, looking as forlorn as a dead duck. And all the while the girls gazed at the two young Americans, fascinated by the swift glib talk of the two big fellows.

Willy decided to have a word with his sister. He strolled across to where the girls were sitting with the Americans.

"Ena" he said, interrupting Justin who was relating a recent adventure of his in the Alps.

"Go away, Willie," said Ena, impatiently. "You are interrupting Mr. Stuyvesent."

"Yes, run away, Willie," added Irene, who was normally very tolerant of Handforth Minor.

Bud waved his big hand and said; "Go play with your bucket and spade. Make sister a nice sand castle." He roared with laughter at his own joke, and the girls joined in - all except Ena. She was gazing with horror at the expression on Willy's face.

Justin echoed his friend's jocular remark: "Yes, run away and play in the sand, little boy."

Willy stared fixedly at the two young men, and then turned on his heel and rejoined his brother and the other St. Frank's juniors.

"Did you hear what those Yankee rotters called me?" he demanded.

Nipper and the rest stared at him.

"Well--what?" grunted Ted Handforth.

Willy spoke deliberately.

"Both of them called me 'little boy' and told me to go and play with my bucket

and spade."

The St. Frank's fellows roared with laughter. All the same, they knew what Willy's facial expression meant, and they felt sorry for the two Americans.

.....

The next morning Willy seemed to have forgotten his resentment towards Justin and Bud. After his swim, he sat down near his sister, and Justin and Bud made him the target for much of their wit. Ena was perturbed. She felt that the young scamp was up to something.

The St. Frank's fag lay basking in the sun, but he was really far from lazy. He paid particular attention to the actions of the two Americans after they returned from their final swim before lunch. He noticed that they used a special skin lotion assiduously, but they were not generous. They used plenty themselves, but never offered any to the girls. Handforth Minor leaned across and picked up the tin.

"Don't be rude, Willy," said Ena, severely. "You must not interfere with other people's property."

"Sorry!" Willy was contrite. "I only wanted to see the name on the tin."

Justin laughed.

"It's a lotion for men, not for the use of little boys," he said and laughed again uproariously at his joke. Once again the girls seemed vastly entertained by the big fellow's cleverness.

After lunch, the St. Frank's fellows saw nothing of Willy for an hour or more. Later he rejoined the party on the beach.

"That kid's been up to something," confided McClure to his friends, but Handforth only sighed.

Walter Church laughed softly.

"Someone will find out very soon, if I know Willy," he remarked.

The two Americans were coming out of the water, and they joined the Moor View girls. Handforth Major scowled.

Whistling, with his hands in his pockets, Willy sauntered past the St. Frank's group, and sat down near his sister.

"Where have you been, Willy?" asked Ena.

"Just for a stroll round the shops" he

Willy replied airily.

Ena did not like the look on his face, but she said nothing further. Idly Willy was watching the antics of Justin and Bud. They were using their towels briskly, preparatory to using the inevitable skin lotion. That famous lotion, in its bright yellow tin, lay between them.

Willy rose, and moved towards the young men. He stumbled over Irene's legs and landed on all fours on top of the two Americans. Therewere angry squeals from Justin and Bud.

"Clumsy young ginki" growled Bud. "Look where you've kicked our lotion, you clumsy little fool."

"So sorry," gasped Willy. "I'll get it for you."

He scrambled up, picked up the tin, and made a great show of wiping the sand from it on his blazer. He came towards the young men, and handed the tin to them murmuring "I'm really very sorry."

Willy rejoined Nipper and Co., who had been amused spectators of what had happened.

Pitt clapped the fag on the shoulder and said: "Good for you, young Handforth." Handforth Minor said nothing. He sat down, his gaze fixed intently on the adjoining group.

Justin Stuyvesant was enjoying himself. Very proud of his fine physique, he was towelling himself vigorously. In fact they had such an adoring audience. The Moor View girls watched them with undisguised admiration.

Justin started telling them how he had nearly been chosen as "Mr. America" in some display or other over in the States. He sat down and started on the tin of lotion. Each young fellow took a liberal handful from the tin, and they commenced the familiar ritual of anointing themselves. Talking all the while, they rubbed away with the lotion - arms, shoulders, chests, legs. Then they lay back lazily in the hot sand.

The sun had reached its peak. It really was hot. The Moor View girls sweltered and almost gasped for breath.

Marjorie Temple was just saying that it would be lacking to be on the sea again, when she stopped short. All the girls were now looking with some astonish-

ment at their American friends.

They too, were gasping. Something was troubling them. Bud writhed, Justin rubbed his shoulder. Then both began to scratch themselves. The girls gazed at them in amazement. The scratching became frantic. An awful expression of sheer torture was on each of the young men's faces as they scratched away at their bodies.

The Moor View girls shuffled away in alarm.

The young Americans seemed to have gone mad. Their anguished faces recorded every range of expression. Suddenly, with mad yells, they leaped to their feet and tore through the amazed crowd of onlookers and plunged into the sea.

The water of the Mediterranean seemed to add to their misery. Justin clutched his comrade, then pointed frenziedly at the fresh-water fountain in front of the hotel. Like Olympic record breakers they ran and leaped towards the fountain. In they went, wallowing like animals in the cooling water. Seemingly it eased their suffering for the mad look lessened on their countenances, and gave way to a stupefied look of shame.

Two policemen arrived on the scene. Bathing was not allowed in ornamental fountains, and the two luckless American citizens were led off, protesting and still scratching.

Lord Dorrinore's party did not see them again. The party had a hilarious evening, and nobody was cheerier than Ted Handforth.

.....

The next day the party was at sea again in the yacht. Ment was far behind them - and so were Justin and Bud.

Lounging in canvas chairs on deck, the boys were discussing the strange event of the previous afternoon. The girls were listening without joining very largely in the conversation.

"You know," said Nipper, thoughtfully, "Willy worked that business yesterday, but I'm dashed if I can figure out how he did it."

Nelson Lee, standing by the rail, had been taking note of the boys' chatter. He spoke to them at last, amusement in his eyes. "You lads are not very observant."

he said. "Lord Dorrinmore and I were watching, and we saw it all. Willy changed the tins. He replaced the genuine tin of lotion with one to which some irritant chemical had been added. Cast your minds back, and you will recollect that he made quite a performance of wiping the tin on his blazer. The tin of lotion which Bud and Justin used came from Willy's pocket."

The St. Frank's juniors roared.

"The awful young rascal!" gasped Ena.

