

COLLECTORS'

DIGEST

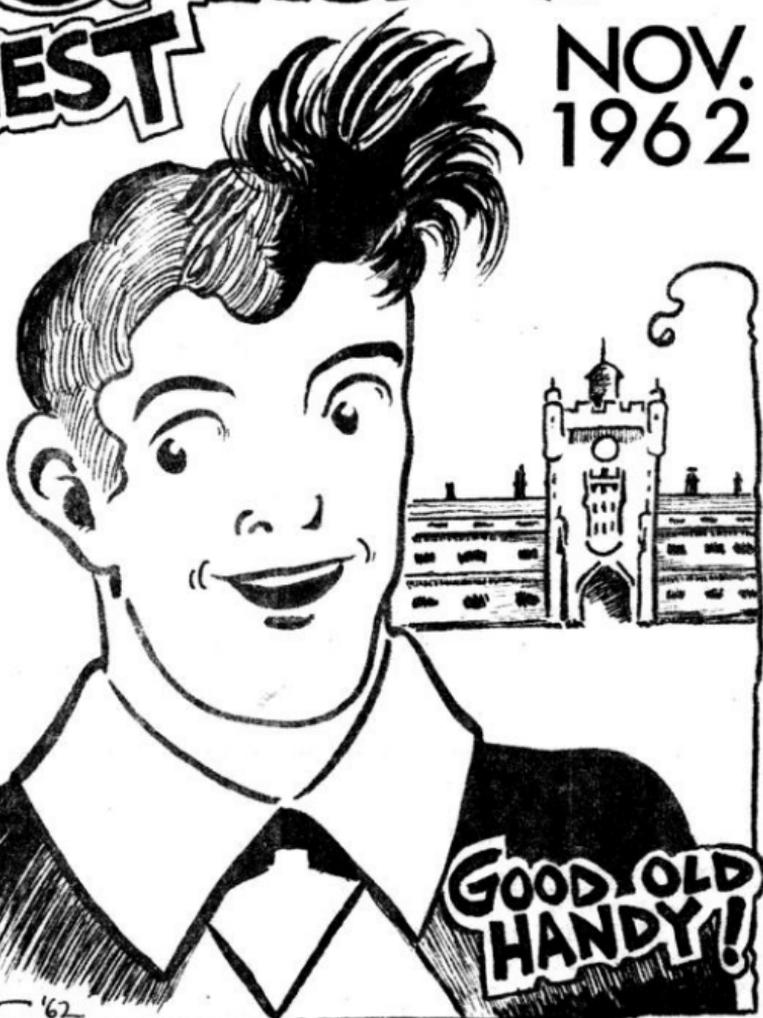
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1962

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Tony Slynn '62

GOOD OLD
HANDY!



Collectors' Digest

FOUNDED in 1947 by HERBERT LECKENBY

Vol. 16

Number 191

NOVEMBER, 1962

Price 2s. Od.

IN YOUR EDITOR'S DEN.



CHUMS IN COUNCIL

WHAT'S IN A HEADING?

Evidently a lot, when it happens to be CHUMS IN COUNCIL. I was quite taken aback at the large number of readers who have written me expressing regret at the dropping of our Chums in Council heading which introduced the Editorial during a good many months this year. Some really loved the happy picture; others feel that the words themselves are appropriate. It is pleasant to realise that my monthly chat is a chummy little occasion.

As our readers know, it is our policy to change headings from time to time - variety is the spice of life - but I promise you that we will bring back the old Chums in Council heading occasionally. The words, at any rate, won't be overlooked.

OUR CHRISTMAS NUMBER

Next month, in the words of bygone days, we shall bring you OUR GRAND CHRISTMAS NUMBER of COLLECTORS' DIGEST. Readers will rejoice to know that it will be yet another of our special ENLARGED issues which have been a feature of our year. It will contain, along with plenty of other seasonable fare, "MERRY CHRISTMAS, MR. BUDDLE", a story of

Slade with Mr. Buddle and Meredith in a battle of wits and wills.

ST. FRANK'S

Our St. Frank's fans, and, of course, everybody who enjoys a delightful article, will be happy to know that our NELSON LEE COLUMN in our Christmas Number will contain "A TOUCH OF WINTER" by Tony Glynn. The topic sounds chilly, but the article, like Christmas itself, is warm as toast. You're going to love it.

A reader wrote me recently that he will always support C.D., "so long as St. Frank's is not pushed too much into the background." My reader used the wrong verb. St. Frank's will never be "pushed" into the background. Your Editor will see to that. If it "drops" into the background, it will be the fault of our Lee fans themselves. I know, of course, that some of our experts in Lee lore are very busy men.

Your editor also, like Mr. Scarlet, has his busy moments - but C.D. still drops through your letter-boxes early each month.

And all our valued contributors are reminded that an article which is not too long is much more likely to see print quickly than one which runs to length.

CONCERNING SUBSCRIPTIONS

An old aphorism, which might prove embarrassing if taken too literally, tells us that he who pays promptly pays twice. Certainly, a subscriber who renews his subscription promptly, saves us a good deal of work at this office.

Our late editor got himself into difficulties by continuing to mail copies of the Digest to readers whose subscriptions had long expired. We made up our minds to avoid this pitfall and the consequent difficulties, but our rule was slackly applied so that we now find a good many readers well in arrears with their subs. This means additional book-keeping, and, as a reminder slip goes out each month until a subscription is renewed, it means that, in the past 18 months or so, we have sent hundreds more reminder slips than should have been necessary. Which all adds to the very heavy expense of producing the magazine. It also means that a reader is justified in saying, "I only ordered so many copies. You had no business to send more."

Our dispatch department is being instructed that, from January next, a copy is to be mailed for one month after the expiry of a subscription. Actually that means two month's grace for every reader. If the sub is not renewed during that period it will be assumed that the magazine is no longer required. We believe that our readers will regard this as a reasonable arrangement.

THE NICEST PEOPLE

Tom Porter of our Midland Club has, for a very long time, been seeking just one copy of the Schoolboys' Own Library to complete the entire set. We are delighted to know that Mr. Porter has at last successfully obtained this last copy. It reached him from C.D. reader Dr. Neill of Hornchurch who insisted that Mr. Porter should accept this rare collectors' item as a gift. We congratulate Mr. Porter - and we congratulate Dr. Neill. Truly the very nicest people, as I have commented before, are to be found among C.D. readers.

THE ANNUAL

The final work is now going into our mighty Year Book - Collectors' Digest Annual for 1962. Have you booked your happy Christmas reading? There is still plenty of time, but don't leave it too late.

THE EDITOR.

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BILLY BUNTER'S CHRISTMAS CIRCUS

The London Club is organising a party to visit the new Billy Bunter show at the Queens Theatre, London, on Saturday, January 5th. Stalls are available at 15/- with the party, and it is hoped that plenty of our readers will come along and join the fun. Applications for tickets should be sent to the Editor of Collectors' Digest. Come along with your fellow-hobbyists and join the party.

Our Scottish readers will be interested to know that the first Bunter stage play "Billy Bunter's Mystery Christmas" is to be produced in Aberdeen in December with Gerald Campion as Bunter.

* * * * *

BILL MARTIN

Our readers have missed of late the full-page advertisement which Mr. Bill Martin inserted in Collectors' Digest for a number of years. Many collectors all over the world have been able to add to their treasures by taking advantage of the services of Bill Martin.

Mr. Martin has been in poor health for some time, and we regret to learn that he is now in Park Royal Hospital in North London. We wish Bill a speedy return to robust health, and look forward to his rejoining our activities once again.

(EDITOR'S NOTE: During the summer an article by Mr. Frank Shaw appeared in the NEW STRAND MAGAZINE. Parts of the article were criticised by our own reviewer, and many of our readers were hostile to some of Mr. Shaw's comments. COLLECTORS' DIGEST has placed space at Mr. Shaw's disposal in order that he may reply to his critics. His reply was originally much longer. For reasons of space it had to be pruned, and Mr. Shaw himself approved the shorter version which follows.)

YOUR FRANK RICHARDS — AND MINE

FRANK SHAW replies:

LET me be controversial this month! Arma virumque cano. And what watchdogs the man has! I should never have put my nose in the STRAND (June 1962 - advt.)

"Dim, ineffectual don

Who dares attack my Chesterton...."

No writer ever had tougher support since Belloc thundered those lines than Frank Richards had from your readers. Belloc's broadside may have shocked Dr. Coulton. Not being dim and ineffectual by any means (even if wrong) he remained, nevertheless, unabashed.

I too, on this unsought battlefield.

Even if wrong I am not what your readers who have assailed me, whose views you have printed, say I am. Lord knows what was said by those you didn't print!

I do not recognise myself in their picture. This is not unreasonable. I wonder, however, if anyone who knows me would recognise it. It is, to me, a caricature. Did the critics read the article? All of it?

This is a paradoxical campaign. I am on your side. No Quisling, Was I naïf to think, loving Frank Richards as much as anyone, this side of idolatry, I would have your approval? I wanted and expected it. Are you idolators? Did you read me as carefully as you would have read "Coker the Champion Champ"?

The STRAND editor has many letters about the slight, ephemeral (I've no illusion) piece, none, I understand, critical. One reader, a headmaster for handicapped children in Australia, I gave three hours to answering. Like myself he had admired Hamilton for forty years.

