

VOL. 23. STORY PAPER

Nº 276

COLLECTORS DIGEST

DECEMBER
1969

23



STORY PAPER COLLECTORS' DIGEST

STORY PAPER COLLECTOR

Founded in 1941 by

W. H. GANDER

COLLECTORS' DIGEST

Founded in 1946 by

HERBERT LECKENBY

Vol. 23

No. 276

DECEMBER 1969

Price 2s 3d

YOUR EDITOR'S CHRISTMAS CHAT.

CHRISTMAS IS CHRISTMAS

Christmas has changed a good deal since most of us were children. In those days we made our own amusements. A few party games and a sing-song round the piano, under the holly and mistletoe and paper garlands, gave us a glorious evening which sent us to bed tired and content. Perhaps we went to church on Christmas morning - the religious side of the festive season had not yet been obscured by commercialisation and the cynicism of cranks. The whole of December was made outstanding by the arrival of the special Christmas Numbers of the old papers. Comics like the Butterfly, Merry & Bright, and the Funny Wonder always came into their own for Yuletide. I suppose nobody makes her own mincemeat at home these days, but my mother always did. The whole evening set aside for the making of the mincemeat was always one of the highlights of the week preceding Christmas.

We still give presents; we still send cards; we still decorate our homes; yet I fancy that Christmas has lost something. I'm not quite sure what it is. There is much more money about, though, even in these days of the Welfare State, there are still poverty-stricken

households and people with nowhere to live, if we are to believe all we are told. There is much more noise. So far as I can see there is no less strife. The games and the piano have been replaced by the television set which, in most homes, will be grinding out its inanities throughout Christmas.

Yet Christmas is still Christmas, bringing with it so many pleasant memories. Probably, even if we had the chance, we should be reluctant to leave our comfortable old armchair and the hardworking TV set, and go back for an old-time Christmas.

Besides, after the turkey and the pud we can settle down against the radiator and re-read Christmas at Mauleverer Towers or maybe join the St. Frank's chums in some Christmas adventure. So what more do we want? And, of course, the C.D. Annual will be at hand to help you re-live some of the joys of the old days.

So here is your old-fashioned editor wishing you the jolliest of jolly Christmases, and everything you wish yourself for the New Year.

SOMETHING TO DO WITH SURFEITS

My English History is growing rusty, but I recall that at some time or other somebody or other died of a surfeit of lampreys. A few of us are in danger of being bored to death by a surfeit of television.

No longer do I switch on to so-called variety shows - those collections of indifferent singers bleating unintelligible songs and so-called comedians trying desperately hard to be funny with tasteless jokes, while studio audiences scream their heads off with lusty approval. They make me yearn too much for an old-style panto at Kingston Empire or a really good variety bill at Brixton Empress.

In a moment of weakness I switched on to something advertised as a thrilling story of detection. It was a mish-mash of snippets, switching sharply from one very short sequence to another even shorter sequence. I couldn't tell which were the crooks and which the detectives, and if there was any story-line at all it eluded me. For the sake of effect, it was accompanied throughout by strains from various musical instruments plus constant drum tattoos. The only real effect was to drown the dialogue, which wasn't much loss. I found myself sighing for a story like those of Leon Kestrel and Granite Grant. The writing of good detective yarns seems to be a dying art.

I see that, 50 years ago come Christmas, our own Danny was reading a Kestrel tale called "The Chink in the Armour." Lucky lad. I don't fancy I have ever read the story, but it must have been better than most of the modern rubbish. It couldn't have been worse.

FRANK CASE

One of my very earliest hobby correspondents was Frank Case. And when eventually I met him on the occasion of a meeting of our Merseyside club, I found him possessed of a simple, straightforward charm which was irresistible. He fought a brave fight against a long and painful illness, and lost. He died towards the end of October, still only in his early sixties.

Frank, with Don Webster, was a founder of our Merseyside club. His death is a great loss to us all. One of his Liverpool colleagues describes him as "one of nature's gentlemen." It is a fitting epitaph. I, personally, will miss him a lot.

A FINAL REMINDER

Publication day for Collectors' Digest Annual is drawing very near. We cannot print many extra copies to allow for readers who may have put off ordering till the last moment. To make sure of receiving the Annual, you should order your copy NOW.

THE EDITOR

FOR SALE — B.F.L's, S.O.L's, S.B.L's, Nugget, Boys and Champion Library, B/Bills, R/Hoods, O'er Land and Seas, Turpins, B/Bills, Modern World and Wonders, Heralds, Friends, Populars, Rangers, Pilots, Triumphs, New Boy's Worlds, Sports Budgets, Scouts, Boys Magazines, Champions, Lees, Plucks, Vanguard's, Marvels, etc. Magnets and Gems as available. Annuals include — GHA's, Chums, BOA's, Scout, Champion, Thompson Strang, England, Modern Boy, Hobby, Empire, etc. Comics, Film and Children's Annuals. Some post-war Journals also available. Good prices for collections or items surplus to requirements.

NORMAN SHAW, 84 BELVEDERE ROAD, LONDON, S.E.19.

Most evenings, 01, 771, 9857.

This story was published 63 years ago in an era of horse traffic, gas lighting, and muffin men. It was the second story to introduce the Swell of St. Jim's, but the fact that it stars Jack Blake makes it an additional rarity. Blake was the hero of the first St. Jim's tale ever written, but, surprisingly enough, he starred in very, very few stories in the next forty years. Now, throw a Yule Log on the fire and sit back and enjoy this old, old yarn.

STAUNCH CHUMS AT ST. JIM'S

"He's mad!" gasped Kerr.

"Mad as a hatter!" gurgled Fatty Wynn.

"Hold him, somebody!"

Figgins & Co. were strolling along Rylcombe Lane, which led from the school to the village. It was not surprising that Kerr and Wynn entertained sudden doubts as to their leader's sanity, for all at once Figgins, without the slightest word of warning, seized his companions by their collars and plunged with them through a gap in the frosty hedge. In a twinkling the three were rolling among the rusty weeds of a half-frozen ditch.

"Only just in time!" gasped Figgins.

"Mad!" repeated Kerr, with conviction.

"You silly ass, you've ricked my neck and spoiled my trousers."

"And my waistcoat," complained Wynn.

"There's two buttons gone off it. Sit on him, Kerr, while I punch his head."

"Hold on!" said Figgins. "Do you think I did it for fun, asses?"

"Well, what did you do it for?"

"Old Ratty is stalking us. I spotted him coming round the corner."

The Co. became serious at once. Mr. Ratcliff was master of the New House at St. Jim's, to which Figgins & Co. belonged. He was fussy and severe. Offences which Mr. Kidd of the School House would pass over lightly, were heavily visited by Mr. Ratcliff upon his boys. And when we mention that Figgins & Co. were supposed to be at this moment labouring over an imposition in the New House, their anxiety to avoid a meeting with their housemaster will be easily understood.

Kerr gave an expressive whistle.

"The Ratcliff beast! Are you sure?"

"Ass! Do you think I don't know his owl's face? And I believe he had spotted us. If he has, look out for squalls."

Figgins, putting his head through the opening of the hedge, warily scanned the lane they had so abruptly left. A tall, thin gentleman was coming from the direction of the village, and the expression of his sour face showed that he had seen the trio before they disappeared.

"Is he looking for us, Figgy?" asked Wynn.

"Yes."

"My hat! Then we're in for it."

"Perhaps not," Figgins thought rapidly. "He could only have caught a glimpse of us, and we may dodge him yet. Look here, if we cut across this field, we can get into the garden behind the Rylcombe Arms, and out through that into the village. Come on; no time for talk! Keep your nappers down, and sprint for it."

There was nothing else to be done. The hedge was high, and if they could get across the field before the housemaster reached the gap, they were saved. Keeping their heads low, the juniors sprinted across the field towards the row of leafless trees which marked the boundary of the long inn garden. A wide ditch, filled with water when the Ryle stream was high, had to be crossed on the further side. It was full up now, and the water lapped over the plank which crossed it by way of a bridge.

"This will be slippery," exclaimed Figgins.

He was right. The plank was indeed slippery, but the three juniors, treading with extreme care, crossed it in safety and scrambled over the garden gate. Figgins lingered for a moment, but he quickly rejoined his comrades. From the safe side of the gate, keeping well out of sight, they looked back across the field. A tall, thin figure stood in the gap of the hedge.

"The Ratcliff bird, as large as life," said Kerr. "He suspects where we are, Figg. You've made matters worse by this move."