At that moment Willy himself came along the deck. He stopped in front of Irene Manners. Solemnly he handed her a small round yellow tin.

"A present from Justin Stuyvesent," he added. He walked sedately away towards the hatchway.

Irene stared at the tin, while the others roared with mirth.

Church could not forget Handy's misery at Ment. He said politely, "That's the genuine stuff Bud and Justin used. You always craved for some Irene."

The girl coloured, and with a superb gesture of contempt she tossed the tin over the rail into the sea.

Edward Oswald Handforth smiled happily.

* * * * *

HOW THEY BEGAN No. 14.

Twenty Big Pages and a Plate of "FATTY" ARBUCKLE. **G.**

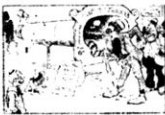


No. 1. Vol. 1.

January 17, 1939.



WINKLE GETS A PUMPH INTO TRINGS FOR A START



THE STORY OF FILM FUN

By W. O. G. Lofts

Do you remember 'Eddie' the Happy Editor? Of course you do, if you read good old FILM FUN in the days of your youth. It was my good fortune to meet one of the 'Happy Editors' a few years ago, in the shape of a Mr. Philip Davies, who had been in control of the paper for many years. We had some interesting discussions on one of my favourite comic papers.

"Do you know, Mr. Lofts," said the editor, at one of our meetings,

"It is a fact that I just do not know the age group of people who read FILM FUN - we get letters from readers of all ages - including many adults." That summed up exactly the impression I have always had about FILM FUN. Indeed, I must confess, that long long after I had put my comic papers behind me, FILM FUN never lost my interest, until probably recently, when its contents today obviously cater for the juvenile market.

The start of FILM FUN makes an interesting story. Since the start of the century, one of the most serious rivals to the Amalgamated Press group of juvenile papers, had been the firm of Trapps Holmes & Co. Since 1909 they had been producing a weekly picture strip comic entitled PICTURE FUN which was selling very well indeed.

Fred G. Cordwell one of the editorial heads, who in the past for the Amalgamated Press had produced such money spinners as 'Fun and Fiction' 'Firefly' 'Merry and Bright' and others of that ilk, thought up the bright idea of having a new comic, the contents entirely devoted to comic strips of current popular film stars (especially comedians) and stories on the same theme for his new venture.

And so FILM FUN was born, based on an idea indirectly from PICTURE FUN. The first issue appeared on January 17th 1920, priced 1½d and was also of a new handy size, copied by such comics as 'Dandy' 'Beano' 'Radio Fun' and 'Magic Comic' at a much later date. There were 20 pages, and also a free gift of a photograph of 'Fatty Arbuckle' who

5/- A DAY FOR



No. 1. Vol. 1.

Every



This week's Film: "CU"



1. "Oh, don't you ever see Fatty in AM or Boney? Oh, yes. And he's a real old-timey. He's got a real old-timey look about him. He's got a real old-timey look about him. He's got a real old-timey look about him."



2. "Well, I don't know what you mean. I don't know what you mean. I don't know what you mean. I don't know what you mean. I don't know what you mean."



3. "Look! Look! Old Fatty popped the corkcases down by a window, and set on a tin and slumbered. And that old creaker for the basement cried, 'There's Robert' waiting for his pie."



4. "No, I don't know what you mean. I don't know what you mean. I don't know what you mean. I don't know what you mean. I don't know what you mean."

Collectors' Digest

S U P P L E M E N T

January 1962

January 1962

THE SILVER CORD BROKEN

By the Editor

The closing hours of Christmas were saddened for countless thousands of people who had heard over radio or television that Charles Hamilton had died. Hours, inexpressibly saddened for those of us for whom he had provided a background throughout the whole of our lives; saddened, too, for a new generation which has been swept into the fairyland of Greyfriars by the magic of his pen.

The Grand Old Man has gone. It can be said of him with complete and certain truth that he has left an empty space which can never be filled. Years ago, when writing my History of the Gem, I said that he stood alone - there would never be another like him. That there will never will be is as certain as that the sun will rise tomorrow.



Early in the afternoon of Boxing Day the news was flashed through to the Victoria Palace where The Grand Old Man's most famous

creation, Billy Bunter, was going through another of his adventures. Behind the scenes a gloom inevitably descended upon the cast, the producers, and everyone connected with the production. But on the stage, in the tradition of the theatre, the show went on - joyful, hilarious, full of life - while the audience roared its delight. Perhaps dear old Frank Richards was there in the wings - rubbing his hands and giving that old familiar chuckle - that his beloved brain-child lives on - and will live on for many, many years to come.

Only last September I was with Frank Richards in that delightful study of his at Kingsgate by the sea. It is an odd fact, but I seemed to have a premonition that he was not to be spared to us for much longer. I had put off going to see him, for Kingsgate is not an easy place to reach from Surbiton. Life these days is such a rush and a bustle - there is so much to do. One puts things off.

But somehow the message came to me that unless I went at once I should be too late. I am deeply and humbly thankful that I went when I did.

In my article on my visit "Appointment with Perpetual Youth" I commented that the very air of the Grand Old Man's study seemed impregnated with the spirit of the wonderful characters he had created - everlasting boyhood - and that was no exaggeration. Today that lovely study is silent. The spirit of boyhood has left that peaceful room. But, out in the world, that spirit will never die while a single one of us is left. The world which Frank Richards created will always live on for those of us who love Greyfriars, St. Jim's, and Rookwood - for those of us who so loved deeply their creator and for those of us who will never feel quite the same again now that he has left us.

All through the years Charles Hamilton was a strange, rather mysterious symbol for we who loved his work. I doubt whether any of us had ever met him or knew anything much about him while the Gem and the Magnet were still alive. The editorial policy of the papers had added to the mystery; the dozen or so pen-names which he used added to the wonder; and the fact that many substitute writers had work published under his pen-names clouded the issue still further.

Some of us, certainly, had penetrated to some extent the

uncertainty. I knew - and countless others like me must have known - that one man was writing the best of the stories of Greyfriars, St. Jim's, Rookwood, Cedar Creek, Ken King, and the Benbow. I knew that the writer was really named Charles Hamilton, the man who had created St. Jim's long ago in Pluck.

But beyond that, the obscurity remained, - and, to some extent, remains to-day. Even now, we know little of the fundamental background of the man we loved so much. Perhaps I hope that we never shall know.