Not to play entirely from ignorance when I wrote "The Man who made Bunter" I went to the experts including Mr. Windsor and Mr. Case. I obtained, to the delight of my T.V. watcher son, aged 16, back numbers. I read forty DIGESTS back ten years and the ANNUALS for five years back. (I had earlier corresponded with Hamilton himself, Mr. Leckenby and Mr. Fayne.)

The result, a long essay, of which the STRAND piece was an epitome, was read by many members and heard, from me, by the Merseyside O.B.B.C. without any word of disapproval and likewise a short piece based on it in the local newspaper and my January COURIER piece, "I say, you fellows —".

Did I have any other background? In the 'twenties, and occasionally since I read scores of stiff-backed school stories. That is why I insist that Richards, through more prolific and loved, for a longer time by many more readers (he lived for a longer time) is not as good as Talbot Baines Reed or the author of "The Gold Bat" and not better than Hadath, Cole, Vachell of "The Hill", "Stalky" or even Farrar. Except occasionally. He is uneven, isn't he?

In 1915 I read my first MAGNET, at the age of six. I read it regularly until 1928 and occasionally until 1938. I inherited from good older brothers early copies and bought more in Liverpool secondhand-book shops. Once I spent my pocket money for a week's holiday in Wales, the whole two-and-six and six stamps for letters home, on

chance found, many miles from my home, Redbacks and Greenbacks.

"Have they," a reader rightly asks (C.D. August) of folk like me "read enough of Hamilton to be competent judges?"

I had a collection which would now be enviable - gone alas, like our youth. Dare I say I thought little of the Rookwood stories, but I read BOYS' FRIEND with relish, enjoying Hinton's editorials as well as BOYS' REALM and sports papers. Till I was twelve I took FUNNY WONDER and other comics. Robin Hood and Dick Turpin were about but I did not fancy them and I was no fan of Sexton Blake. I bought the FOURPENNIES when I could afford to and of course I read the GEN, which as I grew older, seemed to me more mature than the Magnet. I also had the MARVEL, POPULAR, the wonderful CHAMPION, BOYS' MAGAZINE, CHILDREN'S NEWSPAPER, SCHOOL FRIEND, SCOUT, CHUMS, SCHOOL AND SPORT and the CAPTAIN occasionally.

Hamilton was, as I said, head and shoulders above his fellow hacks. The word was not used pejoratively. I am a hack, though not so successful.

Harmsworth did publish these stories for the pennies of newly literate boys. No harm in that. Certainly any idea such as your correspondent suggests of "capitalist-grinding, etc." was far from my mind. Harmsworth also wanted to kill the deplorable "penny bloods." His employee, Hamilton, earned every farthing he received from him and other bosses. Always he gave the best that was in him.

Some weeks that best was not so good. Someone has spoken of his "padding." It can't be overlooked. Another reader went further when discussing the stylistic mystery in the two "Rio Kid" series. Some weeks Hamilton wrote splendid English prose. Some weeks he did not. Few of his stiff-backed books to my mind, are well-written. They were based on an earlier, more inventive phase. Small blame to him and no surprise to non-foildators. By that time characterisation, formerly his strong point, was very thin. He used the same plots over and over again, the same scenes, the same situations, almost the same words. Most understandable. But don't deny it.

He was overworked. He had to repeat himself. New generations of readers was one factor. He did not think the 1924 readers would be seeking his stories out for many multiples of the penny in 1962. He was a human being, a writer doing his job. Good luck to him. In your own columns you have evidenced the repetitiveness, the worn tricks. When not tired he has passages as witty or descriptive as anything in the language.

I said that Latin composition by him I had seen was undistinguished. That was correct. I have not seen it all. Better Latinists than I have, I know, praised his. On the evidence I have I can't move.

It is the same with the literary allusions of which, admirably, I gave a selection. Hamilton was well-read, I clearly said so, but no man so busy from an early age, could have read all the books he quoted from. We all make quotations without going fully to the source. As your columns (again) have said, some of the quotations were wearisomely repeated.

From your columns I had that he would not say where he was educated. I would not be so stupid as to say he was not well-educated. His printed reply to my friend Orwell proved otherwise. I do think you claim for him too much erudition; maybe he himself did.

Am I being "patronising"? Lord forbid if it seems so. Who, by the way, was being patronising when in August C.D. Mr. Davey comments on "one Mr. Frank Shaw" (the oldest down-the-nose trick) saying my piece was "reasonably intelligent" but shows "specious though plausible reasoning" - "in a word sophistry" - for which I have a shorter word. I wasn't writing a philosophical treatise; reasoning, per se, had little to do with it.

In trying, in a magazine not solely published for Hamilton supporters, in the way the editor commissioned me to do it, to give a picture, warts and all, of Hamilton was I wrong to quote you or to mention - after insisting on his high moral influence - his own confession about gambling?

Your reviewer in the July 1962 issue quite misread me when he cites my quotation "there is nothing better" as if I thought H. was referring to the gambling not his

writing. I haven't a copy - mine is with READERS DIGEST in U.S. - but I shouldn't have thought it read like that.

That the stiff-backed Bunter books came before the Christmas plays and the T.V. series I knew. And that they sold well. Printed matter of all kinds did in the War years. Surely these new media widened the field of appreciation immensely?

I did slip when I said Bunter was revived by these media. He had never died.

Because I do not consider Richards the equal of Dickens or his work unremittingly excellent, am I the opponent of the man some of your readers make out? I may be a Bounder, even a Hazeldene, perhaps a bit of an Alonzo Todd; I am not an unrepentant Skinner.

"Limited knowledge" I admit. Who has unlimited? I deny "spite", I detest mere debunkers, things were said "vaguely" because space forbade elaboration. The piece, written long before it, was not cashing in on Richard's death.

Maybe I failed, but my object was to praise the man and his "arms". Wonderful creation I said his work was. I criticised. Unadulterated praise is rarely good writing. always unconvincing reading. I would criticise the great master, Dickens, whom your reader Mr. Davey finds "a bore" or my Chesterton. The best of writers have faults. We would not like them if they hadn't.

Naught was set down in malice. If I seemed patronising I am sorry. I thought that was one vice I was free from.

Certainly I was not patronising the clubs to which I owe much. I have tried to repay the debt. Merseyside Club can tell you that as will Mr. Payne.

In the sad corridors of this adult world the alcove occupied by the O.B.B.C. is a pleasant one and I wish I could myself stay in it oftener. I am with the members ninety-nine per cent.

I am with nothing a hundred per cent. As E.M. Forster said of Democracy, "Two cheers for the O.B.B.C."

YE OLDE CYNIQUE INN

Some folk sort out their problems in the solitude of our famous hostelry. George Sellars went there with a copy of the Blue Gem "Mason's Last Match." George always believed it was written by J. N. Pentelow, but the Gem catalogue credits it to G. R. Samways. When George left, still unconvinced, this is what he wrote in the visitor's book:

An old-timer is one who can remember when the village square was a place,
not a person,

WANTED: Gems, containing the St. Jim's Gallery, illustrated by Warwick Reynolds. F. McSAVAGE, 21231 CELES STREET, WOODLAND HILL, CALIFORNIA, U.S.A.

WANTED: S.O.L. 42; Nelson Lee No. 130 (old series). Your price paid, or SOL's, Nelson Lees, Gems and Magnets for exchange only. Would like to correspond with a reader who is interested in Xmas numbers of SOL, NL, Gem and Magnet.
BRIAN HOLT, BRITISH EMBASSY, REYKJAVIK, ICELAND.

WANTED: to complete binding run - Gems 1053, 1058, 1064, 1069. Available for sale or exchange Magnets, Gems, S.O.L.'s, Union Jacks, etc.
VERNON LAY, 52 OAKLEIGH GARDENS, WHETSTONE, LONDON, N.20.

WANTED: Nelson Lee Libraries, first, second and third new series only. Please give fullest details of condition, price, etc.
NORMAN PRAGNELL, 33 BRAE STREET, LIVERPOOL, 7.

NELSON LEE COLUMN

Conducted by JACK WOOD

This month we welcome a new contributor to the Column. Neil Beck is only fifteen years of age, and it is interesting to see how Brooks' wonderful stories charm a new generation. Readers will also give a warm welcome to James W. Cook, one of our most popular contributors, who starts a new series of his famous Letters from St. Frank's.

HANDFORTH MINOR

By Neil Beck

"The fags waited on the platform.

"One or two people alighted. And one of these arrivals was a junior schoolboy. He was about the same age as Owen minor, but slightly bigger in build. At the first glance at his face, the Handforth trade mark was revealed.

"There was the same aggressive jaw, and the same big nose. But this Handforth was milder altogether than Edward Oswald.

"He was attired - wonder of wonders! - in a dark-blue velvet suit! And upon his head there was a kind of sailor hat."

Thus, Willy Handforth entered the Nelson Lee (No. 386, O.S., "Handforth Minor").

Willy's attire and his meekness on his arrival were all part of a hoax that Willy had thought out with which to fool the school.

Although he was at first treated with contempt and scorn by his Form-fellows, Willy rapidly rose in their esteem by obtaining permission from Nelson Lee to change some old disused box-rooms into studies for the Third. In fact he had only been at St. Frank's a short while when the Third Formers recognised him as their leader.

It was in O.S. No. 392 ("The House of a Thousand Eyes") that Willy's interest in insects was revealed. The usual five-bob was obtained from his major and so Willy set off for Bannington where he bought a selection of beetles. On his way home he rescued a man from death in the old quarry. The man, Dr. Ryland Grimes, invited Willy to look over his collection of insects. Willy agreed and this proved to be the start of a very good story.

