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DECEMBER

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COLLECTORS

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DIGEST



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 Founded in 1941 by
 W. H. GANDER

"SPECIALLY ENLARGED ISSUE"

COLLECTORS' DIGEST
 Founded in 1946 by
 HERBERT LECKENBY

Vol. 21

No. 252

DECEMBER 1967

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A Christmas Letter from Your Editor



Whispers from the Den

JUST CHRISTMAS

Christmas may no longer be what it was when we were younger, but it is still a wonderful time. The very thought of Christmas still makes the heart a little lighter, the memories a little sweeter, the friends a little dearer, the expressions a little kinder. And the deeper message of Christmas still finds its way to us in the hurly-burly of the modern world in which we live. The old, old meaning of Christmas still comes smiling through.

For this Yuletide - lovely old word - I wish you a peaceful time with your families, an enjoyable time and a merry one, with plenty of love and laughter, an old-fashioned time with some of your favourite Christmas stories so that you keep in touch with those authors and artists who worked to give us joy at Christmas, long ago. A happy

Christmas to my readers all over the world.

THOSE MERLINS

A main theme in this month's very heavy mail-bag has been the Merlin Greyfriars reprints. Some readers gave them exaggerated praise; some were unfair in their adverse criticism.

As our own reviewer pointed out last month, the selection of some of Charles Hamilton's greatest series from which to publish pruned sections was unfortunate, especially as it was quite unnecessary. There are plenty of shorter Hamilton subjects which would have fitted snugly and far more successfully into the medium. It seems a pity that a great writer's best stories should be reissued in drastically truncated style, and that no indication is given that abridgment has taken place. I am strongly of the opinion that, when only a part of a long story is published, it should be made abundantly clear to the purchaser that the final product is condensed from the original.

In the periodical "The Reader's Digest" at the present time they are printing condensations of some of the best of the William stories. I find it sad that Richmal Crompton's gems should be presented like this, for the condensations have but little of the charm of the originals. But Reader's Digest does, at least, make it clear that they are printing condensed versions of the originals.

If the passing centuries had left us nothing of Shakespeare but Lamb's Tales, then the bard would have enjoyed but scant fame in 1967.

NOT FOR THE GOODY-GOODY!

In last month's editorial I referred to "the catchpenny nastiness" of some sections of the modern cinema, theatre, and book worlds.

Reader J. Twells of Rugby writes as follows: "Do you really think young people to-day are 'hardened to beastliness' any more than we were when we were younger? We equally enjoyed school stories and 'The Well of Loneliness;' cowboy yarns and Byron's 'Love's Awakening.' All were entertaining and I'm sure none of us were contaminated by the more erotic subjects. You talk about the films' X-certificate. Well, I can enjoy 'Ulysses' and 'Mary Poppins;' 'The Silence' and 'Carry On, Spying.' Entertainment has always been my criterion. We were not all goody-goodies who read the Nelson Lee and the Magnet."

THE ANNUAL COMES OF AGE

This year Collectors' Digest Annual reaches its 21st edition. The Annual has almost become a legend in its own lifetime. It will continue while readers still want it, and I hope that our friends will feel that this year's edition lives up to the standard of its

predecessors. We have already mentioned the superb articles which are in store for you this Christmas from such dedicated writers as Roger Jenkins, Bill Lofts, Frank Lay, and many others. Bill Hubbard, whose "out of the rut" articles are so popular, contributes another little masterpiece this year. Two other articles, each excellent in its own way, discuss the "horror" stories of Charles Hamilton and Edwy Searles Brooks respectively. Philip Tierney handles the Hamilton aspect, Reuben Godsave is in his element writing of Brooks. Putting the two together, and making a comparison should be entertaining for readers this Christmas.

Some time ago we published a little story entitled "Christmas With Meredith." This was one of the most popular of the Buddle tales, and many readers, from time to time, have written to request that Mr. Buddle might spend another Christmas with the Merediths. So this year, in a new story under the title "Mr. Buddle's Christmas Case," that gentleman goes off to Taunton once again, and gets caught up in another brief adventure.

Have you ordered your Annual yet?

ELUSIVE JINGLES

So far, no reader has come forward with a clue to guide me to those Tom Merry jingles I mentioned last month. One reader, however, has made an appeal for us to trace some football verse which contained the repetitive line "Play Up, you fellows, Play Up." I fancy it comes from one of the Herald supplements in the Magnet of the early twenties, but Mr. J. Wark of Dunoon would be grateful if anyone could give him chapter and verse to guide him to the elusive jingles.

A HAPPY NEW YEAR

Owing to the Christmas holidays, it is possible that your New Year copy of Collectors' Digest may reach you a day or two later in the month than usual. A slight delay may be unavoidable, so please do not be unduly worried. Before the New Year is very old, the Digest will be with you. Once again, my dear friends, to you and yours - a joyful Christmas and a peaceful and prosperous New Year.

THE EDITOR.

 LARGE ASSORTMENT of O.B.B's for swop. Lees, Magnets, Gems, Science Fiction (former large size), Amazing, Wonder, Future, Astounding. S.a.e., please.

J. COOK, 178, MARIA ST., BENWELL, NEWCASTLE-on-TYNE, 4.

CHRISTMAS ELIMINATION COMPETITION

Here is a little elimination puzzle to amuse you during the coming Christmas. For each clue, cross off TWO words in the list. (If you do not wish to mark your copy of C.D., copy out the words on a sheet of paper, and do your marking there.) When you have crossed off two words for every clue, you will still have two words left. If, for the fun of the thing, you like to enter the competition, write your two left-over words on a post-card with your name and address, and post to the editor. We shall award ten shillings to each of three senders of correct solutions. In the event of more than three correct solutions being received, all will be placed in a hat and a draw made.

Closing date: December 16th. Post early for Christmas.

THE CLUES:

1. Head. 2. Periodical. 3. Prefect. 4. Two detectives.
5. Rookwood boy. 6. Two doubles. 7. Two Reggies. 8. Two Irish boys.
9. Two porters. 10. A boat. 11. Nurse. 12. Two fine dogs. 13. A series.
14. Star in a Hamilton series. 15. Another periodical.
16. Home of some of the finest stories. 17. Two Hamilton horses.
18. Comic paper character. 19. Removite's relative. 20. Two Ralphs.

THE WORDS

ATE	HAY	AMY	PRIM
RAW	WOOD	LILY	PITT
TOWSER	BLAZER	MACK	STACEY
RIVERS	REILLY	BILLY	LOCKE
SON	POPULAR	MUSEUM	BUTTERCUP
CARDEW	AUNT	WING	WEEKLY
ROSE	MUFFIN	TRUMBLE	PEDRO
HAMILTON	WALLY	WILL	HOLLY
MARIE	HOLMES	PENNY	WATER
LIBRARY	BEATRIX	PONGO	FLYNN
MAHARAJAH			DETECTIVE

DANNY'S DIARY

DECEMBER 1917.

I love Christmas, and, even more, I like getting ready for Christmas. It's really the weeks before Christmas which make it such a wonderful time.

Of course, with this war on, Christmas isn't what it was. I'm old enough to remember the lovely times we had at Christmas before the war. Still, even with a war on, and a good many of the street lights out, and no lights in the windows of the shops, and not such a big variety of stuff on sale in the stores and the markets - it's still wonderful to have Christmas.

It has been a lovely month in the Boys' Friend. In "Foiled at the Finish," Lattrey set out to get Jimmy Silver expelled - and almost succeeded. Lattrey told Jimmy that Flynn had gone to a pub called "The Ship," but when Jimmy went after Flynn, who wasn't there at all, he was kidnapped by the rascally innkeeper. Lattrey has intended that the prefects should find Jimmy at the Ship, but Mornington and Erroll take a hand.

The Cedar Creek tale was "The Bad Man from Boot Leg." Long Bill tried "shooting up the town," and then descended on Cedar Creek School. Frank and Bob put paid to him.

Next week, in "Brought To Terms," Lattrey was expelled for his cowardly plot in the previous story. But Mr. Lattrey, the father, knows of the inside story of the Head's brother, and Mr. Lattrey blackmails Dr. Chisholm, so Lattrey is not expelled.

"Done Brown" was the Cedar Creek tale. Frank Richards wants to present a Shakesperian play, but Gunten won't believe that Frank can act. Not till, one day, a fearful-looking character turns up at the school and claims to be a relative of Gunten's.

Then - the Christmas Double Number, and I don't think there has ever been a better one. Christmas stories of Rookwood, Cedar Creek, Bagshot, Highcliffe, and more. But the cream of them all was the double-length Cedar Creek tale. The Muldoons, with their little sick daughter Bridget, live at White Pine, but they are so poor that Father Christmas is not likely to come for Bridget. So Frank Richards and Co ride a long, long way, on sleighs, to Fraser, to buy a beautiful doll for the kid. They meet lots of exciting adventures before Father Christmas calls at the Muldoons shack in White Pine. Lovely Christmas tale.

"Jimmy Silver's Guest" at the Priory for Christmas was, of all people, Lattrey. Jimmy felt sorry for Lattrey who had nowhere to go for Christmas. But Algy Silver, Jimmy's cousin, is at the Priory, and Cousin Phyllis begins to think that Lattrey is a bad influence on Algy. When she is proved right, Lattrey is kicked out of the Priory.