"How do you make that out?"

"If he spots us now, he'll think we came here on purpose to come to the Rylcombe Arms to see that cad Joliffe and his set. That'll mean being taken up before the Head. Call yourself a blooming general?"

"Don't worry your poor little brain, my son," said Figgins. "He won't catch us. He could only have caught a glimpse of us in the lane. He won't spot us here."

"He's coming across the field," exclaimed Wynn.

"Let him come. He isn't across the plank yet. I noticed it was loose as I crossed it, and I stopped for a tick to --"

"To make it safe?"

"To make it looser," said Figgins serenely. "Keep down here in the shrubbery. We want to see him negotiate that plank. It ought to be worth seeing."

The Co. chuckled joyously. Keeping in cover, they watched the thin figure of the housemaster. He was coming towards the gate, but his expression was dubious now, so suddenly and completely had the trio disappeared. He meant to investigate a little further.

He reached the flowing ditch, and looked doubtfully at the plank. Treading very gingerly, he commenced to cross it. He had taken three steps when the further end of the plank slid downwards, and the housemaster plunged forward. He made a desperate effort to recover his balance, slipped from the plank, and splashed up to his knees in the water.

"Oh!"

The sudden shock made him gasp and flounder, and in a moment he was in the

deepest part of the ditch, with the water flowing round his waist. He struggled back to the bank he had left, and clutched at the rusty reeds and weeds. He was a dragged object as he dragged himself out.

"Oh! I shall catch cold, I'm sure I shall!"

His trousers were soaked, his sleeves wet, his tall hat sailing away merrily towards the river. The juniors, hidden on the other side of the gate, remained still as mice.

"The silly ass," whispered Figgins.

"He'll catch cold if he stands there grumbling. Why doesn't he make a run for it?"

Apparently the same thought came into Mr. Ratcliff's mind. Nothing but sharp exercise could save his nether extremities from freezing. He turned away, and started across the field at a good pace. He was thinking only of getting home and changing his clothes.

"This," said Figgins, "is what comes of trailing down innocent youths like a giddy blughound. Come along." Figgins led the way through the inn garden. "The sooner we get out of this place the better."

The juniors had excellent reasons for not wanting to be seen in the garden of the Rylcombe Arms. The inn was kept by a man of shady character, named Joliffe, against whom the Head of St. Jim's had solemnly warned all the boys. Joliffe was known to have induced some of the most reckless of the Upper Form boys at St. Jim's to visit his place, to initiate them into the mysteries of card-playing for money and betting on horses, and it had come to the knowledge of the Head, Joliffe and the Rylcombe Arms were strictly taboo.

There was a path beside the inn, leading out into the main street of Rylcombe, and it was by this that Figgins hoped to escape. But the luck of Figgins & Co. seemed to be out that day. Figgins suddenly whispered "Cave!" and dragged his companions into the shelter of an outhouse. Coming down the path beside the inn was a well-known figure -- that of a senior of the New House at St. Jim's.

"It's Sleath," whispered Figgins, peeping out cautiously. "I say, this is rotten. Fancy his coming on us like this!"

"Think he's after us?" asked Kerr.

"Acting in collusion with the Ratcliff bird?"

"No." Figgins shook his head. "I believe he's here on a visit to Joliffe. I've thought a lot of times he was one of the chaps that had dealings with that rotter. He's just the sort. But he'd be down on us, if he found us here, just the same."

"If he goes into the house we can slip past," said Kerr.

"He's not going in. He's talking to somebody at the side door. Hark!"

Sleath's voice could be distinctly heard. He was not a dozen paces from the juniors.

"I must see Mr. Joliffe. Tell him it's important. It's about the money."

"He can't see you now, sir," said a rougher voice. "He says you can give me what you've brought him."

"I haven't brought him anything. I want to explain --"

"Then I'm afraid there'll be a row, sir. It's no good. He won't see you."

"But I will see him. Let me pass!"

Figgins, looking cautiously round the corner of the shed, saw Sleath, with a white, angry face, push his way in, in spite of the man's real or pretended resistance. They were still speaking, but their voices died away indistinguishably inside the house.

"Come on," whispered Figgins.

The three juniors darted away, and in a minute were in the High Street of Rylcombe. There they breathed more freely.

"Now for a sprint to St. Jim's!"

exclaimed Figgins. "If we buck up, we may get there ahead of Ratty, and be nicely at work in our study when he arrives."

"What about Sleath?" said Kerr. "It's as plain as anything that he's in the habit of visiting that cad Joliffe, isn't it?"

"Looks like it, and looks as if he owed the man money," answered Figgins. "No business of ours. Buck up!"

And Figgins & Co. set out upon a run to the school. They covered the ground quickly, and when Fatty Wynn began to puff and pant, Figgins and Kerr took him by the arms, one on each side, and raced him along between them. They were still some distance from the school when they sighted the figure of the housemaster. Mr. Ratcliff was not accustomed to violent exercise, and he had soon dropped into a walk.

"We shall have to go round him," said Figgins.

They lost a quarter of a mile making a detour to escape the lynx eyes of Mr. Ratcliff, but when they reached the gates of St. Jim's, the housemaster was not yet in sight. The three scamps hurried to the New House, and were speedily at work in their study.

Ten minutes later the door of that apartment opened, and Mr. Ratcliff looked sourly in. He saw three juniors hard at work, with inky fingers and set, serious faces, and they all looked up respectfully as they saw him. He gave them one long, searching glance, which they met with faces of the most perfect innocence, and turned away without saying a word.

And as soon as the door had closed, Figgins & Co. chortled joyfully.

(This 63-year old "classic" will be continued next month)

THE CHRISTMAS HOLIDAYS. In December, owing to the Christmas Holidays, Collectors' Digest will be going to press a day or two earlier in the month than usual. Club secretaries and Advertisers will assist greatly by sending in their contributions as early as they can. If possible, we do not wish to delay the publication of the January issue.

BEST WISHES for Xmas and New Year to all Hobby friends.

KIT, SUSAN, NEIL and RON BECK, LEWES.



*A Happy Christmas and a Prosperous
New Year to all my Readers!* *THE SKIPPER.*

BLAKIANA

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

JACK OF ALL TRADES

By S. Gordon Swan

IT CANNOT be said of Sexton Blake that he is a jack-of-all-trades and master of none. During a long and meritorious career he has followed many trades and professions and shown himself proficient in all of them; so much so that a sceptic might question that one man could do so much in a lifetime. But his fans do not doubt, knowing that the great detective is a little more than mortal.

Particularly is this variation of employment noticeable in the early part of the century, when a glance at Union Jack titles gives a clue to the avenues in which he was working, some of them involving the most unlikely occupations.

The Cab Driver Detective; The Mechanic Detective; The Jockey Detective; The Actor Detective; Sexton Blake, Beefeater; Sexton Blake, Gamekeeper; Sexton Blake, King's Messenger; Sexton Blake, Shopwalker; Salvation Army Blake; Sexton Blake, Cheap Jack; Sexton Blake, Wrestler; Sexton Blake, Chef --- these are but a selection of the relevant titles applying to his early days. There is unconscious humour in one of the titles combined with the author's name: The Fisherman Detective, by Paul Herring.

In furtherance of his investigations Blake even became a publican, a lock-keeper, a bookmaker, a playwright and a scoutmaster, so it can be seen that the scope of his activities was wide and varied. He does not seem to be quite so versatile to-day, perhaps because this is a

mechanised age.

In addition to all these occupations he engaged in other pursuits which can scarcely be classified as legitimate employment. On one occasion he led a band of convicts in a mass escape from a South American prison -- surely a reversal of a detective's duty. This occurred in a story called His Excellency's Secret, in which Blake was matched against Count Ivor Carlac and Professor Kew.

Then, in The Cleopatra Needle Mystery, Blake posed as a lunatic in order to gain access to an asylum in which some skulduggery was in process. This was an unusual story in which the reader was introduced to a number of mental cases ranging from the harmless to the dangerous. While one character provided some humour in the form of little verses which he composed, there was one stark chapter which in my opinion rendered the story unsuitable for juveniles. This was a tragic episode in which a lunatic had a brief interval of sanity and committed suicide in Blake's presence.