His great love of pets was never better shown than in the tale

"Willy's Dog" (1st N.S. No. 131). Enraged by seeing a greyhound run over by a car and the body callously kicked into a ditch by the dog's 'owner', Willy took a look at the dog and found that it was still alive. Taking it back to St. Frank's he fought to save its life, and succeeded. But then the legalities of Willy's ownership were investigated, however, after one or two scuffles with the dog's supposed owner, the real owner came forward and made Willy a present of the unfortunate Greyhound (called "Lightning" by Willy).

Apart from Lightning, Willy's pets included Marmaduke the monkey, Septimus the squirrel, Rupert the rat, Priscilla the parrot, Ferdinand the ferret and Sebastian the snake.

In "Peril Camp" (77, 2nd N.S.) Willy showed extreme courage, coolness and his 'way' with animals when he recaptured an escaped man-eating tiger and returned it to its circus-owner.

Handforth minor was also capable of showing great courage. In "The Slaver of Kalala" (64, 1st N.S.) he was sentenced to die a terrible death by the slaver Lorenzo. He was stretched out in a little hollow in the sand and left to be eaten by an army of black ants. Not once did Willy cry out and his courage was rewarded when a storm broke and flooded the hollow, thus enabling him to escape.

In the previous tale "In the Cannibals' Grip", Willy had been sentenced by K'laba, the cannibal chief, to be roasted on a kind of spit over an open fire. Otto Lorenzo, the slaver, appeared in the nick of time to save Willy's life.

Willy shone on the cricket field as both a batsman and a brilliant fielder. His first real chance came in St. Frank's cricket revolution series (Nos. 516-520 O.S.) when Fenton introduced, at Browne's suggestion, three school cricket XI's. Willy took his place in the Third XI, but by the beginning of the First New Series he was a regular member of the Second XI. On one occasion (O.S. 518, "Playing for the First") Willy played for the First XI at Helmsford, held a catch and then proceeded to score 21 not out (batting at No. 9) to win the match by three wickets.

His big chance did not come until No. 7 1st N.S. ("Handforth to the Rescue") when St. Frank's were playing the Third Schoolboy Test against Young Australia. In the field he made two brilliant catches in the first Aussie innings, and when he batted he scored 10 and 41.

Yes, Willy Handforth was truly one of Brooks' best characters. He possessed cheek enough for a dozen, a remarkable attraction for animals, coolness and courage. It must not be forgotten that he was also a good footballer (by Third Form standards, anyway). His powers and abilities of leadership were such that the Third backed him up to a man

in all things or else he wanted to know the reason why they did not; law in the Third was enforced by the power of Willy's fist (shades of E.O.H.!)

Being kindred spirits, William Napoleon Browne and Willy naturally had a great amount of respect for each other and it was due to this that on several occasions they were featured together. An instance which jumps to mind is in "The New Year Revellers" (O.S. 552), when after several failures by the Removites to bring Muriel Halliday (an under-mistress at the Moor View School) and Mr. Henry Bruce together under the roof of Dorrimore Castle, Willy and Browne proceeded to journey to London (from the castle in Derbyshire) and there, after Willy's tact had failed, they kidnapped Miss Halliday and carried her off back to Derbyshire where everything turned out well.

It was well-said by E.S. Brooks that Willy had a "way with people." No better example of this can be found than his repeated success when dunning his major of five-bob. Handforth major grew weak at the knees at the sight of Willy and dreaded those two fatal words 'five-bob'. Although he held all girls in open contempt they liked him because of his coolness and cheek.

Apart from his other qualifications, Willy was also something of an inventor. Remember the "Silent Two"? There were in fact two of these, one a car and the other a river-boat. The car appeared in "St. Frank's Saves the Ashes" (1st N.S. No. 9) and was described thus:

"The design was more or less conventional, but it was no mere toy affair. The two-seater body, brilliantly red with glistening new enamel, rather favoured the racing-style, with a tiny windscreen and an enormous bonnet.

"From one side of this bonnet protruded a huge exhaust-pipe of gleaming copper, and it extended right to the rear of the car, where the outlet was flattened in the orthodox way.

"The radiator was imposing, and the centre of it, although very business-like, suspiciously resembled zinc gauze of the kind that is used for pantry windows.

"The car was clearly brand-new, and it was perhaps only open to criticism on one score.

"It was fitted with four bicycle wheels, and these rather detracted from the general effect. In every other respect this novel automobile was of true racing design."

One point that was omitted at this stage was that the engine would give out after two or three miles; but this was not very surprising considering that the engine was only two fag-power! Yes, Chubby Heath and Juicy Lemon were Willy's engine.

The second "Silent Two" came into "The Mystery of the Poisoned River" (1st N.S. 102) when Willy and Co. were instrumental in the solving of the problem, why hundreds of fish in the River Stowe were being killed.

This "Silent Two" was similar to any other motor-boat except that this motor was, as before, Chubby Heath and Juicy Lemon; the operation of this craft was similar to that of the land model, i.e. Heath and Lemon pedalled the craft along by a similar method to that of a bicycle.

For me there was never a better St. Frank's character than Willy Handforth, although I must admit, I have a soft spot for everyone at St. Frank's.

* * * * *

LETTER FROM ST. FRANK'S

By James W. Cook

St. Frank's College,
Bellton, Sussex.

From the moment I stepped off the train at the sleepy old station at Bellton I somehow knew I was back in that better world that lies forever dormant but which is always ready to appear when summoned by good faith.

Nipper had written me and at the earliest opportunity I went down to see him to record the latest news from St. Frank's. But even as I walked down Bellton Lane memories came flooding back of Dr. Karnak, Ezra Quirke and Cecil De Valerie. Somehow those three faces came into my mental vision as soon as I reached the stile that leads into Bellton Wood. Perhaps it is because I have always associated them with the supernatural that the gloomy shades in Bellton Lane stir up these events from past days of the time when Dr. Karnak had De Valerie under his spell. I wondered how Val was these days. In fact I was anxious to know how the old school had progressed since my last visit and it was in this frame of mind that I turned into the gateway and entered St. Frank's.

But there it was, exactly the same as we all know it. The proud elms and the leafy chestnuts still look over the Triangle and peep into the form rooms where Mr. Crowell and Mr. Pagett the oldest of the masters, still reign supreme. Oh, I mustn't forget Mr. Stockdale, another old-timer, Housemaster of the Modern House, who will forever remain in my memory for his heroic action with Kennedy Hunter, M.A.

The dear old Triangle is crowded with these scenes from early St. Frank's days although the later events were equally filled with drama and danger.

It appeared the juniors were at lessons for a quiet, studious air hung over the school and the lobby just inside the Ancient House slept in the peace of silence. Very soon it would be dinner and a release from the hunger pains of Fatty Little! So into Study C I went and sat down to wait for Nipper. It has often crossed my mind of the possibility of former people associated at one time with St. Frank's returning to the old school. What, I wondered, happened to juniors like Claude Carter, Noys, John Willard, or seniors such as Starke, who had all left St. Frank's for various reasons; I wondered if they had ever tried to come back. The thought struck me as I remembered Bernard Forrest's vain attempt to regain entry into the school after he had been expelled. His disguise had been exposed at once.* It has always puzzled me why he went to great lengths to get sacked+ and yet greater lengths to return.

Gore-Pearce was another junior who occupied my thoughts as I sat in Nipper's comfortable arm chair. But the place is filled with visions of schoolboys and their various adventures that fight for space in one's memory that soon the mind refuses to concentrate on any particular event.

My meeting with Nipper and Co. will be told in my next St. Frank's letter.

* Second New series No. 179
+ 1st New Series No. 71

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WANTED: Stiff-cover story "The Reasedale School Mystery" by Smith. Your price paid plus postage. J.A. WARK, GREENKNOWE, CLYDE STREET, KIRN, DUNOON, ARGYLL.

MAGNETS WANTED: 1017, 1018, 1019, 1020, 1021, 1022, 1038, 1043, 1044, 1047, 1168, 1169, 1187, 1191, 1194, 1218, 1219, 1258. 5/- each offered. Also SOL's 191, 169 7/6 each offered. Also COMIC CUTS and JESTER.
GERRY ALLISON, 3 BINGLEY ROAD, MENSTON, ILKLEY.

WANTED: S.O.L.'s Nos. 60 and 68. Magnets Nos. 829, 862-865, 867, 868, 874, 869, 879, 884, 886, 897, 900. DR. R. WILSON, 100 BROOMFIELD ROAD, GLASGOW, N.I.

MEMORIAL EDITION OF "THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF FRANK RICHARDS" - 25/- . Packed with interesting reading and many fascinating pictures, with a long supplement on Charles Hamilton's work by Eric Payne. Obtainable from any bookshop or direct from Collectors' Digest Office. The Editor of C.D. will mail the Autobiography to any address in the world.

WANTED: Union Jacks - year 1917. Nos. 691, 693, 695, 702-4, 711, 717, 721, 725, 727, 732, 733, 736, 740. Year 1919 - 800, 820. Year 1920 - 851-856, 858, 861-863, 865, 870, 872, 874, 877, 885.

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

DANNY'S DIARY

NOVEMBER, 1912.

"BAFFLED!"

A Splendid New, Long, Complete School Tale of the Chums of St. Jim's.



How: As the last stroke of midnight rang out from the clock-tower, a slight sound was heard in the passage, and Captain Mellish tore the door open. The mysterious "X" had kept his word—he had come, exactly at twelve o'clock, to steal the Wood's picture! (See the thrilling, complete school story inside.)