The next week "Mornington's Last Plunge" carried on with Jimmy Silver's party at the Priory. Morny is bored at the Priory, and goes out gambling with Lattrey, Peele and Gower who are at "a place along the river" named the Lodge. Those three cheat him at cards, but Morny is an expert at cheating, and they get the worst of it.

"Guntzen's Little Game" was the first story of a series about Cedar Creek. Guntzen bears malice against Miss Meadows, and when Frank Richards is sent by her to put an advertisement in the Thompson Press for a handy man, Guntzen manages to tamper with the advert.

Last Boys' Friend of the year gave us "Algy of the Third" in which Jimmy's cousin goes to Rookwood as a new fag, and turns out to be a nasty bit of goods.

Cedar Creek carried on with "A Peculiar Persecution" in which Miss Meadows seems to be advertising in the Thompson Press for a husband. All sorts of weird and wonderful types turn up at the school, and it was good fun. But in the end, Miss Meadows found out about the tampering with her advert, and at the close of the year she is preparing to make things hot for Frank Richards.

Early in the month there was a shocking disaster at Halifax, Nova Scotia. A munition ship blew up in the harbour, and a third of the city is in ruins. Well over a thousand were killed, and double that number injured. Awful, so near to Christmas.

There have been a lot of air raids this month. I reckon this is due to Russia making a separate peace with Germany, which has let the Huns switch all their power against the other allies. Things seem to be very tough on the fighting fronts, but there is one bright note. General Allenby has won a big victory against the Turks, and has taken Jerusalem from them.

The Christmas Double Number of the Nelson Lee Library was a winner. It contained a very long story by Nipper, entitled "The Phantom of Tregellis Castle," and it's a Christmas story with a vengeance. A big party, plenty of snow, and the spectre of an ancient cavalier. Just the thing for the fireside as mum made her mincemeat with prunes and apples.

There is a change in the Boys' Friend 3d Library. The stories are now printed crosswise with 3 columns instead of lengthwise with

two columns. I don't dislike it, though the books seem to get tatty quickly.

The Gem hasn't been so bad this month. There is a bit more variety than there was, at any rate.

"The Schemer of the Shell" misfired a bit. Talbot fell foul of Racke. Racke paid Lodgey to rob the Head. Talbot got the blame and was expelled. Gore backed up Talbot. Talbot was cleared. Racke was exposed but wasn't expelled. What a Headmaster!

Best of the month's bunch was "Tom Merry's Brag." Tom, much goaded, claimed in exasperation that the School House, with Trimble in goal and Racke as a back, would still beat the New House. But Figgins was a gem. At the end, he put two rabbits in his team, too, so everything was fair. I enjoyed this one.

I also liked "Jack Blake's Hun," even though it introduced that blot, the St. Jim's Parliament and Mr. Pepper. A German plane was brought down near St. Jim's, and it was Blake who captured the airman. Rummy that Blake so seldom ever plays a star part in any story.

"Rivals in Sport" was one of those tales I never like. Can't be a sportsman. A Mr. Grenfell took Mr. Ratcliff's place for a time, and he arranged a series of contests between the Houses. Rather a yawn.

"Number Nine on the Warpath" was fairish. Levison, Clive, and Cardew set out to play tricks on the St. Jim's parliament. Mildly amusing, this one. But I shall be glad when that parliament gets blown up by Guy Fawkes.

We have seen some good pictures, though we often had to walk home when there were air raids on and the current was cut off the trams. Irene Vanbrugh was in "The Gay Lord Quex" which was feeble for me. Jack Pickford and Louise Huff were in "The Ghost House" which was nice and weird. Mary Pickford was good in "The Little American." Gladys Cooper looked nice in "My Lady's Dress," which my mum liked but I didn't. William Gillette was exciting in "Sherlock Holmes." Just before Christmas we saw Mary Merrall and Franklin Dyall in "Daddy Longlegs."

Vice-Admiral Wemyss is now First Sea Lord in place of Admiral Jellicoe.

It has been very much a war-time Magnet this month. The first tale "The Missing Skipper" was pretty painful for any boy beyond the second form. Greyfriars and St. Jim's seniors are playing football at St. Jim's. On the way home, Wingate disappears from the team. He has been kidnapped by some toughs in the pay of Loder, who wants to

be Captain. He is kept in a cave. Without much ado - it is all over in a few chapters - a new election is held. But Wingate gets away. At the end he tells Loder: "I shall not crush you," and Loder says "You're a brick!" And I spent a penny on that lot.

Then came the Magnet Christmas Double Number which contained a Who's Who and a Greyfriars tale called "The Greyfriars Christmas Party." A crowd of overseas boys from Greyfriars and St. Jim's - with the two Bunter Brothers - spend Christmas at Greyfriars in charge of Mr. Prout. The dreariest Christmas tale of all time, methinks. And I spent tuppence on that lot.

Next week came "Four From The East" which was a continuation of the Christmas Party at Greyfriars tale. Skinner was in it, plotting away, and Harry Wharton popped on at the finish.

After this "Flap's Brother" was a lot better. It couldn't be a lot worse. It introduced the Twins from Tasmania of the Gem's serial. Bunter did some ventriloquism so that Flap Derwent thought her brother Flip was a gambler. Pretty good this tale. Final story of the year was "Locking After Inky," another pretty good yarn, introducing Kuri Din, a Redclyffe boy whom Hurree Singh had known when small. But Kuri Din was a rascal, and he was exposed owing to the impersonations of Wibley. So the Magnet's year went out, if not in a blaze of glory, at least quite respectably.

The Penny Popular's Christmas Double Number was just terrific. "Billy Bunter's Christmas Dream" by Frank Richards, in which Wun Lung faked a ghostly Christmas pudding; "The Ghost of St. Jim's" by Martin Clifford, in which the spectral monk walked; "Snowed Up" by Owen Conquest; and "Christmas at Cliveden" by Charles Hamilton. Doug said he was sure that the Cliveden tale was one of a series from the Boys' Realm or Boys' Herald of before the war. I always love the Pop.

Early in December, Dad booked seats for a theatre outing on New Year's Eve. They left it to me to decide which one I wanted to see. I could have chosen George Robey in "Zig-Zag" at the Hippodrome. Or "Bubbly" which has been running for 8 months at the Comedy Theatre. Or J. M. Barrie's "Dear Brutus" which has only been on a week or two at His Majesty's. But I plumped for the Drury Lane panto, which, this year, was "Aladdin." I always like "Aladdin" for it is spectacular and you get some mysterious effects. So on the last day of 1917 we went to "Aladdin" at Drury Lane. The chief star was Stanley Lupino.

SALE: £5 Book Token, £3.

38, ST. THOMAS'S ROAD, PRESTON.

BLAKIANA...

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

ECHO OF THE ROUND TABLE

Bill Lofts writes:

I am astonished at Walter Webb's comments on my investigation into "The Man from Persia" by Lewis Jackson. I can assure Walter and others interested, that I spent a great deal of time and money on research about this story. Not only did I double check on the facts known by official records, but I rather irritated the people concerned by demanding another check from a different source. I am completely puzzled by Walter's attitude on "Lewis Jackson" copying another's story and getting paid for it. After all it was Walter who first spotted that S.B.Ls. (2nd Series) Nos. 675, 690, 708, 732, 734, were all originally written by other writers. In my own records (and those of the Sexton Blake Circle I believe) for example No. 732 has on the cover the author's name as D. Stewart. Certainly he was paid for writing it - even though it was originally written by Mark Osborne.

In one of the first articles I wrote in Blakiana I mentioned the fact that I thought a story written by Ladbrooke Black was the worst I had ever read. If as is stated Lewis Jackson rewrote one of Black's stories it simply explains the poorness of it, plus the fact that I think Jackson was a very sick man during the last years of his life. It is logic to assume that Jackson was not so brilliant in the 50's as he was in the 1920's and 1930's. Some authors, like wine, improve with age, others do not, and it is my firm belief that Jackson unfortunately did not.

Readers who may have missed my contributions in the C.D. of late may be interested to know that for the last few months I have been doing some real secret service type of investigations for a large publishing firm. Some day this full story will be told. During my M.I.6 work I had the good fortune to trace and contact quite a few relatives of famous Sexton Blake authors. Amongst them were the daughter of William Murray Graydon (sister of Robert Murray) and also the widow of Robert Murray Graydon - Mrs. Victoria Graydon. I have also met the widow of Gwyn Evans, probably the most colourful and lovable Blake writer of all time. I have obtained some fresh data about these authors which will appear in Blakiana during 1968. Readers who may

have been puzzled about the plots of Sexton Blake on T.V. will be interested to know they are all originals. However, very shortly old U.J. stories will probably be adapted. The stories by Robert Murray, Gwyn Evans and G. H. Teed have received the most consideration, and with this I am sure the majority of members of our circle will agree.

* * * * *

WILLIAM MURRAY GRAYDON

by S. A. Pachon

Foreword by Bill Lofts

Whilst I was preparing an article on "The Graydons" I received a letter from one of our American members, Mr. Stanley A. Pachon, who, after expressing his interest in my articles and research, enclosed a draft of an article he had written on W. M. Graydon's work in America. This he had gleaned from various papers and magazines not available in this country. Readers who admire the work of William Murray Graydon will, I am sure, be interested in details of the life of this prolific writer of Sexton Blake stories.

