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ENLARGED CHRISTMAS NUMBER

H. WEBB
1970

COLLECTORS' DIGEST

STORY PAPER COLLECTOR

Founded in 1941 by
W. H. GANDER

COLLECTORS' DIGEST

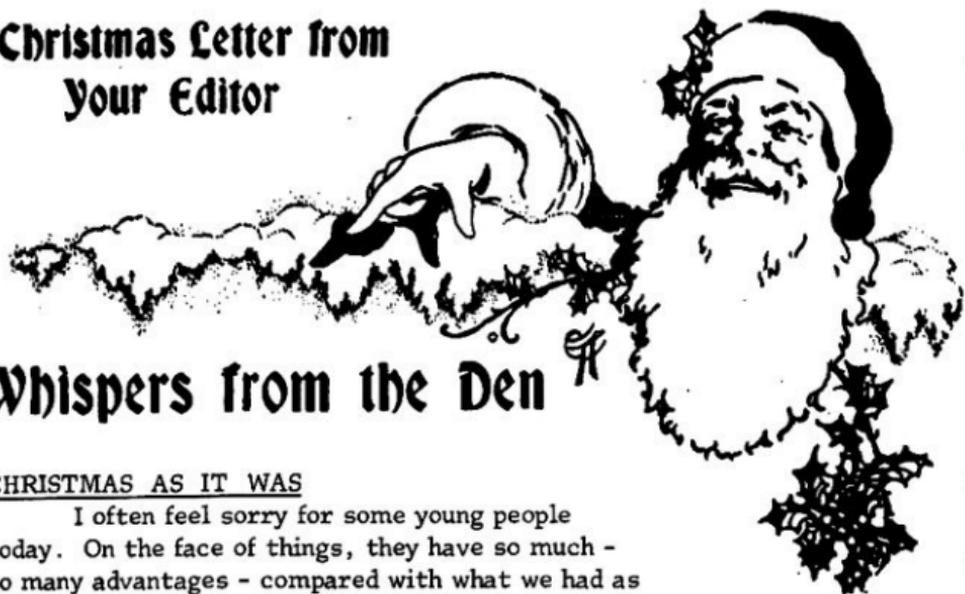
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Vol. 24

No. 288

DECEMBER 1970

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A Christmas Letter from
Your Editor

Whispers from the Den

CHRISTMAS AS IT WAS

I often feel sorry for some young people today. On the face of things, they have so much - so many advantages - compared with what we had as children. Their new schools are built on palatial designs; the equipment they use is very expensive and unlimited; they need never bother about their personal appearance or trouble to get their hair cut; they do not have to face the discipline of the old teachers who used to believe that good behaviour and a pride in one's personal appearance was an essential part of education. They have sex and drugs to replace the sport, the reading, the joy of competition which was part of our lives. They have the family car to save them walking;

they have radiators in their homes to lean against; they have fish and chips in Spain on their annual holiday; they have the well-balanced school meals to replace the indigestible stuff that mother used to give us. They have television in endless supply to replace the family visit to the cinema or the orgy of reading.

I'm still sorry for them, especially at Christmas time. For the atmosphere of the family Christmas in days gone by was wonderful. It made December a fairy tale month, starting with the superb Christmas numbers of our various papers. There was less money about, but the old family Christmases had something which money could not buy.

I wish all my readers a Christmas, peaceful and joyful, with many pleasureable hours connected with the old papers which we all remember with love, and cherish so much. A merry, merry Christmas, everyone.

A LITTLE BIT OF OLD ERIC

In a recent edition of the TV programme "Call My Bluff" they presented the panel with a short episode from "Eric" or "Little By Little." In fact, they presented three accounts of the same event in the story, but only one was from the actual story. The other two were by other writers. The panel had to guess which was the genuine extract. For anyone who knew the book, it was easy, but I forget whether the panel landed on the genuine extract.

It has, however, given me an idea for a competition in the coming year, which I hope to offer to the clubs or, possibly, to C.D. readers in our columns. It could be interesting.

Before leaving "Eric," I remember being fond of the story when I was a child, though, even then, it was a very old one. Even today, despite its blatant preaching and sentimentality, it is easy to see why it was a best seller for many years. For one thing, it contains much pleasant prose, and, in pathos, those old writers were on to a winner. For people have always loved to weep. There have been many "send-ups" of "East Lynne," but I fancy the audience laughs at the artists making fools of themselves rather than at anything in the story.

Whether Dean Farrar really had a message is doubtful, unless it was that the good die young - which is dismaying for the good. It is

improbable that Farrar was a reformer, in spite of the following passage near the end of the story: "The weary train - (it carried poor people for the most part, so, of course, it could matter but little how tedious or slow it was!) - the weary train, stopping at every station ---"

In the context, that bit about the poor brought fresh tears to red eyes. In our sad hearts we resolved that if ever we owned a railway we would let poor people ride for nothing, first-class, in express trains.

But the argument was specious. In real life, as we all know, the speed of a train journey has little to do with the size of our bank balances. And when we find ourselves in a train stopping at all stations, we do not immediately curse car owners who are luckier than we are.