How early the Christmas Double Numbers come out! I have had some of them during November, and they are so lovely that I would like to keep these big fat, snowy issues for ever. My brother Doug had the Christmas Number of PLUCK - 52 pages for 2d. He gave it to me and I loved the main story "The Squire's Secret" which was all about Detective Spearing.

At the beginning of the month the shop of John Barker & Co at Kensington High Street was burned out. Four women died, and many others were seriously injured, though the fire brigade worked hard. How awful with Christmas drawing near!

The Gem has been just TRE-mendous this month. Never better which is saying a toothful. First there was a story called "Baffled" a real corker. All about a mysterious cracksmen who called himself "X" and robbed people of their precious possessions. Captain Mellish, the cousin of Mellish of the Fourth, came into the story. Dr. Holmes was robbed of his Rembrandt. The next week brought "Caught Redhanded" which carried on the tale of "X" and Ferrers Locke,

the detective, was called in. When the thief was eventually apprehended everybody was amazed to learn his identity. But I had suspected him. I won't write down here who the mysterious "X" really was in case anybody should read my diary some time and it might spoil the story for them.

Then came "Hard Times". Tom Merry & Co were hard up, so Gussy advertised himself as a detective like Ferrers Locke. I've never laughed so much in all my life.

And then - then- the Gem's 52 page Christmas Number. The St. Jim's story was "Nobody's Study" and it was terrific. Nobody's Study was called that because it was only used as a punishment room. Once a monk disappeared from that room, leaving all his clothes behind him, and he was never found. In the story, Levison chipped Tom Merry into spending a night in the room, but the gas went out and there were strange noises - so Tom Merry ran for it. I don't blame him. The next night Levison elected to be locked in Nobody's Study to show he was braver than Tom. And in the morning - Levison had disappeared and all his clothes were in a heap on the floor. WOW! What a grand tale!

Also in this Double Number was "The Hound of the Mocr", a story of Kingston, the detective, written by Robert W. Comrade. My pal Lindsay's elder brother works at the Fleetway House, and he told me that Robert W. Comrade's real name is Edwy Searles Brooks. It was a topping, exciting story.

Then in the Double Number there was a story called "The Grammar School's Triumph" by Prosper Howard, all about Rylocbe Grammar School and bringing in Tom Merry and his friends. It was illustrated by E.E. Briscoe.

Dad took me to the Motor Show at Olympia in the middle of the month and it was interesting. We saw the Wolseley, Renault, Humber, Austin, Daimler, Sunbeam and Talbot. I tried to persuade Dad to buy one, but he says the wolf is at the door. But he opened his heart and bought me two "Boys' Friend 3d Libraries" on the way home.

One was a thriller by Maxwell Scott called "The Black House" and I liked it because it introduced Nelson Lee who is in "Birds of Prey" the serial in the Gem. The other was a very good school story by Horace Phillips, called "The Worst House at Ravenshill."

Late in the month Mum and Dad took me to Tricity House which is a new restaurant just opened in Oxford Street, London. It is an amazing place for all the cooking is done by electricity on special appliances which the Tricity people have invented. Fancy cooking by electricity! They say these appliances will become available to the general public, and that future housewives will cook by electricity. Current will become cheaper and cheaper and in fifty years time people will get it for nothing.

Towards the end of the month I had a Union Jack from Cousin Robin at Aldershot. It was called "The Great Turf Mystery" and it was a 40,000-word story of Sexton Blake, Tinker, and George Marston Plummer. It was a bit heavy for me, so I sold it to Doug for a halfpenny, and he said it was very good.

Doug had "Cheer, Boys, Cheer" Christmas Double Number. It had stories by Horace Phillips, Stewart Young, Ronald Stewart, Gordon Wallace and Clive Fern. I'm not very keen on C.B.C. A new serial has just started in the Boy's Friend, called "Sporting Life, or From Walf to World Champion." It is about a boy who lived in a barrel - what a place to live! - but eventually became a great boxer.

The wooden toll-bridge at Coring-on-Thames is to be pulled down and a new one built suitable for the masses of modern traffic. I saw the old bridge when Mum took me to Henley in the Summer. It is picturesque, and I believe it is the very last wooden bridge left carrying road traffic over the Thames. It seems a shame to pull it down, but Dad says we must progress and some people like to live in the past too much.

The Magnet stories have all been about Vernon-Smith, the Bounder of Greyfriars, in a feud with the Famous Four. It is evidently going to be a very long series, for the stories are still going strong.

The first was "Top Dog" a scouting story, in which the Bounder's patrol licked Harry Wharton's patrol. The second one was a Guy Fox story called "The Bounder's Triumph" and Smithy made a complete guy of Bob Cherry. Was Bob's face red?

Then came "The Schoolboy Crusaders", in which the Bounder started a new football

team in the Remove, and managed to beat Harry Wharton & Co by getting a professional footballer to play for him.

Then "Sacked from the School" in which the Bounder, through awful trickery, got Frank Nugent expelled. It was a dramatic story.

Finally, "The Schoolboy Renegade" in which the Bounder got Bulstrode on to his side against Wharton. Bulstrode, once a rotter, had reformed, but the Bounder pulled the strings so he turned against Harry again.

Smithy says he is going to get Harry Wharton and all his friends expelled. I hope he won't succeed.

The editor of the Magnet has just published a poem written by one of his young readers. It goes like this:

You ask me why I never find
The labour of the day tires;
Because, good friend, my youthful mind
Is with the chums at Greyfriars.
I love St. Jim's, so full of glee,
I revel in Tom Merry;
But all the same I'd rather be
With Wharton and Bob Cherry.

Dear Editor, if you but knew
The thoughts of each supporter,
And how your book thrills through and through
The globe in ev'ry quarter!
'Tis read by many a boy and man
On train-rides, trips and tramways;
And I'll support it all I can,
As sure as my name's Samways.

I wish I could write verse like that. Doug says: "You write verse! You can't hardly write you own name!"

Which is libel or scandal - or something.

(Turn back the clock and enjoy a Christmas of exactly fifty years ago. "DANNY'S CHRISTMAS" is in Collectors' Digest Annual for 1962. Have you ordered your copy?)

WANTED: GEMS most issues between 400 and 500. Most issues between 772 and 879. Also Nos. 935, 953, 954, 956, 975, 980, 985, 989, 990, 992, 933, 998, 1129, 1150, 984.
MAGNETS 45, 52, 134, 136, 141, 195, 205, 237, 238, 239, 277, 318, 319, 353, 400, 417, 422, 435, 469, 706, 719, 751, 752, 762, 763, 764, 809. most issues between 821 and 890, 900, 921, 924, 925, 938, 940, 942, 943, 946, 949, 951, 965, 967, 988, 996. POPULARS 183, 190, 370, 385, 396, 452, 455, 466, 474.
ERIC FAYNE, EXCELSIOR HOUSE, GROVE ROAD, SURBITON, SURREY.

WANTED: MAGNETS to purchase or exchange. Advertiser has some Magnets chiefly in the 1500-1600 range for exchange. Write:
J. YAFFE, 13 CEDRIC ROAD, HIGHER CRUMPSALL, MANCHESTER, 8.

WANTED: Gem No. 799. B.F. (Green 'Un) 762, 764, 780, 1042, 1257, 1264 to 1298.
1 TIMBERTREE ROAD, OLD HILL, STAFFS.

I have repeatedly stressed the need for material for Blakiana, and so it will not come as a shock to anyone when I say that unless material IS forthcoming it will be an impossibility for Blakiana to appear more than occasionally in the coming year. The need is pressing and urgent; and so, for the last time, I not only ask for your co-operation but also emphasise that the continuation of Blakiana (at least, so far as I am concerned) is dependent upon YOU!

BLAK

Conducted by JOSEPHINE PACKMAN
East Dulwich, London

JOSIE PACKMAN

* * * * *

MUSINGS ON THE S.B.L. THIRD SERIES

By Chas. Wright

When the Third Series commenced in 1941 the war was of course in full swing, and, as was to be expected, our old friend Sexton Blake had quite a large number of cases dealing with the great conflict. Some of them dealt with secret factories and underground factories, a bombed-out hotel, Black Market operators, mysteries involving a Cashiered Major, an Italian war prisoner, missing airmen, Civil Defence workers, and personnel in the Army, Navy and Air Force.

When the war finished, Blake went back more or less to his old type of cases with which we were familiar in the previous series; but although practically all the stories were very good, to the old-timers there was something missing. Where were the old friends (or enemies) of yore ...Gunga Dass, Zenith the Albino, George Marsden Plummer, Dr. Huxton Rymer, Leon Kestrel and Rupert Waldo? Alas, they had departed forever, except for a rare appearance in 1943 of Zenith, and in 1944 of Leon Kestrel. We came to understand of course that the world had changed so much more after this war than was the case after the 1914-18 war - at least, so far as boys books were concerned - and Blake and Tinker were now operating under vastly changed conditions. The Spiv had arrived; the Night Clubs and Cabarets were increasing; and in the Blake world spying was on the increase to such an extent that he was kept quite busy rounding up some of these gentry. The Racketeers were on the increase, especially where Currency and ex-Government stores were concerned, and Blake had his share of these cases too. He still

IANA

AN, 27 Archdale Road,
n, S.E. 22.

dabbled in cases connected with sport, however, as he had done in the past. "The Mystery of the Rio Star" was very topical at the time, dealing with very high priced footballers. "The Case of the Doped Favourite" involved him once again in the 'Sport of Kings', and the "Doped Heavyweight" took him again into boxing circles. He also had the usual crop of cases dealing with murder, forgery, burglary and skulduggery in general.