- - -

William Murray Graydon, one of the more prolific writers of fiction, was born in Harrisburg, Pa. on Feb. 11, 1864. He attended various schools and spent 7 years at the Harrisburg Academy under Prof. Serler.

Young Graydon was justly proud of his ancestral background. His great grandfather, Alexander Graydon was an Englishman who received his education at Trinity College, Dublin, and came to America in 1730. where he took up the practice of law in Philadelphia. A great uncle also named Alexander Graydon was the author of a book of reminiscences "Graydon's Memoirs" which dealt with Philadelphia and Pennsylvania about the time of the Revolution. Mr. Graydon's grandfather moved to Harrisburg, Pa. about 1798. Young Graydon's father was also a prominent attorney in that city.

From his early age William was a voracious reader and began to write at a very early age and most of his initial efforts appeared in the columns of the local newspaper, The Harrisburg Telegraph.

From 1884 to 1889 Mr. Graydon was employed in the Harrisburg National Bank and in his spare time devoting his talents in writing sketches of various kinds. In 1889 Mr. Graydon terminated his employment with the bank and devoted himself exclusively to authorship. He had married in 1886 and had two children.

Graydon's first professional literary efforts in a publication with a large circulation, appeared in the columns of the Argosy published in New York City by Frank A. Mavsey. This was a short sketch called "Our Midnight Cruise" which appeared in the issue of Feb. 23, 1889. His next effort was a more ambitious one, a two part story titled "Captured in the Punjab." Over a dozen sketches and two part stories followed, then came his first long serial "The Rajah's Fortune" which started with the issue of Mar. 8, 1890. This was followed rapidly by another long serial "Under Africa." A half dozen short sketches followed. After the publication of "With Cossack and Convict" another long serial, he devoted himself to writing only book length stories, with only an occasional short sketch. The backgrounds of most of his stories were laid in Africa, Russia and an occasional camping out serial.

Since Mr. Graydon had become very prolific and the Argosy could use only a limited number of stories by him, he began to contribute to other juvenile and adult publications, chiefly to Golden Days, Half Holiday and to a Street and Smith publication called Good News. Then from 1892 to 1897 appeared 8 long serials under his own name and 7 under the pseudonym of "Alfred Armitage"; all the Armitage serials were based upon historical backgrounds and subjects. (Note: A number of years ago a friend of mine who had corresponded with various authors in his youth wrote me that Mr. Graydon acknowledged the "Armitage" pseudonym as his own.)

A contemporary account which appeared in Nov. 1891 gives an interesting account of Mr. Graydon's residence and writing habits. It stated "Mr. Graydon works at home, in a study overlooking the beautiful Susquehanna (river) and the Cumberland Valley, in which the scenes of many of his stories are laid. This room is a typical author's den. A large flat-topped desk stands in the center, and on this, the two tables and the lounge are heaped with stacks of old manuscripts, letters, French and English papers, while bound volumes of the London Graphic and the Illustrated News occupy one corner. A prominent feature of the apartment are the pictures which adorn it. Among the latter are views of all the foreign cities and a great framed portrait of the famous French Military Painter Edouard Detarille, bearing his autograph in one corner "a personal gift of M. Detarille."

"Mr. Graydon is fond of all sport and nature and among his recreations are camping, fishing, canoeing and walking."

In an editorial introduction to Graydon's new serial "Red Rose and White" which began in the issue of Apr. 2, 1898 of the Half Holiday

it stated "He now resides in England, having gone there several years ago." This would indicate that he came to England about 1895.

As he became more and more established in England his contributions to American periodicals became less and less and although many of his old serials were reprinted in book form and continued to appear in various editions into the 1930's, very little news came from him in American publications after 1900.

* * * * *

EXTRACTS FROM THE "UNION JACK" No. 594 dated 27 Feb. 1915

Presented by Josie Packman

A copy of this Union Jack has recently come into my possession and I feel that some of the information therein will be of interest to all Sexton Blake enthusiasts. I always like reading the Editor's Chat in any paper and have gained quite a lot of information in that way. In those early days the chat in the Union Jack was known as "A Word from the Skipper" and in this particular issue this is what he had to say. (He was writing about the following week's story entitled "Abdulla the Horse Dealer".)

" The bulk of the story is laid in Persia, and the local description is a thing I want you all to make a note of. You know, it has often been said about the Union Jack that it is an education in itself. Which is perfectly true, for, whenever a description of a foreign country is given you may be pretty sure that the author has indeed been there. Some time ago I had a visit from a Lancashire reader and he mentioned what wonderful descriptions were given by the author of the Yvonne and Wu Ling stories. My reply was that the author had been there himself and was thus writing from actual knowledge, and that is why he can write such a wonderful amount of "grip" into his yarns. Take the story of Dr. Huxton Rymer in "Pluck" last week. One could tell from the reading that the author was body and soul in the place he was writing about. The same applies in next week's yarn. I have just mentioned Dr. Huxton Rymer, so that while I am about it I do not think it will come amiss if I tell you that he will be appearing regularly in "Pluck" for some time to come. The story this week is "The Globe of Fire" and deals with the adventures of a most valuable pearl and of course Dr. Huxton Rymer. "

Now, the point is, a story with a similar theme appeared in the Union Jack under the title of "The Crimson Pearl" and featured Dr. Huxton Rymer and Yvonne Cartier. It could be a coincidence, but this

Union Jack was a double number: so, presumably if the Pluck story was the same one it must have run as a serial. I would be most grateful if anyone can give me the answer to this puzzle. I am sure some lucky collector has the copies of Pluck for this period and could oblige me with details of the story.

Advertised in this copy of the Union Jack is a great new Sexton Blake film called "Sexton Blake and Britain's Secret Treaty;" also one of those famous picture competitions of the period. This one is called "Powder and Shot" our Great War Competition, first prize £500. I wonder who won the prize and if he is still alive?

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THE ROUND TABLE

Matt Mead, who tells the new Sexton Blake story "Star Crossed," arrives in Britain from America, and is courteously met by Tinker at the airport. This is Mr. Mead's first impression of Tinker: "He stood easily, could obviously handle himself well, and had a smile which didn't start you digging for ulterior motives."

I don't know for sure what Mr. Mead means, but I suspect that he had met plenty people who, when they smiled at him, had designs on his virtue. Of course, Mr. Mead is expressing a negative. When Tinker smiled at him, he didn't think that Tinker had designs on his virtue. It's a warning to all of us, when we go to meet anyone at an airport, to guard our smiles lest we be misunderstood.

Let's hope that Tom Merry or Jimmy Silver never come across Mr. Mead and give the advice "Keep smiling." He'll put them in the X-certificate class at once. It's a nasty old world when a bloke can't smile safely.

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J. TWELLS of Rugby writes: "In BLAKIANA, Sexton Blake on television is said to be well done. No mention is made of the radio series in which William Franklyn in the title role, with his matter-of-fact and unexciting voice, is not my idea at all of the famous detective. Most of the radio series so far have been extremely naive, to say the least."

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No new issues of the Sexton Blake Library are to be published for the next month or two. This is due to the fact that Mayflower, the company who have issued the S.B.L. in recent years, is in the process of changing proprietorship. We will notify our readers when new Sexton Blake novels become available in the shops.

HAMILTONIANA

CHRISTMAS STORIES

by Roger M. Jenkins

Nothing could touch the Magnet for the sheer delight of its Christmas series. The Gem could boast of Double Numbers that were unsurpassed, but when the Gem Christmas series are examined they prove strangely unsatisfactory: in 1909, for instance, Christmas was spent in a haunted chateau in France; in 1910 Tom Merry was a down and out in London; in 1922 there was a Christmas barring-out at school; in 1923 Cardew was still maintaining his vendetta against Tom Merry; and in 1925 the Terrible Three hurried from one place to another pursued by a criminal. Each of these series was darkened unpleasantly, not so much by the mysterious villain that everyone expects in a Christmas series, but by an unsettled feeling, often with undertones of personal vindictiveness or grievance on the part of the juniors. The seasonable goodwill was an ingredient conspicuously absent in nearly all the Christmas series that Charles Hamilton wrote for the Gem.

Of course, this was mainly caused by the fact that he gave up writing for the Gem before the dawn of the Golden Age. There are uncomfortable episodes in early Magnets, if one cares to look for them: in 1922 when Brian Maulevere was turned out into the snowstorm, the juniors showed no signs of relenting, and indeed we were told that Bob Cherry raised his hand and called him a cur. Nothing so crude and tactless marred the stories of the Golden Age, when villains were removed without arousing such feelings of discomfort in the reader. The first truly sophisticated series was in 1926, when Coker was kidnapped, and the interview in which Potter and Greene explained to Mr. Prout exactly why they were not going to spend their holidays looking for Coker was a little masterpiece of sustained irony. For sheer entertainment, however, with conversation as sparkling as bubbles on champagne, one must turn to the volume for 1929, the beginning of the Courtfield Cracksman series; nothing is more delightful than the little conversation Bunter initiated with the Famous Five at Wharton Lodge, concerning Christmas presents, and its unexpected sequel.

