

COLLECTORS' DIGEST

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21

GRAND ENLARGED CHRISTMAS NUMBER

THE RAINBOW 2^D



Collectors' Digest

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CHUMS IN COUNCIL

YULETIDE

Another milestone! Another Christmas! A time for thinking of old friends. A time for counting our blessings as we look back to the very first Christmas of all. I think perhaps that I am luckier than most men, though each one of us has plenty for which to be thankful. But I am lucky in the many hundreds of friends I have made in recent years. Loyal people, unselfish people, kind people. All over the world I have these friends - folk I have never met and never will meet in most cases - who write me heart-warming letters which bring me the joy, the warmth, the spirit of Christmas, all the year.

My wish for you, my chums, is that the blessing, the spirit of Christmas may be with you all, not only just now at this festive season, but all the year through. A Merry, Merry Christmas!

S.O.S. SAVE OUR SEXTON!

This month the Sexton Blake Library will appear in a new format, rather after the style of the magazine ARGOSY. There will be no increase in the price of the book which still remains at the modest figure of one shilling per copy.

Not always has a change of format been something to be welcomed. Some readers will recall the case of the Gem when the format was changed in January 1958. It was a step down, the paper lost too much of its old charm. It never seemed quite right again.

Things are much different in the present case of the S.B.L. The new presentation should make the famous book welcome to a much larger circle of readers. Yet the change has clearly been made with an eye on old readers who have known and loved the monthly for so long, and this I think is a matter for congratulation to the editor of S.B.L. There is no change in the name of the monthly; the numbering is to carry on without a

break. It has been fairly obvious for some time that the sales of the much-loved Library have left something to be desired. The S.B.L. now enters upon a trial period. If its sales do not show a substantial increase in the coming months, it will disappear entirely.

I appeal to all my readers to support the new format Sexton Blake Library. Sexton Blake is the last of the fine pre-war characters to live on, in his original setting, to the present time. The Sexton Blake Library began in 1915. It is still with us - the last of the many. Let us try to keep it with us. It is surely an effort really worth making.

Every month there are two new issues of S.B.L. at one shilling apiece. Two shillings a month. It is not a lot to pay for so desirable an aim.

We shall all be giving Christmas presents to someone. Surely in our circle of relatives and friends, there is someone who would be delighted to receive the S.B.L. regularly in the months to come. It is a convenient way of giving a present, too. For 7/6 the two issues will be mailed to any address for 3 months; for 15/- six months' issues; for 30/- the issues for the whole coming year. And the subscription department of Fleetway Publications will send a greeting card with your gift.

We can further help by asking our newsagents to give Sexton Blake a trial, and display him on their counters.

Even if you are one of those who do not care for detective or adventure stories, we appeal to you to back up FOR OLD TIMES SAKE. If every reader of COLLECTORS' DIGEST rallies round, it will make a world of difference. And you will be surprised at the high standard of reading matter in the grand old SEXTON BLAKE LIBRARY.

S.O.S. SAVE OUR SEXTON.

THREE CHEERS FOR THE MINSTRELS

Everybody knows the "Black and White Minstrel Show", the finest T.V. entertainment in the world, transferred with equal or even greater success to the London stage. I was chatting recently to George Inns, brilliant and world-famous producer and deviser of this superb show and he was sighing nostalgically as he browsed over part of the editorial collection. "As a boy I used to have them all - Magnet, Gem, Popular and the rest," said George.

And before he left the editorial office he whispered to me: "I had a very, very warm spot in my heart for the Nelson Lee."

A HAPPY NEW YEAR

The magnificent cover of our Christmas Number is specially drawn for this issue by gifted Henry Webb. It is a foretaste of further joy to come. Early in the New Year Collectors' Digest will present a splendid article on Tiger Tim and the Bruin Boys by W.O.G. Lofts. It ensures a Happy New Year for all.

THE EDITOR.

WANTED: Story Paper Collector No. 51. Also volumes 1 and 2 of S.P.C. J. OVERHILL, 99 SHELFORD ROAD, TRUMPINGTON, CAMBRIDGE.

OFFERS of S.O.L.'s and Pre-war FILM FUNS, please. J. MARSTON, 168 NEW ROAD, BURTON-ON-TRENT.

WANTED: Populars, Nelson Lees, Union Jacks. 38 ST. THOMAS ROAD, PRESTON.

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

MERRY CHRISTMAS MR BUDDLE.



BY
ERIC
FAYNE

There was that end-of-term feeling in the air in the Lower Fourth Form at Slade. In less than a week the school would be breaking-up for the Christmas Vacation; the end of term examinations had long ended, leaving in their wake a mild interest as to what the results would be; for the pupils of Slade, almost to a man, it was a period of marking time.

That peculiar apathy which descends upon schools during the closing weeks of term was evident in Slade now. Even the masters had not escaped its lethargic spell, though it attacked some more than others. Mr. Drayne, who led or was led by the Third Form, always boasted that it took his boys two weeks to settle down at the beginning of term and then two weeks

to break-up at the close of term. The period in between was devoted to hard work, with the exception of the week necessary to get acclimatised to a forthcoming half-term holiday and the week necessary to get over that half-term holiday.

Mr. Buddle, the master of the Lower Fourth, who also taught English to other forms, was a man cast in a different mould from Mr. Drayne. Mr. Buddle was acutely conscientious and really believed that his pupils should be at their very best in the closing weeks of term. With such a belief at his heart it was quite amazing that Mr. Buddle had escaped duodenal ulcers. It was not surprising that, as the end of term drew near, Mr. Buddle's temper became tart, his patience more frayed, and his

nervous system more severely tried.

So, although end-of-term drowsiness was evident among the pupils of the Lower Fourth at Slade that morning, it found no reflection in the master of that difficult form. Mr. Buddle was a whale on duty.

"Pilgrim, recite!" rapped Mr. Buddle. Pilgrim stood up to recite from memory. He was an average scholar, but he was also the keen captain of Lower School sports at Slade. There was still one fixture to be played on the football pitch before term-end - an important one - and Pilgrim did not intend to risk detention falling to him for Wednesday afternoon. He hoped that all the members of his team would be equally careful.

Pilgrim recited:

"Thy wish was father, Harry, to that thought.

I stay too long by thee, I weary thee.
Dost thou so hunger for my empty chair,

That thou wilt needs invest thee with mine honours

Before thy hour be ripe?"

"Good!" said Mr. Buddle. "Very good! You may be seated, Pilgrim! Brazenbean, continue!"

Brazenbean rose to his feet, rubbed his little snub nose, and screwed up his eyes in an effort of memory.

"O foolish youth..." said Mr. Buddle.

"I'm not foolish, sir. I'm just trying to remember."

There was a titter in the class. It died away as a ferocious gleam shot into Mr. Buddle's eyes. Pilgrim looked round anxiously.

"Foolish" said Mr. Buddle, "would be a euphemism if applied to you, Brazenbean. I was prompting you, crass boy. O, foolish youth —"

"A happy smile overspread Brazenbean's pimply visage.

"O, yes, sir, thank you, sir."

He plunged on:

"O foolish youth! Thou seekest the greatness which will overpower you —"

"Overwhelm thee!" snapped Mr. Buddle.

"Yes, sir. My wind is weak, my day is dim, you have sealed up my expectations, you have a thousand daggers in your thoughts —"

Mr. Buddle sighed.

"I accept that, Brazenbean. In view of your abysmal laziness and your limited brain capacity, it is something to find that you have recalled the gist of a few of the terms used by Shakespeare. Be seated!"

Brazenbean clasped with relief and sat down.

"Meredith!" said Mr. Buddle.

Pilgrim's anxiety intensified. Meredith seldom shone in class, at any rate as a scholar, but on the right wing he was indispensable to Pilgrim's team on Wednesday. There were occasions when the Lower Fourth found Meredith vastly entertaining in class. Pilgrim hoped against hope that this was not one of those occasions. Mr. Buddle, like the great Queen, did not look in the mood to be amused.

Meredith rose to his feet. There was no guile in those honest, innocent blue eyes.

"Thy thoughts are wet!" announced Meredith.

Stifled chuckles sounded all over the room. They died away as Mr. Buddle's brows knitted ominously.

"Meredith!" said Mr. Buddle in a deep voice.

"Yes, sir, I'm trying to remember. Thou hast whetted —"

Meredith paused, looked up at the ceiling, and licked his lips. Several more faint chuckles sounded in the class. Pilgrim glared round in exasperation. Mr. Buddle sat in stony silence.

Normally Meredith was an artist. He knew just how far to go. On this occasion, encouraged by the faint sniggers and the grinning faces, his sense of artistry deserted him. He rushed to his doom.

He lifted a hand and brushed back his mop of golden hair.

"Thou hast whetted —" he said again, enunciating each word with staccato effect. Then again, as though striving to remember, he gazed up at the ceiling.

The chuckles were more pronounced. Even Pilgrim was grinning.

Mr. Buddle rose to his feet. As his gleaming eyes swept the form the grins vanished from every face.

"Meredith," said Mr. Buddle softly, "for now a time is come to mock at form."

Meredith stared at him innocently.

"Oh, no, sir, that comes further on, I'm sure."

"Quite so, Meredith," said Mr. Buddle with fiendish geniality. "It comes further on as you are well aware. But the quotation is apt. For are you not mocking the form of which you are a dishonourable member? Are you not —" Mr. Buddle's voice rose. "Are you not mocking — actually mocking — your form-master?"

"Me, sir? You, sir? Me mocking you, sir? Oh, no, sir! It's just that I'm no good at learning Shakespeare, sir. Isn't it awful, sir? I just can't learn Shakespeare, sir. I can read the play, sir, with real relish sir, but I can't learn the lines."

"You have had exactly one week in which to learn that famous speech of King Henry the Fourth," said Mr. Buddle bitterly. "Clearly you have made no effort — no effort at all — to learn it. I will not be mocked — I repeat mocked — in my own form-room, Meredith. This college breaks up for the Christmas vacation on Friday next, but today it is only Monday. I am determined that between now and Friday next you shall all do credit to every master who has instructed you throughout this term. In the closing days of term you should all be at your very best. And —" Mr. Buddle thumped his desk. "And you shall be! You hear me? You SHALL be!"

Meredith stood with his hands at his sides, his eyes downcast.

"I shall waste no further time on you, Meredith," said Mr. Buddle.

"Oh, sir!"

"No further time at all. You will be detained on Wednesday afternoon. You will come to this form-room and write out this glorious speech of Henry the Fourth which I could recite before I was eight years old. You will write it out five times, Meredith, and you will then not be allowed to leave the form-room until you can recite it to me without one mistake. Enough! Be seated, Meredith! Garmsway, proceed!" Mr. Buddle waved his hand in the air, thus dismissing the subject.

Garmsway rose to his feet, but Meredith did not sit down. His bright, boyish face was the picture of woe.