Of course, we still missed all the old characters, and it took a long time to settle down to the new stories; for after all, we

had been used to reading about these varied and formidable opponents of Sexton Blake for over forty years! But we settled down and enjoyed these stories, although up to a point, it was like Punch without Judy.

A few years ago, however, a heavier shock awaited us. Sexton Blake no longer sat in his armchair in his old dressing-gown, pipe in mouth and Pedro at his feet, while Tinker or Mr. Carter, as you prefer, pasted articles in the famous Index. He opened a palatial office in the West End, and engaged a glamorous staff (shades of Yvonne, Nirvana and The Black Duchess!), and I for one have never become used to it. But I suppose we have to realise that Blake, who has always been topical and modern, must move with the times. And who knows, perhaps in the future - when we have the S.B.L. fourth series - Blake will be one of the most famous space detectives doing his stuff on the various planets.

* * * * *

"THE CASE OF THE COLONIAL CRICKETER"

The following interesting letter has kindly been sent on to me by our editor:

"I am making a rather late comment on an article in the 1961 Annual, but an illness earlier in the year put the matter out of my mind for a while. It is with reference to the contribution THAT CRICKET STORY that I write - "The Case of the Colonial Cricketer."

This especially interests me as, so far as I can recollect, it was the first "U.J." I ever read, though I must admit I never spotted the technical errors at the time. The assignment must have been rushed upon Andrew Murray, an author whose work I enjoyed very much in the old days. Recently I read an old "U.J." of 1911 entitled "Sexton Blake - Boxing Trainer", expecting it to be by A.S. Hardy, but after reading a few

paragraphs discovered it to be in the unmistakable style of Andrew Murray.

The point on which I wish to comment, however, is that Mr. Webb ascribes it to Andrew Nicholas Murray (author of Kew, Carlac and Lawless,) but in the list of Blake authors he is included under the name of Geoffrey Murray. So which is correct?

As to the subject of whether G. H. Teed or Murray Graydon wrote the most stories of Sexton Blake, I should cast my vote for the latter, because he wrote some of the PENNY PICTORIAL, and I have four Boys' Realms of 1906 each of which contains a story of Blake, undoubtedly in his style (one of them features Matthew Quin) and there were more stories to come in this series.

Yours sincerely,

S. GORDON SWAN.

(According to my records the 'Colonial Cricketer' story was written by Andrew Murray. The fact that both Murrays have ANDREW as a Christian name does, however, tend to make things somewhat confusing. With regard to the Teed - Graydon matter, I agree with Mr. Swan (as also did the late Herbert Leckenby) that the odds are in favour of Murray Graydon, who also wrote a number of the Blake stories that appeared in ANSWERS round about 1910-11. Josie P.)

* * * * *

SEXTON BLAKE LIBRARY TITLES AND AUTHORS (3rd SERIES) (continued)

No. 440	Fear is my Shadow.....	T. Martin
No. 441	A Cold Night for Murder.....	T. Martin
No. 442	Guilty Party.....	R. Dolphin
No. 443	Epitaph to Treason.....	W. A. Ballinger
No. 444	Desert Intrigue.....	J. Stagg
No. 445	Mission to Mexico.....	A. Maclean
No. 446	Murder Made Easy.....	D. Reid
No. 447	This Man Must Die.....	W. A. Ballinger
No. 448	Bred to Kill.....	T. Martin
No. 449	Conflict Within.....	D. Reid
No. 450	Bullets to Baghdad.....	P. Chambers
No. 451	The Angry Night.....	W. H. Baker
No. 452	Witch-Hunt.....	D. Reid
No. 453	Man on the Run.....	A. Kirby
No. 454	Design for Vengeance.....	T. Martin
No. 455	Murder Comes Calling.....	D. Reid
No. 456	Hurricane Warning.....	R. Williams
No. 457	The World-Shakers.....	D. Reid
No. 458	Large Type Killer.....	R. Williams
No. 459	Date with Danger.....	T. Martin
No. 460	Some Died Laughing.....	R. Dolphin

No. 461	Violence in Quiet Places.....	J. T. Story
No. 462	Journey to Genoa.....	F. D. Fawcett
No. 463	Contract for a Killer.....	D. Reid
No. 464	The Big Steal.....	J. T. Story
No. 465	Danger on the Flip Side.....	J. T. Story
No. 466	Dead Man's Destiny.....	T. Martin
No. 467	The Devil to Pay.....	R. Dolphin
No. 468	Thief of Clubs.....	G. Johns
No. 469	Shot from the Dark.....	P. Chambers
No. 470	Pursuit to Algeria.....	A. Maclean

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THE PEDRO STORY

The Editor of COLLECTORS' DIGEST invited readers to send him their opinions of KILLER PACK, the story which re-introduced Pedro to the Sexton Blake Library. Here are some views received to date:

ARTHUR J. HOLLAND (Australia): I thought the author gave us a good, wholesome and interesting yarn. It was nice to read that dear old Pedro, in spite of being "long in the tooth", still has the same admirable characteristics of old. It is refreshing to know that his son Manuel is following in his father's footsteps. As the story progressed, Pedro's oration to the Canine Council Limbo (4th Division Dream Section) was super. It was good news to read that Pedro's and Manuel's future home will be Berkeley Square. If other writers deal as kindly and sympathetically with them in future stories, the old Blake fans should have no cause for regrets.

ALEX PARSONS (Tranmere): Pedro's re-entry was marred by the fantastic nonsense that accompanied it. I thought the bloodhound's soliloquies gave such an atmosphere of unreality that the characters became as unconvincing as puppets. I had a mental picture of the author's fingers working them. We have had many talking animals in fiction, but God save us all from a Soliloquising Bloodhound.

MISS E. J. PATE (Australia): Although I was very happy to see the faithful old fellow again I did shed a tear or two for his outraged dignity. Why must some of the writers set out to make a fool of the old order? There was none of the human warmth and appeal of the old Pedro-Blake relationship, and why Pedro didn't run amok among all those other sick characters I just don't know. Maybe I might get to love Manuel in time - but why was he necessary at all?

JACK WOOD (York): A keen welcome back for Pedro. Although I'm not too fond of the "speaking animals" or "speech in dreams" sort of presentation, the Pedro yarn was a pleasure and Manuel proved a "real" character. More of both, please.

ERIC FAYNE (Surbiton): I thought "Killer Pack" an excellent detective story, but as a return for Pedro - so keenly anticipated - I felt it lacked the warmth and mild sentiment which the occasion needed. I felt that the writer was making comedy of the event and this was a mistaken approach. The son for Pedro was natural but unnecessary. Change for the sake of change.

Something of the old Blake-Tinker relationship in this one story would have done no harm to the "New Look", as it is sometimes called - and it would have created a wealth of good-will among older readers. Even those accustomed to the present-day S.B.L., might well have welcomed it as a change. My view is that the S.B.L. gave us something really worth having in the return of Pedro, but took something away again in the way the story

was handled.

Pedro's come-back was a brilliant idea, but as such it failed to some extent. But there is another day - and I hope the idea may have another airing with more successful results.

CHANGE OF FORMAT FOR THE SEXTON BLAKE LIBRARY

We understand that the famous Library is shortly to have a change of format, and will present an appearance something after the style of "ARGOSY". It is a costly process, and it is to be hoped that all lovers of the famous detective will give the new-style Sexton Blake Library every support.

R E V I E W

"BILLY BUNTER'S BODYGUARD"

Frank Richards
(Cassell's 10/6)

The basic theme of this new Bunter book - the bank robber who is observed doffing his disguise in a wood - is very very familiar. It was used in the Magnet, invariably in a first-class story and it was always acceptable. There is no doubt that it will prove equally acceptable this time and that readers will regard "Billy Bunter's Bodyguard" as one of the best of the post-war series.

There are three rather incredible episodes in the story. It is unbelievable that a criminal would rely on a trap, drawn by a pony, as his means of a getaway after robbing a bank. It takes some swallowing that a kidnapper should merely gag Bunter - not bind him or make him insensible - and risk wheeling him away through the streets in broad daylight under a tarpaulin on a handcart. It seems unlikely that an "old boy" would be given accommodation in term time at the public school from which he had been expelled years before.

But most of us suspend credibility, more or less, when reading a story of this type, and the yarn is written with the old skill and charm. It will ring the bell with all but the carping, and, as almost the last of the posthumously-published stories, it will be doubly welcome.

ADVENTURE ON TELEVISION

By John Werrham

Bowling along the Dover Road on a brilliant September afternoon was pleasant enough except that our objective was a television studio and not the seaside. Arriving promptly at 4.30 my wife and I were escorted without delay into a "briefing room" which is about as near as one ought to get to a prison cell; Here I displayed such treasures as were available and from which a few were selected; these formed a cheerful array in the studio later in the programme. The producer then appeared and introduced me to Mr. Gerald Campion who still seemed to carry a hint of Bunter about him even without any make-up. The old Gems and Magnets, Collectors' Digests etc., were supported in a row on a large curtain draped over a bench along one side of the studio, beginning with Magnet No. 1 down to a salmon cover of 1939. Now the interviewer arrived after a breakneck journey from another studio without a minute to spare - television is like that.