The Courtfield Cracksman series ran on well into the Spring Term, but in 1930 there was a self-contained Christmas series that represents the high-water mark of Charles Hamilton's achievements in this field - the Cavandale Abbey series. Cashing in on Lord Cavandale's sense of obligation, Bunter invited himself to the Abbey for Christmas, and we can vividly imagine the defensive expression that appeared on his

lordship's face as Bunter suggested himself as a guest. Objectionable as Bunter was, however, it is strange how we were always compelled to sympathise in his misfortunes and rejoice in his triumphs, and in the Cavandale Abbey series there were plenty of both. Perhaps the most telling factor was the number of purely descriptive passages, where gloom, mystery, and terror were depicted in paragraph after paragraph without any conversation at all, and whether it was the mysterious whispering in the corridor at night, or the Phantom Abbot in the locked room, there were incidents enough to chill the spine of every reader.

The following year saw a series as memorable as the previous two, and far more well-known - the Mauleverer Towers series. Bunter's outrageous efforts to get himself to the Towers for Christmas culminated in a lengthy taxi-ride, which ended rather suddenly and unexpectedly when he flung himself out of the cab in order to bilk the driver, and fell through the snow and down into a secret passage. Gaiety and mystery were the keynotes of this series, and merriment still reigned supreme, together with an aura of cosy happiness, when the Flip series began during the same holiday period.

Nothing quite matched up to this trio of Christmas series, but there were nevertheless many joys in store. Some collectors treasure the Valentine series of 1932, with Mr. Quelch lost in the snow and calling out, "Help! If you are a Christian, come to my aid!" Many have a soft spot for the Wharton Lodge series of 1933, which is told on a quieter, more domestic plane, but is full of amusing incidents. A strange Christmas was spent on the Devonshire moors in 1934, at Hilton Hall, but one of the later favourites is Polpelly in 1935. The long descriptive passages concerning the appearance of the ghost must surely rank as one of the author's finest word pictures, recalling a similarly famous episode at Lochmuir way back in 1923.

Only sporadic pleasures remained after 1935. Christmas at sea the following year was a wash-out in more senses than one, though Reynham Castle in 1937 had its moments, but when read after a perusal of the Cavandale Abbey series the absence of finesse is only too evident. The Soames series of 1938 is cleverly constructed, but it lacks the trimmings we expect with our Christmas fare. The Lamb series of 1939 had one or two fine sequences, especially when Mr. Bunter, smoking one cigar after another, expatiated to his hopeful son on the sacrifices that war must entail, and had the story ended before term began instead of being allowed to collapse into a series of repetitive incidents, the reputation of the Lamb series might well stand higher today.



Naturally enough, opinions differ on the relative merits of the various series, but there can be little dispute about the attraction of the Magnet at Christmas time. The inevitable snow, the slides in the quad, snow-ball fights, jolly parties, and the mysterious intruder (often taking a spectral form) - all combined to rouse and excite the youthful reader, so much so, indeed, that looking over the old festive numbers today I am aware of a sudden tugging of the heart-strings as they bring back unforgettable memories of happy days long past.

* * * * *

LET'S BE CONTROVERSIAL

No. 118. THE LAST OF THE CHRISTMAS DOUBLES

Fifty years ago, as Christmas approached in 1917, an era ended. Up till then, it had been the custom to publish a double number of most of the Companion Papers, at least at Christmas time, and often to mark other seasons of the year. With Christmas 1917, the boys enjoyed what were to be the last of them, though none can have been aware of it at the time.

It seems likely that readers were pleasantly surprised towards the close of 1917 to find that the old custom was still to be observed. In point of fact, it was quite an astonishing occurrence. In recent months, the number of pages had been reduced in all the weeklies. The editor had harped continuously on the shortage of paper, and had exhorted readers to "order in advance" to make sure of securing copies. Sadly, readers had accepted things as one of the results of the war.

And then, out of the blue, came a Christmas Double Number for the whole darn lot. Some readers may cynically have wondered whether the paper shortage could really be as bad as the editor had been making out, and whether or not those cuts in size had not been the means merely of reducing costs for the publishers. Others may have seen it as a sign of promise that



matters were improving and the paper situation was coming back to normal.

The last named must have been disappointed, for within a week or two after the double number, the Boys' Friend was cut in size yet once again and within a few months the Popular was to disappear from the shops altogether, pro tem.

It is necessary to point out that the Boys' Friend had never been cut so drastically as the other papers. During 1917, while the Gem and Magnet only offered 16 pages, the Boys' Friend comprised 12 large sheets which were the equivalent of 24 pages of Gem and Magnet size. So when, in early 1918, the Boys' Friend was reduced to 8 pages, it merely fell in line with the others.

This long delay in reducing the size of the Boys' Friend suggests that the editor was particularly anxious to make a success of that paper. This is further substantiated by the fact that for 3 years Charles Hamilton had concentrated on Rookwood to the detriment of St. Jim's and Greyfriars, while Rookwood had now been joined by the superb Cedar Creek stories. In fact, as we pointed out last month, in those 3 years there had only been 3 substitute Rookwood stories in the Boys' Friend.

Without any doubt, the Boys' Friend Double Number of 1917 was by far the most attractive of all the Christmas Doubles of the Companion Papers this year. There was a splendid double length story of Cedar Creek, under the title of "Frank Richards' Christmas." It was the plum of the Christmas stories, flowing over with the most delightful festive atmosphere. It had the well-deserved honour of being perfectly illustrated on the cover by a little-known artist named Robert Strange. Some years back, we reproduced this fine B.F. cover, on a Christmas cover of the Digest. The story was reprinted later on in the Holiday Annual, under the title "How Father Christmas Came to White Pine."

Supporting this story, in the 1917 B.F. Christmas Double, was a long Rookwood story "Jimmy Silver's Guest." In addition, there were seasonable stories of the Highcliffe



Merry Christmas



chums and of Bagshot, respectively. To the best of my knowledge, this was the only time Bagshot featured in a story as a separate entity. These two stories may have been by sub writers, but they certainly helped to make an outstanding Christmas special. And, of course, there were other series and serials running at the same time in the Friend.

The Double Numbers of the Gem and the Magnet this year made a poor show beside that of the Boys' Friend.

In 1916, Hamilton had written the Magnet Christmas tale; Pentelow had written the Gem's. In 1917, the changes were rung. Pentelow wrote the Magnet's, Hamilton the Gem's. Am I seeing a little too far when I wonder whether this did not happen by chance? Is it impossible to imagine that one said to the other: "We'll change over this year!"?

But there is a little bit more to it than that. The Gem's story was "The Shadow of the Past" and the title, perhaps, had a shade of meaning not intended by the author. There has never been the slightest suggestion that this tale was not written by Charles Hamilton, and there is no doubt that it was. All the same, it is not a particularly good story.

It reintroduced Outram, but it never recaptured the power of the two yarns in which he had made his initial appearance some eighteen months before. There was snow on Wayland Moor, and there was a haunting of a barn, but no real Christmas atmosphere.

One of the main backgrounds for the story was Pepper's barn. It was here that Outram hid himself, and played ghost in order to keep inquisitive folks distant. But both Mr. Pepper and his barn were the creations of Pentelow - and recent creations at that. So recent, in fact, that when "Shadow of the Past" was written, the tales introducing Pepper and his barn were most likely still in manuscript form.

It is interesting to note the following extract from "Shadow of the Past":

"They turned into Pepper's field, and approached the barn, which loomed up dimly in the mist.

The barn was a somewhat solid structure. The door was flush with the ground, but the ground sloped under it, and at the back the floor was several feet above ground level. The space below was bricked in, with a door, and was used as a storehouse. In that somewhat dismal recess under the barn, the great Grundy had, on a celebrated occasion, spotted Mr. Pepper counting his miser's hoard. But the half-subterranean storehouse was unused now; the barn was wholly

devoted to the uses of the St. Jim's Parliament. The building was tenanted by the dog Binks, but the fags did not mind Binks. They were quite friendly with Binks."

Pepper's barn, the St. Jim's Parliament, the miser's hoard, and the dog Binks were all recent Pentelow creations. Yet they feature in this Hamilton story "The Shadow of the Past."

It is, of course, possible that Pentelow himself wrote the above paragraph and inserted it into "Shadow of the Past." If he did, it would seem to be an extremely conceited and high-handed action. But is it really likely that he did anything of the sort? On the other hand, it is a clumsy paragraph.

It is hardly feasible that, in order to introduce Pepper's barn, Pentelow considerably re-wrote the whole of "Shadow of the Past" so that Outram should hide himself in that particular spot. If, in fact, Hamilton had hidden Outram somewhere else, in a place later altered by Pentelow, then just where was that "somewhere else"?

I, personally, do not doubt that Charles Hamilton used these creations of Pentelow. We can any of us believe what we want to believe, but in my book, from my study of the stories, I am convinced that evidence points to Hamilton being in accord with the system that he acted as the king-pin while a number of stories were written by other writers.

A few weeks after "The Shadow of the Past," he contributed "Jack Blake's Hun" which again contained plenty about Pentelow's St. Jim's parliament. This parliament business was always a rather stodgy affair, but Hamilton infused some light, amusing lines, in contrast to the rather hammy hand of the creator. In "Jack Blake's Hun," Hamilton wrote, in characteristic style:

"It was the ambition of Tom Merry & Co to make the St. Jim's Parliament as like as possible to the respected and revered institution on the banks of the Thames. And, indeed, there was a certain resemblance, inasmuch as the meeting was rich in vociferous voices, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing."

A week or two later, in "Number Nine on the Warpath," Hamilton was once again relating adventures in connection with this tedious Parliament.