"Oh, sir, I can remember it now. It's all come back to me, sir. Thou hast whetted on thy stony heart, to stab at half an hour of my life —"

"Silence, Meredith!" roared Mr. Buddle. He had sat down, but he leaped to his feet again. "I will not hear you now. I am not surprised that you have remembered now that retribution has overtaken you, but it is too late. Too late! I decline to hear you. Your time has passed!"

Mr. Buddle spoke with a majesty and bitterness which would have done credit to Henry the Fourth himself.

Meredith, in his turn, was under-studying the repentant and tearful Prince Hal. His gentle blue eyes were pleading.

"Oh, please, sir, let me say it. My memory's a bit erratic, sir. You prompted me, and it's all come back. I can't be detained on Wednesday, sir. I'm playing football, sir — the last match of the term, sir —"

"Hal!" said Mr. Buddle, still performing Henry the Fourth. "You have already played your last match of the term, Meredith. On Wednesday next you will be in detention from two till five — or six — or seven o'clock if necessary. Sit down and be silent!"

"Sir!" It was Pilgrim now. He stood up though he felt the effort hopeless. "We need Meredith, sir, on Wednesday. We're playing St. Martin's. Please, sir, could you flog Meredith instead?"

Meredith looked at him indignantly, but Garmsway and several others took up the chorus.

"Please flog Meredith, sir, and let him play football on Wednesday."

Mr. Buddle's eyes glittered over the class.

"Silence! I will not flog Meredith. To do so would be to exhaust me uselessly, for no strokes of the cane would penetrate his thick and nauseating skin. Meredith is detained on Wednesday afternoon!"

"Oh, sir, the football, sir —"

"If" said Mr. Buddle ominously, "any obscene boy makes further mention of football in this room this morning, the entire class will be detained on Wednesday."

No obscene boy made any further mention of football in Mr. Buddle's form-room that morning.

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"You stupid, horrid-minded little pig!" said Pilgrim.

"Oh, skip it! The Gump picks on me!" grunted Meredith, sulkily.

Morning classes were over and the two boys were strolling together in the misty Close. Meredith was woful, Pilgrim a picture of tense exasperation,

"You had to pick this morning, of all times, to nettle the Gump!" said Pilgrim in disgust. "You're warped! That's what's the matter with you! You're warped!"

Meredith grinned faintly.

"The Gump made a sitting target. I couldn't resist it." He wrinkled his brows. "You know me, Pil. I never give up hope. I might be able to work it."

Pilgrim stared at him.

"How could you possibly work it?"

"Well —" Meredith drew his school muffler a little closer round his throat. "You remember last term? The Gump bottled me for the cricket against Sutherby — but I played in the end. I worked the cradle."

Pilgrim snorted.

"You blackmailed him! If you think you could get away with it twice, you're even wetter than you look."

Meredith chuckled softly.

"I'm going to give the Gump a Christmas present."

"A Christmas present?" Pilgrim came to a standstill, and gaped at his companion through the mist. "Last time you blackmailed him — this time you think you can buy him. You lunatic, it would never work." "You think the Gump wouldn't accept a Christmas present from me?"

"Of course he wouldn't! He'd see through your slimy mind at once. You'd get six on the behind as well as an afternoon in bottle."

"If the luck of the Merediths does not desert me, my posterior will be unscarred — and I shall not spend an afternoon in bottle!" said Meredith airily. He jerked some loose change from his pocket and scanned it.

"Lend me a couple of coppers, Pil."

"What for?" Pilgrim drew several pennies from his pocket and passed them to his friend.

"I am going," said Meredith, "to ring up my old man. I shall reverse the charges but I need the coppers to get the Exchange. My old man is going to send me the Gump's Christmas present."

"You're right up the pole!" muttered

Pilgrim. "In any case, will your old man be at home at this time of the day?"

Meredith smiled ingenuously.

"If my old man isn't there, my Mummy will be. Won't that be nice!"

Pilgrim shook his head in despair, and they entered the school building. Meredith took possession of the telephone cabinet just within the big doors, and lifted the receiver. He dropped pennies into the coin box.

With anxious brow Pilgrim stood and watched him for a few moments. Then the harassed skipper of Lower Fourth games joined a group of fellows, and sauntered away with them.

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Mr. Buddle spent Tuesday evening at a club meeting in the village of Everslade. It was nearing ten when he returned to the school and entered his study. He turned on the light and then crossed the room and switched on his electric fire. Divesting himself of his overcoat, Mr. Buddle entered his adjoining bedroom and hung the coat behind the door. Then he returned to his study where he expected to find a thermos flask of cocoa which the school housekeeper always left for him on his table on any evening when he missed supper in the staff dining-room.

His flask was there as usual, with an attendant cup and saucer. Beside the flask lay a large white envelope.

Mr. Buddle picked up the envelope and read the inscription thereon. Written in a clear round hand was the following:

A Small Gift To Sir
with best wishes from C. Meredith.
Merry Christmas Mr. Buddle.

Mr. Buddle grunted with annoyance. "What an abysmally stupid boy!" he observed aloud.

He poured out a cup of steaming cocoa which he placed on the low table beside his armchair against the fire. Then he took up the large white envelope again and sat down in the armchair.

Once more Mr. Buddle scanned the inscription in the boyish hand.

"Ridiculous youth!" muttered Mr.

Buddle. "Inane adolescent!"

He dropped the envelope on the floor. Frowning, he sipped his cocoa. Replacing the cup in the saucer, Mr. Buddle addressed the bust of Shakespeare on the mantel-piece.

"Obviously a subterfuge by a cunning lad! A trick to escape his detention. What audacity! What barefaced audacity! I will return it to him unopened."

Mr. Buddle finished his cocoa. He yawned. Once again he grunted. Once again he picked up the large white envelope.

"Merry Christmas, Mr. Buddle!" he read aloud.

He wondered what the envelope contained. There could, of course, be no harm - no loss of dignity - in opening it.

Slowly Mr. Buddle inserted his thumb in the flap of the envelope and prised it open. He drew out the contents.

It was a copy of the Gem. Mr. Buddle knew the Gem well. For a long time now Mr. Buddle had received the Gem regularly. Hidden within his "Times" it was delivered to him by his newsgagent every Wednesday morning. Mr. Buddle read, enjoyed, and loved the Gem. It was his secret shame. Mr. Buddle had suspected more than once that Meredith knew his secret. Meredith had a way of finding out things.

But this copy of the Gem "with best wishes from C. Meredith" was something exceptional. It was a Gem among Gems. It was such a copy as Mr. Buddle had never seen before. It was a huge issue. It had a gorgeous coloured cover. Across the top of the cover were the word CHRISTMAS DOUBLE NUMBER.

"Goodness gracious!" murmured Mr. Buddle.

It was truly a magnificent issue. It glistened with pristine newness as though it had only recently come from the printing machines. But Mr. Buddle knew enough about the Gem to appreciate that this could not be the case. Much water had flowed under the bridges since that copy of the Gem was in the shops. It was a copy which someone, somewhere, had preserved with loving care.

Mr. Buddle turned over the pages almost reverently. It comprised no less than 52 pages. Mr. Buddle had never seen a Gem of such magnitude.

He finished his cocoa. He leaned back and gazed at the title of the story -

"The Mystery of the Painted Room". It was described as a 50,000-word Christmas story of Tom Merry & Co.

Yet again Mr. Buddle addressed Shakespeare's bust.

"Am I doing that gross boy an injustice? Is it possible that he has been moved by the spirit of Christmas? Can I accept this wonderful book in the spirit with which it has been given to me?"

The bust of Shakespeare looked dubious. The eyeless sockets did not flicker.

"I would dearly love to retain this superb copy. Could I, in all dignity, do so?" Mr. Buddle shook his head involuntarily.

"No, a thousand times, no! I could not accept a Christmas present from Meredith without cancelling his detention for tomorrow afternoon. That revolting boy is guilty of a heinous scheme. He shall not succeed. Discipline must be maintained. This Christmas gift must be returned to him." Mr. Buddle sighed, closed his eyes, and murmured:

"Oh, calamity! Oh, disaster!"

He opened his eyes again, adjusted his spectacles, and regarded the Gem. A thought occurred to him. There was no reason at all why he should not read, say, the first chapter -

Mr. Buddle drew his chair a little closer to the fire, settled himself happily, and started to read.

It was a wonderful story. Tom Merry and his friends had gone to Eastwood House as the guests of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy for Christmas. But Lord Eastwood the father of Arthur Augustus, had vanished. Had he gone of his own free will, or had some nefarious hand engineered the kidnapping of the Earl?

A youth named Kerr was suspicious of the butler, a stout but powerful man of the name of Pilkington. Mr. Buddle, too, suspected Pilkington. With such a problem Mr. Buddle was in his element.

Half-way through the story, Arthur Augustus was alone, late at night, in the Painted Room. On the ceiling was an ornate carving of Bacchus, the god of wine. As Arthur Augustus looked up at Bacchus, he was horrified to see a glitter in the eye of the inanimate god.

"It's alive!" panted Arthur Augustus.

The next morning he too had disappeared.

"Goodness gracious!" breathed Mr. Buddle. He look around him nervously. Then he glanced at his clock. It had turned midnight.

Mr. Buddle grunted, rose to his feet switched off the fire, made his way into the adjoining room and went to bed. He took "The Mystery of the Painted Room" with him.

In his bed, with his hot water bottle between his knees, Mr. Buddle read on. Not since he first met Tom Merry & Co in a story called "Baffled" had Mr. Buddle enjoyed himself so much.

It was half-past one when Mr. Buddle, tired but content, finished reading the story. He had thoroughly enjoyed himself. He sighed, closed the paper, and looked at the picture of Arthur Augustus in the sinister Painted Room on the cover.

"I would," murmured Mr. Buddle, "dearly love to retain this wonderful story. It cannot be. Discipline must be maintained."

He placed "The Mystery of the Painted Room" on his bedside table, switched off the light, and nestled down to repose.

After so much enjoyment Mr. Buddle felt kindly disposed towards Meredith of Slade. But Mr. Buddle's mind was made up. Meredith's Christmas gift was a deep-laid scheme to avoid discipline and Mr. Buddle was determined that, for once, Meredith was not going to get away with it.

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The next morning Mr. Buddle rose at seven. After performing his ablutions and dressing he placed the precious Double Number of the Gem in its white envelope. The white envelope he deposited on the table of his study.

Then, as was his custom, Mr. Buddle went for a brisk walk in the misty Close. Mr. Buddle enjoyed excellent health, and he attributed that fact to the lengthy perambulation which he always undertook before breakfast, rain or shine.

At eight o'clock the breakfast bell rang, and Mr. Buddle made his way to the

dining hall to enjoy his own meal and to supervise his form in the enjoyment of theirs.

Breakfast over, Mr. Buddle rose to his feet.

"You may disperse," he said genially. "Meredith, you will remain."

With a clatter the Lower Fourth dispersed, with the exception of Meredith. That angelic-looking youth stood in his place half-way down the long dining table.

"Come here, Meredith" said Mr. Buddle. Meredith went there, and Mr. Buddle regarded him thoughtfully. It seemed impossible to believe that behind those honest blue eyes could be crocodile tears; that beneath that mass of golden hair there could be a brain worthy of Machiavelli. But Mr. Buddle knew his Meredith - or thought he did.