So it was back to the briefing room with Mr. Campion for the final discussion. It seems that no script is prepared and only the broadest outlines of general procedure are discussed and this was resolved into a few introductory remarks, the exhibition, the

"discovery" that "Billy Bunter" was there in person and the final jollification all round. From the briefing room back into the studio for "voice level and lighting tests." The stage was at floor level and boasted nothing beyond three chairs and a half-circle of sounding boards. As we toasted under the lights the technicians flitted around and I struggled to look something I was not feeling, until we were banished to the semi-darkness of the Control Room. The tension here was even worse. A row of television sets each with a different picture and each engaging the attention of a gazing, muttering human. Other humans in the background gazing, though silent, but no less anxious. In the absence of chairs Campion and I supported the wall and I think this was the period when I did more throat swallowing than ever.

At last the call came, we were back in the chairs, there was silence, a signal, and the questions started. I do not know whether the Old School Tie came into operation at this point but the nerves disappeared and I thoroughly enjoyed the thrust and parry. The result to date is one fan-letter, and very likely, a new member for the O.B.B.C.

DEATH OF FAMOUS ARTIST

THOMAS HENRY FISHER, who illustrated every William story ever published, died on October 15th at the age of 83. During his long career he contributed to Punch and other magazines, and created the famous sailor trade mark of Players Cigarettes. He was a regular cartoonist of the Nottingham Football Post. He leaves a widow and a daughter.

Miss Richmal Crompton, creator of William, writes Collectors' Digest as follows:

"It was very sudden. He was well, and working on a William sketch at 5 o'clock. By 5.45 he was dead, from heart failure. He was 83, so we are fortunate in having had him as long as we have.

He will be irreplaceable as William's illustrator, though I suppose that the publisher will find a substitute. He was a charming man with a delightful sense of humour - and a very clever artist."



Mr. Thomas H. Fisher.

Another Silver Chord broken.

HAMILTONIANA

'THE GLORIOUS FIFTH' AT GREYFRIARS

By Brian Doyle

'The Glorious Fifth' at Greyfriars! In how many "Magnet" stories has the annual event of Guy Fawkes Day been celebrated, I wonder? Quite a number, that's certain.

In many years, especially during the 'thirties, came a story set against a background of fireworks and guys; a story so beautifully written that the descriptions made the reader almost scent the acrid tang of smoke and gunpowder in the cold November air.

These seasonal stories usually had an appropriate title; a few that come to mind are: "The Stolen Guy" "All the Fun of the Fifth" "Guyed on the Fifth" and "Fooled on the Fifth." Each story had a suitably colourful cover.

A couple of outstanding stories of 'the Fifth' spring into one's head ...

There was the classic series of 1934 in which Mr. Prout, as temporary Headmaster, ordered all fireworks to be confiscated - needless to say, his order went for nothing when the 'Secret Seven' intervened. It was in the same story that Loder, then temporary Head Prefect, was made the 'guy' of Greyfriars and came within an ace of being burned on the school bonfire!

On the last 'Fifth' at Greyfriars in 1939, Price of the Fifth planted fireworks in Mr. Proust's fireplace - with effective and colourful results!

In many stories some unfortunate was gagged and bound, tied to a chair, and hoisted around the school grounds as the latest thing in guys. The victims during the 'thirties included such people as Loder, Horace Coker, Herbert Vernon Smith, and temporary pupil Jim Warren.

If Charles Hamilton was still writing regular "Magnet" stories it's probable that this year's Guy Fawkes Day would be featured, as usual.

What would be happening down at Greyfriars on this November the Fifth, I wonder? Let's take a quick trip to Kent and find out ...

Assuming a convenient cloak of invisibility (we don't want any firecrackers thrown at us) we walk through the school gates just as dusk is falling.

It's rather a chilly November evening and there are faint touches of fog in the air and quite a bit of ground mist hovering a trifle eerily above the deep green turf of the playing fields in the distance. We glance back and see Gosling, snug in muffler and carrying a lamp, just starting to lock the heavy iron gates behind us.

Before us the great historic school buildings loom darkly. Most of the windows are alight with warmth and illumination from within and cast long patches of shadowed yellow light on the damp ground outside.

As we stroll towards the Cloister Field, where the huge school bonfire is to be lit, we see streams of Greyfriars boys all heading in the same direction, long school-coloured scarves dangling from their necks and gusts of misty breath visible in the cold evening air.

There go the Famous Five, all lending a willing hand in carrying a sizeable cardboard box filled to overflowing with fireworks of all shapes and sizes. Bob Cherry, a wicked little grin on his ruddy face, pauses for a moment to take a jumping squib from his pocket. While Wharton, Nugent, Bull and Hurree Singh look on with smiling faces, Bob lights the blue paper and tosses the squib at the feet of a familiar fat figure



— FRANK NUGENT —

looming up out of the loom.

"Bang! Snap! Crack! Pop! Crack!"

The squib certainly gives value for money as it jumps around Billy Bunter's ample, tight-checked trousers.

"Yarcooch! Help! Murder!"

Bunter hops around, vying with the squib to see who can jump highest, as a crowd of fellows gather around to enjoy the joke.

The Famous Five go on their way chuckling.

Who's that figure hovering in the shadowy cloisters? It looks like Vernon-Smith - and that slightly bitter smile on his lips probably means that some unfortunate has a surprise in store. If they haven't already had it!

Ah, perhaps this is a clue. Walker and Carne, those shady chaps in the Sixth, have just stopped the Famous Five and seem to be asking them if they've seen their even shadier cronny, Loder, anywhere. Harry Wharton & Co. shake their heads and disclaim knowledge of the bully of the Sixth; but after the two seniors have walked on, looking worried, the Removites break into laughs and whispers. They evidently know more than they showed!

Here we are on the field at last. And there's the great Greyfriars bonfire ...

Standing well over twelve feet high, there is a space at the top for the gun - which apparently hasn't arrived yet. But what's that noise and cheering in the distance? Perhaps it's the guy arriving ...

It is! But there's something rather unusual about the figure. It seems to be moving - and the eyes behind the grotesque mask appear to be glinting. That's Vernon-Smith at the head of the procession too, with a crowd of other juniors carrying the guy on an old chair tied to two long poles, following behind. As the procession nears the bonfire, as yet unlit, the guy seems to be struggling to get away ...

Here comes Messrs. Quelch and Prout, both for once wearing genial smiles; they haven't forgotten they were once boys themselves and remember how much fun they used to have on the Fifth. Mr. Prout walks majestically across to the guy, now surrounded by excited juniors.

"Quite likelike, my boys" he booms. "It's a remarkable effort, don't you think, Quelch?"

Before Quelch gets a chance to reply, the 'lifelike' figure suddenly bursts its bonds and jumps up with a roar of anger.

Prout staggers back in astonishment. "Wh-a-a-t...!" he gasps. "It is alive ... upon my word ... this is unprecedented, unparalleled ...!"

The 'guy' tears its mask off, revealing the contorted features of Loder of the Sixth!

Loder glares around and dashes off into the night.

"Someone else practisin' for the school sports..." remarks Lord Mauleverer.

"Loder! Loder, come back, do you hear? Loder ...!"

But Mr. Prout's request falls on deaf ears. If Loder hears he heeds not. Like the Pharaohs of old he has folded his tent and stolen silently away ...

But now the genuine guy is being hoisted up on to the bonfire. Wingate, the school captain, steps forward and applies a match to the paper at the foot of the heap and within minutes the flames are leaping high and the faces of the watching schoolboys glowing fiery-red. Now comes the fireworks

Rockets, catherine wheels, crackers, squibs, Roman candles, golden rains, 'bangers', and dozens more are soon busily in action.

Bunter stands on the outskirts of the crowd, munching a bar of chocolate as he watches. He isn't really keen on fireworks - especially when they're squibs! - but when he has finished his snack he intends to steal away to Lord Mauleverer's study, where he happens to know there is a sumptuous fruit cake just waiting to be eaten.

Now from all sides, come the crack of squibs, the 'swooshes' of rockets and the hiss of display pieces. For an hour or more there's noise and gaiety in the air. Then

it's time to go back into the warmth of the school, where there will be hot chestnuts and cocoa to enjoy. The field slowly empties of boys and masters.

A morose-looking Gosling wanders on to rake down the fire; there comes a soft hiss as he waters down the last reluctant glowing embers. Then he too disappears -- and the field is left empty and dark.

A cold wind suddenly springs up and we decide it's high time we left. As we turn our collars up and make for the gates, we hear a faint voice coming from an open window above us ...

"If you two funks won't help me to put this squib down old Prout's chimney, I'll do it myself. But wait till the next time I get a hamper from Aunt Judy, that's all."

It's Coker, of course, planning one of his regular vengeances on his form-master. This one, like all the rest, is probably doomed to failure. He'll no doubt choose the wrong chimney ...

Soon, even Coker's raucous tones have faded away and we find ourselves in the lane outside the school. There's quite a thick mist drifting in from the sea now and we're looking forward to sitting at our fireside, having a hot drink and enjoying an old "Magnet" - Guy Fawkes edition, of course ...

* * * * *

LET'S BE CONTROVERSIAL

No. 62. THE IDOL

I have lost count of the number of times, in recent years, I have been called an idolater. The word can mean "a great admirer", in which case the implication is true. But I have a sad feeling that those who toss the word "idolater" in my direction intend it to have a less kindly meaning.

A good friend of mine wrote in Controversial Echoes: "How you Hamilton enthusiasts do bristle when your idol is criticised!"

Do we? I have a hunch that Let's Be Controversial would not have remained constant for 5½ years had it not contained some criticism and appraisal. Surely our readers are intelligent enough to have hooted it out of the Digest long ago if it comprised merely the vapid outpourings of an idolater.