At this stage, it is perhaps fitting to mention that an earlier St. Jim's Parliament had been created by Hamilton in early blue cover days, but there is nothing at all to show that this 1917 parliament was in any way linked with that of a decade earlier.

Before the end of 1917, Hamilton was to write, for the Magnet, a

story entitled "Flap's Brother." The star parts were played by the Derwents, the "Twins from Tasmania" serial by Pentelow, then running in the Gem.

Why, if Charles Hamilton was antagonistic to Pentelow and bitterly opposed to the system of substitution as it was carried out, did he co-operate to this extravagant extent? We can, if we like, assume that Charles Hamilton, the A.P.'s most valuable asset, was bullied into using substitute creations - that he was afraid of losing his job. But was he the type of man to be bullied? We can, if we like, believe that he went cap in hand to Pentelow and tried to curry favour with that gentleman. Was he the type to try to curry favour with anyone? When we consider these points, we might recall that five years later he was again introducing Mr. Erasmus Zachariah Pepper and his notorious barn.

Well, so much for "The Shadow of the Past" and what came immediately after. That Gem Christmas Number also contained a St. Jim's Who's Who which gave Cousin Ethel as "Miss Edith Cleveland," and listed Julian's uncle as "Mr. Isidore Moss." Luckily, in the nineteen-sixties, we haven't been blessed with a "Prospectus" of St. Jim's.

And what of the Magnet Christmas Double Number for 1917? I suppose there may have been a more stodgy Greyfriars tale than "The Greyfriars Christmas Party," but I doubt it. Certainly, there were some worse written sub tales, but they, at least, were funny in their inanities. This one was heavy as lead, minus the remotest sparkle, and not even unintentionally entertaining. The plot (if one can call it a plot) was a contrived absurdity. Fourteen boys from Greyfriars and St. Jim's spent Christmas at Greyfriars because they had nowhere else to go. Mr. Prout was in charge. They were joined by one or two remote relatives. Hurree Singh had hurt himself, so he stayed too, and, of course, Bunter was there. As if the sons of wealthy parents overseas would remain on at school over a Christmas vacation!

Among the forlorn lot were Tom Brown, Squiff, Inky, Koumi Rao, Clifton Dane, Wun Lung, Hop Hi, Fishy, and a caricature of Buck Finn.

The Famous Five appeared only in a brief episode at the beginning. In the sequel, the following week, they were just briefly mentioned at the end. If the author thought that he was providing a novelty for Christmas by excluding the main characters from this dismal little affair, he was sadly in error.

The most memorable factor of those Christmas Double Numbers of fifty years ago - the last of the Doubles - is that the Boys' Friend

was so outstandingly superior to the others. It shone like a star at the top of the Christmas tree that Yuletide of 1917.

CONTROVERSIAL ECHOES

JOHN TROVELL: That Charles Hamilton and Leonard Shields were at the peak of their professions during the Golden Age of the Magnet, was a happy coincidence responsible for the success of the paper, and one wonders how many regular readers were first attracted to the Magnet by the appealing cover illustrations of that period.

The great series of the Golden Age such as the China, Brander, Wharton Rebellion, etc., owe much to the genius of Shields for the outstanding success that they achieved.

The papers that made them Stars, in turn found fame from the combined efforts of author and artist in producing work that would have lost much of its appeal without the often underrated importance of the artists work.

FRANK LAY: I thoroughly enjoyed your piece on the artists and have always felt it a pity that many very good artists, such as the one you particularly mention, J. Abney Cummings, did not achieve more fame simply because they did not have the luck to illustrate those papers which are so much in demand to-day. The finest artist of them all was undoubtedly Warwick Reynolds but as you say his work in the Gem is not a fair criterion of his ability.

Artists, like writers, were working for a living, and, knowing in advance how much they would be paid for a particular series of sketches, had very little inducement to give of their best. One exception to this was E. E. Briscoe who was in all things a perfectionist and although he had many glaring faults, particularly in his figure drawing, some of his work must have taken him hours and been most unremunerative. To anyone who is interested I would refer them to his work for the Pink Union Jacks, the Boys Realm and similar. Arthur Jones is another artist who we associate particularly with the Nelson Lee and The Thriller. Whilst he was not in the front rank these papers suited his style and when his work was absent they lost a distinct quality.

J. TWELLS: In "Let's Be Controversial," about artists, it states that the "Nelson Lee" may have been handicapped by the lack of a good regular artist. Now, to me, Arthur Jones will always be the "Lee," for although he was dropped (do we know why?) when the mag. was enlarged, his illustrations for many years had something, life if you like, that the other artists, with their inability to draw more than

two or three types of faces, hadn't got.

PETER HANGER: I am surprised to learn from this month's "Let's Be Controversial" that you have such a high opinion of the illustrators. As far as I am concerned, they just about passed muster, but it wasn't very long before I came to the conclusion that they weren't very good.

No! I could easily have done without the illustrations. Then any illusions would have been my own, influenced by no one except, of course, Charles Hamilton.

GEORGE SELLARS: Dear old Mac was part of the Gem, as Chapman was of the Magnet, and Wakefield of Rookwood. In all their work, one could usually pick out the individual characters. Mac's work was very clear cut and accurate, and I think that Reynolds was rather good in his portraits of St. Jim's.

* * * * *

R E V I E W

THE BILLY BUNTER PICTURE BOOK

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FOR SALE or EXCHANGE

Stones of Venice 3 vols. and Byron's Poetical Works both from the personal library of Charles Hamilton and autographed by him.

Edwy Searles Brooks: The Strange Case of the Antlered Man, (as Berkley Gray "Mr. Mortimer Gets The Jitters"), (As Edward Thornton "Whoopee at Westchester," "Wally Davenport's Dizzy Blond," "The Schoolboy Racketeer"); (As Reginald Browne "Schoolboys Album 1947," "The Rival Schools," "Whoopee at Westchester," "The Schoolboy Home Guard," "The Pirates' Cove Affair," "Fortescue of the Fourth."

Wodehouse - The Head of Kays; Warren Bell - Tales of Greyhouse, Dormitory 8; Talbot Baines Reed - Fifth Form at St. Dominics, Master of the Shell, Willoughby Captains. Gunby Hadath - Schoolboy Grit, According to Brown Minor, Playing the Game, The Swinger, The March of Time, John Mowbray Barkworth's Last Year. John Finnemore - Teddy Lester's Schooldays, Three School Chums, The Empire's Children, Batchelder A Born School Captain. Desmond Coke - The Bending of A Twig. Ascott Hope Stories of School Life. A.B. Cooper - Noel Hamilton's Probation. Gordon Stables - Twixt School & College. Avery - Mobsley's Mohicans. N. Hewitt - An Exciting Term at Monks Eaton. Barrow-North - Jerry Dodds Millionaire. Charles Turley - Godfrey Marten Schoolboy. Visiak & Hawkins - The War of the Schools. Escott-Inman - The Second Form Master of St. Cyril's. Rhoades - Our Fellows at St. Marks, Quills. Mansford - Bully, Fag & Hero. Goodyear - Three Joskins at St. Jude's. Cleaver - Vengeance of Jeremy Poole, Browne Follows the Clue. Rochester - The Greystones Mystery, Haunted Hangars, Lair of the Vampire, Despot of the World, Black Wing. Edgar - Skid Kennedy Speed King. Gilson - Lost Empire The Fire-Gods presentation copies from author, Race Round the World, Lost Column. Broadsheet Novels Nos. 1-6 complete set. Many other scarce Hentry, Brereton, Collingwood, etc.

W A N T E D: Good loose copies or volumes containing any one or more of the following: GEMS: Some issues between 801 and 832; 953, 954, 959, 960, 967, 970, 974, 975, 981, 984, 985, 986, 987, 989, 990, 992, 993, 995. POPULARS: 401, 403, 407, 409, 413, 415, 421, 422, 427, 433, 441, 442, 466, 467, 474.

ERIC FAYNE, EXCELSIOR HOUSE, GROVE RD., SURBITON, SURREY.

NELSON LEE COLUMN

CONDUCTED BY JACK WOOD

As yet another Christmas comes round, may I take this opportunity of wishing all readers of the Column a very happy Christmas and a Prosperous New Year.

I would also thank all my many colleagues who have kept the Lee flag flying with their monthly contributions.

I am most grateful to all of them, and so, I'm sure, are all Lee-ites at a time when our thoughts will be moving especially to those Christmas series so delightfully portrayed by Edwy Searles Brooks over so many years.

So to our editor-in-chief, the duplicating agency staff and all our readers, may this, and all your Christmases, be bright.

* * * * *

"A MERRY ST. FRANK'S XMAS" or CHRISTMAS TITLES

by William Lister

"A snowy twilight, silence and harsh whiteness with an occasional wind lashing like a frozen whip, an eerie mauve light over everything and in the low carvings of the snow banks, bleak and twisted trees. Forsaken, forsaken." and here we have a quote from a Christmas story - let me follow it with a little more - "The snow sifted down at twilight, soft as an unuttered prayer and as beautiful and patient. It was Xmas Eve and there was a fine fragrance of an onion stuffing being prepared in readiness for the fat goose." Or again - "A great storm blew up in a twinkling of an eye and the train bogged down in Lamey station, and the wild white winds whipped through a man's clothing and turned his blood to ice." And are these quotes from Charles Dickens? Indeed not, nor are they quotes from Frank Richards or E. S. Brooks but from a story in "To See The Glory" by Taylor Caldwell entitled "Father Donahue and the Shadow of a Doubt" and thereby hangs my tale.