Strangely enough, real world-wide fame came to Charles Hamilton long after the peak of his power was passed. His best work in the Gem was done between 1910 and 1914, and again between 1921 and 1924. In the Magnet his greatest achievements appeared between 1927 and 1935. To the keen student of his work down the years it was obvious that the stories of the later Magnet, first-class though they were, lacked something which the stories of a few years earlier had possessed.

We have delighted in the post-war books of Billy Bunter, but nobody would claim that any single one of them came within a long way of the standard of the Magnet stories. They have all been excellent school stories - that goes without saying - but the vivid plots and the characterisation of the old days have been missing. No doubt this was partly due to the insistence on the part of the publishers for the light type of story featuring Billy Bunter.

Again, strangely enough, Charles Hamilton's best post-war work has been seen in the Tom Merry stories published by Spring Books.

Real fame came late to this great man whose influence on the youth of Britain for more than half a century has been beyond compute. If any man did real good with his life - real, lasting good for the world in which he lived - that man was Charles Hamilton. We must all feel this sad morning that Britain herself did him less than justice. Honours have been heaped upon people whose achievements have been infinitesimal beside those of Charles Hamilton. Perhaps he may have been contented that it was so. Perhaps the love of millions was sufficient for the man who asked so little and gave so much.

In 1952 was published the Autobiography of Frank Richards.

It was a joy to possess but sadly disappointing in that it left so much unsaid. We learned nothing of his childhood, nothing of his schooldays. He wanted it so. Clearly, it was his wish that the story of his early life should remain untold. I hope that it will remain untold - that there will be no ferreting into that period of his life which he obviously wished to remain private.

We saw him as something of a playboy in the south of France in the few years just prior to the first World War. Then silence - until he reappears at Welwyn Garden City where he lived during the second World War. It is only in the past fifteen years that we have seen something of a concrete picture of this man who influenced our lives so greatly.

And now he is gone. God bless him. God Rest His Soul. Maybe he is in a special Heaven, surrounded by all those characters which he brought to life. They will never be forgotten. Neither will he.



THE FEBRUARY ISSUE
of
COLLECTORS' DIGEST
will be a
SPECIAL MEMORIAL NUMBER
TO
FRANK RICHARDS

- AN ISSUE YOU WILL ALWAYS TREASURE -

MONTHS!! SEE
INSIDE

April 24, 1970.

rbuckle. 
Famous-Lasky Star
FOR THE JOB



was in those days one of the Kingpins of Comedy.

The front comic strips were of 'Winkle' the Pathe Mirth Wizard - a name used by the great Harold Lloyd in his early days. Pages 2 and 3 contained a humorous story of 'Fatty Arbuckle's Schooldays' written by himself, but I am told, these were editorially scripted. The illustrations of this tale, and many of the comic strips which were to appear in the following years were by George William Wakefield, who had been connected with the same group of companion papers for many years. A large man, with huge hands, and a very clever boxer in his youth, it was hard to see how he could draw such boys with cherub faces; indeed, one collector some years ago described all his boys as having girls' faces! Maybe it was this impression that made some people think that he was actually a woman! But 'Bill' Wakefield as he was called by fellow artists, had a great sense of humour and this is to be found in his comic drawings. Probably he will be remembered best for his ROOKWOOD illustrations.

Pages 4 and 5 of the first issue of FILM FUN contained comic strips of 'Lawrence Semon' and 'Baby Marie Osborne' who surely must be a grandmother by now.

Pages 6, 7 and 8 contained a serial story entitled 'Screen Struck' by 'Jack Fordwich' a name which hid the identity of Harold J. Garrish, a former Director of Amalgamated Press Ltd., who died in harness a few years ago. The illustrations of this serial were by that small, extremely clever Irishman, J. Louis Smyth,

who, like G. W. Wakefield, had been connected with the same group of papers since the 'Fun and Fiction' days.

The centre pages consisted of another comic strip of 'Earle Montgomery and Joseph Rock' when these were stars.

How many while seated in a comfortably upholstered Picture Theatre realise the perils and dangers which daily threaten the life of the camera man? Well, here was a theme for another grand series of stories on pages 12 and 13; the exploits of Jack Rightaway, the Fearless Camera Man.

'Mack Swain' the one and only Abrose. 'Ben Turpin and Charlie Conklin' (the latter later changed his name to Lynn for some reason, and is a different character from the famous Chester Conklin) 'Slim Summerville's side-splitters' and 'James Aubrey' made up the rest of the contents, which was a grand 1½d worth even in 1920.

Such was the success of FILM FUN that in April they introduced a companion entitled KINEMA COMIC which was identical in format, with 'Fatty Arbuckle' in comic strip form on the front page. This no doubt sealed the fate of the old PICTURE FUN - which had been hit badly by these new rivals in the last few months, as shortly afterwards the Amalgamated Press Ltd., bought out all the Trapps Holmes papers and PICTURE FUN was incorporated into FILM FUN.

The main policy of FILM FUN was to be strictly topical and to have the most popular comics of the films in strip form and by sticking to this policy, the sales always reached a very high level. No. 45 brought the first increase of price to 2d when in a short editorial notice FILM FUN was described as a 'Comic Journal'; surely proof that it was intended for readers of all ages.

One can easily trace the rise and fall of many of the early cinema stars in the years that followed. Harold Lloyd; Charlie Murray; Baby Peggy; Wesley Barry; Jackie Coogan; Lupino Lane; Buster Keaton; and Grock, the famous clown, were a few that appeared, with the first named appearing on the front page for many years, now under his more familiar name.

Every boys' paper had its own private detective, and FILM FUN was no exception. In the late 20's they introduced a Mr. E. and his chinese assistant Ling Su. The 'E' I have been told stood for Edwards - but he liked to be called 'E' for short. Readers, who may at once exclaim that surely the detective of FILM FUN was Jack Keen, may be surprised to know that he originally appeared in Kinema Comic until that paper folded up in 1932. For the records, then, Jack Keen started in KINEMA COMIC in issue 582 dated 20th June, 1931 - when the

front cover featured a large illustration showing a dramatic scene from the story. Jack Keen was of a similar type to the great Sexton Blake. His assistant was Bob Trotter, who surprisingly like Tinker was picked up by his master, when a waif of the streets. I have good reason to believe that this character was created by Alfred Edgar, the Blake writer, but the stories that were written through the years that were to follow, were written by a syndicate of writers, many indeed who were known in the Blake field of fiction.