I hope I don't bristle at criticism - but I do bristle at unfair criticism. I bristle at loose comments which can be denigrating, especially when the writer, more often than not, does not mean exactly what he says. I have challenged plenty such comments in this column. Sometimes the gibe of "idolater" is really no answer to the challenge.

Recently I challenged a suggestion that Charles Hamilton wrote in a simple style. The writer of the suggestion did not mean "Simple" he meant "simple" - but the impression that the average reader of the comment would gain is that Charles Hamilton wrote for less intelligent youngsters.

In this month's News Letter, issued by the London Club, the reporter refers to a debate concerning the respective merits of Handforth and Bunter. The reporter concludes: "The result of the debate showed that Handforth was the better of the two characters."

It showed nothing of the sort. At most it showed that a majority of those taking part in the debate considered that Handforth was the better of the two characters. Which is something quite different.

In this column I challenged Mr. Frank Shaw who informed readers of the New Strand magazine that "there have been much better school story writers" without mentioning the names of those "much better writers." Mr. Shaw has written Collectors' Digest as follows: "I insist that Richards, though more prolific, and loved for a longer time by many more readers (he lived for a longer time) is not as good as Talbot Baines Reed or the author of "The Gold Bat" and not better than Hadath, Cole, Vachell of "The Hill", 'Stalky' or even Farrar. Except occasionally. He is uneven, isn't he?"

The underlining is mine. In passing, Mr. Shaw also refers to idolatry.

One or two readers saw idolatry behind my suggestion that as Charles Hamilton kept his youthful background shrouded in secrecy we should respect his wish. That it was no business of ours. I have heard the view expressed that a man well-known to the public, like a film star, is fair game for the publicists.

There is no comparison. Film stars seek publicity and thrive on it. Charles Hamilton never sought publicity. He was the most retiring of men. He lived the life of a recluse. In fact, he had lived for seventy years before one in a thousand of those who had loved his stories even knew the real name of the man who wrote them. Publicity and fame came to him very late in life when journalists realised that there was real news behind this man - a man seen so hazily, by his own wish, for decades by millions who had loved his work.

I make no idol of Charles Hamilton, I have no objection at all to fair appraisal of his work. I have offered plenty of criticism of various phases of it. While I am spared I shall offer plenty more.

But I admired his work immensely, and I have a high respect for the memory of the man himself. More than that, I am grateful to him. I am grateful for the happy reading he gave me throughout my childhood, for the pleasure and stimulation he has given me all my life.

I go further; I contend that all in our movement, whether Hamiltonians or not, should be grateful to Charles Hamilton. Does anyone believe that without Greyfriars, St. Jim's and Rookwood, our movement would have existed at all?

I don't.

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

CONTROVERSIAL ECHOES

No. 60. THE MYSTERY OF THE KID

W.O.G. LOFTS: I was told by a former sub-editor of the Popular that it was the late Stanton Hope who provided the data on authentic scenery, etc., for the Rio Kid stories. He was an expert on anything western, and was a great friend of Mr. Hamilton, visiting him frequently. I have no intention of taking the gloss away from Mr. Hamilton, for, after all, he did write the stories - no editor has ever disputed this in conversation. Many other collectors take the view that the 1936 stories were nothing like so good. By that time Stanton Hope was a globe-trotter, and was, possibly, not able to "sub" the stories as he had done those in the Popular.

STAN KNIGHT: I was interested in your references to the Rio Kid. I have recently been reading one or two Populars with these tales included, and agree with all you say. They are delightful yarns.

RAY HOPKINS: You have really set all of us "thinking readers" a tough problem to solve in your 60th Controversial featuring the Rio Kid and the reason for the excellence of this "Popular" Western series when the author had never been in that hemisphere. One always thinks the movies an excellent study in these cases but these stories were written in the "silent" days so no help could be gleaned from them. Atmosphere could perhaps have been obtained from them but did Chas Hamilton ever take time to visit the cinema? His prodigious output would seem to make that impossible. One is forced to feel, in the absence of any clues to the reason from the writer himself, that he was able to present the Rio Kid in a natural setting because he was just that kind of writer. Perhaps it all came out of his imagination (H.G. Wells never personally met a Martian). Chas Hamilton is a master of the school story, the sports story and also the Western and it is also possible that, had he tried his hand at them, he could have given us great historical yarns, science-fiction phantasies and war stories. The above wordage has been enjoyable for me to get out of my system but does not add an iota to the knowledge we already have on Chas Hamilton. One hopes that more autobiographical data on our favourite author's works will come to light from a perusal of his unpublished papers.

(NOTE: The Rio Kid stories appeared in the early days of talking pictures - ED.)

BOB WHITER: SIXTY UP! Fancy Let's Be Controversial being such an old boy! I greatly enjoyed your observations on the Rio Kid. To me it has never been such a mystery that Frank Richards was able to write so masterfully on the Wild West. Most men have loved cowboys from a very early age, and Frank was no exception. There was plenty of really first-class western material - stories and pictures - available when he was young, and I have no doubt that a writer of his ability could let his imagination guide him to writing so convincingly. I agree with you that when the Popular Kid stories were written he was at his peak. Hence the superiority of these stories over those of ten years later. Incidentally, the only mistake I ever noticed was a reference to putting the safety catch on a Colt revolver - they never had them. The whole thing makes a very interesting subject for debate.

GEORGE WILDE (on an earlier topic): Harking back to Controversial No. 59 I must express myself in full accord with your findings; it is not uncommon to come across references

of one kind or another, in the national or local press, or occasionally in less predictable publications, to the work of Hamilton. Almost without exception they seem to me to betray ignorance of the real scope and nature of his output. The general trend is to typify him as an "Ouch, yaroo, leggo!" author crossed with a "stiff upper lip, down with cads" advocate. Horseplay abounds, of course in his work, as do problems of school-boy honour; but how much else there is besides, that seems so little recognised. No, the fact is that though they dish out the nonsense, these critics don't know their stuff.

NORMAN PRAGNELL (on an earlier topic): I was amused to read Basil Adam's dogmatic remarks re Frank Richards in October C.D. He wants to know who wrote better school stories than Frank Richards. I will tell him. Edwy Searles Brooks did. That is my view and one honestly arrived at after reading hundreds of school stories by both authors. I will give him the names of three school stories by Brooks that I think were better than Richards' "Downfall series." First "The Scandal at St. Frank's" series. Secondly the "Handforth in Disgrace" series and thirdly the Bernard Forrest series. These views will obviously not be held by admirers of Charles Hamilton, but the question was asked and I have answered it.

Old Boys' Book Club

MIDLAND

Meeting held 25th September, 1962

The September meeting was one of the most enjoyable for some time. Despite apologies for non-attendance from our two Burton members, twelve of us, including a new member, Gerald Price of Blackheath, had the pleasure of listening to one of Ted Davey's amusing and instructive talks. Taking as his subject particularly Greyfriars, he drew attention to the high moral principles, the never failing humour, the excellent English and the cleverly woven plots of these school stories of Frank Richards. Quotations from a Bunter Book e "Billy Bunter's Barring Out" illustrated too, another point which was outstanding in Frank Richards work - real life characterization which was unfortunately lacking in the majority of other school story writers' works. We all enjoyed this talk which involved some interesting points of discussion. Naturally others of us who had other interests besides the Hamilton stories, did not entirely agree with all Ted said and a lively debate followed.

The quiz set by Jack Corbett was, like that of last month, a stiff one and Tom Porter and Jack Bellfield were joint winners. Norman Gregory was the nearest in "Guess the Number" competition and won a N.L.L. Old series No. 281. We were delighted to see this month's "Collectors Item". This was S.O.L. No. 58 "The Butt of the School" by Michael Poole and as everyone knows, Tom Porter has been searching for this, to complete his full collection of S.O.L.'s for nine or ten years. Congratulations from us all, Tom. And as Tom added, it came along as a result of the great generosity of Br. W. D. Neill of Hornchurch, Essex.

After the discussion introduced by Jack Bellfield, the members were treated to a

fine reading by Madge Corbett of her husband's contribution to the Australian Golden Hours Magazine. Subject - Frank Richards the Down to Earth Author. The Library raffle was won by Ray Bennett.

HARRY BROSTER.

AUSTRALIA

When members gathered at the Book Bazaar on Thursday, 11th October at 6 p.m. they were very pleased to welcome to the meeting Arnold Keena who has been absent from the ranks for some time.

After the chairman Syd Smyth, had opened the proceedings, the secretary gave her report on the happenings in club circles since the previous meeting. The London Club members will be pleased to hear that their taped greeting is now being enjoyed by Jack Murtagh in New Zealand from whom we will doubtless receive some interesting comments.

Letters from Tom Dobson in Victoria, Bill Gander in Canada and Bill Hubbard in Kenya were then read and discussed. Before the meeting was thrown open for general topics the question of a Christmas Party was brought up and those present expressed the wish that arrangements made last year be repeated this year - date to be decided at November meeting.

The Blake enthusiasts held the floor as both topics discussed for the rest of the meeting were in this field. Unanimous decision on the long awaited Pedro S.B.L. "Killer Pack" was that what happened to the grand old chap, should not have happened even to a dog! Even the supporters of the Old Guard, who are always accused of being rank sentimentalists declared they could not swallow it in such large doses as served in Pedro's dreams. NO, unanimously NO, Pedro's bones should never have been so indecently disturbed.