During the course of the year, one of the contributors to "Collectors' Digest" touched on this matter of story titles and it seemed to be his opinion that a good title to a tale was half the battle, a matter on which I am inclined to agree. Furthermore he wondered if the old tales had better titles than today's (maybe he had in mind the Sexton Blake Library) and again I would think this is so.

However, let me return to "Father Donahue and the Shadow of a Doubt." Even if I had had the book in the house over Xmas and found

myself short of Xmas reading I would never have looked under that title and would thus have deprived myself of a very enjoyable short Xmas story.

There can be no doubt that when E. S. Brooks or Frank Richards got round to Xmas we got a title to whet our appetites. I think particularly of Edwy Searles Brooks, as I must confess most of my Christmases were spent among the boys of 'St. Frank's.' In fact I was a lover of Xmas, so the 'Nelson Lee' got read about three times on these special occasions. I soaked myself in their seasonable atmosphere. But let us now take a look at the titles of some of these tales and see if the very title itself does not send the thrill of Xmas joy and adventure through your very bones (old as those bones may be by now).

1916 to 1920 saw "A Xmas of Peril," "The Phantom of Tregellis Castle," "Dorrie's Xmas Party," "Yuletide of Mystery," "The Haunted School," and "The Xmas Plot," anyone of which, you will agree has the spirit of the festive season embodied in it. For 1922 to 1926 for example (and I am only giving an example) the reader should arm himself with the E. S. Brooks' catalogue compiled by Bob Blythe for a further development of these thoughts.

"The Ghost of Somerton Abbey," "Archie's Pantomime Party," "The Spectre of Handforth Towers," "Handforth's Ghost Hunt," "The Schoolboy Santa Claus," "The Ghost of St. Frank's," "The Ghost of Glenthorne Manor," or "Ghosts of Dorrimore Castle" and there you have it.

Those of us who read of Ezra Quirke in "The Haunted Schoolboy" and "Return of Ezra Quirke" will not have forgotten what Xmas could mean with a copy of "The Nelson Lee."

When I think of all the snow that has fallen within the pages of those titles, of all the snowdrifts, parties, Xmas puddings; of the number of Xmas crackers pulled, of a most fantastic array of ghosts (that usually turned out harmless after all) how can I help but wish you all "A Merry St. Frank's Xmas."

* * * * *

STRANGE and MYSTERIOUS

by R. J. Godsave

If there was one thing in which Edwy Searles Brooks excelled it was the mysteries created in his fertile brain that were really mysteries.

Obviously, I was not possessed of a detective turn of mind, as I must confess that I could never even arrive at a solution of a plot or have an inkling of how it was done during the unfolding of the story,

and had to wait impatiently for the final episode of the series.

Some of his best series dealt with occult phenomena, such as the Ezra Quirke and Nerki the magician series. Even the brighter readers of the Nelson Lee Library must have had difficulty in finding a solution to the strange and mysterious happenings, and had to await the final story.

The fact that Nerki did not cast a shadow as did ordinary mortals must have baffled many readers. When the plot was unravelled the solution appeared to be quite simple, although in reality it was complicated.

Simplicity, of course, is the key of all successful plots, having the effect of making things seem far from simple as the reader is usually looking for an extravagant explanation.

Such was the grip that Brooks had on at least one of his readers that no earthly explanation seemed possible, and I was more or less forced to the conclusion that the only explanation was the supernatural.

Some years ago I attended a séance held in the home of a friend, and although I adopted an obstructive attitude to the proceedings I was unable to prevent the table at which we were sitting from rising from the floor. I knew my friend's parents well, and am convinced there was no trickery as the séance was conducted in a more light-hearted manner than is usual on these occasions.

If Brooks excelled himself in stories of occult phenomena he was equally good in the writing of more mundane mysteries which shewed that he possessed all the qualities of a good author.

* * * * *

RETURN BOUT

WELL, I'LL BE JIGGERED! writes Len Wormull

Well I'll be jiggered! All I did was give Handy a dose of his own medicine - a right hook - and I find myself labelled "pedant." Not really surprising, perhaps. I seem to recall certain correspondents being branded "ignorant gate-crashers" for incurring the High Lama's displeasure. But I won't go into that, not being irascible!

Newcomer to the hobby? Hardly. Only recently I had a letter from a reader asking if I was the same person to whom he sold Magnet No. 1 in the thirties. I replied that I remembered the occasion very well, and that he parted with it for 2/-! My St. Frank's passport dates from 1929, perilously near the cataclysm which was to mark the end. Even at ten I resented the policy change in 1930, preferring school to detective stories. Having barely started, and knowing not

of past epics, I saw it to its conclusion. After which began a relentless search for back numbers taking me right up to the war. My impressive Lee collection, together with a more-impressive Magnet collection, became war casualties. Things were never quite the same again. When nostalgia finally triumphed, it brought with it the gloomy realisation that I wasn't half the boy I used to be. The adult had taken over, completely forgetting what it was to think and feel as a youngster. I saw things differently.

Now back to Handy. How can a connoisseur like Jim Cook state that no one has really discovered why the N.L.L. ended, when the paper's degeneration was such that readers had every just cause to abandon ship? E.S.B. himself has admitted story deterioration due to editorial "help." Was not this in itself a reason? I would refer him to the fine series of articles by Norman Pragnell a few years ago on contributory causes. As I see it, Handforth was the principal character during the period of decline. When a star performer fails to attract an audience the obvious conclusions must be drawn. A real-life Handy, as then portrayed, would soon be out of a job. He had his moments, of course. One of these was the memorable "Death of Walter Church" series. Not only was it one of the most moving stories Brooks wrote, but I regard it as the finest piece of Handforth writing to appear. For one brief moment we saw Handy as a character with warmth and compassion - a side to his nature which, unhappily, we were never to see again. He could have been a great star, instead of which we are left with the memory of a marathon performance with only the occasional sparkle. Despite his shortcomings, I still think the Nelson Lee was a great little paper. In my own "confused and pedantic" way, I still find myself irresistibly drawn to the very first boys' paper I ever read. But I have long since taken my head out of the sand.

I'M LEN'S SECOND writes Frank Lay

Some two years ago I voiced much the same opinion as Len Wormull re Handforth although I went a bit further and coupled his name with Bunter as the two most obnoxious characters in schoolboy fiction, but my words would seem to have been unread as very little protest was raised. I did not go so far as Len in saying that the demise of the Lee was partly due to the over-playing of Handforth. There is little doubt that the Lee was at its peak from 1920 to 1926. From 1926 we find Handforth taking over from Nipper as the leading character and with some exceptional series allowed a gradual deterioration in quality. Until 1926 Handforth was only a prominent character. He was

even then bombastic, self-opinionated and arrogant but kept within reasonable bounds. I would hesitate to use the words "lacking warmth" as one can recall many occasions when he was far from "cold" in an emotional sense.

I do not think my old friend Jim Cook is fair to call Len a pedant and he is certainly not a new-comer to the hobby. I have known him for many years and he has a very wide general knowledge not confined to the Nelson Lee but embracing the Magnet, Gem and other papers and when he does break into print he has something worthwhile to say. I was glad to see John Tomlinson backing him up and I am sure that if a poll of the Lee's most popular character was conducted Handforth would be well down the list. He may be "lovable" but the best stories in the Lee, and there are a good many, are those where he does not take the lion's share of the limelight.

MAGNETS, HOLIDAY ANNUALS, GREYFRIARS S.O.Ls., offered for EXCHANGE. MY WANTS INCLUDE: Magnets 874, 876, 877, 879-888, 925-930. 958, 959, 975-979, 995, 1007, 1012, 1013, 1038, 1043, 1071, 1084-1086, 1110, 1133, 1134, 1255-1261, 1264, 1265, 1269, 1271, 1273-1275. St. Jim's S.O.Ls: 196, 214, 258. King of the Islands 4d. B.F.L. 442, 589. Rovers: 718, 719, 726, 727, 732, 740. The above list represents my special wants and if you can offer from it, you can name your own terms. Other wants as follows: Rookwood S.O.L. 308. Cedar Creek 3d. B.F.Ls. 417, 465, 469, 473, 481, 485, 493, 497, 509. Cedar Creek S.O.L. 142, 178. Highcombe S.O.L. 290. Grimsdale S.O.L. 232, 238, 242, 248. Modern Boy No. 1. Champion 724-835. Comics years 1934-1940 specially Christmas (Double) Numbers. Skippers, Wizard, Adventure - most for the years 1936-1940. 4d. B.F.Ls. 334 (The Jungle Patrol), 684 (The Lion's Revenge). St. Frank's S.O.L. 396, 399, 402.

P. J. HANGER, 10, PARK SQUARE, KINGS HEATH, NORTHAMPTON.

W A N T E D: Boys Friends, Union Jacks, Pucks, B/Bills, etc.
FOR SALE: Bunters, Chums, Sexton Blakes, Annuals, Rainbows, etc.
PAYNTER, 30 BEECH ROAD, WYCOMBE MARSH, HIGH WYCOMBE, BUCKS.

SALE: Twelve Magnets, nine 1938 issues, three 1940; Nine Chips, all 1941. £2 the lot.