In fact, many of the arguments of the old social reformers can be seen, years later, to have been riddled with holes. Bernard Shaw, and, to some extent, Dickens, preached that poverty was the cause of crime, and that when poverty is eradicated, crime will disappear too. The affluent society has given us the answer to that one.

Harking back to "Eric" for the last time, I still have a very soft spot in my sentimental heart for Dean Farrar's tear-jerker.

DID OUR HERBERT WRITE STORIES?

In a fascinating article which we printed last month, our contributor, Mr. W. O. G. Lofts, stated that the late Herbert Leckenby was an author whose stories were published by Gerald Swan. Mr. Lofts said that it did not come as a big surprise to him. I must confess that it comes as a very big surprise to me, and I think it likely that some memories are at fault.

I knew Herbert for a great many years - probably much longer than most people connected with the hobby today. He gave me masses of intimate details about himself and his career, and our hobby exchanges were enormous as the years passed. He never ever told me that he had written stories or had anything of the sort published. I think it most unlikely that, if he had ever had stories published, he would have said nothing about it.

During all the time that I knew him, he was a prolific letter-writer. He also wrote a fair number of pleasant articles which linger

in the memory. But whether he would have been capable of writing stories professionally is quite a question. If he did have stories published, he would have had no reason to keep the matter secret.

ANNUAL TIME IS CHRISTMAS TIME

For several months we have been warning readers that the result of delaying ordering the Annual may be disappointment. We issued the same warning many times last year, but still some readers left it too late. Production costs are high, and we cannot print many extra copies, beyond the number ordered in advance, to allow for late-comers.

Our Bill of Fare will make the 1970 edition one of the very finest yet. Henry Webb has drawn the superb cover. It's an Annual to remember.

THE EDITOR

REVIEW

THE INKED-IN IMAGE. A Survey of Australian Comic Art. By Vane Lindesay.

Published by William Heinemann Australia Pty. Ltd., Melbourne. Hard covers, price \$7.50. Size 8" x 11"; 73 pages introductory text, 221 pages cartoons and strips.

Just published, the first edition of this attractive volume has sold very well in Australian bookshops. A nostalgic stroll down the years with Australia's most famous cartoonists - from earliest work in the Melbourne Punch of 1855 until the wane of this art a century later when the overwhelming volume of American strips all but displaced local talent. Here are the early strips which became deservedly famous over the years; some still appearing although with later artists. Wally and the Major, Bluey and Curley, Ginger Meggs and a host of others. Humour from the early gold rush years and from the Outback, through the trials of the wartime Australian Digger, to the more or less calm of the domestic scene. And reminders too of the cartoonists' skill in lampooning the political and other figures of the past. I recommend that C.D. readers watch for this book.

JACK HUGHES

CHRISTMAS AT CAVANDALE

By Roger M. Jenkins

Christmas was a time when the Magnet came into its own, a time when every reader must have come under the spell of Charles Hamilton's special enchantment. There had to be snow, there had to be ghosts or mysteries, and above all there had to be Bunter as happy as a pig in clover, doing full justice to all the glorious food that the season demands. Goodwill, merriment, and a spice of fear was the menu that the Magnet could always provide. St. Jim's lacked Bunter, and so Christmas in the Gem could never match a Magnet Christmas for hilarity and indulgent enjoyment.

There are so many splendid Magnet Christmases that one is spoilt for choice, but I have always had a soft spot for Cavandale Abbey in 1930. It had the merit of being a compact series of four stories, providing Bunter with the first real chance to spread himself since Bunter Court five years earlier.

It began with Bunter in the unusual position of having failed to secure for himself an invitation for the holidays. Having spent most of his journey money on food, he was travelling beneath the railway seat in the time-honoured fashion and was thus in the fortunate position of being able to save Lord Cavandale from a murderous attack. On receiving an assurance from the noble peer that he would be glad to assist Bunter in any way, Bunter then proceeded to invite himself to the abbey for Christmas:

Even Bunter dimly realised the colossal cheek of what he was asking Lord Cavandale. And kind as was the expression on his lordship's face, it was growing a little colder. A sort of defensive expression came over it, an expression often seen on the faces of people who had to deal with William George Bunter.

Allotted a suite of rooms at the abbey and his own personal servant, Albert (whose name Bunter thought it artistocratic to forget), he was all set for a magnificent holiday which was spoilt only by a mysterious sniper, an intruder, and the ghost of a phantom abbot. What was unpleasant for Bunter was certainly highly agreeable to the reader, and it was not until Ferrers Locke came on the scene that the mystery was completely solved.

The Cavandale Abbey series was all the more interesting for having two separate mysteries instead of the usual one, a feature which

LET'S BE CONTROVERSIAL

No. 153. IN A BROWN STUDY AT CHRISTMAS

As Christmas approaches, any little detail is sufficient to enshroud the present with mist and to bring surging back into vision something that happened long ago. Christmas is the season of memories.

I was reading this month's extract from Danny's Diary. The lad refers to "The Schoolboy Mazeppas" which featured in the Cedar Creek series in the Boys' Friend fifty years ago. It was the word "Mazeppa" which set the memory buds tingling. There were a number of occasions when Charles Hamilton returned to that Byronesque theme.