Syd Smyth, who had the pleasure of meeting Blake author, Stanton Hope, before his death recently in Sydney, supplied some very interesting details of the scope of his various activities and promised that when all the data has been collated an article will be published in the club magazine.

Treasurer Ernie Carter then dealt with financial matters before the meeting adjourned to the nearby coffee shop for a most pleasant conclusion to the evening's business.

B. PATE - Secretary.

MERSEYSIDE

Meeting held 14th October.

This was another splendid meeting, with a very good attendance, the only absentee being Bill Greenwood, who sent his apologies. To counterbalance this, however, we were most pleased to welcome a new member, Mr. Galley of Aigburth, more so as it is a considerable time since we last had an addition to our membership. He quickly made himself at home, and we most sincerely hope he will become one of our band of regulars.

We got off to an early start, the full and varied programme including two quizzes, the usual debate, brisk library business, and much informal discussion. The first quiz an excellent effort submitted by Norman Pragnell, was won by George Riley, with Bill Windsor second. Frank Unwin's equally entertaining list of posers resulted in a win by Bill Windsor, closely followed by George Riley and John Farrell. The debating subject chosen by Jack Morgan was a very good one, which gave rise to much animated discussion; Norman promises a similar one for next month.

Our next meeting will be the A.G.M. and as there is much important business to be dealt with, including the election of officers, we are hopeful that as many members as possible will be present. This will probably be the case, the section of late seeming to have taken on a new and revitalized lease of life, which is most gratifying to all concerned, not least the writer.

Next meeting, 11th November (6 p.m.) at Bill Windsor's.

FRANK CASE.

LONDON

The October meeting, held at the home of Reuben Godsave at Leytonstone on Sunday, 14th October, was a happy and jolly occasion. A good attendance enjoyed a varied programme. Two Desert Island Companions selections, by Lauri Sutton and Leslie Todd respectively, were interesting, and as a result Bob Cherry increased his lead at the top of the popularity table.

Tom Wright gave an amusing reading of a St. Sam's episode, punctuated throughout by hearty laughter from the listeners. Bill Lofts won Don Webster's Nelson Lee quiz.

Nearly all present aired their views in the debate on Reformed Characters. Four rounds of a modified "Illuminator" quiz were held, this delightful game being introduced by Reuben Godsave.

The Hamilton Library in charge of Roger Jenkins, did brisk business, and there was a healthy demand for "Billy Bunter's Bodyguard" and the Gem Catalogue.

Next meeting at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Len Packman, 27 Archdale Road, East Dulwich, London, S.E.22. Phone Townley 2844. Please inform hosts if intending to be present.

UNCLE BENJAMIN,

MR. W. O. G. LOFTS BEREAVED

The mother of Bill Lofts, London Club Member and popular contributor to C.D., died very suddenly on Monday morning, October 15th. On behalf of all its readers Collectors' Digest expresses its deepest sympathy with Bill in his sad loss.

NORTHERN

Meeting held on Saturday, 13th October.

Our Chairman, Geoffrey Wilde, was back with us this month to open another well-attended meeting, a little later than usual, library business, plus the sale of some surplus magnets, having taken longer than expected. We were pleased that Elsie Palmer was among those present, her departure from the district having been postponed for the time being. Another stalwart, Harold Busby, is ill in hospital, and we send our best wishes for a speedy recovery and return to the fold.

The minutes and treasure-librarian's reports were soon disposed of, and then Gerry Allison read some of the interesting correspondence received during the month. Bill Thurbon of Cambridge made a further donation of books for the library and some comics were purchased as some of our postal members were showing an increasing interest in these.

This month sees the birthday of our President, P. G. Wedehouse. He was written acknowledging our greetings, and tells us he is busy writing a book, and when it is finished he has promised to record a talk on tape for us, telling of his own boyhood reading. Jack Wood told us about the new Bunter book, which has just been published and pointed out there is only one more to come, more's the pity, unless some of the substitute writers get cracking again. The rest of the evening was devoted to watching film, both moving variety and stills. Molly Allison showed some of the Chesterfield reunion and some taken at Matlock at Easter. Tom Roach followed on with an excellent programme on general interests. Ron Hodgson rounded off a fine evening's entertainment with some stills of glorious scenery of Scotland, and a few taken at Matlock in our hotel. A novel and enjoyable meeting.

Next meeting, Saturday, 10th November.

YOURS SINCERELY

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

STAN KNIGHT (Cheltenham): "Danny's Diary" looks like becoming as popular in our circle as Mrs. Dale's Diary did in hers. Let's hope he doesn't (like so many of us) start out with every good intention of keeping on but after a while lose heart.

G. T. WAINE (Wroughton): Thank you for the many happy golden hours you have given us during the past twelve months.

RON HODGSON (Mansfield): I've just had some Biggles and Captain Justice B.F.L.'s and I wonder if anyone can give me a list of titles and numbers of the issues containing these characters. My congratulations to both "Philpot Bottles" - a real good chuckle all through.

ARTHUR HOLLAND (Australia): It has been a wonderful year for the Digest. Excellent covers, new features, special enlarged numbers, and an occasional school yarn thrown in as a special treat. C.D. is my favourite reading matter and I always look forward to each issue with keenest anticipation. Many thanks for making such a splendid job of our periodicals and for the valuable and unselfish service rendered to our hobby.

TONY GLYNN (Manchester): I noticed that a correspondent recently asked for information on Little Folks, and I should like to second the proposal. I have a volume of Little Folks for 1907 and I treasure it for its high artistic and literary standard. Artists represented include John Hassall, Harry Rountree, W. Heath Robinson and his brother Charles. Among the writers are Harold Avery and (surprisingly) Arthur Bryant, now Sir Arthur Bryant, the distinguished historian and Ford Madox Hueffer, who was to achieve greater fame in other fields after he changed his name to Ford Madox Ford in the first war. If the production of a comic paper such as Puck is a lost art, the production of a children's monthly such as Little Folks has been lost with it.

JAMES W. COOK (Wembley): Cannot you in your heart of hearts find possible space to publish these few first lines of Vital Lampada in humble payment for your very rude error?

"There's a breathless hush in the Close tonight -
Ten to make and the match to win -
A bumping pitch and a blinding light,
An hour to play and the last man in.
And it's not for the sake of a ribboned coat,
Or the selfish hope of a season's fame,
But his Captain's hand on his shoulder smote -
'Play up! Play up! and play the game!'

(A printer's slip changed Sir Henry Newbolt into Newport. To compensate for our very rude error we have pleasure in printing the lines - ED.)

JOHN STOKES (Dublin): October C.D. is very wonderful with the fine article about Frank Richards' old home and all those splendid photographs of the interior of the house.

Sexton Blake Today

DEATH AND LITTLE GIRL BLUE No. 509

V. J. HANSON

A good book and a good foil for its companion. A story of mystery, intrigue and deduction, against a background of kidnapping. There are three main groups of characters, all having different motives and none of them knowing the whole truth of the case until the final chapter. The plot covers the love of a man for his mistress, the greed of commando killers for money, a third man's desire for revenge and an international crook's use of all these emotions to gain a new secret weapon - 'the Groaner'. Good fast action, well-drawn characters, good dialogue and a detective who uses his powers of deduction to the full.

Mr. Hanson has produced a book to please all tastes.

DANGEROUS PLAYMATE No. 510

PHILIP CHAMBERS

Another excellent novel containing all the ingredients of first class detective fiction - superb varied characterisation; a carefully planned and cleverly developed plot; a strong, active, intensely 'human' detective working against time to stay an execution and save the life of a man who once saved him; a fanatic who wished to play chess with live men; and, above all, the high standard of literature and story-telling which is the hallmark of this author's work.

From the first vivid word picture of a holiday crowd's interest in the unusual at sea described in the opening lines, through the anger and embarrassment felt by Sexton Blake and his fellow war-time Resistance workers in French North Africa as they watched a tide of pathetic refugees returning to Marseilles from that same Algerian territory as they held a 20th reunion of their group, right through to the unexpected and entirely satisfactory ending, this story grips the reader's imagination and interest.

A 'must' for all collectors' book shelves.

YOURS SINCERELY (continued from page 31...)

CYRIL FARRON (Boston): The Nelson Lee once had a series of illustrations of gateways to public schools. My own school, Boston Grammar School, was featured. The year would be about 1924. Is it possible for any of your experts to supply me with any information about this series - dates, etc?

HAROLD LACK (Northampton): I couldn't disagree more strongly with Jill Lyne, Barbara Redfern & Co "an odious bunch"! Never! Like yours my memories of Cliff House are of the days when Stella Stone was captain and the "bouncer" was Augusta Anstruther-Browne. How well I recall her arrival at Cliff House with Peggy Preston, how the latter saved her life in the school fire; her expulsion and her return as "Olive Wayne". They were to me wonderful stories although I admit that as the years went by they became less interesting. I liked Betty Barton & Co. but never as much as the Cliff House girls.

ARTHUR CARBIN (Rugby): The Digest gets better and better, and I enjoy all sections of it, but I must say how entertaining Danny's Diary is. For a few moments each month I feel as though I was living in the past again. A nostalgic and delightful feeling. I also like very much the illustration at the head of Chums in Council. It reminds me of the days when I sat with my sister and brother with one or two cousins in front of the fire, just to talk. I get a strange feeling inside me when I look at that fine drawing.

SYD SMYTH (Australia): October C.D. was a joy from the wonderful cover to the back page. The only way to improve it would be to give a free Magnet with it.