O. W. WADHAM, 12 MILITARY ROAD, LOWER HUTT, NEW ZEALAND.

NEWS OF THE CLUBS

MERSEYSIDE

Meeting - November 12th

Friends of the Merseyside Section have expressed concern at the apparent non-activity of our group over the past few months. The unpalatable truth of the matter is that from the very thriving section of a few years ago membership has gradually dwindled, for various reasons beyond our control, to a mere handful. Several of our most valued members "emigrated" to London, Nottingham, Barnsley and elsewhere: two or three very fine members, alas, passed away. Never a numerically large section, it so happened that when sickness prevailed, or some members were away on holiday, the attendance at meetings fell to a meagre three or four. Certainly insufficient to organise successful meetings.

In the spring, therefore, it was decided that the Section would not meet during the summer months, whilst holidays, etc., took their toll of attendance. Taken very reluctantly, this decision, nevertheless, appeared to be a sensible one.

We resumed on Sunday, 12th November, at Bill Windsor's residence, as usual, and, considering our small membership, the attendance was very satisfactory, the following being present: Bill Windsor, Pat Laffey, Bert Hamblett, Bill Galley, Jim Walsh, Jack Morgan and Frank Unwin. Naturally, the future of the Section was discussed, and it was unanimously agreed to continue the monthly meetings throughout the winter months, and, at the same time, to extend a very cordial invitation to our old friend, Norman Pragnell, and other ex-members, to join up with us again and ensure the continued existence of the Section. It is no use disguising the fact that every single new member is absolutely vital to us at the present time, and the regular attendance of present members a sheer essential towards the successful future of our meetings.

After the summer break, the renewal of our fellowship was most welcome, and letters were read from Frank Case, Don Webster, Tom Porter and David Hobbs, from America. The library did some good business, and the tone of the meeting was very enthusiastic and encouraging, and the "Time, gentlemen, please" signal came before we had completed our programme.

Our Christmas get-together will take place on Sunday, 10th December, at 6.30, and a most varied and entertaining festive programme will be provided - old films, music, quizzes, games etc., not to mention the customary Yuletide feed. If any members of other sections could see their way to putting in an appearance they would receive a very warm Merseyside welcome, and this, of course, also applies to our own Frank Case, Don Webster, Norman Pragnell and George Riley.

FRANK UNWIN

M I D L A N D

Meeting held October 31st, 1967

There was a good attendance of fourteen including, Mrs. Fleming the wife of Bert and the evening was given over to the treasurer, who arranged the whole programme.

The Anniversary Number and Collector's Item were this month: Union Jack No. 1151 dated 31st Oct. 1925 and entitled "The Million Pound Double" - 42 years old to the day and Monster Library No. 3 "The Tyrant of St. Frank's" published as a reprint in 1926 Nelson Lee Library O.S. Nos. 187 to 194. The Monster had a beautiful full coloured cover and was priced 1/-.

There was a good deal of comment on the Chesterfield gathering and all agreed it had been a pleasant trip and very much worthwhile.

Norman Gregory's programme consisted of an unusual quiz based on the advertisements

which appeared in the Magnet over the years, followed by a game which consisted of Popular Boys' Book titles. Norman concluded with a general discussion on "The Power of a Name." In his quiet but firm manner he kept the meeting entertained for almost the whole evening; no mean task. He came out with flying colours particularly as his programme was very much off the beaten track.

The news that John Wernham is producing a new book, The Billy Bunter Picture Book, was welcomed by members and no doubt all will endeavour to obtain copies.

Members sent a "Get Well Card" to Frank Case's wife who has been in hospital. She is apparently now out of hospital and has to return for treatment.

The programme next month should be interesting and after such a good attendance in October we expect another good turn out.

The meeting will be held on the 28th November at The Birmingham Theatre Centre at 7.30.

J. F. BELLFIELD

Correspondent.

N O R T H E R N

Meeting held 11 November 1967 - Saturday

By car, by train and by 'bus (and owing to a local shortage of the last-named) on foot - members and friends arrived for the Film Evening which is quite an annual event now. The Library business is always conducted first, and Kenneth Whittaker could not stay after that, and also Chairman Geoffrey Wilde, after greeting all, had another unavoidable engagement. However, Vice Chairman Jack Wood took charge and 22 members and friends settled down to the evening's programme.

Treasurer Librarian Gerry Allison gave a very satisfactory financial report, and went on with news from postal members. We were pleased to learn that Cliff Smith is rejoining us from St. Anne's on Sea. The News Letter from London gave details of the new book from the Charles Hamilton Museum, and many present looked forward to possessing it. A general discussion on the various professional re-prints followed. Jack Wood had information regarding a book about Bessie Bunter from Merlin Books, by Hilda Richards. From Cliff Webb came an idea that all hobbyists should write to Fleetway House on the same day with a list of suggestions for re-prints.

Following this discussion Mollie Allison told of the very interesting joint meeting between Midland & Northern members at the Portland Hotel which she had enjoyed in Chesterfield.

The eagerly awaited final episode of our Serial was now given by Harry Barlow. Over the past six months, listening to the turns and twists and flights of fancy injected by others, Harry has groaned in comical dismay at the thought of winding it up. But as we expected he rose splendidly to the occasion. The villain turns out to be Soames. He knocks out the disguised Wibley - taking the fake plans! Wibley, happily recovered, is the hero of the hour, and received congratulations from Mr. Quelch and Ferrers Locke - though, Bunter, as usual, swanks that he was the one who did it all.

A reading from "The Performing Flea" the collection of letters written to a friend by P. G. Wodehouse was now given by Jack Allison. First, a description of the animal waifs who were sheltered at Rensenburg, and then an account of "How to become an Internee!" Both extracts laced with the refreshing Wodehouse humour.

The refreshments were now handed round, and then Harry Barlow (again!) got out his colourful films flashing on the screen. Scenes from the Yorkshire Dales, Harrogate, and Switzerland first. Then a fantasy made by Harry himself. We saw a country lane named "Oak Lane" and a sign post "To Friardale," followed by schoolboys in an old stone-built Grammar School. It gave us the feeling of really seeing Greyfriars. Harry wound up with home scenes and police dogs training, and, at the end, a real old-timer of Charlie Chaplin - the greatest comic of all time. And so we took our leave.

REMINDER: Next Meeting Saturday, 9th December, 1967 - THE CHRISTMAS PARTY.

M. L. ALLISON Hon. Sec.

L O N D O N

Sunday, November 19th, saw the very first exhibition of the Nelson Lee Museum when members congregated at Bob Blythe's Dollis Hill home. A room upstairs had been set apart for the numerous exhibits and here was a display to gladden the hearts of all Nelson Lee supporters. Most members had a perusal ere the start of the meeting downstairs in the room where both Nelson Lee and Hamilton librarians were doing very good business.

Don Webster opened the proceedings by welcoming Maurice Black of Margate who had come along with Ben Litvak.

Don Webster proposed a motion that a hearty vote of thanks be given to Bob Blythe for his untiring work on the Nelson Lee Museum. Bob Acraman seconded and it was an unanimous decision. After good reports from both librarians, Roger Jenkins gave out particulars of the new Charles Hamilton Museum publication. Copies from John Wernham at 15/-, this includes the postage, otherwise members attending can collect their copies at the Christmas meeting at Hume House, East Dulwich, London, S.E.22. on Sunday, December 17th. Price here 12/6d.

From Magnet 187, Larry Peters read a couple of amusing chapters, featuring Dick Russell when his father had financial difficulties and the auction sale conducted by the Remove Form to help Russell. Bunter's ventriloquism with Loder was the comedy spot. Very well received and greatly enjoyed.

Laurie Sutton's Double Quiz proved too good for all competitors. The members to get the most answers were Don Webster, Bert Staples and Roger Jenkins.

Len Packman read interesting items from club newsletter number three, potted personality was Jim Parratt. Len also brought a copy of the Modern School Magazine, number 42, for members to look at. Then followed one of Laura's famous feeds.

After tea, Bob Blythe showed coloured slides of Edwy Searles Brooks, Frances Brooks and the famous study, where quite a good number of the stories were written. Pictures of both Bob and Len Packman were also shown. After the slide show, Bob exhibited more manuscripts, letters, Monster libraries, Detective Weeklies, Thrillers, etc., truly a collector's dream. Grateful thanks were recorded to both Bob Blythe and helpmate Len Packman, for arranging to collect the exhibits and the former especially, truly a labour of love. The secretary was asked to write to Frances Brooks expressing the thanks of all present and Leites everywhere for placing at their disposal all the material on show.

Thus the second autumn Nelson Lee meeting concluded with thanks to the hosts, Bob and Laura Blythe. Homeward bound with pleasant memories, but do not forget to let Len Packman know if attending the Christmas meeting.

Uncle Benjamin.