On the occasion to which Danny referred in his diary, it was Handsome Alf Carson, the villainous rustler, who bound Frank Richards and Bob Lawless, spreadeagled on the backs of their horses, and then drove the horses out into the wilds.

Some ten years later, the Mazeppa theme was used again in a Rio Kid story. This time it was Sheriff Watson who was the victim. It was an Indian who doomed Watson to a terrible death in the desert. I fancy the Indian was Chief Many Ponies, a memorable character. But it was the Rio Kid who rode out into the desert in an effort to save the sheriff who would offer him nothing but a hangman's noose in return.

I remember riding, as a schoolboy, on a little branch railway which ran - and probably still runs - from Grays to Romford. I always loved small branch lines. I rode on the Grays to Romford line quite a few times as a boy - occasionally the train in the reverse direction ran through to Tilbury. I fancy there were two little stations between Grays and Upminster. One of them was Ockenden, often said, at that time, to be the prettiest station in England. It was peaceful and neat, with, in the summer, a mass of roses and other flowers, carefully tended by the station master. I can't recall the name of the second station before Upminster was reached, but I feel sure there was another.

Just who were the owners of the line at the time to which I refer I cannot say for certain. It had been the L.T.S.R., in Edwardian times; later it became the Midland; and, still later, the L.M.S. At

Romford, it came close by the L.N.E.R., which, in earlier days, had been the Great Eastern.

On this particular day, I bought a Magnet at Grays station. I was by no means a regular reader of the Magnet at that time - there were too many sub stories for those who could tell marge from butter - and tuppence was tuppence. As the train chugged away from Grays towards Ockenden I started to read that Magnet. It was entitled "The Vengeance of the Sheik," and in it the Mazeppa theme was used again. This time it was Bob Cherry who suffered, and he was bound on the back of a camel.

It was, in fact, the last story of the Sahara series concerning the Arab schoolboy, Ali Ben Yusef. Later I obtained the complete series direct from the Fleetway House.

This 8-story series is probably the best of the earlier travel stories, and a good deal better than those of the latter-day Magnet. The long travel series was a novelty at that time, in the mid-nineteen-twenties. It is seldom mentioned today, possibly because the period when it appeared is a difficult one to collect. It stands apart because Major Cherry was in charge of the party, and, in addition, one or two of the Cliff House girls were in the party. So far as I remember, this was the only travel series in which the girls played a part, and, so far as I am concerned, I am glad of it, though they enhanced this particular series.

I know that some of our Lee contributors are happy that Brooks featured the girls extensively in his travel yarns. I daresay they are right. It would have spoiled the travel series for me had Hamilton introduced a crowd of girls. For one thing, the men of those days, writing about boys and their girl friends, were far too coy.

When Christmas nears I always think about "The Mystery of the Painted Room" which was, almost certainly, the best Christmas Gem of all. In the autumn of 1936, when it was obvious that "Painted Room" would be the Christmas story, I wrote to the editor, suggesting that the story should be reprinted in two separate issues, to obviate the drastic pruning to which the old St. Jim's tales were being subjected at that time. He replied, thanking me for the hint, and said he hoped to follow my advice. And he did.

At that time, I used to go regularly on Wednesday evenings to a splendid new cinema, the Trocadero at Elephant and Castle. A Gaumont house, it was magnificent by any standards, and, seating nearly 4,000 people, it was, at that time, the largest cinema in Europe. I remember Sophie Tucker, in a speech at the end of her act, calling it "This beautiful, beautiful theatre." Sophie was right. It was to be several years before Gaumont built an even larger cinema, the State at Kilburn.

The enormous capacity of the Trocadero enabled the management to put on remarkably expensive shows. There were always two big pictures, a news reel, and an organ interlude by the "mighty Wurlitzer." On occasion, the programme would comprise three big feature films. Sometimes they would have from 6 to 10 variety acts in addition to the two main films. On one occasion I recall a full-length pantomime in addition to two films; sometimes a full-length touring revue; sometimes an opera. And always, a huge theatre packed to capacity every evening.

The giant attractions put on at the Trocadero caused complaints from other cinemas whose smaller capacities made such lavish shows out of the question. In fact, it was the extravagance of the Troc's shows which caused the standard contract for films booked to contain the clause that "the total length of the programme in which this film is shown shall not exceed $3\frac{1}{4}$ hours." So the Troc's lavishness was curbed, even though the length clause in the contracts has never been strictly observed.

I always sat in a gangway seat in the front row of the circle - $\frac{2}{4}$ for the seat. I always went in just before six o'clock in the evening, when one's favourite seat in the best part of the house was almost always available. One evening there was, on the stage, a mind-reading act. No doubt it was done by a code, but it was completely mystifying. A woman was blindfolded on the stage. A man came into the audience, asking the woman to identify objects which he took from members of the audience.

When he came to the front of the circle I handed him the current issue of the Gem which I had bought an hour earlier at the bookstall on Surbiton station.

The man held the Gem aloft. "What have I here?" he asked, or words to that effect.

"Child's paper," came the reply from the stage.