Probably the most famous characters ever to appear in FILM FUN were that wonderful pair of comedians Laurel and Hardy. They actually started in issue No. 564 dated November 8th, 1930 in the middle pages, and they were to run for no less than 1,410 comic adventures until issue No. 1974, dated Nov. 16th, 1957, (probably through the death of Oliver Hardy). For many, many years they were illustrated by G. W. Wakefield, and on his death they were continued by his son, whose style was amazingly similar. Terence (Terry) Wakefield so I have been told is now an Ambulance driver in London, as the bottom has fallen out of the old comic illustration market in recent years.

Joe E. Brown; Schnozzle (Jimmy Durante); Claude Hulbert; Max Miller; Sydney Howard; Old Mother Riley; Sid Field; Frank Randle; George Formby; Bud Abbott and Lou Costello; Ronald Shiner; Dean Martin and Jerry Lewis; Red Skelton; Tommy Cooper; Harry Secombe; and Terry Thomas - FILM FUN had them all, and I'm sure that the above names will bring back tremendous nostalgic memories to many.

1957 was I think the turning point for the changes that were to come in the format for FILM FUN. Issue No. 1954 was the first attempt to colour the cover in blue - whilst other weeks saw green and yellow borders. Terry Thomas by this time was featured on the front page drawn by that superb comic artist 'Jumbo' Wilson, whose comic animals especially had no equal, and the contents by this time were changing to more juvenile tastes.

Now what of FILM FUN today? Subtitled 'and Thrills' it's still a good 4½d. worth, though its price has increased 200% since 1920. The front illustrations of Walt Disney's 'Goofy' are I suspect by an Anglo-Danish artist by the name of Neilson. Tony Hancock comic strips in the inside pages may be by one of the famous Parlett Bros. (See how topical FILM FUN is, by the dropping of Syd. James.) Picture story strips are by artists unknown to me, whilst surely the 'Film Fun' quips or jokes are by our old friend J. W. Wilson.

'Mr. Midshipman Easy' is drawn, of course, by our old friend Eric Parker, whose hobby of different uniforms bears him in good stead

of the days of the pirates. Barry Ford's Round-Up is still a very interesting feature, though I think I will be diplomatic and not reveal the identity of the 'author' behind this series. And last but not least, the stories of St. Franks school (now brought up-to-date since they first appeared in 1917 in the 'Nelson Lee Library') written by E. S. Brooks. There has been much criticism of these stories by many people, especially of the changing of characters' names, and it certainly is not my intention to make a controversial subject of it in this article, but it is a fact that these stories have proved very popular with the modern generation of readers, and the editorial powers should be congratulated on their foresight in at least reviving some of the most popular school stories in juvenile fiction.

And as I close my article on the story of FILM FUN, the reader must bear with me, that it is a sheer impossibility to cover all the history of this most popular comic in the space allowed for this article - I could add of 'The Adventures of Madcap Mollie' written by 'Pearl White' in the 1920's (so recently mentioned in the C.D.). Cowboy Picture strips of Buck Jones and Tim McCoy drawn by that famous 'Thriller' and 'Nelson Lee' artist Arthur Jones, and again that mystery of Charlie Conklin and Charlie Lynn, plus that famous serial reprinted in FILM FUN of "House of Thrills" originally in the BULLSEYE, (another of Fred G. Cordwell's papers). They thought so highly of him at the Amalgamated Press that a special memorial service was held for him in Fleet Street on his death.

I still buy FILM FUN these days for my nephew, and if readers today want good value for money, they could do no better than buy a copy of good old FILM FUN.

* * * * *

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HAMILTONIANA



How Levison Minor Came to Greyfriars

A magnificent story of Greyfriars, dealing with a "runaway" from St. Jim's, who finds some staunch friends in Harry Wharton & Co.

BY FAMOUS

FRANK RICHARDS.

FAMOUS SERIES No. 15

Appearing early in 1923, this series ran in the Magnet in pleasant connection with the stories in the Gem at that time. In the Gem, Martin Clifford had told how Levison Minor came to run away from St. Jim's. Frank Richards took up the story in the Magnet, and the above is the opening story of the Greyfriars part of the tale. Frank Levison found refuge at Greyfriars, where Levison Major joined him in a delightful set of tales.

DO YOU REMEMBER?

No. 38 - Gem No. 441 - "Too Clever by Half"

By ROGER M. JENKINS

Stories about the Fifth form at St. Jim's always have a special

attraction for collectors, perhaps because they tend to be of a more serious and dramatic nature, with less of the horseplay in which some of the lighter stories abound. "Too Clever by Half" is certainly a fascinating tale which has a centre of interest in the senior school, and it deservedly ranks as one of the classics of the Gem.

St. Leger was spotted gambling by Major Stringer, a governor of the school. The Fifth-former, in desperation, refused to give his name, and went back to the school to ask Cutts for advice. It turned out that Baggy Trimble had been in the neighbourhood at the time, and Cutts ingeniously decided to find Trimble and thank him for pulling Cutts out of the river at 3.45 p.m. - the crucial time. Cutts had calculated well. Of course, Trimble could not refrain from claiming the glory of this alleged act of heroism, and, when Major Stringer came to the school and identified St. Leger as the miscreant, Trimble's evidence was available to prove that the major must have been mistaken. The Head announced with pleasure that St. Leger was cleared, without a single stain on his character.

Naturally enough, the story could not end there. Trimble began to "borrow" money from St. Leger at an alarming rate, and was in turn blackmailed by Mellish and Piggott. The inevitable crash came, and St. Leger was not expelled only because his father had been injured at the Front, and Dr. Holmes was unwilling to aggravate the distress of St. Leger's father at the time.

Gem No. 441 was published in the summer of 1916, but the signs of wartime deprivation were few. It is true that the old blue cover had gone for good, but the paper could still boast 24 pages, and looked substantially the same as it had done in its glorious heyday. The food consumed by those picnicing on the river was as choice and substantial as it had been in days of yore, and D'Arcy was depicted in a rowing-boat with his topper resplendent in the July sunshine. Hard times were to come, but a summer afternoon in England was still the time for lush and lazy pleasure in the assured days when Cutts and St. Leger were "Too Clever by Half."

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LET'S BE CONTROVERSIAL

No. 55. The Substance and The Shadow

Bill Lofts recently wrote me as follows: "I am puzzled as to how E. S. Brooks came to be credited with having written most of the Gem substitute stories towards the end of the substitute run. Actually Francis Warwick wrote a great many of them; he has his bound volumes of

his own tales, and he names characters he invented. The Handforth tales were by Brooks, of course."