"Last evening, Meredith," said Mr. Buddle, "I found upon the table in my study an article which you appear to have intended as a Christmas present for me."

Meredith smiled.

"Yes, sir. I hope you like it, sir. I wish you a very Merry Christmas, sir."

"Thank you, Meredith." Mr. Buddle frowned upon the golden-haired youth. "It was a kindly thought I am sure, Meredith, but it is quite impossible for a form-master to accept a gift from a pupil even at Christmas time."

"Ch, sir!" Deep sadness came into the clear blue eyes. There was a wealth of disappointment in his voice. "Ch, sir!"

"Quite impossible!" repeated Mr. Buddle firmly.

"I understand, sir," said Meredith soulfully. "I knew, of course, sir, that you would not suspect me of any interior motive. I mean, sir, that just because I gave you a tiny Christmas present, I did not dream for one minute that you would think you had to let me off detention this afternoon, sir."

"I should," said Mr. Buddle, "be averse to suspecting any boy in my form of chicanery."

Meredith sighed.

"You would have loved that story, sir. I wish you could have read it, sir. Did you read it, sir?"

Mr. Buddle cleared his throat, and stirred uneasily.

"I am a busy man, Meredith. I have but little time and little taste for light literature."

"Of course, sir!" Meredith smiled bravely, though his innocent blue eyes were moist. "I expect I shall be the same when I grow up like you, sir, and reach adultery —"

"What!"

"It stands to reason, sir," murmured Meredith.

"The word you wish to use is adulthood - or possibly adulthood," snapped Mr. Buddle.

"Yes, sir, I'll remember, sir. In any case, you couldn't have read the story sir. I mean to say, sir, you wouldn't read a Christmas present and then give it back, sir —"

"Quite!" said Mr. Buddle. He blushed. "I appreciate your kind thought, Meredith, and there the matter must end. You will now follow me to my study, and I will return your Christmas gift to you."

Meredith followed Mr. Buddle to that gentleman's study. When Mr. Buddle entered the room he came to a sudden stop - so sudden that Meredith collided with his former-master's rear.

Mr. Buddle had placed the large white envelope on his table to await his return. It was no longer there. The surface of the table shone with polish but with nothing else.

In the doorway Meredith stood with his hands behind him.

Mr. Buddle looked under the table; he scanned his bookshelves; he glanced in to his bureau. With a grunt of annoyance he wandered round the room, lifting cushions, sorting over loose papers, searching behind chairs - but all to no avail. There was no sign of the large white envelope containing "The Mystery of the Painted Room."

Frowning darkly Mr. Buddle whisked into his bedroom. A couple of minutes later he whisked back into his study.

For a moment he stood staring at Meredith. There was a pink spot on each of Mr. Buddle's cheek bones. Meredith regarded him woodenly.

"I placed your gift on my study table when I left this room an hour ago. It is no longer here. Some person has removed

it."

Mr. Buddle compressed his lips.

"I see, sir."

The boy spoke in subdued tones. Mr. Buddle found something vaguely disturbing in the accusing gaze from the honest blue eyes.

He breathed hard with intense vexation. After a moment he said:

"Go to the housekeeper's room, Meredith, and tell her that an envelope has been removed from my study table. You can describe the envelope. Ask Mrs. Cleverton to enquire as to whether one of her staff may have taken it away in error."

"Yes, sir."

Meredith sped off down the corridor. Mr. Buddle glanced at his clock. It was nearing time for morning classes.

Ten minutes later Meredith returned. He came empty-handed.

"Mrs. Cleverton says that Agnes made your bed some time ago, sir, but Agnes says she only brought away some rubbish from your room. It went into the incinerator, sir."

"What imbecility!" yapped Mr. Buddle. "I placed the envelope on my table - and now it has gone. Somebody has removed it."

Meredith stood in silence, his face expressionless.

"It appears, Meredith, that I am unable to return to you the copy of the periodical which you wished to give me as a Yuletide gift."

"I see, sir."

Meredith spoke respectfully.

Mr. Buddle's whgrin got the better of him.

"You are an utterly absurd boy, Meredith. Your intention of giving your former-master a Christmas present was ridiculous buffoonery. You have placed me in an intolerable position."

The innocent blue eyes were raised in reproach.

"I'm sorry sir, please forget it, sir. It was only a very small gift in any case sir. As you've lost it, you can't give it back to me, sir. May I go, please, sir? I shall be late for class."

Mr. Buddle stood in indecision. At last he said: "You may go, Meredith."

"Thank you, sir."

Meredith turned away. His head was drooping a little. In the doorway he looked back at his form-master.

Mr. Buddle felt himself invidiously placed. He made up his mind.

"Wait Meredith. Do you think that you could now recite the passage from Shakespeare which is the subject of your detention this afternoon?"

"I could try, sir."

"Commence!" snapped Mr. Buddle. Meredith commenced:

"Thy wish was father, Harry, to that thought ----"

Mr. Buddle interrupted him.

"Very well, Meredith, under the circumstances your detention this afternoon is cancelled."

A smile of gratitude overspread the bright, ingenuous countenance.

Oh, thank you sir. How kind you are, sir!"

Mr. Buddle extracted his handkerchief and blew his nose.

"That will be all, Meredith. I think you meant well, though your action was misguided. I appreciate your thought in giving me a Christmas gift. You may go."

So Meredith played in the St. Martin's match that afternoon, and his agility on the wing enabled Slade to hold a rather heavier team to a one-all draw.

That evening, before lights were extinguished in his dormitory, Meredith sat up in bed and re-read the letter which he had received from his mother:

Darling Ceddie,

I am sending you the copy of the Gem which you wish to show to your prefect. You must take great care of the paper, for it is one which your father values very highly. When you come home on Friday, place it flat in the bottom of your suit-case, in order that it may not get creased in any way.

In great haste, darling, to catch the post.

Your loving Mumsie.

On Friday, when Mr. Buddle watched the boys leaving for their Christmas vacation, it did occur to him to wonder whether, just possibly, "The Mystery of the Painted Room" might be lying uncreased in the bottom of Meredith's suitcase. Mr. Buddle dismissed the thought at once as unworthy. He was not a suspicious man.

ERIC FAYNE contributes

"LATE SUMMER FOLLY"

to

C.D. ANNUAL FOR 1962

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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 Fayne. 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: 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.1.

WANTED: Union Jacks - year 1917. Nos. 691, 693, 695, 702-4, 711, 717, 721, 725, 727, 734, 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.

WANTED: Gem No. 799. B.F. (Green 'Un) 762, 764, 780, 1042, 1257, 1264 to 1296.
1 TIMBERTREE ROAD, OLD HILL, STAFFS.

CHRISTMAS OFFER

From the Hamiltonian Library of the London O.B.B.C.

Librarian - Roger Jenkins, "The Firs", Eastern Road, Havant, Hants.

The Hamiltonian Library is prepared to pay 12/6d each for good copies of the following books:

MAGNETS - 751, 1004, 1013, 1029, 1032, 1078, 1079, 1080,
1081, 1082, 1129, 1142, 1144, 1150.

GEMS - 755, 763, 764, 789.

SCHOOLBOYS' OWNS - 12, 20, 36, 42, 60, 68, 76, 84, 132,
168, 169, 170, 181, 197, 203, 206, 251.

CATALOGUE -

A new printed and illustrated catalogue of the Hamiltonian Library is now available. If you would like to see a list of the 1300 Magnets, Gems, and Schoolboys' Own Libraries available for loan, please send a 3d stamp (not SAE) to the Librarian.

(London Club members will receive copies automatically.)

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

FOR SALE: Number of Boys' Own Annuals 1900-1940. Chums Annuals 1900-1940. 3 Young England Annuals. 3 Union Jack Annuals. 6 Chatterbox Annuals. Volumes of Buffalo Bill 4d novels. Boys' Friend Libraries. Champion Libraries. Sexton Blake Libraries. Union Jacks 1920-1930. Various Aldines and Newnes 2d, 3d, and 4d Libraries. 1d Turpins. Number of Nelson Lees 1st and 2nd new series. Billy Bunter and Tom Merry Books. Buffalo Bill and various children's annuals. Puck comics 1910-11. Please write:
30 BEECH ROAD, WYCOMBE MARSH, HIGH WYCOMBE, BUCKS.

FOR EXCHANGE: Young England 1906-7. Knockout 1961, complete, mint. All work, No Play; Avery. School on the Steep; Judd; Illus; Brook; Strang Annuals 1921, 1924. Girls' Own Annual 1902. 43 B.O.P. 1952-56 (/- post free. Wanted - Magnets 1169-1174. Magnet Christmas series. A. PARSONS, 45 FAIRFIELD ROAD, TRAFFORD, B-HEAD, CHESHIRE.

WANTED: Nelson Lee Libraries, first, second and third new series only. The "Casino" - The "Garden" - The "Kennel" - The "Gracie Allan" Murder Cases by S.S. Van Dine. Please give full information re price, serial numbers, condition, etc.
NORMAN PRAGNELL, 35 BRAE STREET, LIVERPOOL, 7.

EXCHANGE - Bound volume Gems 324-344, without blue covers, ex. plus. condition for later bound Magnets. Also wanted some bound Gems, Excellent condition only.
R. KELLY, 13 SUNNYSIDE AVENUE, HIGHAMS PARK, LONDON, E.4.

BLAKIANA

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

At the moment (16th November) I have not had one single response to my request for material last month. I have done my best to keep this section of the magazine going for the past nine and a half years, but I have now reached the point where I cannot go on without the necessary support. As things are, there does not look as if there will be any Blakiana for January - at least, so far as I am concerned. Whether or not February will be more fortunate - remains to be seen!

JOSIE PACKMAN

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MY VIEW

By Walter Webb

Ernie Carter, in the current issue of the Australian Golden Hours Magazine, accepts Andrew Murray as the author of S.B.L. No. 142 (second series) titled "The Adventures of Speed Mad Camden." He is, I feel sure, under a misapprehension, despite the fact that this author's name was given in the official list as published in BLAKIANA (C.D. No. 172). The actual writer of this story, and of No. 167, titled "The Secret of the Green Lagoon" (also given as being by A. Murray) was another Murray - Edgar Joyce, better known as Sidney Drew. Neither story is written in A. Murray's style at all, but they do show a marked resemblance to E.J. Murray's style of diction.

Regarding the Brooks brothers, it is obvious when you read the stories attributed to each that they are all the work of the same writer, and those collectors who keep lists of the S.B.L. titles would be safe in disregarding the ".L.H." part of the name and putting "E.S. Brooks" against each title. Clearly, E.S.B. wrote them all. Maybe L.H.B.'s task was to type them on dictation.

* * * * *

Here we present you with a fore-taste of the appearance to be presented by the Sexton Blake Library with its issues for December. The new S.B.L. is of the popular pocket-book size that will sell at no more than the price charged previously.