My companion chuckled, and I turned a little pink. I thought of the Gem as a boys' book and not as a child's paper.

"Ask her the name of the paper," I requested.

"The gentleman wants to know the name of the paper," said the man, or words to that effect.

"The paper is named the Gem," came the reply.

Obviously there was some code conveying the message in the way the man in the audience worded his questions, but it was brilliantly done.

That Gem contained "The Mystery of Eastwood House," which was the first part of the reprint of "The Mystery of the Painted Room." Whenever I come on the story I think of the Troc. And whenever I pass the Troc now I think of the "Painted Room." That is the cause and effect of memory.

Alas, the glory that was the Trocadero, Elephant and Castle, has long gone and is forgotten by most in that part of London. It is many, many years since I visited the Troc, though it still stands. I wonder whether they have reduced the size. I feel sure they have changed the name to Odeon.

The story of the Painted Room lives on. It must have made a big impact on readers when it first appeared in 1913, for it was a theme which was fresh then. By 1936 when the reprint occurred, the effect was blunted. Since Gussy first disappeared from the Painted Room in 1913, plenty of others had disappeared and been incarcerated in dungeons the Fistical Four had vanished in a series of marvellous eerie quality, Lord Mauleverer had disappeared in Mauleverer Towers in a superb series, and Bob Cherry, in a series on a slightly lower standard, had faded from the Greyfriars scene when the villainous Krantz was haunting the corridors. And there had been others in the same vein.

By 1936 the glory had departed from the Painted Room in the same way that it departed from the Trocadero with the passing of the years. But, even all these years later, it remains one of the Gem's finest.

The films I saw on that occasion? Well, one of them was "Ring Up The Curtain" (or it may have been "Ring Down The Curtain") starring Alice Brady, Frank Morgan and Micky Rooney. I booked it for our school cinema a few weeks later. I have often looked out for it on TV, but so far in vain. If it ever comes, it will remind me of the Troc and a Christmas Gem.

We are each the product of the period in which we grew up. I am glad that I can remember the cinema when it was great, and the Gem when it was a wonderful influence for good among the youth of the land.

(Eric Fayne contributes "The Buddle Pavilion" to the 1970 Annual.)

 FOR SALE and WANTED: Magnets, Gems, Nelson Lees, S.O. Libs., Sexton Blakes, Bunter Books. (S.a.e. for list.)

F. BOTTOMLEY, 48 DOWNHILLS PARK ROAD, LONDON, N.17.

XX
 I WANT TO BUY. Now is the time before Xmas to turn those surplus items into cash! Good prices paid. Exchanges considered. Very comprehensive stock available of old Boys Books and Journals. Send me your "wants" lists! Too numerous to list. Items available include Hamiltonia, Magnets, Gems, S.O.L's, Bunter/Merry hardbacks and Annuals, C.H.A.'s, Facsimiles, C.D's, S.P.C., and Miscellany, etc. Lees all series, some bound. S.O.L's, St. Frank's, S.B.L's, Nugget Library, B.F.L's, B/Bill, Robin Hood, Pilot, Young England, Modern Boy, Boys' Realm, Friend & Herald, Pilot True Blue, Champion, etc., etc. Hundreds of Annuals and Hardbacks. Film Material. WANTED for personal collection, titles by William Le Queux.

NORMAN SHAW, 84 BELVEDERE ROAD, LONDON, S.E. 19.
 or Ring Evenings - 01 771 9857.

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 FOR SALE: Aldine Robin Hood Libs. (1925) 31-49. Schoolgirls' Own Libs. 669, 703, 707, 709, 713, 726. Both @ 5/- each. Jester 615 @ 10/-. 'Confederation' U.J.'s 1476, 1480, 1484, 1508, 7/6 each. S.O.L. 378, 411. S.B.L. 3, 103, 244, 2/6 each. HAMILTONIANA: B.F.L. 383 20/-. S.O.L. 277, 280, 283 for 37/6. MAGNETS 1615-1625 for 110/-. GEMS 1250, 1252, 1257, 1258, 10/- each. PLUCKS 251, 255, 10/- each. B.F.S. 975-984, 10/- each. (Plus postages.)

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

XX
 WANTED: Magnets 1220 and 1323. £3 each offered, in any condition, but must be complete with covers.

W. SETFORD, 24 COLWYN AVENUE, DERBY, DE3 6HG.

XX
 WANTED: Magnets, Gems, Populars, S.O.L's; private collector.
NELSON, 69 FRIERN BARNET LANE, LONDON, N.11.

Nelson Lee Column



THE FIRST AND THE LAST

by William Lister

Everything has a beginning, everything has an ending. There can be no doubt about that. I want to draw your attention to the fact that in the long history of the "Nelson Lee" it is obvious that there is a first copy and a last copy and in a long series of Christmas tales there was the first and the last.

I have by my side a copy of one of the first Christmas adventures of the boys of St. Frank's, "THE PHANTOM OF TREGELLIS CASTLE." It was to be the forerunner of many tales of festive adventures of crooks and spooks, of fun and fear, of holly and mistletoe, of Christmas trees, of snowstorms and howling winds.