I am not sure whether Bill is not making an assumption, rather like the gentleman who asked the classic question "Have you stopped beating your wife?" I do not know whether Mr. Brooks has ever been credited with writing most of the Gem substitute stories during the period in question, but evidence seems to show that he wrote a good many Gem tales during the twenties. What strikes me as really astonishing is that few people seem to care two hoots who wrote any of the substitute stories in either the Gem or the Magnet.

A decade back, the substitute writers received something less than justice. They were condemned, not so much for what they wrote but because they wrote at all in the Hamilton papers. In the past few years the pendulum has swung in the opposite direction, and a certain amount of whitewash has been slopped into the stream of substitution which spread like a morass across both papers for many years.

The moderate view, clearly, is that a number of substitute stories were inevitable if the continuous story of the schools was not to be interrupted, but what amazes me is the lack of individuality, character, and impact in the substitute stories as a whole. Undoubtedly, these stories caused irritation to the discriminate reader, but, beyond this, they left no impression at all.

We know that a number of different writers acted as substitute authors over the years, but, apart from Pentelow, whose style is unmistakable, no writer has been picked out and named on the strength of any quality in his work. Mr. Lofts has provided extraneous evidence as to who these authors were, but nothing in the stories themselves points to any individual writer. The substitute stories are masses of words and situations, strung together without personality. Surely this is proved when nobody bothers a tinker's cuss who wrote them, and nobody will bother to examine them even to find out.

The only substitute story which has ever received more than passing mention down the years is "A Very Gallant Gentleman" - a dreary tale which has received attention far beyond its merits on account of its controversial theme. Hundreds of substitute stories were written yet just one is recalled. How many people to-day could summarise the plot of even one story by a substitute writer? Precious few, methinks!

It is fairly certain that Mr. Brooks wrote a good many of the St. Jim's stories in the twenties. Which? We have plenty of Brooks fans in our clan. Are they able to tell us which stories their favourite writer wrote in the Gem?

Whether a skilful, dedicated writer could have written a substitute story for the Gem and Magnet which could not be detected from the genuine article is a moot point. I think that he could. It is, probably, not very surprising that none did. It would not have been surprising if the substitute writers had poured their own personality into their stories. But none, again with the possible exception of Pentelow, seems to have done so.

A good story will live on. A bad one dies. The majority of the Hamilton stories live on because they were well written and worthwhile. The substitute stories died, not because they were substitute stories, but because they were not good stories.

I do not claim that the sub-writers were not adequate for their job of writing for boys. But the inference is clear. Not one of them wrote a Greyfriars or St. Jim's story which lived longer than the week in which it was published. If they had done so, those stories would be sought and talked about today.

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

(CONTROVERSIAL ECHOES on "A STAR IS BORN" will appear
next month.)

HUMOUR AND HAMILTONIA By Robert Mortimer

"Laugh and the world laughs with you. Weep and you weep alone." That's an old proverb, but a very true one. In the battle of life a sense of humour is very important, and can help us to overcome many trials and tribulations.

I maintain that men such as Chaplin, Danny Kaye and Bob Hope, who have made the whole world laugh, have done more to boost our morale than all the politicians. Think what a brighter world it would be if Professor Jimmy Edwards were Prime Minister, and Bud Flanagan, Home Secretary.

Humour has always played a big part in the Greyfriars and St. Jim's sagas, and Charles Hamilton has given us many rich comedy characters.

The first one that springs to mind is, of course, the immortal Billy Bunter, surely the fattest and funniest character in schoolboy fiction. You have only to look at Bunter to laugh. With his fat, preposterous figure, his fatuous expression and his bespectacled, owl-like appearance. We love Bunter, in spite of his unpleasant ways. He, like Mr. Toad, full of absurd conceit, will go happily on his way, yet endearing himself to all those who read about him. His creator gave this ridiculous figure a humour which I think has made him unforgettable.

Another figure of fun is Horace James Coker, the fool of the fifth form.

I have always had rather a soft spot for dear old Horace. In spite of his many faults, he has so many good qualities. He is big, burly, full of conceit: he is heavy-handed with the fags, but not a bully: Coker is generous, brave as a lion, and a wonderful, if unconscious, comedian.

Bob Cherry, although not strictly a comedy character, is so full of the joy of life, with his sunny smile and cheerful manner, one could never be sad in his company. He

drives dull care away.

Johnny Bull is the one I like least of the Famous Five. He has always struck me as being rather a dour character, with little sense of humour.

Mr. Prout, the portly master of the fifth form, with his rich, fruity voice and pompous manner, has given me many a quiet chuckle. I am sure Prout must have a sense of humour, otherwise how could he have had a pupil such as Coker in his form and still retain his sanity?

Harold Skinner, with all his unpleasant ways, can be humorous at times in a cynical kind of way, and we mustn't forget that he is a clever cartoonist. So I think there must be some good in the wily Skinner.

Peter Todd can be quite humorous at times, and to have Bunter as a study-mate one would need a strong sense of humour. How I enjoyed those comic Herlock Sholmes stories Peter used to write for the "Greyfriars Herald." Remember them?

Over at St. Jim's we have the one and only Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. Dear old Gussy has supplied the comedy relief in many a story. Gussy is certainly one of Mr. Hamilton's most lovable and endearing characters.

Then we have Monty Lowther, the humorist of the Shell. Monty has always been one of my favourite characters. We have a lot in common. Like myself he is a lover of anything connected with the stage. He is always fond of a joke, although I must confess some of his puns are pretty awful. But we mustn't forget he is only fifteen.

Yes, Charles Hamilton, besides being the greatest of all writers of school stories, has created many wonderful comedy characters.

Once again I quote:

"A little nonsense now and then,
Is relished by the wisest men."

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DID BILLY BUNTER GET THE ANNUAL?

asks GERRY ALLISON

Early in December, when all my thoughts were centred on the Collector's Digest Annual with the most eager anticipation, I chanced to read Magnet No. 148, "Bunter's Bust-up" - the 56 page Christmas Double Number for 1910. Imagine my surprise when I came across the following, in the eleventh chapter.

"Letter for Bunter."

Billy Bunter was coming downstairs in the morning - last down of the Remove, as usual - when Ogilvy spoke. Bunter made a rush.

"Where is it? Hand it over."

Ogilvy tossed the letter to Bunter, and the fat junior caught it eagerly.

It was a large, square envelope of thick paper, and on the flap at the back, were three initials in old English type.