(For the interest of Blakiana readers, here is what Ernie Carter wrote in the Golden Hours Magazine No. 5 (June, 1962). Josie P.)

"It is known that Andrew Murray passed away in 1924 shortly after his last story for the Union Jack was published entitled "The Sign of the Yellow Dragon". But, No. 142 of the Sexton Blake Library, 2nd series, dated 3rd May, 1928, entitled "The Adventures of Speed Mad Camden" was published four years later. It seems that the A.P. held stories by Arthur Patterson for the UNION JACK which were published a few years after his death."

Readers are invited to write in to Collectors' Digest with their opinions on the new S.B.L.

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My own feeling about these authorship queries is that certain stories may well have been conceived by a different person to that shown on the official list - as in the case of the two Brooks and two Murrays. Indeed, a number of us have no difficulty in recognising the actual writer by his style and diction. Nevertheless, the fact remains that hard cash was paid to the person named in the official list. Therefore, whether I like it or not, I feel that for record purposes, I must accept the person to whom payment was made as being the credited author of the story, for which he (or she) received that money.

Incidentally, "Mark Osborne" was another writer whose work appeared long after he had died. In this case it was in the Sexton Blake Library.

JOSIE PACKMAN.

THOSE BUMPER UNION JACK CHRISTMAS NUMBERS

By Leonard Packman

One of the things I look forward to at Christmas is the reading of some Xmas numbers of the U.J. I have already sorted out this year's 'treat' and they are before me as I write.

Let us take a brief look at them.

We begin with the Xmas Week issue dated 28.12.1912. This is a pink covered U.J. titled "A Christmas Conspiracy" and written by W. Murray Graydon. The cover illustration is by E.E. Briscoe. At the top of the first page we read:

"NOTE: The Skipper desires to draw his readers' attention to the fact that "A CHRISTMAS CONSPIRACY" has been written expressly for this issue of the UNION JACK."

The inside illustrations look very interesting, and as I cannot remember reading it before I am quite sure I shall enjoy this yarn!

The next is the Xmas Double-Number for 1913. (No. 529, dated 29.11.1913), titled "The Sacred Sphere." Written by G.H. Teed, this story features Yvonne, Wu Ling and Huxton Rymer. The coloured cover is by "Val," and the caption reads "A magnificent 80,000-word romance!"

It will be a real treat to read this exciting yarn again!

The third is No. 584 (dated 19.12.1914), another Xmas Double-Number by Teed - "A Soldier and a Man". The cover illustration is again by "Val" and the story features Yvonne.

I couldn't ask for anything better!

Now we come to the X.D.N. for 1915 - "Fugitives from Justice" No. 633, dated 27.11.1915). A real Christmassy coloured cover by "Val" and another fine Teed yarn starring Yvonne.

The next is what I consider to be the best of them all. This is the X.D.N. for 1916 (No. 685, dated 25.11.1916). This story. "The Blue God" I have read several times, and I am now looking forward to reading it once again. Written by G. H. Teed, this double-length yarn features Yvonne, Huxton Rymer and Hammerton Palmer. The coloured cover is by H.M. Lewis - and a very attractive cover too!

Finally, we come to the last twopenny X.D.N. of all. This is No. 737 (dated 24.11.1917) titled "The Peril of the Trehermes." Written by E.S. Brooks, this is one of my "purple period" stories. The coloured cover is an excellent one by Arthur Jones.

Well, by the time I've got through that little batch Christmas will be over - and then I shall look forward to another dose of the same mixture next year (D.V.).

And now, just to warm me up, I am about to read a few other

Double Numbers. Maybe the titles will bring back happy memories to some of the Old Brigade, so here are the details:

THE DIAMOND DRAGON (No. 493), Easter D.N. 22.3.1913. Written by G. H. TEED and featuring Huxton Rymer.

THE YELLOW SPHINX (No. 512), Summer D.N. 2.8.1913. Written by Teed and featuring Yvonne, Wu Ling and Rymer.

THE CASE OF THE RADIUM PATIENT. (No. 584), Spring D.N. 11.4.1914. Written by Teed and starring Rymer and Yvonne.

THE DEATH CLUB (No. 558), Summer D.N. 20.6.1914. Written by Teed and featuring Yvonne and Hamerton Palmer.

THE CRIMSON PEARL (No. 564), special holiday number, 1.8.1914. Written by Teed and starring Yvonne and Rymer.

THE VENGEANCE OF THE ELEVEN. (No. 599), Easter D.N. 3.4.1915. Written by Teed and featuring The Council of Eleven.

* * * * *

THE STORY OF NIRVANA

By Josephine Packman

(Reprinted, by request, from C.D. No. 37, January, 1950)

As this is my first venture into the field as a writer, I hope any errors will be overlooked in my endeavour to relate the "Story of Nirvana."

Some of our Sexton Blake fans are rather inclined to ridicule the stories in the UNION JACK dealing with the affairs of Tinker and Nirvana; but for myself, being at a young and impressionable age when I first read these yarns way back in 1925, I must admit they were great favourites of mine, and I can remember at the time regretting very deeply that nothing more was ever heard of Nirvana and her immediate associates Marie and Phillippe the Fox.

The whole series only ran to thirteen numbers spread over the period from October 1925 to December 1926 and were written by that very famous author of so many Sexton Blake yarns, George Hamilton Teed, and were set against the background of some quite exciting adventures, many of which led Sexton Blake and Tinker to different parts of the Continent.

In No. 1149 the series commenced with the affair of the Duchess of Rayland's diamond necklace which had been stolen by Nirvana. A short prologue gave an episode in Tinker's early boyhood when he first met Nirvana, then a small child trained as a pickpocket by her elder sister Marie. Years later, when Nirvana has become a famous dancer, these two young people met again at the Ball given by the Duchess of Rayland, but Nirvana, still under the influence of Marie, steals the necklace, and by using Tinker as an unconscious ally, involves him in all the subsequent troubles. However, Tinker's one aim was to get Nirvana away from Marie, but unfortunately she insisted upon staying with her sister until she had solved the mystery which surrounded her parentage.

Tinker kept this affair secret from Sexton Blake, thinking that nothing more would be heard from Nirvana, but in the next yarn, No. 1150, the activities of a gang of forgers are traced to Marie, Phillippe the Fox and Flash Brady, by Tinker, and in order to protect Nirvana he had to confess to Blake, but in the end Nirvana was allowed to go free.

The third adventure, related in No. 1156, took place in Sicily, that island of

deadly vendettas, where once again Tinker met Nirvana, and armed with the knowledge that her associates were also on the island, he was able to help Sexton Blake break the vendetta of the Bellame family, of whom Phillippe was a member. It was during this period that Nirvana realised just what Tinker meant to her and that he was trying to help her break away from Marie; but always the urge to discover the truth about her parents was too strong, and Nirvana stayed on with Marie.

In No. 1159, a very reasonable Christmas story, was the finding of Nirvana of her long-neglected mother and the brother she had never seen, but who had also been ruined by Marie, and under the name of The Tango Kid was well known to the police. Marie and her two unworthy friends did their best to fasten the guilt of a jewel theft on Nirvana's brother, but here Sexton Blake stepped in and thwarted their plans.

From here onward, I feel I must just list the remainder of the series, with a brief account of their titles and characters, otherwise the article will become too long and take up too much valuable space in the "C.D."

No. 1161, "The Mystery of the Painted Slippers," involved another of my favourite characters, Dr. Huxton Rymer, who, with Marie, was on the trail of the painted slippers, in the heels of which had been hidden some valuable diamonds. No. 1168 entitled "Nirvana's Ordeal" brings the first part of the series to a close, with Nirvana being able to devote herself to her mother, and then rather a long time was allowed to elapse before the first of a series of six stories appeared in No. 1198, called "The Mystery of Room 7." The stories concerned the efforts of the wealthy and unscrupulous Augustus Keever to get Nirvana into his clutches, but behind everything there lurked the sinister shadow of the mysterious Monseigneur X.

Each story was complete in itself. No. 1199 "The Case of the Sheffield Ironmaster" saw Blake and Tinker in Sheffield. From there, in the "Affair of the Derelict Grange" in No. 1200, they travelled to Cornwall and incidentally the popular Yvonne then came on the scene by offering to care for Nirvana.

In No. 1201 Tinker, who had been sent to Palestine, was shipwrecked in the Adriatic, and through being rescued and taken to Venice was able to help Blake once again to outwit Monseigneur X, and incidentally to rescue Nirvana, who had been prevailed upon by Keever to accompany him to Venice with the promise of revealing where her father was to be found.

In No. 1202 "The Clue of the Two Straws," Sexton Blake, with the aid of both Tinker and Nirvana, was able to clear up the scandal of the forged Rolicnian Bonds by breaking up the gang of forgers and arresting Keever.

The final meeting between Blake and Monseigneur X occurs in Spain. The story of the mysterious Monseigneur ends amid the mountains of the little State of Andorra, but Blake was able to discover the true identity of Nirvana's father, and in the last episode of this series No. 1208, "The Adventure of the Two Devils", Nirvana and her parents are united, but only after Tinker's final efforts to get her out of Marie's clutches.

As I remarked at the beginning of this article, nothing more was ever heard of these interesting folk, and I, for one, was extremely disappointed that Marie did not get the punishment she deserved.

YE OLDE CYNIQUE INN

As Chairman of the London Club, Don Webster has a load of responsibility on his shoulders, though he admits it is a pleasant load. All the same he found a weekend at our famous hostelry most refreshing, especially as he had a number of Talbot stories in his case. This is what Don wrote in the Visitors' Book:

Tis not the man who hath the most that gives the most away,
Ner yet the man who knows the most that has the most to say.

Once again Christmas is upon us, and old timers will be thinking of many famous Xmas numbers which E.S.B. turned out in the past, with their familiar pictures of ancient stately homes covered in snow, and the liveliest of adventures happening to Nipper and Co.

Happy days, never, unfortunately to return in, at least, the old format. But memories are long, and a cosy fire and a copy of the old stories can soon reproduce something of the traditional atmosphere, so here's wishing all my readers and all N.L.L. enthusiasts everywhere the Merriest of Christmases and the Happiest of New Years.

And a particularly warm welcome at the festive season for an old friend Tony Glynn, who has been absent from our Column far too long, but returns in his best form this month.

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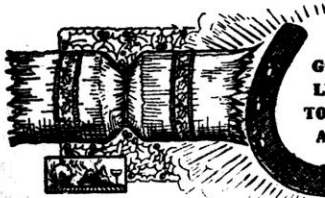
A TOUCH OF WINTER
By Tony Glynn

I think it was Thomas De Quincy who wrote of the delights of reading on a winter night while snugly enthroned before a good fire with the rain on the window panes for background music.

To get the best out of such agreeable circumstances, I suggest that your reading matter should be good and wintry. A frosty, snowy, blizzardy setting for your story is bound to make you appreciate your bright fire and your personal good fortune.

At this time of the year, I would urge Leetites to forget the television set, stoke up the fire and turn back the clock thirty-odd years to enjoy some of the wintry writings of Edwy Searles Brooks.