Perhaps the most outrageous adventure in which Blake ever indulged was the time when he ran away with another man's wife. This might cause raised eyebrows even in the permissive society of to-day, but at the time it was published, The Prisoner of the Mountains could have created a scandal that the Man from Baker Street might never have lived down. However, admirers of Blake who have never read the story may rest assured that the detective's motives were strictly honourable and in the lady's best interests. He was merely protecting her from a scoundrelly husband who had designs on her fortune, and one is glad to state that he got the villain a gaol sentence. Rather surprisingly, the story was written by W. Murray Graydon.

It will be seen from the foregoing examples that Blake's career has been broad and comprehensive.

(His Excellency's Secret by Andrew Murray, S.B.L. 1st series, 19;
The Cleopatra Needle Mystery by J. N. Pentelow, S.B.L. 2nd series, 101;
The Prisoner of the Mountains by W. M. Graydon, S.B.L. 2nd series, 51.

* * *

"MURDER AT SITE THREE"

Reviewed by Roger Sansom

I finally caught up with the 1958 Sexton Blake film "Murder at

Site Three," at the Classic Cinema, Waterloo Station (in fact I am drafting this notice of it over a cup of tea in the buffet). A very bad print of a rather unremarkable 'B' feature, it nevertheless, has some points about it that make it worth a viewing for the Blake enthusiast - though it has recently been slated by Howard Baker, on whose original story (being S.B.L. No. 408, Fourth Series) it is loosely based. Very loosely, in fact.

Were the cars and the fashions really like that as recently as 1958? They must have been, but how subtly these superficial changes creep in. The film lives to tell its story on us!

Geoffrey Toone is a very competent Sexton Blake, who deserves better material. He looks well, and he has a relaxed authoritative power, which is as it should be. Richard Burrell gives a delightful performance as Tinker, putting to shame the urchins of radio and television. I think in future I shall see quite a bit of this performance in my mind's eye as I read.

Barbara Shelly is well cast as Paula Dane, and does all that is required of her without flinching. But why such an experienced film and television actor as Harry Towb sees fit to give us what is practically a stage performance in regard to gesture and timing, I do not know. The remainder of the cast performs adequately.

I suspect that the film has been cut at some time subsequent to its release. Also, there is a rather nasty bit of continuity near the end, when Mr. Toone appears to have had his hair combed between two action shots. Alas, the identity of the villains proclaims itself from the start.

As I came into the cinema, the main attraction, "Night of the Generals" was showing, and there on the screen - by purest coincidence - was the definitive Sexton Blake, if he could be persuaded to play it. His name? Michael Goodliffe.

* * *

THE WORST AND BEST OF SEXTON BLAKE

By "Anon"

Until about November 1929, Sexton Blake authors were anonymous.

My "Union Jack" collection has many gaps including the three issues preceding No. 1360, dated 9th November, 1929, but on this particular issue appears an author's name for the first time, "The Men Who Were Dead" by Gwyn Evans.

When I was reading the good old U.J. back in those days, I remember the pang of disappointment I experienced in discovering that Sexton Blake stories were not all written by the same author, like the "Magnet," "Gem" and "Nelson Lee" were, although we have since learned that substitute writers were employed on some of these papers.

In the case of some Blake authors, it would have been better if the curtain of anonymity had not been raised, because even today I find several of my "U.J.'s" quite unreadable, whilst others are dull and boring.

Two stories I class as unreadable are "The Bandit of the Bark" (U.J. 1295) and "The Scourge of No-Man's Land" (U.J. 1304) described as "Wild life in the gold-mining camps of the Wild West." These featured a character "known to the police of two continents as Napoleon L., the sleuth, and to himself only as Krock Kelk, the Crook King," in my opinion one of the dullest, most uninteresting characters ever created. The "S.B. Catalogue" lists the author as A. Paterson. The artist (not E. R. Parker) depicted Krock Kelk with shoulder-length grey hair and beard, with a flowing moustache, not unlike Buffalo Bill in general appearance.

The "Magnet" is deemed to have its Golden Age between the late 20's and early 30's, but I have never read when the Golden Age of the U.J. existed. As my collection only commences with No. 1280, dated 28th April, 1928, I cannot comment on stories preceding that date, but those I have, relating the Zenith the Albino Stories, leave me with the feeling that here is an excellent character in search of an author. In my opinion, Anthony Skene never gave him the exciting stories he deserved. In the hands of Gwyn Evans he would have scintillated. Under the guidance of G. H. Teed or Robert Murray he would have become really memorable.

I find Anthony Skene's style of writing rather difficult to read - to me it does not appear to flow smoothly. I would like to cite "The Humber Woodyard Mystery" (U.J. 1325) as an example and would ask

some Blake collector to read it and pass an opinion, either agreeing or disagreeing with me.

On the credit side of the U.J. I never fail to enjoy any yarn written by Robert Murray; he could always be relied upon to turn out a well-written, interesting story, guaranteed to keep your eyes glued to the page.

One of the most outstanding series of his I possess is the Paul Cynos Series, which commenced in U.J. No. 1289 on 30th June, 1928, under the title of "The Seven Sons of Cynos."

It deals with the release of Paul Cynos from prison after serving 16 years for a murder he did not commit. He and his business partner, Jabez Knowland, had set out to make a fortune by cornering the market in Madagar Oils. However a rival named Scott Sanders held a big block of shares and threatened to flood the market, forcing the price down. Wanting to come to some kind of terms, Cynos and his partner, Knowland, arranged a meeting with Sanders. Knowland was late in arriving, and after a heated argument between Cynos and Sanders, a shot was heard and a man in an adjoining office rushed out in time to see Knowland dashing into the office he shared with Cynos. Scott Sanders lay dead in the centre of the outer room, and Cynos was standing in the doorway of his private office, gun in hand.

Cynos swore that after arguing, Sanders had left his private office and closed the door. A moment later he heard a shot and on rushing out had seen the man lying dead on the floor with a revolver close by. He recognized the gun as his own and automatically picked it up, then his partner and the other man had burst in. Convicted of murder he was sentenced to hang but was reprieved and sentenced to penal servitude instead.

After serving sixteen years he was released, and embarked on a trail of vengeance, which included Jabez Knowland, the real murderer, the Judge who sentenced him, and all those connected with the trial. During his imprisonment his seven sons had grown up, changed their names, and obtained high positions in order to help in their father's revenge.

I can highly recommend this as a really gripping series.

* * *

Danny's Diary

DECEMBER 1919

I had forgotten what a Peace Time Christmas is like, but it's wonderful. This year the shops are packed with toys and games and Christmas foods; the decorations are lovely; the lights make it look like fairyland. There are stacks and stacks of holly and mistletoe in the market square. And at the beginning of the month, the Old Age Pension went up to 10/- a week, so old people can have a bit extra at Christmas, too.

I got quite a few tips before Christmas so I was able to get more books than I usually do. I had two Sexton Blake Libraries. One of them was a special Christmas novel entitled "Five Years After," and it is a cosy tale, but the one I liked best was "The Chink in the Armour," which is a story about Leon Kestrel. I have got to like the Kestrel stories very much.

Early in the month the British boxing hopes took a tumble. At Holborn Stadium, Carpentier, the Frenchman, beat Joe Beckett, knocking him out in the first round after the fight had only been on for one minute.

I had some Nelson Lees this month. There has been a long series running about a barring-out against Mr. Howard Martin, a brutal new Headmaster. The stories I bought were named "Victory for the Rebels" and "Exit the Tyrant." Tinker, Sexton Blake's assistant, came into the last-mentioned story, and he played a substantial part in it. At the end, the old Head, Dr. Stafford, came back. The Nelson Lee Christmas Number was a real festive one. It was called "Dorrie's Christmas Party" and it was set in a historical mansion in Cornwall. Among the guests at the party were Sexton Blake and Tinker, and the old African chief, Umlosi.

There have been some terrible gales during the month, and a lot of damage has been done all over the country.

In the Boys' Friend 4d Library there has been a Greyfriars story called "Football Champions." It brings in all the schools and there is a lot of football but not a lot of story. The new paper "Boys' Cinema" gave away an art plate of Tom Mix, but it is not a paper that I would

want regularly.

There has been very much a mixed bag in the Magnet. The opening tale was original and very amusing. It was "The Rise and Fall of William Gosling." The porter answered an advertisement in a matrimonial paper, and thought he was going to marry a lady who owned a pub. On the strength of his hopes he cheeked the Head. I liked this one, but the rest were pretty frightful. "Alonzo's Agency" was a mixed-up affair concerning Alonzo, Fishy, the Rev. Jeremiah Slagg, and the Cannibals' Conversion Agency.