C.D.A.

(No! It was not the "C.D. Annual." If you cannot remember - or guess - what the initials stood for, please turn to the foot of page 27.)

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WANTED - WANTED - WANTED !!! HOLIDAY ANNUALS. Reply giving price and date to JOHN GUNN, QUEENS HEAD HOTEL, MATLOCK.

WANTED: Populars 183, 190, 370, 385, 396, 452, 455, 466, 474. 5/- each offered or liberal exchanges.

ERIC FAYNE, EXCELSIOR HOUSE, GROVE ROAD, SURBITON.

WANTED: S.O.L's 42, 258, Nelson Lee No. 130 (old series). Your price paid plus postage. The advertiser has some S.O.L's, Nelson Lees, Gems and Magnets for exchange only.
BRIAN HOLT, BRITISH EMBASSY, REYKJAVIK, ICELAND.

YOURS SINCERELY

(Interesting Items from the Editor's Letter-Bag)

CHARLIE WRIGHT (Greenwich): I don't usually gladden (or otherwise) the Editor's heart by writing. I don't think I have written more than half-a-dozen letters to editors in the last 50 years. Good heavens! I have been reading comics and periodicals for half a century. (Just a moment while I disentangle the pen from my beard.)

I must congratulate you and the artist on the superb cover. Weary Willie, Tired Tim, snow, and W.C.B. The two lovable rascals from Chips are my two oldest friends from the ghostly world of "characters in fiction." How well this cover recalls to me my parents taking me with them shopping on Saturday evening when I was only a tot, and my father always bought me a copy of "Chips." How well I remember, too, the naphtha flares mentioned on page 6 of C.D. - flaming and roaring in the wind.

I don't know who wrote the article on the Favorite, but I am sending a copy of the Favorite for Christmas 1914, which perhaps the writer will accept with my compliments.

Thank you for a fine Christmas Number, and for one of the finest covers of recent years.

(The Book Souvenir which is awarded every month for the Star Letter of the month goes to the sender of the above. Our reader's gift of another issue of the old Favorite has been passed to the writer of our article, who has accepted it joyfully. - ED.)

BEN WHITER (London): In the Evening News recently there was correspondence as to which paper featured Weary Willie and Tired Tim. A few days later came the sad news of the death of Bransby Williams, from whom I had a letter when Chips finished publication. He was a great lover of the old comic papers. I remember buying the Favorite when I was at school, and recall the time when it was incorporated with Merry & Bright.

WALTER FLEMING (Chingford): I disagree profoundly with Mr. Vernon Lay's remarks apropos Bunter and Handforth.

ROSS STORY (Worthing): I would like to put on record my keen appreciation of Bill Loft's article in the December Lee Column. It was intensely interesting - and also sad. It must have touched many staunch Lee-ites to read about the declining years of their beloved Library.

I would also like to record the amazing fact that in less than 4 months Bill has acquired for me - from what unknown regions! - the complete 1st New Series of Nelson Lee Library. He has now set himself the formidable task of tracking down all the Old Series on my behalf. Truly there must be something of Merlin the Magician as well as Sexton Blake and Harry Wharton in Bill's make-up.

LURIE SUTTON (Orpington): I think the best school story ever written is "Adrift on the Pacific" - the 6th of a magnificent Magnet series telling of the South Seas adventures in 1938. My wife considers this the finest story she has ever read, and has been reading chapters from it over and over again. Certainly it takes some beating with its gripping and superb descriptive writing in which we share the perils and agonies of our Greyfriars chums on their raft. Who had dry eyes when Bunter started wandering in his mind, or when the noble Mauly sacrificed his last chunk of beef for the fat but starving owl? Who didn't feel relief when the raft finally touched on the coral reef?

RON HODGSON (Mansfield): What an excellent cover for the Christmas Number - or any other number, for that matter. Was it just a coincidence that the year began and ended with famous Weary Willie and Tired Tim on pink paper like the old Chips?

(Not exactly a coincidence. We are delighted that you spotted it. - ED.)

STAN KNIGHT (Cheltenham): Many thanks for the hours of happy reading in 1961. I have no criticisms to make, for I enjoy every aspect of the hobby covered by the Digest - even the criticisms of others, when offered in a friendly way. "A joy shared is a joy doubled," so you should have a really joyful time this Christmas in thinking of the joy brought to so many in the pages of C.D. and the Annual.

D. M. MACKENZIE (Sutton): 1908 was a great year for boys. The first George Marston Plummer yarn appeared early in the year; Scouting for Boys was published in fortnightly parts - and the Scout. The Boys' Herald, with "The Wolf Patrol" and "Sexton Blake at School" was one of the early favourites. What a year it was! The id Gem grew up at the ripe age of a year, and the id Magnet started. We were very lucky youngsters to be alive that year.

CHRISTOPHER LOWDER (Malvern): A most original Christmas competition - and what a splendid issue of the Digest. From your sincere Editorial to Sexton Blake To-day I enjoyed every single page. And, of course, you are right about friends. It's a wonderful magazine, the Digest, and I am sure it will go on and on. Thank you, Mr. Editor, for all the happiness that has come through the letter box at the beginning of each month - and especially for this memorable Christmas issue.

PETER WALKER (Nottingham): I have just finished reading the Nelson Lee S.O.L.'s called "The Tyrant Head" and "Rebels of the Remove." The action of the Removites' barring-out takes place within a week or even less. However, we start off with references to the "bitter December night" in the opening pages. Later we are told that "Nipper ventured into the cold, blustery November night," and, finally, "the January evening was cold and foggy." It is astonishing that simple errors should be passed week by week. One can only conclude that Mr. E. S. Brooks was either a very busy man - or he couldn't have cared very much when he wrote these stories.

JOHN JARMAN (Mansfield Woodhouse): The Editorial for December was a delight - particularly lines 15 - 17. They remind me of Shelley's immortal stanza:

We look before and after
And pine for what is not.
Our sincerest laughter
With some pain is fraught.

Our sweetest songs are those that tell of saddest thought.

The set-up of your chat reminds me of that of the Greyfriars Herald of happy memory - and the row of characters at the head heightens the effect. I wonder if this is by design. Certainly at times it resembles Wharton's style.

Answer to query on page 25:

Bunter's letter was from the Christmas Dinners Association.