If you know the county of Derbyshire and especially if, like myself, you have hiked and climbed in the Peak District in thick snow, the Christmas series of the N.L.L. for 1925 can scarcely fail to grip your attention. Here were Handy and Co., with Nipper, Archie Glenthorpe,



NELSON L

Conducted by

GOOD
LUCK
YOU
ALL!

THE COLUMN

JACK WOOD

were bent to meet it. Phipps, in advance, carried a lantern in one hand and Archie's gladstone bag in the other. And every weary traveller was smothered in snow from head to foot. They were like so many white ghosts of the night."

Of course, the fellows and girls knew that all would be well once they reached Dorrie's castle. William Napoleon Browne, with his usual whimsy, was putting his visions of hot coffee and tasty morsels into words as the company trudged along, bringing hollow groans from Fatty Little.

Onward through the wind and snow they plodded, thinking of "the glowing hearths, the roaring logs, the cheery, joyous atmosphere of a great household..."

And what did they find when they reached the castle at last?

The place was in darkness and totally deserted. A great padlock held the ornate gates tightly closed. The St. Frank's fellows and their charming guests stood in astonishment.

"Much as I hate the thought," ventured William Napoleon, "I am compelled to think that we are facing an outlook of the murkiest description."

And they were, but I don't intend to go any further. To do so might spoil this series for those who have yet to come to it.

several Removites and the Moor View girls on their way to spend Christmas at Lord Dorri-more's castle in the Peak. The train in which the party was travelling became snowbound some miles from Buxton. A bad enough situation in which to spend your Christmas Eve, but that was by no means the end.

Aided by Archie's valet, the ever-practical Phipps, the party acquired a lantern and set out on foot across white-shrouded Derbyshire moorland at dead of night and in the face of a blizzard.

"The Party made a curious picture as it trudged along the lane. The high wind was driving from straight ahead, and all heads

Mr. Brooks obviously liked this type of setting for a Christmas yarn for, in the Christmas series of 1928, he used substantially the same ingredients; a lonely castle, the St. Frank's boys and the Moor View girls, uncanny happenings in almost every chapter, a return of the sinister Ezra Quirke - and plenty good, old-fashioned Christmassy snow!

The N.L.L. was over and done with before I was born, but I was fortunate enough to come by some old copies during my wartime childhood. This particular Christmas yarn and its sequel were among the first St. Frank's stories I ever read and I recall them with great affection.

Another of the earliest N.L.L. stories I read was a wintry one called "The St. Frank's Ice Carnival" in No. 94 of the new series (February 18, 1928). In this, we had those enchanting winter companions Irene and Co yet again, a background of robbery closely connected with the rotters Merrell and Marriott - and weather conditions of frost and snow which gave the St. Frank's fellows a chance to organise an ice carnival on the frozen River Stowe. The carnival was Handforth's brain-child, and, for once, Handy had been struck by a workable idea.

Like Mr. Wingle, in "Pickwick Papers", Handy was full of tales about his own prowess on the ice - until it came to the event, when Edward Oswald's attempts at figure skating proved the star comedy attraction of the show.

Edwy Searles Brooks seemed to enjoy having the juniors bogged down in snow - and he exploited the dangers of snow on the railway yet again in November, 1929. In "Handforth's Girl Chum" we find Handy Church and McClure bravely weathering a blizzard in the good old Austin Seven. They were returning from the "talkies" in Bannington, with Nipper, Tommy Watson, Travers, Archie and other Removites bringing up the rear on their bikes.

Handy's car foundered and turned turtle into a snowdrift and only the combined efforts of the St. Frank's fellows put it to rights. Then, the partyspotted a great barrier of fallen snow on the nearby railway line - with the green light indicating that a train was due at any moment.

Events happened quickly; an attempt to warn the approaching train; a grinding of brakes and telescoping of coaches; the St. Frank's juniors on hand in the rescue; the discovery of Eileen Dare, the young woman detective, in the train - and the beginnings of a new mystery.

For Eileen, who had helped Nelson Lee in so many cases, was accompanied by a little girl named Molly and there was a mystery about Molly, but, once again, why should I give the game away to readers who have not

yet come to this series?

There are others, of course, for Mr. Brooks served up enjoyable tales with winter settings year after year. And they are still enjoyable - particularly on a chilly night, in front of a good fire and with the rain rattling on the windows.

* * *

TONY GLYNN contributes "CALL IT SCIENCE" to C.D. ANNUAL for 1962.

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WANTED: Merseyside Branch O.B.B.C. require the following old series Nelson Lee Library. "Ezra Quirke" - "Tommy Watson at Moat Hollow" - "In the Sahara" - "Arrival of Buster Boots" - "The School with a Bad Name" - "Revolt Against Guy Sinclair" Fulllest details to: NORMAN PRAGNELL, 33 BRAE STREET, LIVERPOOL, 7.

WANTED: The Jester, The Comic Home Journal, Chips, Famous Fights, The Police Budget, Lydgate Magazine, Strand Magazine, volume 35, "Twenty Years After" John Dicks Sixpenny Edition; "Victorian Romances and Bloods" "The Lover Fugitives" (a novel); also a ghost story (title unknown) with eighteenth century spectre on cover; Bentley's Magazine, volume ten; Theatrical Picture Postcards of all kinds. Tom Brownes Comic postcards. FRANK PETTINGELL, HIGHFIELD LODGE, 60 WISE LANE, LONDON, N.W.7.

WANTED: Good loose copies or bound volumes containing any of the following: MAGNETS 45, 52, 131 to 149 inclusive, 195, 205, 237, 238, 239, 277, 318, 319, 353, 400, 417, 422, 921, 924, 925, 938, 940, 942, 943, 946, 949, 951, 965, 967, 988, 996. Most issues between 821 and 890, 900. GEMS: many issues between 400 and 500. Many issues between 800 and 879. Also Nos. 935, 953, 954, 956, 975, 980, 985, 989, 990, 992, 933, 998, 1129, 1150, 984. POPULARS: 183, 190, 37C, 385, 396, 452, 455, 466, 474. Advertiser has complete sets of Gem, Magnet and Popular but needs many good replacement copies before having final binding work done.
ERIC FAYNE, EXCELSIOR HOUSE, GROVE ROAD, SURBITON, SURREY.

WANTED: Odd copies or full collection of "The Rocket" (early twenties). Good price paid, or other books exchanged. Also other O.B.B.'s wanted, except Magnets, Gems, Chums, Scouts, B.O.P.'s, JOHN KING, 5 WHITE HART LANE, LONDON, N.22.

RESULT OF OCTOBER COMPETITION

Scores of Squiggle Rhymes poured into the Digest Office. Full of wit and fun, the squiggles produced giggles. To find the best two of them has been a problem worthy of Sexton Blake. After hundreds of giggles - and a long time of earnest consideration - we have selected the following:

Boer War Incident: KETTLE on his METTLE (Sent in By Charles Wright, London.)

Sir Hilton's Downfall: POPPER PROPER CROPPER (Sent in by W.H. Broster, Kinner, Worcs.)

A book award is forwarded to each of the above successful competitors.

DANNY'S

DIARY

Everywhere begins to look very Christmassy. The shops are decorated and brilliantly lit, the trams are full of people carrying great piles of Christmas presents and loads of food. The waits come round singing carols fairly often, and, in the town, the Salvation Army band plays carols outside the Town Hall every Saturday evening. One time they played my favourite carol "Softly the Night is Sleeping", and I liked it so much that I asked Mum for tuppence to put in the collection box.

We are going into the country to spend Christmas with my grandmother so Mum hasn't had to get in so much Christmas food as when visitors come to spend Christmas with us. But she had made a lot of puddings. She always gives Jessie a big one to take to her mother.

Early in the month I had the Boy's Friend Christmas Double Number and it was a huge affair. It contained no less than eleven stories, the chief one being "His Brother's Return". It was very sad and I persuaded Doug to read it as I thought it might touch his heart and make him feel very kind towards his own brother. There were also five articles in the Boy's Friend, and one of them was all about boxing, by Bombardier Billy Wells.

We do a lot of decorating for Christmas. In the drawing room Mum will only allow holly and mistletoe and expensive paper chains, some of them costing more than a penny each. But I am allowed to decorate the dining room, and I bought a packet of paper strips in assorted colours. It was great fun one evening making my paper chains. I used paste which Mum made for me from flour and water, and joined the strips in rings, linking the rings together. Mum wouldn't let me put them up till the middle of the month.

The Gem hasn't been quite so good this month as all through the year. The first story was "Grimes of the Fourth" in which Lumley-Lumley, the millionaire's son, paid the fees for his pal Grimes, the grocer's boy, to become a pupil at St. Jim's. There was a sequel to this called "One of the Best" and they were both fine stories.

Then came "The Captain's Rival" which was an odd story but a good one. My pal Lindsay



has a brother who works at the Fleetway House. He told me how it came about and I was very interested. It seems that Martin Clifford used to write St. Jim's stories in Pluck, but he called himself Charles Hamilton in those days. That was before the Terrible Three went to St. Jim's. It seems funny to think of St. Jim's without them. Most of this new Gem story consisted of an old story about Kildare and Monteith which appeared in Pluck. But Martin Clifford has written several chapters at the start to explain why Tom Merry isn't there. The Terrible Three put Monteith in a sack so they were rusticated. That means, not allowed to be at school for a week. (It seems a wonderful idea. I told Doug I thought I would try to be rusticated next term, and he said he thought it a better idea if I tried to be exterminated. He has fearful cheek sometimes). Then at the end of the story, Tom Merry came back and was in time to see the Headland Football Match which the seniors played. Being nearly all about seniors, this story was very different, but it was good.

Then came "Jack Blake on the Warpath." This was a bit bitty, but quite good. I think it had had similar treatment to the previous story, for it carried on the Kildare-Monteith feud. It seemed as if new pieces had been written in about the Terrible Three being tarred by the Grammarians, and Jack Blake trying to avenge them.

Lastly "The Rival Housemasters" which were Mr. Ralton and Mr. Ratcliff. It was quite good, but there was an awful lot of conversation, and there were a lot of little episodes.

An Italian airman, on a flight from Paris to London, crash landed on a house at Palmers Green this month. He was not much hurt, but the house was damaged. Dad says this is what suburban householders may expect in the future with so many aeroplanes about.

I had a Benny Popular this month. The St. Jim's story was "Tom Merry's New School." Tom was working to help Ferrers Locke, the detective, and went as a pupil to a boarding school where the Principal was a crook. The Sexton Blake story was "The Order of Release" and Mr. Lindsay, who knows all about Sexton Blake, says it was once named "Sexton Blake's Christmas" and it appeared in the Union sack Christmas Number for 1905.

Dad came home one evening and gave us the glad news that he has booked for the whole family to go to the Drury Lane pantomime "The Sleeping Beauty" on New Year's Eve. He has booked for Jessie to go with us.