Nelson Lee and Nipper, fugitives from Fu Chong Tong, a villainous Chinese secret society, had only been at St. Frank's for three months. It was their first Christmas at the school.

They saw it as we so often saw it in the years to come - in its seasonable setting.

"The white mantle of snow had covered everything, and transformed the familiar scene into something quite new and wonderful. It was rather appropriate that snow had fallen during the night. It had descended during the hours of darkness, and St. Frank's had awakened to find Christmas at hand in earnest. The air was crisp and keen; my breath hung like steam in the atmosphere."

But about that ghost(?) and unless you are feeling old age creeping on (I am sure members of the O.B.B.C. will find their hobby keeps

them young) you will be waiting to see it.

Come with me - if you will - to Tregellis Castle. It is there(!) away towards the left, on top of yonder rising hill. I realise the evening light is making it look gloomy. The castle appears to form a silhouette against the leaden sky. The effect is rather grim. You can picture to yourself dungeons and wide stone-paved halls with dark corners and cutting draughts. The battlements are covered with snow.

It is here the phantom has its lair; but until tonight it has not been seen for over 70 years (you lucky people) and here it comes - the Cloaked Cavalier!

The figure is visible, in spite of the darkness; it is not coming towards us, but walks at an angle. It appears to be a man attired in strange clothing, with a long flowing cloak outstretched. The whole vision exudes a faintly greenish haze - a haze which was wholly unearthly. There is no face, the apparition is headless! It moves across the snow with swaying, ungainly strides. There is a man in its path, his attitude one of frozen horror - he screams.

Run, man, run. Don't stand there!

The Cavalier is right on the motionless figure, its wide cloak outstretched further, and then curled itself round the rigid form. Do you hear that wild despairing cry?

The icy wind is sighing round the gables of the castle, the wide expanses of snow are just visible. But the Cloaked Cavalier has vanished; only one man's footprints are there. The phantom has crossed the lawn without leaving a single trace!

Of course, you will say, "there is an explanation for all this" - there is - but the editor has not enough space for me to enlighten you. Tell you what! Contact Gerry Allison or Bob Blythe for a loan copy of "Nelson Lee" No. 130, O.S. and find out - you may sleep better over Christmas. Don't forget it is "The Phantom of Tregellis Castle" you wish to hunt down.

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Many Christmas moons have passed away since we saw the phantom of Tregellis Castle. 1917 to 1932 is a far cry.

Many snowstorms, howling winds, parties and ghosts of various sizes and descriptions have flowed under the St. Frank's bridge

before the strange events of "Archie's Christmas Party" (new series 152 to 154, 1932).

Your cover feature(!) a weird witch complete with broomstick, sailing across the face of a crescent moon in full view of a boy from St. Frank's.

We are to visit Archie Glenthorne's "Aunt Eustacia." The poor old dear has got herself mixed up with some black magic mystic - name of Nerki (shades of Ezra Quirke).

Our destination, the heart of the New Forest and Auntie's gloomy old mansion. Forgive the weather - the wind is blowing eerily across the desolate expanse of country, and the moon, in the cold sky, is only visible now and again as the scudding clouds part.

It is only fair, in case you are squeamish, that I warn you that Auntie's mansion is haunted (though the ghost only appears at the festive season).

Oh! It's only right that I should introduce you to this Nerki fellow. Ivan Nerki is an astounding mystic, endowed with strange and mysterious powers, a man living years out of his own age, an alchemist, a necromancer, in fact direct from the Middle Ages.

While I have been explaining matters, there has appeared the suggestion of snow in the clouds; and indeed a few stinging flakes are drifting along on the wind.

"Good god!" to quote Archie: something is rising above the hedge, black and conical - a witch's hat - followed by a queer misshapen face, a great hooked nose and nutcracker jaws. And now the jaws open and a wild screeching cackle of laughter breaks the night. And now the hideous creature rises, mounted on a broom, and just a glimpse of long trailing garments floating in the wind. A great black cloud obscures the moon, and darkness has shut down. She has gone.

So much then for our pre-Christmas dinner thrills. However, the great day has arrived, a real old fashioned Christmas day, frosty, snowy and crisp. Forget your worries in the round of tabogganing, skating, and the rest of the outdoor sports. In fact, old fruits, build your nerves up for what is to happen as you sit down for your Christmas dinner with this St. Frank's party.

Sorry to have to leave you in this snow-bound old mansion in the

heart of the New Forest. But trust dear old Edwy Searles Brooks to get you out of it. He will you know! If you don't believe me, see in addition to "Archie's Christmas Party," the "Haunted House" and "The Sorcerer's Prisoners," nos. 152, 153, 154, New Series "Nelson Lee."

You are bound to have a Merry Christmas if you spend it with those Nelson Lee characters and their creator - Edwy Searles Brooks.



THE MONSTER WAS A MAMMOTH

By O. W. Wadham

The golden age of St. Frank's must have surely been the period 1925 to 1928. In those years Edwy Searles Brooks must have been as prolific as Charles Hamilton in the schoolboy fiction field. His work in the Monster Library proves that.