The most odd Magnet tale I ever read was "Bunter on the Boards." Bunter left school and went on the stage touring as a ventriloquist. Bunter was quite out of character, and it was all odd with a capital 'O.' Final of the month was "Bunter's Christmas Portrait" which was quite a negative.

The Gem was a bit better but not much. "Loyal Miss Marie" was a sequel to the previous tale about the thief, Stewart, an old friend of Talbot's. "The Schoolboy Employers" just couldn't be swallowed. Glyn bought a factory, so that he could employ ex-soldiers, and Tom Merry got blown up. "Lovelorn Grundy" told of Grundy in love with Miss Lulu Briggs. The final of the month was "A Christmas Adventure." It was a Talbot-Marie tale, introducing Jim Dawlish.

I had the Union Jack just before Christmas. The story was called "The Mystery of Fiume" or "The Wedding by Proxy." Funny how some stories are given alternative titles. Seems a bit old-fashioned. I found it rather a stodgy tale.

Early in the month there was a murder on the sands of a place named St. Anne's, near Blackpool. The body of a lady named Mrs. Breaks was found there.

People don't go to the pictures so much in the fortnight before Christmas, so the programmes are often not very good. Still, we have seen some good pictures. We saw Isobel Elsom and Henry Ainley in "Quinneys" which was too slow for me. Another time we saw a big Italian film named "Nero and Agrippina" which was in colour. Mary Pickford's films now come from the Walturdaw Co., and we saw her in "The Ragamuffin" which was lovely. Bessie Barriscale was very good in "All of a Sudden Norma," and Dorothy Gish, one of my favourites,

was wonderful in "Peppy Polly." There is a new serial named "The Tiger's Trail" and it features Ruth Roland.

One of our cinemas has started what they call a double-feature programme, which means they have two big pictures, instead of one big picture plus a serial, a comedy, and the news. I am not keen on the double-feature business.

The Boys' Friend has been pretty good this month. First Rookwood tale was the last of the Lovell Minor series and was called "Teddy's Last Chance." In "The Mystery of Mossoo," the French master has his hair dyed, it goes funny, so he disappears, and Jimmy and Co. find him hiding in a bungalow.

"The Form-Master's Double" was not by the real Owen Conquest, and it was too silly. An old boy kidnaps Mr. Manders and impersonates him at Rookwood.

At Cedar Creek there have been two tales of rivalry with Hillcrest. They were "On the Warpath" and "The Redskin Raiders." Then, "Chunky Todgers' New Job" was acting as a typist and secretary to Mr. Penrose, the editor.

Once again, the Boys' Friend Christmas Number was the best of the lot. It contained "The Ghost of Rookwood School," in which the ghost turned out to be Lattrey playing tricks. And in "Snow Bound," the Cedar Creek chums were driving a party to the Mission Dance when a heavy snowfall came down on them. Both these tales were good.

My Gran and Auntie Gwen came up to spend Christmas with us. Gran is too frail to travel by train now, so Dad arranged for a car to bring them to us. We had a lovely time. On Christmas morning I had lots of presents in my pillow-case at the foot of my bed, and the one I liked the most was the new Holiday Annual which Doug gave me. On the afternoon of Boxing Day we all went to the pictures and saw Marguerite Clark in "Snow White," and it was wonderful.

WANTED: Good loose copies or volumes containing one or more of the following: Gems 801, 817, 826, 828, 832. Also Populars 401, 403, 407, 413, 415, 422, 441.

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

Nelson Lee Column

EARLY STRUGGLES THE "BOYS' BEST"

By Bob Blythe

Have you ever heard of the "Boys' Best?" Well, neither had I until I started my investigation into these old papers. It's true that it is listed in the C. D. Annual of 1947 as having a very short life (37 weeks in all), but for me it was non-existent. However, back in 1911, Edwy must have heard on the grapevine that a new paper was being published by Newnes, and so he decided to try his luck with this new venture.

We open this correspondence with a letter which shows that the initial contacts had already been made.

Oct. 26th, 1911.

I have pleasure in enclosing you herewith the first chapter of the Chinese revolution story. As you will notice, I have titled it THE LAST HOPE, and have adopted the nom de plume of Leslie Kent.

I really must apologise for the delay in sending the enclosed, but I have been laid up for a short while with a very nasty influenza-cold - which seems to be a pretty general complaint just now.

I trust you will find the first chapter to your liking.

For some mysterious reason he was asked to send the carbon copy as well - a most unusual request.

October 30th, 1911.

Dear Mr. Bullivant,

As promised, I enclose herewith the carbon copy of THE LAST HOPE. As you will see, this is on yellow paper, although the top copy was on green. You will also notice that it is typed double-space after all.

After you have read it will you be good enough to return it to me, for it will be difficult for me to go on with the story without having the first chapter to refer to?

The first chapter was evidently O.K. and the editor replied.

November 1st, 1911.

The enclosed is quite alright. Will you please go ahead with the story, keeping up plenty of incident and dialogue, and not exceeding 6,000 words in length.

Yours faithfully,

CECIL H. BULLIVANT
Managing Editor.

The story, consisting of only 6,000 words was soon written.

November 5th, 1911.

I have pleasure in enclosing you herewith the completed MS. of THE LAST HOPE. As you will notice I have re-typed the first chapter, as I always make a practice of keeping

a copy of all work sent out.

I shall be in the city to-morrow afternoon, and shall call upon you, when I hope you will be able to spare me a few minutes.

I am, Dear Mr. Bullivant,

I don't know, of course, how Newnes treated their contributors, but Mr. Bullivant was obviously very busy, or else he had an over zealous office boy with an eye for promotion!

Nov. 18th, 1911.

Dear Mr. Bullivant,

As I have called at Southampton Street three times, and each time been refused admission to your office, I think it advisable to write and tell you that I shall again call upon you to-morrow morning (Monday, Nov. 20), when I trust you will find time to see me for a few moments, as I have several little matters to discuss with you. You mentioned, when I last saw you, that should I wish to discuss any matter with you, I could either write or come and see you - hence my visits. Needless to say, I was rather disappointed that you were unable to see me on either of the three occasions referred to.

I am, Dear Mr. Bullivant,

Whether or not he ever did get to see the editor we shall never know, for there is a gap until January.

During this period another story was written, and sent, but with no success.

January 2nd, 1912.

I beg to thank you for your courtesy in sending me the enclosed contribution, which I have given most careful consideration. I am afraid that it is hardly suitable for the "Boys' Best," and this being so, I venture to return it herewith with many thanks for your kind offer.

Yours faithfully,
THE EDITOR

In view of the contents of this last letter, it seems rather strange that two days later the editor wrote the following letter.

Jan. 4th, 1912.

Now that I have had an opportunity of working off some of the surplus stock which necessarily accumulates when launching a new paper, I shall be happy once again to see you amongst my contributors. If you have one or two 5,000 word completes by you, I will give them an immediate reading. I have marked one 5,000 word complete in the enclosed synopses, which I shall be glad if you will turn in.

Yours faithfully,
CECIL H. BULLIVANT
Managing Editor.

Incidentally, the inference here that E.S.B. had had a story accepted. (Presumably "The Last Hope.") Although I have looked at every copy of this paper, I haven't found it yet!

E.S.B. takes Bullivant up on his offer and also tries to flog that perennial "Caravan and Canvas."

BURES HOUSE, Bures, Suffolk.
Jan. 5th, 1912.

Thanks for your letter of yesterday's date. I will write up the Synopsis you have

marked, and let you have the story complete in the early part of next week. Meanwhile, in response to your invitation, I herewith enclose a short adventure story, although I am not quite certain as to whether it is the style of story you want.

I have been wondering if you have an opening for a serial. I can let you have a full chapter-by-chapter synopsis of a circus serial - if such a synopsis would be of any use to you. I have also an idea for a school serial in my head, and I could submit a synopsis should you care to see it.

I am, Dear Mr. Bullivant,

Jan. 8th, 1912.

I have no opening for a serial just at the moment, but your idea of a circus yarn, if it is a good one, certainly appeals to me. Will you keep it by you for a few weeks, and write to me again?

The story mentioned in the next letter is obviously the one suggested by the editor in his letter of the 4th Jan.

January 11th, 1912.

Thanks very much for your letter of the 8th inst. As you suggest, I will keep the Circus Synopsis by me for a few weeks, and then submit it again. Meanwhile, I herewith enclose the completed MS. of the PAPHYRUS OF THE PHARAOHS, which I trust will meet with your approval.