On December 21st Dad took Mum to the Covent Garden Opera House to see a film "The Miracle". It's a fabulantic film. It cost £15,000 to make and is 7,000 feet long. It is coloured in natural tints, and the presentation is aided by an orchestra and a choir of 200. I didn't go as Dad thought it was beyond me.

My Cousin Robin at Aldershot sent me two Union Jacks and a bar of chocolate for a Christmas present. One was the Christmas Double Number which contained an 80,000 word story called "The Mad Millionaire" or "Delivered from Evil." It was about that original Count Ivor Carlac. The other copy contained "The Christmas Conspirators." I sold them to Doug for 2/6 and he liked them a lot. He gave me the Cheer, Boys Cheer Christmas Week Number which had a creepy tale called "The Haunted Theatre" and a story about the Canadian Mounties called "Trooper Browning's Christmas".

We had a marvellous Christmas at my Gran's in Essex, but before I set it down in my Diary I must record the month's Magnets.

The first story was "Mark Linley's Last Fight" in which Vernon-Smith caused Mark to lose his scholarship and leave Greyfriars. It's part of the Bounder's plan to get Wharton and all his pals out of the school.

Then came the Magnet's Christmas Double Number. In "Drummed out of Greyfriars" the Bounder was brutally attacked by an enemy of his father's, but Smithy said that Wharton had caused his injuries, so Harry was expelled in disgrace. The Head said to Wharton: "You shall not besmirch this school any longer." It was a grim story for Christmas. This issue contained two other long complete stories, 5 pages of comic pictures, a serial, and a Billy Bunter mask.

After this came the downfall of Vernon-Smith. The story was called "Bob Cherry's Barring-Out". In the end, Harry Wharton and his friends went back as pupils to Greyfriars

and Smithy paid the price for his evil deeds.

The last Magnet of the month was "Harry Wharton's Win". It was an indelible tale but good fun. Ponsobny gave a Christmas party at Highcliffe and invited some of the Cliff House girls. Marjorie and Co were invited, and took with them two very muscular "young ladies" named Miss Franke and Miss Bobb. Vavasour tried to kiss Miss Franke - and received a mighty punch on the nose. Another win for Greyfriars.

Christmas Eve was on a Tuesday, and after lunch we set off for the station - Mum, Dad, Doug and me ---

(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?)

MR. BOTTLE CONSULTS HIS SOLICITOR

Dismil Chambers,
Litigation Street,
Oswaldtwistle.

Our client, Mr. Horatio Bottle, as drom our attenshun to the letters from correspondens appearin in September C.D.

He wishes to catergorically deny that he is a frond, and meerly used the name Horatio Bottle as a non de ploom or soodernin, which is the prerogertive of all litery artists. However, any further proof of identyerty from genuin enquirers may be obtained from the Mersey Sideseckshun secretary, Mr. Frank Case, enclosin five pounds, as a token of good faith and towards defrain clerical costs, etc. He further trusts the matter is now closed; the spellin used by the partys concernd will obviosly become teejios in the extrem to the reeder of C.D.

JEREMIAH SHARK

Messrs. Shark, Swindell and Robb,
(Solicitors-at-lor.)

(Also budgies for sale, and rooms paperd very cheap)

DIGEST READER ON TELEVISION

Tom Langley, 17 year old C.D. reader of Birmingham appeared on B.B.C. T.V. in October. Tom has a large collection of Victorian "Penny Dreadfuls" and he discussed his treasures on the programme and many of the old papers were displayed to viewers. Such characters as Ned Kelly, Jack Harkaway, Sweeney Todd and Varney the Vampire lived again during Tom's appearance. The programme caused much interest, and it may be repeated later at greater length. Tom is the son of Tom Langley, the Midland broadcaster.

HAMILTONIANA

POSTSCRIPT

by Roger M. Jenkins

Mrs. Wright has kindly furnished me with some additional information concerning her uncle, Charles Hamilton, which may be of interest to collectors generally.

Charles Hamilton shared an establishment with his sister from the time that his mother remarried. When his sister married in 1911 and became Mrs. Harrison, this arrangement continued on a very happy footing, as the two men were on very friendly terms. The three of them lived and travelled together, and the European travels mentioned in the Autobiography were in the company of the Harrisons, except for occasional short partings. In 1914 they all settled in Hampstead Garden suburb, though difficulty in obtaining a house sufficiently large resulted in Charles Hamilton having a tiny bungalow near the Harrisons' house. In 1924 they all moved to what is now Mrs. Harrison's London house, and this was Charles Hamilton's pied a terre in London until 1939. He spent a third of every year there until 1937 and after that he used to go up for a month at Christmas.

"Rose Lawn" was purchased because Charles Hamilton's niece (now Mrs. Wright) needed some sea air. In 1929 the family overflowed into the bungalow opposite (then called "Mandeville") and Charles Hamilton presented it to Mrs. Harrison, who equipped it and entertained in it, as her brother hated entertaining himself.

It seems that, as he grew older, Charles Hamilton became more of a recluse, and he could only be winkled out of his shell to meet children and very old family friends dating from the Edwardian era, and even then he was highly selective. If he didn't wish to meet a particular person, he would go to bed and pretend to be ill! This will not, perhaps, be much of a surprise to collectors, for even the most gifted author needs a great deal of quietness and solitude if he is to produce work of any merit at all.

* * *

ROGER JENKINS contributes "THE BUNTERS AT HOME" to C.D. ANNUAL for 1962.
UNA HAMILTON WRIGHT contributes "CHRISTMAS WITH FRANK RICHARDS" to C.D.A.



— BOB CHERRY —

CONTROVERSIAL ECHOESNo. 61. *X* MARKS THE SPOT!

GEOFFREY WILDE: As you justly observe, a man with a standing character-list to maintain couldn't in the nature of things construct a real mystery. The villain must be expendable, i.e. not a permanent member of the cast; yet only such a one could constitute a real surprise in the denouement, while conversely any figure newly introduced into a mystery series stood out immediately as the guilty party.

It is indeed by their atmosphere that Hamilton's best crime series make such an impression, for he had a remarkable power to evoke mood. The magic of Christmas, the summer countryside, the tang of the sea - he could do them all, including the eerie. I was surprised at your omission of the Kranz series, which though it began indifferently ended in really gripping style. The reader as usual suffered little mystification but he could for once sense the very real bafflement experienced by the characters involved in the story, and despair of their ever seeing the light. Mauleverer's solving of the problem stood out as a real coup in the best Sherlockian tradition. This was a great change from the irritation and impatience one often felt when no one seemed able to see the answer to the mystery. The last three numbers here worked up a really powerful atmosphere. I must admit this same quality eluded me in the Vernon series, but of late Magnet tales I would accord a high place for eerie atmosphere to the Moat House Christmas sequence from the Lamb series. A Gem classic other than those you mention was "The Spectre of St. Jim's" which certainly held me in an uncanny tension - and many another reader too, I suspect.

JOHN WERNHAM: On this theme the unspoken question is unvaried: "Why did Charles Hamilton spend so much time writing so many 'rollicking' stories and leave his gift for suspense so neglected?" He excelled in both types of story but those like the Captain Mellish series stand out like 'gems' in a background of regging and other lighthearted adventures. (Incidentally, the Mellish yarn is not in the London Library!) He never wrote mystery stories for the reason that once the mystery is discovered a second or third reading is unlikely. Putting the reader into the author's confidence is psychologically sound. Perhaps Hamilton's simplicity resembles that of Hitchcock, who, although wrapped in mystery is a plain, uncomplicated man, according to himself.

BASIL ADAM: Some of my favourite Grayfriars stories have a touch of the eerie about them, so I cannot agree with Roger Jenkins when he disapproves of the Ravenspur Grange Series. The atmosphere of gloom and horror which hung over Ravenspur Grange simply held me in its spell. Three other stories had their eerie moment for me, all of them Christmas series - Cavendale Abbey, Ghost of Mauleverer Towers and last but not least Reynham Castle. I always try to read one of these series over the Christmas holidays.

The Magnet would have been the poorer if Frank Richards had not written these thrilling stories, especially at Christmas time.

HARRY BROSTER: I have never read the Ravenspur series but I did read the China series. There was enough violence and murder in that lot to suit anyone, but generally I do not associate that sort of atmosphere with Charles Hamilton. I always turn to his school yarns as a soothing change from the more common crime and violence, horror, etc., which are more or less a common menu nowadays.

RON HODGSON: I am glad you mentioned "Nobody's Study" as I gave a chapter from that yarn as my favourite at a recent club meeting - the one in which Tom Merry agreed to spend a night in the "Study", and the gas slowly died out. A gripping chapter which showed Tom as a frightened schoolboy - as I've no doubt anyone placed in such a situation would be. I would have liked to see how Frank Richards would have made Harry Wharton

behave had this occurred at Greyfriars.

Laurie Sutton: I have always felt, like yourself, that Charles Hamilton's policy was to let the youthful reader in early on the mystery, yet at the same time allowing him to think that he was being clever in spotting something. The Ravenspur Grange series was unique, but generally C.H. never went in for the "whodunit" and I find the Mysterious X utterly alien to his style - in fact I do not believe that this series was written by Hamilton. The introduction of a newcomer for the purpose of a story was very much in the line of the sub-writers (usually for the purpose of an expulsion sensation). One recalls for example, Bingham "the rascally prefect" and Craik, in "A Son of Scotland" (one of the phoney British Isles series that was obviously conceived in the editorial office.)

(Charles Hamilton certainly wrote the Mysterious "X" series. I discussed it with him many times, and he regarded it as one of his most successful stories in the Blue Gem, as indeed it was. He also wrote "The Prefect's Plot" of Bingham, though that was a less noteworthy story. There are any amount of occasions when Mr. Hamilton introduced a temporary character simply to serve one story or series. - E.F.)

Larry Morley: There seems to be a deal of bickering in the Echoes about the merits of Frank Richards' work. Whether or not Mr. Hubbard is right, I can only say that I have had more enjoyment out of Frank Richards' work than any of the hard-cover stories. To my mind his work had that little extra something - call it atmosphere if you like - that the other school story writers lacked.

Bob Whiter: I, too, like the Ravenspur Grange series and consider it very well done. It was remarkable how Frank Richards built up atmosphere in the mystery series and even in the single stories.

It's the same in movies - these so-called horror films always give me a hearty laugh, whereas a Hitchcock treatment gives far more edge of the seat suspense. As Roger Jenkins once wrote in an article: "It's always best to leave a reader asking for more", that is, not to over do things. Some writers have that gift - Frank obviously did. Others try too hard and put in too much. I always remember the fine atmosphere when John Redwing saw the old sea captain for the first time in the Polpelly series.

Re Stanton Hope and the Rio Kid. All I can say is it's a pity Frank didn't sub Hope's yarns - they would have been so much better. I've read plenty of Hope's stories and I certainly never got the impression he "was an expert on anything Western."

Syd Smyth: I think that Bill Lofts is astray when he writes that Stanton Hope could have helped Charles Hamilton with Rio Kid atmosphere. Mr. Hope had barely a nodding acquaintance with Mr. Hamilton in the corridors of Amalgamated Press according to his own words to us, and I am positive he would have told us such an important item as Bill suggests if he had so helped. He did visit Mr. Hamilton, but many years later.