Old Boys' Book Club

MIDLAND

Meeting held November 28th, 1961

This pleasant meeting was held in the Henby Room, Arden Hotel, Birmingham, and was attended by ten members. We were pleased to hear of Norman Gregory's continued good progress back to health though it was evident he would not be home for Christmas. First item was a reading from the 1927 Holiday Annual - "What happened to Bunter." In this case Bunter tried his tricks of persuasion on the Head of St. Jim's. He wanted to spend a few days with his friend D'Arcy (D'Arcy knew nothing about this arrangement). Those who are familiar with this yarn which brings in St. Jim's and Rookwood, know Bunter was "booked" for a flogging and had "hooked" it from Greyfriars. This was ably read by Jack Corbett. No. 2 item was a talk by Jack Bellfield on "Snobbery in the Hamilton Schools." Reading from the Rookwood S.O.L. "Living a Lie," Jack gave several instances of snobbery. Often characters of the working class status were made figures of fun. This provoked a very interesting series of opinions from members. A third item was a read article by the writer of these notes - on Cedar Creek - the school in the backwoods of Canada. One of Frank Richards' best creations, and, as I pointed out, the only instance when the author introduced boys and girls attending the same school. That some of the personnel were prototypes of characters from the Magnet, Gem and Boys Friend (Rookwood) was only too obvious but wheredid he get his idea of Vere Beuclero? This was a new characterization and apart from being unique, was a very interesting study. After a word game by Tom Porter and refreshments George Chatham gave the fourth item: - A reading from a famous Yuletide Greyfriars yarn S.O.L. 319 "The Phantom of the Tower." The part when Bunter arrives at Wharton Lodge to find the place empty except for his old enemy, the butler, who remembering past insults from the Fat Owl of Greyfriars refuses to pay the taxi man. Need we go on? Ted Davey supplied the final item when he read a cutting from the "Daily Mail" when the Librarian at Birmingham acknowledging a bequest of nearly 2,000 early children's books, emphasised the fact that the children's stories of our early days are still as popular and as much in demand. As he said "children still cry over 'Black Beauty'."

HARRY BROSTER - Secretary.

MERSEYSIDE

Meeting held 10th Dec, 1961

Once again a good meeting was held at the home of Bill Windsor; we were very pleased to have Bill Greenwood with us, making up for the temporary absence of John Farrell, who is not too well at the moment, and who we hope will be back with us in the near future.

Unfortunately the meeting commenced on an unhappy note with the announcement that our chairman, Frank Unwin, has had to resign from the section for personal reasons; the loss of such a popular and hard-working member is a great blow to us, and we shall

miss his presence a great deal.

Much of the evening was taken up in discussions on club affairs, and the arranging of programmes in the coming year; we are hoping to put on a film show next month, which should make a pleasant change, and we are hoping to get a full house for the occasion. After refreshments another literary quiz from Frank Case; this was won by Norman Pragnell, who was in really good form. The library business was quite brisk, and the evening ended with the drinking of a toast to Absent Friends.

Next meeting Sunday, 14th Jan. (6 p.m.) at Bill Windsor's.

FRANK CASE.

LONDON

"Boys Will Be Boys." No, not the immortal book by E. S. Turner but the famous film about Narkover College was the highlight of Brian Doyle's Christmas meeting at Clapham on Dec. 17th. With an attendance of over 40 in ideal settings, viz. shelves loaded with bound volumes of the "Magnet," "Chums," "Captain," "Punch" etc., the atmosphere imparted the true spirit of Yuletide. How we enjoyed the film; thanks to all concerned in the showing of it. Another happy event was the presentation to young Doyle, a lusty new infant, of a 'teddy bear' which, I am happy to say, was not shot by Prout in the Rockies. It was indeed a wonderfully happy gathering, even Mrs. Kebble's Siamese cat was enjoying itself making the acquaintance of all present. A splendid feed put on by the hosts, Brian and Mrs. Doyle, Mrs. Doyle senior and other willing helpers. An excellent Christmas reading by Roger Jenkins, a fine Yuletide Quiz by Len Packman and of course the Don giving another funny reading from an issue of "Punch". Great stuff! Ask Tony Potts of the Leeds Club who was present. He will tell you what a jolly happy meeting. Josie's final meeting in the chair and what a climax. Thus the next meeting will be the A.G.M. on Sunday, January 21st, 1962, at Hume House, Lordship Lane, East Dulwich, London, S.E.22. Kindly let Len Packman know if intending to be present.

UNCLE BENJAMIN.

AUSTRALIA

Realisation measured up to anticipation when the club members met for their Xmas celebration on Thursday, Dec. 14th at their usual rendezvous in the Book Bargain Bazaar.

In an effort to provide a festive spread worthy of Billy B. the secretary, ably assisted by Stan Nicholls, had organised a special Australian Christmas dinner for the occasion. The warm weather made the iced salad with chicken doubly enjoyable and all the members' healthy appetites filled the chief's heart with delight.

When the fruit salad and ice-cream stage had been reached a halt was called to the feast and members relaxed around the sadly depleted table to enjoy the greetings from friends absent and overseas.

Then by candlelight the chairman proposed a toast to our absent members, Arthur Holland and Bruce Fowler in particular and our host of friends overseas, wishing them continued happiness within the collectors brotherhood. A second toast was then proposed to the secretary and the chairman expressed the members appreciation for services rendered in this capacity and for the catering enjoyed at the Xmas party.

A Christmas cake was then cut to celebrate the club's birthday and members settled down to enjoy the readings.

As so many comments had been passed in favour of the outstanding Editorial in the December C.D. the secretary began the readings with this to set the right atmosphere for the charming little Xmas story sent down by Arthur Holland. All present enjoyed a hearty chuckle at the sentiments expressed by the inscrutable "William" in "What's Wrong With Christmas."

A wonderful evening finished all too soon but a very happy memory lingers on of

what were truly golden hours.

B. PATE (Secretary).

NORTHERN

23 of us turned up for the Annual Christmas Party on 9th December. We have been fortunate with the weather lately, but luck deserted us on this occasion, for it was a very foggy night.

At 4.45 we all sat down to a sumptuous spread which would have done credit to the Bounder's study, and we all did our best to emulate Bunter. After our exertions at the festive board Gerry Allison read us a letter he had sent to our President, Frank Richards, expressing our appreciation of his wonderful writing over the years, and wishing him all the best for Christmas and the New Year. Gerry also announced that Fred Cockcroft had given to the club library no fewer than 122 old boys books, including many Gems, Magnets, Populars and S.O.L's. These will form a very valuable addition to our library, and we are all most grateful for such a magnificent gift.