By-the-bye, you mentioned nothing in your letter about the short-story I enclosed. Do you think it will be of any use to you?

I hope to send you another Synopsis - short story - in the course of a few days.

I am, Dear Mr. Bullivant,

Remembering the editor's request to re-submit the circus story idea in a "few weeks," Edwy waited the required time and did just that.

Jan. 22nd, 1912.

As I am coming up to London to-morrow (Tuesday) I have written the first two chapters of the proposed Circus Serial, and am bringing this up, together with a synopsis of the remainder. If this strikes you as being favourable, I can then submit the first instalment with a chapter-by-chapter synopsis. I trust you will be able to see me for a few moments to-morrow, as I should like to discuss the matter with you.

I am, Dear Mr. Bullivant,

The next two letters indicate, I think, that Edwy was not finding the going easy.

Feb. 9th, 1912.

I have gone through the enclosed MS. most carefully, and, as you suggested, have made numerous alterations. In some places, where the revisions were too drastic to be made by pen, I have had new pages typed and substituted. I am sure you will find the story much more to your liking now.

With regard to CANVAS AND CARAVAN; have you looked into this yet? I am well aware that your time is fully occupied with other matters, but I have been expecting to hear from you about this story, as I should very much like to write it up for THE BOYS' BEST.

I am, Dear Mr. Bullivant,

Yours very truly,

Feb. 15th, 1912.

Dear Mr. Bullivant,

Have you had time to read that CANVAS & CARAVAN synopsis yet? And do you think the altered MS. of the "PHARACHS" is satisfactory? If you're not too busy, I should much appreciate a line from you in regard to these.

I am, Dear Mr. Bullivant,
Yours sincerely,

With the next letter Edwy's hopes of getting a story published in the "Boys' Best" is beginning to get rather dim.

Feb. 19th, 1912.

Dear Mr. Brooks,

I regret I have been too busy to look at your MSS, but as soon as an opportunity comes along I will do so.

Yours faithfully,
CECIL H. BULLIVANT

Edwy has one last try.

Feb. 20th, 1912.

Dear Mr. Bullivant,

Thanks for your note of yesterday's date. I'm sorry you haven't had time to look into my MSS. yet. I'm coming up to London on Thursday for the day. Do you think you can spare time between now and then to glance at the suggested circus story? If so, and you required some alterations to the synopsis we could then talk it over - and a few minutes talk is worth a dozen letters. I hope you will be able to do this; in any case, I will call at your office on Thursday morning on the chance.

I am, Dear Mr. Bullivant,
Yours very truly,

The hope expressed in this last letter is finally extinguished as these final three letters show. There is no evidence that Brooks tried to contact Bullivant again. In any case these letters must be read against the background of the "Boys' Best" struggle to survive. Even when the last letter was written in April, the editor must have known that the paper could not last much longer. In fact, the paper folded up after the 37th issue in June 1912.

Feb. 21st, 1912.

In reply to your letter of the 20th inst. Mr. Bullivant wishes me to say that as he is so dreadfully busy this week, he will be very glad if you could postpone your visit until a little later on. As soon as he has had time to read your MSS. he will write to you immediately.

March 30th, 1912.

Dear Mr. Brooks,

I am extremely sorry to have to return the enclosed, but I am afraid I have no opening for it in the "Boys' Best."

With many thanks for your kind offer.

Yours faithfully,
for Cecil H. Bullivant.
TG.

cont'd ..

April 29th, 1912.

Dear Mr. Brooks,

I have again read "The Papyrus of the Pharaohs" and feel that even now it is not up to the "Boys' Best" standard. I have, therefore, no other alternative but to return it to you with many expressions of regret. A little later on I hope to have another opening for your work, and will assuredly bear you in mind.

Yours faithfully,
CECIL H. BULLIVANT

As a postscript, to the remark that I hadn't found a story in the "Boys' Best" that I could identify as Brooks, I can add the following, for what it's worth.

I decided to have another go at tracing the story "The Last Hope" mentioned in the correspondence. Now there is definitely no story so called, neither is there one by "Leslie Kent." But there is a story called "Heroes of the Circus" in No. 16, dated Jan. 1912, which, although dealing with circus life, has a Chinese element, and one of the chapter headings reads - "The Last Hope!" Lacking definite proof, this must remain a mystery, but for my money, it's too much of a coincidence for it to be written by anyone else - so in the new catalogue (advert) the story will be credited to E.S.B., with a query.

* * *

DEMO: OPEN LETTER TO THE EDITOR

JAMES W. COOK (Auckland). Carbon copy to Bob Blythe.

I am writing in support of Bob Blythe's protest of the paucity of space allowed for Nelson Lee copy. Over the years we have had a preponderance of Hamiltoniana in the C.D. and although the supply may be inexhaustible the repetition of so many facets and angles of Chas. Hamilton's work can be a little tiresome.

The monthly articles "Let's Be Controversial," "Danny," "Do You Remember" all have a bias towards Hamilton. Even your Editorial cannot get by each month without some reference to him or the schools he created. But granting you the right of majority being Hamilton admirers I do most strongly object to you giving permission for articles boosting Hamiltoniana in the scant area you allow us in the Nelson Lee section.

Len Wormull's contribution in the November issue should not have been inserted in the N.L.L. section since it is purely Hamiltoniana. If he wishes to condone Bunter's implausibility as a character then let

him do so in the vast amount of space allotted to boosting Hamilton's stories. If he wishes to write about Handforth in any way he prefers his contributions to the Nelson Lee Column will be welcomed by me.

But I am sick and tired of the specious magnanimity afforded Charles Hamilton by his old-time readers just because the volume of his output was greater than his contemporaries. Or rather just because the volume was greater because it was accepted by Fleetway House. I don't think "acceptance" in this sense is any criterion for quality. Obviously, Fleetway House had its limits of purchasing powers, and who is to know that many a school story by other authors failed to penetrate the few chinks in the wall left open by Hamilton's hogging the market.

In "Let's Be Controversial" No. 140, the writer refers to John Wheway's letter to Frank Lay.... "It is perhaps not generally realised the awe with which Hamilton was regarded at Fleetway House in his prime. He was almost a law unto himself -- he was almost Fleetway's bread and butter."

I can't see any reason why this "awe" should now dominate the pages of Collectors' Digest. But it certainly seems to have rubbed off on to Hamilton supporters by their incessant claims to Hamilton as the "Master;" the "Greatest;" the "Grand" ad nauseam.

I sincerely hope supporters of Edwy S. Brooks' tales will never get so out of hand in their appreciation of the St. Frank's stories.

If any particular saga in the hobby would justify the extreme reverence afforded Hamilton it should be Sexton Blake. This saga deserves a better coverage than is given. But because of the weight of Hamiltoniana in the CD it is not known whether such coverage is limited... like that of Nelson Lee material.

FOR SALE: Red Magnet No. 139 "Alonzo's Little Game" (fairish guillotined copy) 15/-. The 1938 Texas series (Nos. 1573 - 1582) some copies rough, some good, but series complete: £2-5s. Also No. 1654 "Black Prince of Greyfriars" complete story 7/6. Gem No. 871, "D'Arcy's Adopted" 8/6. "School Cap" Nos. 1 - 5 inc.: 10/-. 1 dozen Picture Shows (1947 - 1951) 18/-. Nelson Lee Library No. 34 (1916) 7/6. B.F.L. No. 246, "The Island Castaways" by A. S. Hardy (lovely collectors' item) 10/-.

S.a.e. first, to ERIC FAYNE.

CHRISTMAS WITH SOAMESBy Roger M. Jenkins

In the early days, Charles Hamilton had the habit of occasionally re-introducing a casual character from a previous story. Horatio Curll, the seedy actor, and Captain Punter, the cardsharper, were two who made quite a number of appearances. In the nineteen-twenties and later, however, villains were usually regarded as expendable characters, and never played more than one part, but there was one exception to this rule, and that was James Soames.

Soames was the smooth deferential man who had been Mr. Vernon-Smith's valet on the journey to the South Seas in 1927. Utterly ruthless, with unfailing politeness, even when in command (though his speech was indeed tinged with sarcasm at these times), he had played a memorable part in a most exciting series. Having failed to secure Black Peter's treasure for himself, he contrived to escape in a whale-boat, and was last seen in southern waters, with little chance of survival and with the certain knowledge that it would be dangerous to be seen in a civilised country. It is interesting to wonder why Charles Hamilton allowed Soames to escape. No doubt he realised that he had created a villain with an interesting personality, and one that it might be prudent to save for future use.