(Charles Hamilton was an extremely independent man, and I, personally, consider it most unlikely that he would have passed his stories for subbing to any other writer. E.F.)

LINK WITH BLAKIANA

"SAVAGE VENTURE", one of the new novels in the Sexton Blake Library, has one of those twists which are so satisfying to regular readers. The Editor of the S.B.L. consults the detective. Two of the Library's star real-life authors have disappeared under mysterious

circumstances. Blake says:

"No manuscripts. It looks as if you'll have to reprint an old pre-war yarn..."

The Editor replies: "We don't do that sort of thing! We're not running the Gem or the Magnet!"

Ho, hum! A hit, a very palpable hit! Of course, it all depends on circumstances. There could be a time when a good old story would be preferable to a bad new one.

That pleasant little interlude in "Savage Venure" reminded us of an occasion in the Gem when Gussy, seeking out ideas to advertise the paper, visited the Fleetway House and later met Martin Clifford, Frank Richards and Hilda Richards.

* * * * *

THE CHRISTMAS BUNTER SHOW

The play: BILLY BUNTER'S CHRISTMAS CIRCUS. The theme: A circus is to pitch in the grounds of Wharton Lodge to give a performance. But Bunter gets mixed up with sinister events - and then the fun begins. The theatre: QUEENS THEATRE, Shaftesbury Avenue, London, W. Kick-off December 24th for a limited season. Performances daily at 2.30.

The London Club is organising a party to attend the show on the afternoon of Saturday, January 5th. The more the merrier. Please join up with your hobby-friends, and have a grand time. Seats with the party are 15/- each. For bookings with the party write to the Editor of Collectors' Digest.

A matter of added interest for all club members and Digest readers is that Eric Fayne will be at the piano at every performance of this entertaining show. He will be playing plenty of the old songs which you love to sing and hum. Come and sing at the top of your voices in the interval with your own Eric Fayne at the piano. If you have any particular favourite among choruses old or new, jot the name down on a postcard and send it to him. But be prepared to sing when he plays it.

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"BOYS WILL BE BOYS" RE-APPEARS IN NEW DRESS

By Brian Doyle

E. S. Turner's near-classic book about old boys' papers, "Boys will be Boys" has just been reprinted in paper-back form (Daimon Press 10/6).

But the format - and the price for that matter - are disappointing.

10/6 is a lot to pay for a paper-backed book, especially when it has no illustrations. The original editions of this work included, as most readers will know, many fascinating pictures. This new one only has a single reproduction - of Billy Bunter in a "Magnet" episode - on its deep purple cover (surely a sombre colour choice anyway?).

Perhaps the high price and 'penny plain' style are explained by the fact (recently pointed out by John O' London's) that the newly-formed Daimon Press is run from a back-garden shed!

Man behind the enterprise is Anthony Adams, formerly a studio manager of Longman's Green and at one time production manager of Studio Books. Daimon is Greek for 'creative force' and also the name of Mr. Adams' new baby daughter. The company is operated from the garden shed of his home in Castle Hedingham, Essex. Here he designs, edits and produces his books, with his wife Angela, who types, sticks on stamps and helps on the typographical side. "Boys will be Boys" is one of the first four books in a series called Background Books.

It's certainly nice to see Turner's excellent and hilarious study again. It has introduced many people to our hobby (and probably to 'Collectors' Digest) and it has long been my own favourite bedside book.

But I still feel it's a pity about those missing illustrations - particularly at that price.

* * * * *

BRIAN DOYLE contributes "THROUGH THE YEARS WITH THE BOYS' OWN PAPER" in C.D. ANNUAL for 1962.

* * * * *

Old Boys' Book Club

MIDLAND

Meeting held, Tuesday October 30th, 62

Last month it was a much improved attendance but this October one surpassed any held this year. Thirteen members including two newcomers assembled in the Arden Hotel to enjoy a full and very enjoyable programme, though again it has to be admitted this was of

usual Hamiltonian routine. One of the items we debated was the fact that no other authors but Charles Hamilton were ever given a chance and this was hardly fair to those who had other interests and in effect, did nothelp attendance. As Ray Bennett put it, what about the OTHER PAPERS of our youth, the NELSON LEE, BOYS MAGAZINE, the THOMSON publications such as the Adventure, Wizard, Skipper, Hotspur, Rover? What of the Detective Weekly, Bulls Eye, the Thriller. Had these papers so little interest that they were not brought into the programme more often? Data produced by Ray gave popularity figures of these of a higher percentage than those of the Magnet and Gem, at time of publication, that is. Both of our two new members enjoyed exchanges between Norman and Jack Corbett though both of them are Magnet fans.

One of them, Mr. L. C. Lidsey won the Library raffle. Quite a common occurrence for a new member to win this raffle. The other just missed Norman's quiz (to his relief) Lucky man, Gerald! This of 14 items was won by the Secretary with six correct, winning a "Modern Boy". A lady member, for the booby prize (score-nil) had a similar reward!!!

A game set by Tom Porter was won by Norman Gregory. The Treasurer also got nearest the Guess the Number contest and won another Modern Boy, George Chatham then gave a short talk and reading from a Bunter Annual. Lovell of Rookwood, George's favourite character was at his funniest in this Christmas yarn of midnight adventures and spooks.

Members present were Jack Bellfield, Tom Porter, Jack and Madge Corbett, Win Brown, Win Partridge, George Chatham, Ray Bennett, Joe Marston, Norman Gregory, Gerald Price, L. Lidsey and the

Secretary - HARRY BROSTER.

LONDON

For our November meeting we visited the home of Len, Josie and Eleanor Packman, which is also the home of Blakiana and Sherlockiana, and which is, further, the place where the club first met in 1948.

A good programme has been arranged, including Desert Island Companions by J. Doyle; a Chums reading by Brian Doyle, this being a chapter of "To Leave Greyminster" by Hylton Cleaver; quizzes by Len Packman and Ben Whiter; a chapter of Herbert Lockenby's "Memories of Old Boys' Papers" read by Len Packman; and one side of a L.P. record dealing with Sherlock Holmes. This featured how Watson met Holmes and the Charles Augustus Milverton adventure. The varied programme was much enjoyed. Roger Jenkins announced good business with the Hamilton Library, and Bob Blythe reported good progress with his Nelson Lee Catalogue.

The Christmas meeting is fixed for Sunday, December 16th at 71, Clive Road, Cricklewood, London, N.W.2. (Phone Gladstone 8148). If attending, please notify hosts Bill and Marjorie Norris by the Friday preceding the meeting.

UNCLE BENJAMIN,

MERSEYSIDE

Meeting held November 11th.

As anticipated, there was a very good attendance at this the Annual General Meeting, the only absentees being Frank Unwin and Bill Greenwood; it was a pity they missed such a really enjoyable get-together. Proceedings opened with the Secretary's report, which included details of the very satisfactory financial situation. Then followed the election of officers for the coming year; our esteemed friend and staunch member Norman Pragnell, was unanimously voted into the Chairmanship, and the Secretary, Frank Case and the Librarian, Jack Morgan, were re-elected for a further year, a compliment appreciated by them both.

The Chairman then dealt with a number of club items, and, at his suggestion, it was decided that we should advertise in the Digest for a number of books to augment the Library; it is hoped we shall have some success in obtaining what we require. A discussion on a controversial subject kept us occupied for the next half-hour, followed by refreshments, and then came an excellent reading from a 1916 Gem by John Farrell. This was a typical example of Charles Hamilton's humorous flair, and his description of Arthur Augustus in the unlikely role of chimney sweep's assistant gave us all one long laugh.

A quiz submitted by Frank Case was won by Bill Windsor, and the meeting ended with a brisk run on the Library. A very good evening indeed.

The next meeting, on December 9th, will be our Christmas one; will members note that the starting time will be one hour earlier, at 5 p.m. due to a very full programme - don't miss it.

FRANK CASE,

NORTHERN

Meeting held Saturday, 10th November.

There was another good attendance at our November meeting and chairman, Geoffrey Wilde extended a cordial welcome to a new member, John Hunter of York, who, as Geoff, pointed out, bears an illustrious name well known to devotees of the hobby.

It was a case of back to the old routine this month, after last month's film show. Our treasurer-librarian, Gerry Allison, was happy to report that this had been an exceptionally good month, no fewer than 300 copies have been acquired for the library. After dealing with various items of correspondence Gerry gave us news of two absent friends. Vera Nicholls is still in hospital, a year after her accident, but we were happy to hear that there is every likelihood of her being able to return home shortly. Harold Busby is now out of hospital, but it is unlikely that we shall see him at the meetings just yet. Our best wishes go to both of them.

Ron Hodgson drew our attention to the Sexton Blake Library, and the important changes which are pending in the production of this publication, which records the adventures of one who had probably the longest continuous life of any character in fiction. It is to appear in a new format shortly, and members expressed the hope that it would meet with increased success.

Then to "My Favourite Chapter" for this month. It was the turn of Gerry Allison and Harry Lavender, but Jack Wood gave us a curtain raiser by reading a very amusing extract from one of the Magnets in the "Coker's Cousin" series. Gerry's chapter was from a Gem story telling how Gussy tried to learn ventriloquism, and what happened after Monty Lowther had altered the wording of an advertisement in the local paper. Harry then read a short story from the 1931 Holiday Annual which attempted to forecast conditions in 1950 and described what happened to a junior who 'told off' a prefect by his radio telephone, only to discover that he had forgotten to switch off the television attachment.

An interval for refreshments followed, and then we had a competition "Heads and Tails" devised by Geoffrey Wilde. We were divided into two teams, led by Ron Hodgson and Frank Hancock, and had to identify the opening sentence (Heads) or the closing sentence (Tails) of a well-known story or other work, not necessarily old boys fiction. After three exciting rounds Frank Hancock's team proved victorious.

Our next meeting is the occasion of our Annual Christmas Party. Saturday, December 8th is the date and 4.30 the time. Tea will be at 5 o'clock. A first-class spread and a bumper programme of fun and games is being arranged, with many fine prizes to be won. There will be a break for refreshments at 8.30 and we shall probably 'break up' about 9.30.

FRANK HANCOCK - Hon. Secretary.

AUSTRALIA

The November meeting got away to a most enthusiastic start on Thursday, 15th when club members gathered at the Book Bargain Bazaar, Sydney at 6.15 p.m.

Syd Smyth opened proceedings by reporting the progress of the club magazine which it is hoped will be available for posting by mid-December.

Members as usual, were looking forward to the overseas news and the secretary, with letters from Frank Unwin, Ron Hodgson and Bill Hubbard provided a wide coverage. And it was also pleasing to hear from local enthusiasts, Bruce Fowler and Harry Curtis from Q'land.