The first game of the evening was one which proved so popular last year, "A cross-country run from Greyfriars to St. Jim's, and vice versa." St. Jim's again came out on top, Tom Merry (Norman Smith) finishing first.

Then Gerry Allison gave us a reading from the Magnet double number of Xmas 1910 - a most amusing episode describing Billy Bunter's efforts to raise the wind for Christmas. Our thoughts turned to the many others interested in our hobby who were not with us to-night and the following toasts were proposed:

Frank Richards, by Geoffrey Wilde.

The members of the other sections of the O.B.B.C., by Frank Hancock.

Members of the Northern Section who were unable to be present, by Gerry Allison.

Collectors Digest, by Stanley Smith.

The ladies of our club, by Bill Harrison.

These were drunk in home-brewed wine supplied by Tony and Audrey Potts.

Then we all went to Courtfield Cinema to play Bingo! This was conducted by Jack Allison, and based on Greyfriars characters. We had a long session, and Mr. Allison provided a prize for each of the many winners.

A large number of prizes were provided by the club, and these were presented to the winners by Gerry Allison, who had kept a record of all points scored during the evening. The first six were:- 1. Elsie Palmer, (R. A. Digby); 2. Bill Williamson, (H. Wharton); 3. Frank Hancock, (Alonzo Todd); 4. Norman Smith, (Tom Merry); 5. Harry Barlow, (Hurree Singh); 6. Geoffrey Wilde, (S. J. Snoop); but there was a prize for everybody.

After further refreshments we wound up the party in appropriate style by singing 'Good old Quelch once looked out,' to the tune of 'Good King Wenceslas.' Another very jolly and enjoyable party.

NEXT MEETING: SAT. 13th JANUARY.

F. HANCOCK, Sec.

Sexton Blake Today

The Latest Sexton Blake novels reviewed by MARGARET COOKE

KEEP IT SECRET (No. 489)

PHILIP CHAMBERS

"Don't miss!" said the advance blurb of "Keep it Secret", and I repeat the warning - don't miss this fine novel of treachery and murder told in faultless English and his

own breezy style by a mature, responsible and highly intelligent Tinker fully emancipated from Blake's influence but retaining all his old loyalty and affection for him despite his anger over Blake's apparent indifference to his own imminent death as a traitor.

Fast moving action, excellent characterisation, great suspense caused by the clever use of climax and anti-climax, tension and near comedy; a soundly constructed plot; a high literary standard and good dialogue make this the best S.B.L. of the year. The novel also gives a detailed history of the man called Craille and shows yet another aspect of this popular character. This story of the theft of an important document from the depths of the National Security Archives by a secret service agent, the ingenious murder of a young cabaret artiste, espionage and counter-espionage, crisis and suspicion grips the imagination and holds the interest of the reader from the first to the last lines.

HUNT THE LADY (No. 490)

DESMOND REID

"As long as there are bad men" said Sexton Blake "there will always be someone gullible enough to believe they're not really bad men at all" and Deputy-Commander Grimwald found himself flushing.

This story tells of an escape from Dartmoor, a missing heiress, Kirby - crime reporter extraordinary with a nose for news, Deputy-Commander Grimwald of New Scotland Yard wishing to suppress the news; a beautiful woman; and a crook who managed to hood-wink everybody until Sexton Blake began to investigate the disappearance of the young heiress and the activities of the dope-ring.

A very well planned story. Not as fast moving as its companion, this novel contains good dialogue and good characterisation, and a surprise ending. Worthy to take its place in a long line of Christmas S.B.L.'s.

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Both books have well drawn and well designed covers, with good strong lettering for the titles, particularly Stefan Barany's cover for 'Keep it Secret'. I like his clever use of the white page as a background.

BILLY BUNTER SHIPWRECKED

There is not much sign of any shipwreck in the new show at the Victoria Palace, but what's in a name? The show provides two solid hours of grand, exciting, swift-moving entertainment for the young and not-so-young. Undoubtedly our friends have another great "hit" to chalk up to their growing list of successes.

It is very much the mixture as before. A hidden Bunter, disappearing food, a ghost or two, a bunch of crooks, the most unlikely member of the cast turning out to be a detective, a series of "double takes", and Bunter planting the custard pies in the crooks' faces to ring down the final curtain. To add to the hilarity, Mr. Quelch loses his trousers.

The scenery is fine. The "Sanny" at Greyfriars provides a novel opening scene, with a view of the football field through the window. The second scene, played before the drop-curtain in previous

productions, is performed this year before an excellent back-cloth depicting the side of a ship. It is a vast improvement. The Crusader's Castle is a most attractive piece of construction.

Lighting is far superior to that of previous years.

The first half is brilliant. There is not a dull moment and action is so swift and fun so fast and furious that one almost loses track of the story. For the real Greyfriars fan, the second half does not quite reach the same high standard. The pantomime absurdities run a little wild. But one does not go to a Christmas show to carp, and the kids yell with delight.

Again for the inveterate Greyfriars fan, a show is judged on the boys. This year, it must be confessed, it is the adults who steal the thunder. That splendid actor, Michael Anthony, is a real asset to all these productions. He enters heart and soul into every minute he is on the stage. Geoffrey Rose gives a fine restrained performance as a sailor who served his apprenticeship on the Woolwich Ferry. Paddy Ward as a most alarming Arab overacts and capers around with an energy which has to be seen to be believed. The most delicious moment in the show is when this bloodthirsty Arab sits smoking his hookah, swaying in his enjoyment. Bunter sits beside him and sways as he enjoys a bottle of pop. When Bunter transfers the tube of the hookah to his pop bottle, he brings down the house with a vengeance, and brings down the curtain on the first half to thunderous applause.

Peter Bridgmont is lithe and active as Billy Bunter, darting hither and thither like a plump feather. His performance is a triumph. Though his voice is not altogether pleasing for Bunter, his lines are comparatively few, so voice does not matter a lot.

The Famous Five display a never-failing energy and verve. On the island they are presented most attractively in smart coloured shorts and bright coloured shirts. The young fellow who plays Harry Wharton is a trifle too mature for the part. Both Harry Wharton and Bob Cherry wear finger-rings which glint incongruously under the lights. The smart producer should have had them doffed.

Robert Lankesheer once again plays Mr. Quelch, and, even as a pantomime Quelch, he is remarkably good.

The mixture as before? Indubitably! But it's a WOW! This critic intends to enjoy it several times more before the end of the run.

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