The Monster was truly mammoth. Due to the kindness of collector Frank Knott, I have obtained seven Monsters, and have so far found time to read and enjoy one of them - "St. Frank's in London." I should say that each Monster contains at least three times as much reading as a Boy's Friend Library. The price of one shilling may have been a bit of a hurdle for the boys of the 1920 years to part up when fourpence was the most other story papers charged, but the Monster was worth it. I found it took four long sittings to digest number 8, printed in June, 1926. I must say I really enjoyed the yarn; it has action and suspense all the way. Another thing Handforth is not so active as in the average St. Frank's yarns, and that is all to the good. Sexton Blake and Tinker are, however, introduced into the story, and that gives extra interest.

The story deals with four somewhat detached episodes, and the character who burnt St. Frank's, a Greek boy, Alexis, has gone from the volume by the time page 47 of the 128 pages have been read.

Those seven Monsters are interesting apart from the stories however. Each one has a cover reproduction of the current Boy's Friend Library and the Sexton Blake Library. They are clearly shown on the inside back cover. Looking at them it would seem that November, 1926, was truly ferocious wild animal month in both books. Number 70 of the Boy's Friend Library, entitled "City of Gold," had an



DANNY'S DIARY

DECEMBER 1920

How I long for the old Christmas Numbers! Doug has some - he keeps them carefully wrapped up in tissue paper - which were double size, dripping with snow, ice, and holly, and with lovely coloured covers. The Gem and Magnet had some lovely Christmas doubles, but it is the double numbers of the comics, like the Butterfly and the Favorite, that I really love so very much.

This year the Christmas Numbers have been better than last year, but all of them came out fairly late - in Christmas Week. Years ago, they often came out too early, some of them in November. But this year's Christmas Numbers have, at least, been Christmassy, and, as a special Christmas gift, the real Frank Richards wrote the story in the Magnet. His first for ages. A pleasant surprise. I thought he must have kicked the bucket.

Early in the month Farrow's Bank came a cropper. It was a terrible thing for people who were just planning for Christmas.

Lovely month in the Boys' Friend. The new Mornington series came to an end with two stories, "Mornington's Atonement," and "After Many Days." The waif they called 'the Kid' was in a prison cell, accused of robbing Rookwood. The Kid escaped, and Mornny found him, befriended him, and hid him in the Abbey ruins. Baldwin Sleath told the Head that the Kid was his, the Head's own son - brought up to a life of crime. It had been Sleath's revenge on Dr. Chisholm for something that happened long ago. Sleath came to a sticky end, but the Head's son seemed likely never to be found. At last, the Head found

his son, Cyril, hidden in the Abbey ruins. A bit theatrical, but I loved every bit of it all.

Last two tales were Christmassy. Mr. Bootles's relative, Captain Digby, came to stay at Rookwood in an effort to get over being shell-shocked in the war. And the ghost of Rookwood walked. Titles of these two good tales: "Cheering Up the Captain," and "The Phantom Abbot of Rookwood."

In the same paper, Cedar Creek was excellent. Alf Carson had carried off Bob Lawless and Frank Richards. He bound them spread-eagled on the backs of horses, and drove the animals loose. Very exciting stuff. Titles "The Schoolboy Mazeppas" and "At The Eleventh Hour."

Then came "The Cedar Creek Sweepstake," which was organised by Buster Honk, and, finally, "Frank Richards' Christmas Story" in which Chunky Todgers tried to replace Frank's story in the Thompson Press with one of his own. Good fun.

Georges Carpentier's Life Story is running in a new paper named "Young Britain." It is an adventure paper.

They are debasing our coins. A bob is not a bob any more. Instead of being all silver, the coins are now part-alloy. What fearful things governments do!

I bought the Popular this month. It contained a story entitled "Christmas at Bunter Court," but it was a disappointment as it was not by the real writer. There was also an old Rookwood story which was good, so my three-halfpence wasn't wasted.

The Gem stories have not been very pleasing, but the paper is a bit better, as the two serials ended, mid-month, and the St. Jim's tale, rather weak though it is, has come back to the front of the paper. The back page of the Gem is now given over to full-page photographs of Britain's heroes, and we have had, in consecutive weeks, the Prince of Wales, Sir Robert Baden-Powell, and Sir Douglas Haig. A new serial, "The Feud at St. Katies" by Michael Poole has replaced the two previous serials.

"The Outsider's Betrayal" starred Lumley-Lumley. It was good to hear of him again, though the tale was second-rate. He became

friendly with the Head's daughter, Miss Cecilie Holmes, the same age as the Outsider. I didn't know Dr. Holmes had a daughter.

"Lowther on the Warpath" was passably good. A story of Tom Merry's Weekly, it contained some neat verse.

The Christmas Number contained "A Christmas Bombshell" which was set at Colonel Lyndon's house, and was a bit of a sentimental mix-up starring Talbot and Crooke.

For the moment they have stopped giving chapter numbers to the Gem tales. I hope they don't go on doing this sort of thing. It's worse than putting alloy in our half-crowns.

Last of the month was "Put to the Test," a feeble little bit about Cardew visiting his grandfather, Lord Reckness, and playing roulette.