It was over a year before Soames did re-appear, in the Christmas series for 1928, in Magnets 1087-9. Soames had encountered much difficulty in making his way back to England in disguise, and was all ready with a plan to kidnap Redwing in order to blackmail most of the treasure money from him - it was characteristic of Soames that he did not ask for it all: he could usually spare a thought for his victims if it did not seriously discommode himself. It was an interesting series, with plenty of action, particularly in the last number, where the excitement was raised to a high pitch of intensity. Yet despite its merits, the series lacks something of the seasonable atmosphere, much of the action taking place by the wintry seashore, with flurries of snow on a misty sea. A couple of paragraphs about Wharton Lodge at the end was no substitute for the festivities that later came to be an established part of the Christmas atmosphere.

It was a full ten years before Soames was heard of again, and it

is surprising that Charles Hamilton should have resuscitated him after so long a lapse of time, since few readers of the Magnet in 1938 could have possessed memories of the stories of the previous decade. The series in Magnets 1609-12 was about the celebrated silver cigarette-case, with the message in Greek letters giving a clue to the hiding-place of the loot from the Lantham post-office raid. Like the previous Soames series, it was full of inventiveness and excitement, but this time there was the proper holiday atmosphere as well, with celebrations at Wharton Lodge, including a fancy-dress ball on Boxing Night, and even a scene at Cherry Place. Among the many delightful touches in this series is the famous visit of Fisher T. Fish to Wharton Lodge, and Bunter's disgust at the way in which Wharton was guilty of softness in allowing "some sponging cad" to plant himself there for the holidays.

Soames had one more part to play in the last complete series of all in the Magnet, which was published during Easter 1940, but in the two Christmas series he showed more resource and courage than any other Hamiltonian villain. His threats were certainly drastic at times, but it is doubtful whether he intended to carry them all out, and it is impossible not to feel a certain reluctant admiration for his intrepidity and ingenuity. Christmas in the Magnet was the time for festivity and merriment, but it was also the time for the phosphorescent face to glimmer through the dark, for the door to creak open, for mysterious lights to glimmer through the night, and for bedroom curtains to part to reveal a sinister intruder: in short, Christmas was the time for Soames.

WANTED-GEMS. Many Blue ones up to No. 436, then Nos. 437, 439, 441, 446, 450, 456, 462, 463, 469, 475-6-7, 484, 489, 492, 494, 509-10, 520, 524-6, 657-8, 700-1, 720-2, 744-5, 749-751, 753-6, 759-60, 763-4, 776, 781, 797, 799, 801, 804, 805, 807-8, 812, 831, 839, 841, 846, 867, 970.

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

WANTED: Books by V. Gunn, B. Gray. C.D. Annuals, S.O.L's old Illustrated Art Catalogues.

MAGOVENY, 65 BENTHAM STREET, BELFAST.

LET'S BE CONTROVERSIAL

No. 141. PLUMP SCROOGE

One of our greatest debts to Charles Hamilton is found in the wonderful Christmas stories which he left us in such numbers. The finest of these appeared in the Golden Age of the Magnet.

Nevertheless, the blue Gem, memorable for so many qualities, is by no means an "also ran" so far as Christmas is concerned. Of their type, most of the blue Gem Christmases were unsurpassed for the brooding atmosphere of mystery, set against the background of the heart of winter. Charles Hamilton never lost his gift of conveying a sinister atmosphere, but, later on, he merged into it the real spirit of Christmas, and this was what set the Golden Age Yuletides apart from some of the others.

Though I really liked my Christmases set at Wharton Lodge, my favourite Magnet Christmas series is that of Cavandale Abbey. It has everything that we expected of a Christmas story, even if it is not alone in being a series which can be read and enjoyed, year after year.

However, it is on the Christmas story of 1927 that I propose to dwell for a while. It is an entertaining and charming little fantasy, very much like Christmas itself, in that it has an anti-climax. The best part of Christmas is found in the few weeks which precede it - the gleeful preparations; the carol singers; the Christmas lights; the gaily decorated shops; the hanging of the holly, the mistletoe, and the garlands; the giving and accepting of presents; the bustling, good-tempered crowds. Christmas itself comes and goes in a flash. Then comes the anti-climax; the day after Christmas; the stewed turkey; the empty streets; the forlorn shops, shorn of all their glamour; the knowledge that nearly twelve months must go by before Father Christmas comes again.

Such was the Christmas story in the Magnet of 1927. Though the holiday finished up at Wharton Lodge, the two Christmas tales showed the Yuletide spirit before Christmas and the anti-climax which followed.

Several times in 1969 in Collectors' Digest we have drawn attention to the power of the pen, whether that pen is used for the champion-

ship or for the denigration of a particular subject. The power of the pen depends on the skill of the writer. We tend to believe what we read. In 1927 Billy Bunter was influenced for the better by the writing of Dickens.

In the opening story, "Bunter's Christmas Present," the Owl is expecting a gift from his uncle. That uncle, like most of the Bunter clan, did not believe in giving much away. He sent his nephew a copy of Charles Dickens' "Christmas Carol." It was not an expensive edition. It cost a shilling.

"Bunter's Christmas Present" - the run-up to Christmas - is a delight from beginning to end. There is snow, there is break-up from school in the air. Many passages, like most of the tales of the Golden Age, show Hamilton at his most inspired.

Scrooge was reformed by the spirit of Christmas. Scrooge, unlike most people who make new resolutions, did not back-slide, if we are to believe his creator. According to Dickens, the reform of Scrooge was permanent, even after the glow of Christmas had faded. He became a second father to Tiny Tim.

Billy Bunter, under the influence of Dickens, followed the excellent example of Scrooge, and reformed. Bunter's reform was not permanent, but it lasted throughout the first story and it was intense while it lasted. It was delightful, delicious, pre-Christmas stuff. For a while he became truthful and generous. He met an old gentleman who looked poor and needy and seedy. Bunter helped the old gentleman to the best of his limited ability - he even gave the old man his turnip of a watch. At the end of the story, while the Christmas bells rang out over the snowy countryside, the old man turned out to be the reverse of poor. He was a millionaire, deeply moved by the goodness of the plump schoolboy.

The millionaire was a philanthropist. He saw in Bunter a kindred soul, who would aid him in his philanthropic works. So, at the end of the first story we saw Bunter invited to spend Christmas at the Park Lane residence of the millionaire. It was the ideal run-up to the festive season.

But with the second story "Bunter the Benevolent" the glamour had disappeared as it does in the shops immediately after Christmas.

The story is entertaining and artfully diverting, even though the star at the top of the tree has tarnished and the snow has turned to slush. The influence of the reformed Scrooge has worn thin. The millionaire philanthropist, like so many philanthropists, is of the cranks cranky.

There are fashions in philanthropy, and each decade has its own fashion. At the turn of the century, it took the form of soup kitchens. At the time of "Bunter the Benevolent" it took the form of distributing money and goods among the poor and needy. In later years the State has taken over that particular branch of philanthropy. In the sixties, the fashionable philanthropy has been education. In the seventies it may be devoted to the perpetuity of illiteracy.

As Bunter's millionaire handed out largesse, the recipients tapped their heads behind his back. His chauffeur exchanged the slightest wink with the beggar. The millionaire's relatives regarded him as "nuts," and when the millionaire departed unexpectedly for a long holiday in the sunshine, Bunter was kicked out. His pig-in-clover period had been as transient as Christmas itself - but he could always fall back on the humble shades of Wharton Lodge - and did.

These two Magnets made a charming little Christmas story and together they formed that rare phenomenon, the ideal Schoolboys' Own Library. The story would have made an ideal reprint in Merlin or Armada in these later years. So naturally it has never been reprinted.

* * *

A FEW ECHOES FOR CHRISTMAS

PETER HANGER: I am sure you are right when you say that Charles Hamilton wrote only what he wanted to write. If further proof of this be needed I suggest that one looks to the Gem in the spring of 1939 when Martin Clifford began to write new stories of St. Jim's, for, surely no editor of a school story paper would begin a new era by commissioning a ten-week European tour; followed, after a mere six-week term, by a six-week Brazilian adventure. It would not surprise me to learn that this unfortunate choice of stories had as much to do with the closing of the Gem as Adolf Hitler.