Then the Blake enthusiasts, discussing the threatened closure of "Blakiana" called for support for this extremely hard working Editress, Josie Packman, who has always given a first class feature for Blake supporters. Victor Colby, who made the appeal has written several new articles in his usual style and there is another article from a member who from his previous work, promises a new and interesting approach to a favourite subject.

The chairman, who is a staunch Hamilton fan, was very pleased to announce news of a new feature in "The A.P. Staff Publication" by Bill Lofts. Members were greatly interested when Bill Lofts' feature on the most outstanding A.P. characters was passed around. No. 1 featured "Billy Bunter" but the next issue will further the knowledge of Blake enthusiasts - naturally after this taste of the treat members are hoping that copies will be available for collectors here, who are all greatly interested.

The latter part of the evening was devoted to a talk by Syd Smyth concluding the biographical sketch of Stanton Hope which he had begun at the October meeting. His information covered the vast range of this author's activities with A.P., comics, newspapers and war experiences.

As usual the meeting concluded very pleasantly in the nearby coffee shop at 9 p.m.

BILL MARTIN

With the death of Bill Martin at the end of October our hobby lost a colourful figure. Mr. Martin was a dealer, pure and simple, and, like most dealers, he came in for a fair amount of criticism, most of it probably undeserved.

He was unashamed, unabashed; he provided collectors with material which was keenly sought and he made no secret of the fact that his treasures went to the highest bidders. There was no false modesty, no hanky-panky, about Bill Martin. He paid out plenty of money and effort in order to unearth hidden treasures, and he expected, and no doubt obtained, a good return for his outlay. And who could blame him? He had made it his business.

He was an impatient man. He was a careless man. But he was not an unreasonable man. I had a number of deals with him and always found him straight as a die. When he made a mistake, he would put it right. If customers were not satisfied he would return their money with alacrity. Above all, he was a brusquely independent man. Yet, in early days, when he had the chronic habit of defacing the covers of periodicals by the imprint of a large rubber stamp giving his name and address, he dropped the practice when customers complained.

A visit to the upstairs room where he stored his wares was an experience. He had literally masses of junk bespattered with jewels. A talk with him over the telephone was another experience. He used lurid expletives lavishly and he was no respecter of persons, but somehow he never gave offence. It was just Bill Martin's way. He had a fund of tales of people who wanted something for nothing, of people who arrived unexpectedly on Sunday afternoons when he was taking his bath, of folk who arrived hopefully in the middle of the night.

"I'm a public benefactor!" he would say. "I make nothing out of it. I just lose

money."

And you took it all with a grain of salt, as Bill knew you would.

Bill Martin was about 58 years of age. His name will be remembered in collecting circles for many years to come. Our hobby is the poorer for his passing.

THE FIRST FIFTEEN

A Survey of the C.D. Annual, 1947-1961

By Donald Webster

From the title of this article you might think that Rugger has supplanted Soccer at St. Jim's or Greyfriars, but such is not the case.

It hardly seems fifteen years ago that the late Herbert Leckenby in collaboration with Mr. H. M. Bond, first issued our favourite Annual. That first edition comprised 88 pages at a price of 6/-. I doubt if he ever foresaw that it would still be appearing and be in even greater demand in 1962, although the price may have more than doubled with rising production costs and the 1962 edition is almost double the size of that 1947 one.

Among the "high spots" down the years have been the complete histories of the Magnet (Roger Jenkins) and the Gem (Eric Fayne), whilst almost all the periodicals of our youth have been analysed by some contributor or other. Boy's Friend, Chums, Popular, Nelson Lee, Captain, Champion, Boy's Realm, Dreadnought, etc., have all had the limelight, and plenty of comic papers have been covered. The Union Jack and Sexton Blake Library have been dealt with at some length, but every succeeding year finds some aspect anew on these famous productions.

There have been so many excellent articles and such a mine of information in C.D. Annuals over these 15 years that it would be impossible to single out the most popular contributions. So may I refer to some of those which seemed outstanding to me?

In 1949 (my favourite issue) John Geal dealt with the Magnet in series form (Magnet Masterpieces), and one was able to chase those elusive numbers. In 1951 Eric Fayne dealt specifically with the Gem (And Every Story A Gem), whilst in 1952 and 1953 Robert Blythe gave us the St. Frank's saga. Thus our favourite schools were chronologically covered.

For Sexton Blake enthusiasts a great deal of work is put in by members of the Sexton Blake Circle. One of their finest years was 1952 when they dealt with Sexton Blake versus such adversaries as Zenith, the Albino, George Marsden Plummer, and Leon Kestrel. Also, the work of Edwy Searles Brooks and G. H. Teed was appraised.

The late Herbert Leckenby contributed some fine articles in his time. His "Streets of Memories" (1955) and "100 Years of Boys' Periodicals" were outstanding. I remember on a visit to York discussing these two articles with him, and being shown the scenes of his youthful ardour for these books. They were his life.

How many of us realise also how much we owe to Roger Jenkins for his work over the years? I think he has contributed to every Annual but one. I always enjoyed his articles, and like many others, look forward to them each Christmas together with those from the pen of Eric Fayne.

C. D. Annual seemed to me to take up where the Holiday Annual left off, only it covered more ground. In its 15 years it has covered our favourite papers and characters, be they senior or fags, detectives or villains - and the feminine element has not been neglected.

We have made new friends in Mr. Buddle and Meredith, and they are a must each year in my opinion.

How pleasing to see the illustrations each year, too! Here we mustn't forget a very old friend and contributor, Bob Whiter, whose covers were part of the annual treat.

Although the Holiday Annual and Chatterbox were reviewed, the hard cover stories never seemed to be adequately covered in the Annual, though articles have appeared occasionally in the monthly. Perhaps some contributor will fill the gap in the future.

It is not my intention to burden you with a lot of facts and figures, and a list of the contents of C. D. Annuals from 1947 to 1961 would be neither practicable nor desirable. If I have covered the main features as a tribute to the Annual's continued success I am satisfied. If I have omitted to refer to your own favourite item I crave your indulgence.

Like you, dear reader, I am looking forward to the time when the postman calls in December and there is a heavy thud on the floor when our beloved C. D. Annual comes through the letter-box. Ah, then for Christmas Eve, a cosy chair and maybe a cigar, whilst I am immersed in our hobby. Let no one disturb me then!

 HAVE YOU ORDERED YOUR COPY OF THE 16th EDITION?

An enormous Anthology of Articles, Stories, and Pictures

C. D. ANNUAL FOR 1962: The following, in alphabetical order, is a list of contributors who are featured in this mighty Year Book: HARRY BROSTER; C. H. CHAPMAN; JAMES COOK; RICHMAL CROMPTON; DANNY; BRIAN DOYLE; ERIC FAYNE; TONY GLYNN; R. H. GODSAVE; ARTHUR HARRIS; GEOFFREY HARRISON; GEOFF HOCKLEY; TOM HOPPERTON; W. J. A. HUBBARD; ROGER JENKINS; T. A. JOHNSON; ROBERT KELLY; FRANK LAY; W. O. G. LOPTS; ARTHUR MOYSE; JACK MURTAGH; ROSS STORY; HENRY WEBB; CHARLES WRIGHT; UNA HAMILTON WRIGHT.

Plus MEMORY LANE in which we sweep you back down the years in four pages of pictures.

 (The new novels in
 Sexton Blake Library
 reviewed by
 MARGARET COOKE)

Sexton Blake Today

THE BIG SMEAR S.B.L. 511

HOWARD BAKER

An attempt by the author "to explore a valid occupational hazard" for anyone in Blake's position.

When Nicky Deutsch escaped from prison and arrived in London determined to ruin and murder Sexton Blake, Grimwald, Coultts and Kirby tried to warn Blake of his danger. Tired, overworked and desperately anxious to finish a report on a serious case, Blake refused to listen to them, made the mistake of underestimating his enemy and nearly paid the price with his life.

A chance meeting with a beautiful girl gave Deutsch the opportunity to stage a series of carefully planned incidents designed to damage Blake's personal integrity so that the detective found himself suspected by his friend, deserted by his clients, facing "professional death" and possible imprisonment for assault.

At that stage Deutsch moved in to commit a murder which would look like suicide and Sexton Blake, bitterly conscious of his own stupidity, refused to accept any help from his anxious staff and worked out his own salvation.

A good story with a sound plot.

SAVAGE VENTURE: S.B.L. 512

W. A. BALLINGER

A story of authors in search of a story for the S.B.L. and of the Editor's fears for



their safety. It deals with slave-traders; ritual killings; treacherous people in high places in Lubanda; and a war-time promise made by Peter Saxon to a Somali sergeant - "if you ever need my help, either you or your people - just call and I'll come."

Now he was answering a call for help, leading a two-man crusade against slave-traders.

The novel is packed with incident and action from the opening pages, where a dead cat is left over the door of the author's room, to the closing chapters describing Marion's danger in a Sheik's harem.

A high standard of writing, excellent characterization and dialogue, and a skilful use of wit to ease the tension in places make this a very good story indeed.

YOURS SINCERELY

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

FRANK CASE (Liverpool): I note with some surprise that one of your readers criticises Ye Olde Cynique Inn on the ground that it is out of place. It has never seemed so to me, and the items take up such a modest amount of space, one wonders there should be any objection. Perhaps I am prejudiced, in view of the fact that my contributions are often accepted. Your readers will be getting the impression I am either a confirmed old soak or a permanent resident of the hostelry.

NORMAN LINFORD (Cannock): I am sure that anyone who has read the Cliff House stories in "The Schoolgirl" will not agree that the characters were just female shadows of their Greyfriars acquaintances. They were written by Mr. Whewey, and he brought about a big change in Cliff House School with his many yarns of sports fixtures so dear to the schoolgirl heart. The Bessie Bunter of Mr. Whewey in no way resembled Billy Bunter and this was, I think, his greatest character change. Incidentally, the captain succeeding Stella Stone was Dulcia Fairbrother, not Dulcie Grey, and I presume you mean Jemima Carstairs when referring to Jemima Carfax. In my opinion we old fans can say many thanks to Charles Hamilton for creating Cliff House, but give a greater measure of thanks to Mr. Whewey for bringing the characters alive and colourful.

J. A. WARK (Dunoon): I must disagree with the remarks of Ray Bennett re Danny's Diary. I think it an excellent feature and I recapture past raptures when reading it. One field I think the Digest could explore further - that of the private detective. I would be delighted if someone would take up the cudgels on behalf of many of the others beside Lee and Blake - Dixon Hawke, Tubby Haig, Falcon Swift, etc. Another of the like was Joe Pickford but I cannot recall which publisher presented him for our enjoyment. All I need add is that Blake and Lee were not the only pebbles on the beach.

REV. J. DOCKERY (Cambridge): I thoroughly enjoy every word of Collectors' Digest. I congratulate you most heartily on its production and its continued high standard. A great achievement, at no small expense of time and labour.

DONALD STURGEON (Burnley): I would not miss a single copy of Collectors' Digest. The atmosphere of the magazine is so friendly, and I have had much happy correspondence with a number of your readers. It all draws me like a moth to a candle into the circle of Old Boys.