A Handley Page aeroplane crashed at Cricklewood, and four people were burned to death. Awful, just near Christmas.

The famous musical play "Chu Chin Chow" has reached its 2,000th performance this month. I wonder how much longer it will run in London.

We spent Christmas with my grandma who lives in Essex at Layer Marney. Christmas Day was on a Saturday, and it was warm like a spring day. I don't like warm Christmases - I like snow and ice. On the Monday, when Boxing Day festivities were celebrated, Dad hired a car from old Ben Wood in the village. Mr. Wood drove us himself. We had our lunch at the Cups Hotel, and then Dad took us to the Vaudeville Cinema and we saw Leslie Henson and Alma Taylor in "Alf's Button." It was a grand film, all about a soldier who, on his uniform, had a button made from the metal in Aladdin's lamp. I haven't laughed so much for years, and Gran loved it, too, and even Auntie Gwen tittered.

Another day, Doug took Mum into Colchester to the Hippodrome. They saw a stage show called "Mumming Birds" which is presented by a man named Fred Karno.

Back at home we saw Marguerite Clark in "The Seven Swans" which is a lovely Christmas story, from the tale by Hans Anderson. Other times this month we saw Nazimova in "The Brat;" Jack Holt in "The Best of Luck;" Elmo Lincoln in "Tarzan of the Apes." A new

serial has started. It is Jack Dempsey in "Daredevil Jack."

Rather a weak bunch in the Magnet. In "Duping the Duffer," Fishy used Alonzo Todd as a dupe in a chocolate club. In "Up Against It," Mr. Hobbinson, a friend of Mr. Hacker's, became the Remove form-master in Mr. Quelch's absence. In "A Son's Dilemma," the Nugents starred. Mr. Nugent was arrested and appeared in court.

Then came the Christmas story, much longer than the Magnet tales of late, and written by the real Frank Richards. This was "Harry Wharton's Trust." The Co. were in a train crash. Angus McAlpine entrusted Harry with a packet, addressed to Mr. Kerr of Edinburgh, which he was to keep out of the hands of Jerrold Drew. A pleasant Christmas tale.

My brother Doug is a grand chap. For Christmas he bought me the Holiday Annual (this year they call it the Greyfriars Holiday Annual, which is a bit of an insult to St. Jim's and Rookwood). But it is a lovely book. There is a long story entitled "The Master's Secret" about how Tom Merry came to St. Jim's. There is another long St. Jim's story named "All Gussy's Fault" in which St. Jim's juniors have a cricket fixture against St. Winifred's without realising in advance that Drake and Rodney have taken over in place of the slacker, Daubeny.

There is a longish Rookwood story about sport, entitled "Jimmy Silver's Rival." And a long Greyfriars tale called "Billy Bunter's Butler." The butler is named Parkinson, and he is really on hire from Chunkley's stores. It is good fun.

Doug bought Mum the new book by John Galsworthy. It has just been published, and is named "In Chancery." It is a sequel to "A Man of Property" which Mr. Galsworthy wrote in 1906, and it is all about a family named Forsyte. Mum loves it, but it seems dull to me.

I bought Dad an ounce of St. Julien tobacco for 10d, and bought Mum a jar of Pink's strawberry jam which cost 7½d.

On New Year's Eve, Dad took us to London and we went to the matinee at Daly's Theatre. The show was "A Southern Maid" and the star was a lovely girl named Josie Collins. We also walked up Regent Street which is being rebuilt. When it is finished they say it will be one of the loveliest streets in Europe.

(EDITORIAL COMMENT: The story in the Popular mentioned by Danny was the last of the long series of substitute Greyfriars tales. After that, the editor went back to the Red Magnet for his stories. Daly's Theatre stood on the site now occupied by the two new Warner cinemas.)

BLAKIANA

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

REX HARDINGE — AUTHOR AND EXPLORER

by Josie Packman

Rex Hardinge has always been one of my favourite authors especially so when he wrote his African tales. Long before he wrote his first Sexton Blake story he had travelled much in Africa so was able to give his stories authentic backgrounds. I came across a statement made by the Editor in Union Jack No. 1517, to the effect that Mr. Hardinge's first story for the U.J. was called "The Victim of the Veldt," which appeared in U.J. 1285. This we know was wrong as the first story was "The Black Cloud" which appeared in the U.J. No. 1265, dated 14 January, 1928. Many years later this story was re-written and appeared in the Sexton Blake Library 3rd Series, No. 283, under the title "The African Hoodoo." However, I decided to make this article one about Rex Hardinge the Explorer, so I have extracted part of the Round Table featured in the U.J. No. 1530, dated 11 February, 1933.

"Readers who are interested in our Lobangu stories and the man who writes them will remember that I revealed earlier that Rex Hardinge was about to start for Africa on an exploring expedition. This was organised for the purpose of taking a party across Africa from west to east, and to secure sound pictures of native life - war dances, ju-ju feasts and so forth. From the starting place on the West coast, Dakar, the line of march was to traverse French Guinea and the Ivory Coast; Ashanti, Nigeria, and the Cameroons; the Sudan, Uganda, Kenya and Tanganyika."