F O R S A L E POSTAGE INCLUDED:

HOLIDAY ANNUALS 1938, 1939, 2/6 each. C.D. ANNUALS 1960, 1963, 1964; "Young Duchess" (Reynolds) 12/6 each. GREYFRIARS SOLS 85, 111, 193, 225, 231, 241, 255, 269-271-273-275; MAGNET 338; Y.F.T. 20, 24, 30, 69, all 10/- each. MAGNETS 1045, 1046, 1048, 1049, 1126-1128, 1130-1131, 1161-1165. 8/6 each. 6 SCHOOL FRIENDS 1920-1921; 6 SCHOOLGIRLS OWN LIBS 1939-1940; GEMS 1157-1200, all 6/6 each. 4 WONDERLAND TALES 1919; 4 TIGER TIME WEEKLYS 1921, 6/- each. 20 CHAMPIONS 1944-1946; 50 WIZARDS 1947-1949; 1/3 each. CHRISTMAS NUMBERS; COMIC CUTS 1912; COMIC LIFE 1914; LOT-O-FUN 1916; BOYS' FRIEND 1919; ALLY SLOPER'S HALF HOLIDAY 1922 20/- each. BUTTERFLY 1912; LITTLE FOLKS 1916 10/- each. S.A.E. PLEASE! GERRY ALLISON, 3, BINGLEY ROAD, MENSTON, ILKLEY.

FOR SALE: Excellent red Magnets No. 208 "Tempted But True;" No. 266 "Bob Cherry's Secret" 21 each. No. 145 "Coker's Catch," coverless and rather rough 6/-. Magnets, No. 860, 899, 981 8/6 each. Nos. 1018, 1048, 1175, 10/- each. (No. 1175 is "The Menace of Tang Wang," but it is on the rough side.) No. 1445 7/6. Gems: Blue Gem No. 253 (rather rough copy) 6/-. No. 1000 8/6. 1190 (Christmas No.) 8/6. Nos. 1170 and 1137 (good copies) 7/6 each. No. 1452 (Christmas No. Reprint of "Nobody's Study") 7/6. Postage extra on all items. S.a.e. first. ERIC FAYNE, EXCELSIOR HOUSE, GROVE ROAD, SURBITON.

The Postman Called

(Interesting items from the Editor's letter-bag)

ROSS STORY (Eastbourne)

Congratulations on the 21st Birthday Number of the C.D. Like the Christmas pudding, packed full of good things and something for everybody.

A letter from Nipper, a 'convert' to the Nelson Lee and Mr. Buddle. Who could ask for more?

BILL LOFTS (London): Laurie Sutton is correct. G. R. Samways did use the pen-name of "Paul Masters" and other names in boys' fiction. These seem fated never to appear in print like Mr. Quelch's History of Greyfriars. I don't doubt that a close perusal of substitute stories 100% written by certain writers, can identify perhaps the author in question, but a point I have tried to make unsuccessfully is that many substitute stories were so heavily pruned and rewritten by editorial staff who interloped their own phrasing etc; that it is a sheer impossibility to tell by style who wrote them! Fred Gordon Cook certainly could not identify all his old stories for this reason - and was always outspoken of how the sub-editor Noel Wood-Smith had hacked his stories about. Mr. Cook did tell me that only one sure way to tell his MAGNET tales was the expression "known to posterity as the famous Five" which friend Laurie never mentioned.

CHARLIE DAY (Keighley): The Digest (and especially wonderful issues like the 21st Anniversary one) fulfils an urgent need in our lives, and, as each month approaches, builds up a sense of expectancy such as we only experienced when in our young days we were awaiting delivery of our Magnets and Gems. This is not just nostalgia. For me, the Digest brings with it its own quota of pure enjoyment and interest. Thank you for the delightful story of dear old Mr. Buddle. Don't let it be too long before we hear of him again. I think he is slowly but surely beginning to take his place in our affections, along with the immortals of our hobby.

R. GODSAVE (Leytonstone): Many thanks for the double birthday number of C.D. which certainly marked the occasion. With the usual excellent Buddle story it did take the appearance of a miniature Annual.

G. W. MASON (Dawlish): The twenty-first birthday, double number of "Collectors' Digest," complete with its nostalgic "Mr. Buddle" story, plus all the rest of our favourite features must have been a tremendous

hit with the rest of your readers, as it was with me. Congratulations and thanks!

A SHINING "STARR"

By L. S. Elliott

Although, of course, the names of Charles Hamilton, E. S. Brooks, and the main authors of the pre-war "Sexton Blake" saga, rank first with the enthusiasts in our hobby, there are other writers who have not been given the recognition they deserve.

One of these is Richard Starr, with whom, through the kindness of Penelope Wallace - daughter of the late, great, Edgar Wallace - I have been enjoying a regular correspondence of recent months.

On April 5th, 1968, he will be 90, but he still writes and remembers like a man many years younger. Some of the well-known papers for which he wrote include "Young Britain," "Chips," "Jester," "Picture Show," "Film Fun," and "The Thriller."

Under his non-de-plume of "LEWIS ESSEX," he wrote that fine story of the Slave Revolt "Spartacus," in the early issues of "Young Britain." As "RICHARD ESSEX" - "Marcus Buller, Detective." The long saga of "Kerry & Co." and the magazine "Kerry & Co's Gazette" appeared in "Young Britain," which started in 1919.

This last item was on the same style as "Greyfriars Herald," "St. Frank's Mag.," "Tom Merry's Weekly," etc., all purporting to be written by the characters involved. The non-de-plume of "FRANK GODWIN," gave us "Bold Robin Hood," which ran for a year - and which was illustrated by Gordon Browne, R.I., - also "Maxim Law, Detective," etc.

Both these yarns appeared in "Young Britain," a not sufficiently 'written about' paper.

"Chips" saw the first appearance of "Slade of the Yard," and "Slade Scores Again."

These stories were, thirteen years later, again serialised in "Film Fun," published as hard-backs by Herbert Jenkins and McBride in the U.S.A., and, finally, serialised yet again in "The Thriller."

In the heyday of that really remarkable paper - "The Thriller" - appeared enough new full-length stories of "Slade versus Lessinger," to allow Herbert Jenkins to publish seven more hard-cover books.

To quote Richard Starr's own words, "Edgar Wallace, Leslie Charteris ('The Saint') and I, were treading on each other's heels in "The Thriller" for a few years."

Finally, recently, Penelope Wallace in her Tallis Press, has issued both paper and hard-cover editions of "Slade Scores Again," under the revised title of the "Girl in Black."

Reverting to "Young Britain," for a moment, this paper was started by Harold Garrish, specially as a vehicle for Richard Starr's writings, when he - Starr - returned in April, 1919, from service in the Royal Flying Corps.

In "Jester," on April 10th, 1919, began "The Dauntless Three" (later "The Big Three") and this was the precursor of other series based on three main characters, such as "Kerry & Co.," and "Patrick O'Flynn." Another well known character was "Drummond Fife."

When "Picture Show" appeared, soon after the first World War - and the first film paper to appear in this country - the famous Herbert Allingham had started a serial story - "Free, Yet A Felon" - in the first issue.

He was unable to continue and he and Maud Hughes, the editress, invited Richard Starr to carry on the story which he did, in 11 instalments. Maud Hughes, incidentally, was Herbert Allingham's cousin, and aunt to that famous author of "Mr. Campion," etc., the late Margery Allingham, who had adopted Mr. & Mrs. Starr, as her "uncle and auntie," when a child.

Incidentally, Mr. Starr, does not agree with the theory that Herbert J. Allingham of "Ralph Rollington" fame, was a relation of Herbert and Margery Allingham.

To quote his own words: "You are quite right about Herbert Allingham being Margery's father. He wrote serials for "Jester," "Fun & Fiction," etc. I never heard of an

uncle of his, with the name of Herbert J. Allingham."

Another series which appeared in the "Jester," was "The Red Domino" which ran for five years and was after the style of Edgar Wallace's "Four Just Men."

Edgar Wallace and Penelope being friends of Richard Starr.

Apart from all these writings he wrote many yarns for women's and girls' magazines, under his own name and the nom-de-plume of "Stella Richards." These culminated in about 60 hard-cover published novels, and, with many other subjects he wrote about 1,000 short stories during a long writing life.

A Londoner, Richard Starr now lives in Sussex, and is probably Britain's senior crime writer. He was 22, when, after writing a number of short stories he, to once again use his own words, states: "I thought - well, this is getting me nowhere, so, I sat down and wrote a novel. It was terrible, but, incredibly, it achieved publication and, in two or three weeks, I found myself in Fleet St., as a reporter on the "Daily Mail" - and I didn't really know what a reporter was. I soon found out!"

For ten years he was a reporter and crime writer on the "Daily Mail," the "Daily Express" the "Evening News" and the late "Tribune." Then he 'went into the country' and wrote stories for boys' comics, girls' weeklies and various magazines as I have stated.

One of his editresses at this time was Mrs. Henry St. John Cooper. Does that name or its masculine counterpart, strike a chord with older readers?

On his return from the war, began his new career of writing, a little of which I have endeavoured to detail here.

Richard Starr, Richard Essex, Lewis Essex, Stella Richards, the Allinghams.

"Young Britain," "Chips," "Jester," "Film Fun," "Picture Show," "The Thriller."

All these names conjure up fond memories and entitle Mr. Starr to be remembered with Charles Hamilton, E. S. Brooks, H. Rider Haggard, Edgar Wallace and all those others who have given us pleasure in past years.

I will finish with a quote from the postscript to his last letter to me - P.S. "I am supposed to be dying of a thing called colitis. I am trying to last till Christmas. I shan't make it to my 90th birthday, which is 5th April, next year."

Well, I hope he is wrong, and that he does 'make it,' and that I can send both Xmas and birthday cards to Richard Starr.

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and a
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