However, as there is no shortage of Greyfriars and St. Jim's stories, I do not see why Charles Hamilton can, or should, be criticised

because, so it would seem, he preferred to write of things other than these for a short period of his writing life. If you had been able to control his writings you surely would not have confined him to these two schools alone. His publishers might, but would you?

This idea of an author writing a whole series of stories of one particular set of characters is a comparatively new phenomenon in literature. Has Shakespear ever been criticised because he wrote only one story of Macbeth and wasted his time on Hamlet?

I am only too thankful that Mr. Hamilton wrote so much about so much, although, inevitably, some parts please more than others. Eric Fayne adds: The article was not especially to condemn the hiatus, but to offer an explanation for it. In the past, editors and sub-writers have been knocked for this gap which was probably not their fault.

WALTER WEBB: The controversy over the Wingate love stories during the past few months has aroused my interest, and although not qualified to pass an opinion as to who wrote them, I must say that the theme seems not typical of Charles Hamilton at all. In fact, remembering his defence against Orwell's outburst and the criticism of there being no hint of sex in his stories, I would say that for Hamilton to have written them would have been in contradiction to his reply that sex was not a healthy subject for a schoolboy to be interested in.

I am surprised though that there should be any doubt about authorship, not because Hamilton's name appears on certain pay-slips, which is not conclusive by any means, but because Hamilton's style is so individualistic as to be unmistakable. Tempo and the way an author sets down his dialogue, the verb he uses over and over again, are often sure guides to identity, and for there to be any uncertainty about the methods of Charles Hamilton after all the school stories he has written is rather odd.

Cannot close before expressing my appreciation of the monthly, which maintains its lively interest without a falter. I look forward to the first week in each month with an appetite which is insatiable. (Editorial Comment: These were not "sex" stories in the sense which Orwell presumably intended. There were quite a few "calf-love" tales, especially in the early Magnet, so that, in itself, would not be any criterion for classing the series as non-Hamiltonian.)

News of the Clubs

MIDLAND

Meeting held 28th October, 1969.

A few years ago we heard much about the "stop-go" economy of the country. Now I think that our October meeting will go down in Club Annals as a stop-go meeting! Quite inevitably and unavoidably there were comings and goings all the evening, so that we never really settled down to anything for long. Then Tom Porter forgot to bring along the usual Anniversary Number and Collectors' items. But we were not at all downhearted, far from it! Indeed our meetings are always largely informal ones of old friends, and most enjoyable too. And we did have our coffee as usual which we missed last month owing to holidays, apparently.

There were ten members and two visitors, the latter including, to our great pleasure, Mrs. Hamilton Wright, whom we had not seen for some time.

The other visitor was Mrs. Ivan Webster. We were delighted to see the Websters, even if very late in the evening. It was their thirtieth wedding anniversary to the day. We were most pleased that they were able to drop in, and all present expressed their hearty congratulations and most cordial good wishes.

By one of those remarkable but very interesting coincidences, today was also the twentieth wedding anniversary of the Flemings, who are both members. To them also we offer our warmest good wishes and sincere congratulations. They were not able to be present, but we do hope to see them soon, at forthcoming meetings.

And what attractive meetings! Winifred Partridge, a long-standing lady member, has most kindly invited us to a housewarming party at her new flat on November 15th. Then in addition to our usual monthly meeting on November 25th, we are very pleased indeed that Mrs. Hamilton Wright, has most kindly invited us to have the usual December meeting at her home in Sutton Coldfield.

As regards the present meeting, after formal business and Tom Porter had told us about his visit to the London Club's meeting at

Leytonstone - and a few interruptions - Jack Bellfield gave us a most amusing reading from the Goldhawk book, "Trouble for Trimble." Again an interruption, but after coffee the Websters arrived and were warmly greeted. The meeting finally ended with some discussion of those two very attractive forthcoming events.

EDWARD DAVEY

Chairman and Secretary.

* * *

LONDON

Cricklewood was the venue for the November Meeting of the London Section, the hosts being Bill and Marjorie Norris. Unfortunately, Uncle Ben was unable to be present, owing to a family gathering, so Don Webster acted as his deputy.

After the Chairman had welcomed those present (including several visitors) the Librarians gave their usual satisfactory reports. Len Packman read a letter written 20 years ago inviting a new member to join the Club (John Addison) who was present at this meeting. Len also read Newsletter dated November, 1953. We were given a preview of the jacket cover of "The Men Behind Boys' Fiction" (edited by two of our members) which showed an illustration of the late Charles Hamilton, drawn by Basil Reynolds. Ray Hopkins gave a short talk on other papers besides "The Magnet" which ceased publication in 1940, and a debate on these followed. Bob Blythe appealed to other members to send in St. Frank's items to C.D. The "Race to the Tuckshop" downstairs proved worthwhile as Dame Marjorie had done us proud, as usual.

After tea, Len and Josie Packman gave us an interesting talk on the four Sexton Blake Annuals and brought their beautifully bound copies to display and illustrate their points. It was obvious that much research and time had been devoted to this. Finally, Les Rowley (our man in wherever it is) set us a novel competition to describe on a post-card the sale of property of any character we wished. Some excellent entries were handed to Les to judge, and the first three prizes went to (1) Bob Blythe, (2) Frank Lay, (3) Larry Morley. The remainder will be read at the next meeting, which will be on Sunday, December 14th at the

home of Bob and Laura Blythe at Colindale.

D. B. W.

* * *

NORTHERN

Meeting held Saturday, 8th November, 1969.

Although one or two familiar faces were missing there was a gathering of thirteen when the Chairman, Geoffrey Wilde, opened the proceedings after the Library half-hour. He had a warm welcome for all and particularly for a new enthusiast, ex-Chief Inspector, R. H. Rhodes, introduced to our activities by Geoffrey Good of Staincliffe. We are always pleased to see new friends and hope Mr. Rhodes will find much enjoyment in the Club and help for his particular interest, i.e. the compiling of a dossier of the scholars in as many schools as possible.

A short time now was devoted to arrangements for the Christmas Party to be held at the Club Room next month on 13th December - the work being divided in the usual manner, the ladies seeing to the feast and the men to the fun, as it were.

Last year several members wrestled with the writing of stories which has to contain special words and phrases, and to-night the originator of the scheme, Geoffrey Wilde, brought the series to a grand conclusion with his contribution, a Sexton Blake story entitled "The Case of the Frozen Asset." As Geoffrey read to us, in his inimitable style, you could have heard the proverbial pin drop. The plot unfolded with quite professional ingenuity. All the characters were first-class, including Detective Inspector Venner, and the specified words, etc., slid in quite unnoticed in this engrossing tale - even the final sentence about THAT TELEPHONE BOX was just right, and pin-pointed the clue which had enabled Sexton Blake to solve the mystery.

Refreshments had been served during an interval in Geoffrey's reading, and now we had a quiz to wind up the evening from Bill Williamson. Bill is about our most consistent winner of quizzes and competitions, and so it was not surprising he soon had us wrinkling our brows in pursuit of the elusive name or place. However, all the

questions were very fair being about the Hamilton Schools and, though several of us were rather floored, it was a very enjoyable ending.

Next Meeting, Saturday, 13th December, 1969. The Christmas Party. Meet 4.30 p.m.

M. L. ALLISON

Hon. Secretary.

FOR EXCHANGE:- Pre-war Annuals, 1 Rover, 1 Wizard, 1 Adventure-land. Dixon Hawke Case Book No. 7. WANTED: Thomson Papers 1936 - 1942. Single story Magnets.

McMAHON, 54 HOZIER CRESCENT, TANNOCHSIDE, UDDINGSTON.

 40 Nelson Lees (Old Series) for sale or exchange, also Collectors' Digests - 6d. each.

P. HARLEY, 214 SALTWELLS ROAD, DUDLEY, WORCS.

FOR SALE - ALL POST FREE: Complete Wycliffe Saga in 12 B.F.L's - 150/-; CHIPS, Double Xmas Number, 1900 - 21/-; CHATTERBOX ANNUAL 1899 - 21/-; 10 Assorted COMICS - 60/-; 109 'C.D's' between 122 - 247 - 3d.each. All the following at 10/- each:- PLUCKS (Haygarth) 276, 278, 280, 282; MAGNETS 935, 978, 1241-1243, 1584, 1588; S.O.L's 240, 244, 246. GEMS 1241, 1243-1247, 1249-1253, 1256-1258; CHEERIO 2. 3.; TIGER TIM'S WEEKLY 2. 3.; YOUNG FOLKS TALES 165, 167, 171..... CHILDREN'S NEWSPAPERS 1 - 500
 what offers?

G. ALLISON, 3 BINGLEY ROAD, MENSTON, ILKLEY, YORKSHIRE.

MAGNETS: In exchange for Smedley and Stacy series, I offer choice, early Red Magnets.

SHARPE, BOX 81, BOX HILL, VICTORIA 3128, AUSTRALIA.

COLLECTOR WISHES TO PURCHASE old Picture Postcards, in quantities of not less than 100. - BRADLEY, ROSEHILL COTTAGE, LEAVENHEATH, COLCHESTER, ESSEX.

The Postman Called

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

J. McMAHON (Tannochside): Though I sympathise with the Lee-ites in their wanting more space in the Digest, I would deplore losing Danny or the Editorial. I find both these items most informative as well as entertaining. Surely a happier solution would be to increase the size of the magazine with a suitable increase in price.

R. GODSAVE (Leytonstone): Whilst all Leeites would welcome more pages to the Nelson Lee Column it is obvious that the new serial about to commence in the 'C.D.' will nullify any extra pages which might be available.

I wonder whether 'Let's Be Controversial' could sometimes be curtailed.

The letters relating to E. S. Brooks' early life - so ably dealt with by Bob Blythe - would seem to ensure that there would be no lack of articles for the Lee column.

T. COCKBURN (Ayr): Latest C.D. is very good. I hope there is no question of dropping "Let's Be Controversial" or the Editor's Chat - these features are so good. As for Danny's Diary - why not a more recent series of extracts, say the 1930's. 1919 is too far away for me fully to appreciate it. Three pages seems very good for Nelson Lee, considering I don't know him and have never heard anybody ever mention him as people remember Sexton Blake and Billy Bunter.

R. J. McCABE (Dundee): Having no favourites, I enjoy C.D. as a whole - but I've a very soft spot for Danny.

G. ALLISON (Menston): As a contribution to the question whether or not you give enough space to the Nelson Lee Column, here are my figures of library borrowings during the last 12 months - I've worked them out whilst on my back.

HAMILTONIANA 4106. SEXTON BLAKE & THRILLERS 943.
BOYS' FRIEND LIBS. 208. COMICS 206. LEES 89. OTHER
ITEMS 59.

So out of 5611 copies, 89 are Nelson Lees. Q. E. D.

BILL LOFTS (London): How right Walter Webb is in his article! It only explains the extreme difficulties us compilers have in naming authors of stories. It is indeed puzzling what stories L. H. Brooks did pen completely under his own bat. Mr. Twyman, as far back as the early 20's knew that E. S. was writing for Leonard, and could tell at once by the style. He rather thought they insulted his intelligence by making one author into two, but to be diplomatic thought it best to let them have their way of things.

BILL MORGAN (Sutton Coldfield): Re the points raised in your editorial of November.

On no account terminate Danny before 1990. It ranks No. 1 in my present reading priority list.

Your editorials are helping to preserve my sanity during so much exploitation of sub-culture, so I am sure C.D. would not do equally well without them.

BUNTER BOOKS WANTED to complete set. Nos. 3, 4, 6, 10, 13, 14.

T. PRATT, 5 SOMERSET DRIVE, POOL PARK, KIDDERMINSTER,
WORCS.

 - WANTED TO PURCHASE, the following numbers of "Collectors' Digest" - one to seventy-one inclusive, also numbers 80, 87 and 152. Please state price required.

N. THROCKMORTON, THE FORSTAL, BIDDENDEN, KENT.

FOR SALE: Magnet 818, Sexton Blake at Greyfriars. Union Jack 794, First Waldo plus Nelson Lee. What offers?

MERV BRANKS, 5 DUBLIN STREET, INVERCARGILL,
NEW ZEALAND.

 HAVE YOU YET SENT ALONG YOUR REMITTANCE TO BOOK THE 1969 ANNUAL? IF NOT, you may be too late. DON'T BE DISAPPOINTED WHEN THE TIME COMES. Order Now.

MUSINGS ON THE MARVEL

By O. W. Wadham

The green-covered MARVEL was famous for Jack, Sam and Pete stories by S. Clarke Hook, and also for boxing yarns by Arthur S. Hardy. Early in the 1920 decade the MARVEL had a coloured-cover, after the style of the MAGNET of those years.

I have an issue dated April 15th, 1922. There is no sign of the Clarke Hook characters, and Hardy's man, Tom Sayers has also vanished. The green-covered paper ran two long complete stories, the paper in the twenties had three much shorter efforts.

Boxing tales were still going strong, however. There were two running in the copy I have, one by John S. Margerison, and another by Alan Walter Edwards. The third yarn was a Navy yarn, but no author's name was given.

The print in the 1922 copy was even smaller than in the MARVEL of the war years. But there were four less pages than an issue I have of 1916. Most other boys' papers had boosted their size by the 1920 years.

The title of the old paper had been increased. It was called THE MARVEL AND SPORTS STORIES, with which is incorporated THE BOYS' HERALD. The price, too, had advanced from one penny to two-pence. How did the disappearance of Jack, Sam and Pete effect sales I wonder? If the MAGNET and the GEM had discarded Greyfriars and St. Jim's in the 1920 years, would they have lived on for another twenty years? I am sure they would not have lasted even one year.

There is no doubt that S. Clarke Hook was the mainstay of the early MARVEL; the writers of the 1920 decade seemed to dwell mostly on boxers connected with the Navy. In the saga of boys' fiction those tales have not found a place. Just when the MARVEL finally folded I do not know, but I feel sure that readers of those dear, dead days would have found the most attractive thing about their old paper the coloured cover, with the drawing signed by some artist called C.M.B.

THE BUNTER COURT SERIES. We understand that Bunter Court, published by Howard Baker Publishers, will be out just prior to Christmas.

HOBBY HOLIDAYS

By Gerry Allison

I suppose to most people their summer holiday is the great event of the year. Perhaps members of the Clubs may suggest that the monthly meetings are what they look forward to most of all. But how many members have thought of combining these two joys?

So many of us have pen-friends whom we have never met - some living at attractive sea-side towns or at interesting places inland. And what about the Collectors' Digest Who's Who with scores of names of men and women with just the same tastes as our own. I never tire of looking through the Who's Who, and wishing I could meet so-and-so, and talk to him for hours and hours.

I am inspired to write this article after my wife and I have returned from our fourth summer holiday spent with my fellow-librarian, Roger Jenkins, of the London Club. This time our foursome was completed by the secretary of the Northern Section - my sister Mollie. On previous occasions, Tom Porter of the Midland Club, has been with us.

So you see, besides enjoying lovely scenery, excellent meals and (usually) fine weather, we have had wonderfully congenial company. What happiness it has been to recall old friends, memorable meetings, and outstanding events of the last twenty years since the hobby brought us all together. Think of pulling up the car to enjoy a magnificent view, whilst listening to one of us reading the holiday adventures of - say - Tom Merry & Co.

This year, in addition, I was able to make the acquaintance of the sister of the late Arthur Harris, whose collection of comic papers was world famous. For years I corresponded with Arthur Harris and was even able to supply him with items he had long sought. How unbelievable it was to see that amazing collection, and to handle with reverence some of those rare papers. For instance - a bound volume (No. 1) of Comic Cuts! Fortunately, the papers have fallen into good hands and Miss Harris is herself enjoying some of the best reading she has ever known.

However, I am delighted to say that when I returned home, I brought with me a complete year's run of The Jester - surely the comic paper with the finest authors who ever contributed stories. The tales by John Edmund Fordwych (H.J. Garrish) are superb. Remember "The School Bell?" I have days of pleasure ahead. Think of fifty weeks of Racketty Row to enjoy - to say nothing of Constable Cuddlecock!

Yes, I can truthfully say that my 1969 holidays have given me greater happiness than anyone would think possible in this 'Brave New World' of ours. "Go and do thou likewise" Luke X, 37.

CAPTAIN JUSTICE'S ADVENTURE IN SPACE!

The **MODERN BOY**

EVERY SATURDAY.
Week Ending December 18th 1937.

No. 511.
Vol. 20

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CHRISTMAS OF THE FUTURE—CHOOSING PRESENTS BY TELEVISION!

Edited by Eric Fayne, Excelsior House, Grove Road, Surbiton, Surrey.
Litho-duplicated by York Duplicating Services, 12a The Shambles, York.