According to the Editor, there was a hitch in the plans but Rex Hardinge set out alone and arrived at Dakar after 20 days in a steamship where he was the only Englishman aboard. His last letter home from Dakar was to the effect that he was leaving that place on the

morrow and would send further letters as soon as possible. He had left behind him with the Editor some stories for the U.J. but as No. 1530 was the next to the last Union Jack printed no one knows what happened about them, neither did we ever learn what happened on the trip to Africa.

However, we do know that Mr. Hardinge returned safely, as so many of his Sexton Blake stories of later years appeared in the Sexton Blake Libraries. We can believe that all his African ones had been written by a man with first-hand knowledge of the country. (It would appear that there is nothing new under the sun, Mr. David Attenborough was not, after all, the first man to take moving pictures of the African jungles and the animals and people living in them.)



SEXTON BLAKE'S FRIEND

by S. Gordon Swan

ONE OF THE earliest of the Scotland Yard men who made more than one appearance in the Union Jack was William Spearing, the creation of Norman Goddard. He was described as big and burly, walking with a swagger and wearing his little hard felt hat tilted aggressively over one eye. In view of this description, his successor, Inspector Coutts, owes something to this character.

Generally referred to throughout the stories as "Mr. Spearing," he was stodgy and unimaginative, with a tendency to rely on Sexton Blake to do the work while he - Spearing - reaped the kudos. He was a plodder, with none of the brilliance or flashes of insight which characterised the Baker Street criminologist; without the loyalty of a Coutts or the integrity of a Harker; but he was a reliable man in an emergency and offered solid support in a scrap.

One would not suppose that Mr. Spearing had any great appeal for the readers of the Union Jack, yet he must have enjoyed more popularity than expected, for someone conceived the idea of producing a series of stories dealing with the earlier adventures of Will Spearing. So it was that in Pluck No. 317, dated 26th of November, 1910, appeared the first yarn in this series.

The story was entitled "Spearing P.C.," and on the top of the front cover was printed the announcement, "Grand Tale of Sexton Blake"

Friend." In this episode we learned that Will Spearing was the son of a farmer who had fallen on hard times. His parents were dead and his old home was being sold up.

Will Spearing decided to abandon farming and go to the great city to seek his fortune, so he said goodbye to his native village and set off for London. The round-faced, red-cheeked country youth found the going tough in the metropolis and he was just about down and out when a chance occurred for him to enter the police force.

He was befriended by a Detective-Sergeant Priest of Scotland Yard and through his help became a constable stationed at Camberwell. Here he encountered the enmity of a man named Briggs, who was the station-sergeant and seemed jealous of Spearing from the start.

In the second story we were introduced to Jasper Renard and his daughter Nell, who was destined to become Spearing's sweetheart. (There were no girl friends in those days, only sweethearts.) And in this connection it might be mentioned that a Mrs. Spearing was once introduced into a Union Jack story, and by no stretch of the imagination could she be pictured as a Nell Renard in middle age.

Another inconsistency in this new series was that the younger Will Spearing was quick-thinking and imaginative, qualities which were lacking in his Union Jack counterpart. These attributes made him much sought after by his friend Detective Priest of Scotland Yard, who was always calling upon Spearing's services, much to the annoyance of Station-Sergeant Briggs.

In fact Spearing engaged in a number of enterprises which seemed to go far beyond the ordinary duties of a police constable and should have earned him early promotion. That he did not get it for a long time was due, no doubt, to the jealousy of the station-sergeant, who went out of his way to block Spearing's progress. Even when Spearing did the sergeant a good turn in the matter of his delinquent son, Briggs showed no gratitude.

At first the Spearing yarns shared the paper with other stories, sometimes with a reprint of a Nelson Lee adventure by Maxwell Scott, but it wasn't long before the tales became double-length, which meant that they took up the whole of Pluck except for an instalment of a serial. They must have been the most popular series that the paper

ever printed; they were certainly the longest-lasting.

Here it might be mentioned that Spearing appeared in no less than four periodicals: The Union Jack, The Boys' Friend Library, Pluck and The Dreadnought. In the last-named he was featured in august company, that of John Marsh, George Marsden Plummer and Count Ivor Carlac. The story was "The Great Conspiracy" and was probably by Norman Goddard.

In the earlier stories in Pluck one can detect the writing styles of Norman Goddard, Ambrose Earle and others. Later came Andrew Murray, H. Clarke Hook (son of the creator of Jack, Sam and Pete) and Edwy Searles Brooks. The ubiquitous W. Murray Graydon also entered the field: he introduced a criminal who also appeared in the Union Jack and the Sexton Blake Library - Laban Creed. I believe other well-known authors also contributed to the Spearing Saga, but I have no exact information on this point. It would be interesting to obtain a list of all the stories in the series and their corresponding authors.

As time went on Spearing became a fully-fledged Scotland Yard man; then the tales were shortened to make way for other attractions such as Reginald Wray's Western tales of Dick Britton and Zena Race and the yarns of Victor Wild, the Boy Jockey, which I think were written by Allan Blair. And in 1913-1914, when the impact of motion pictures was being felt, Pluck ran a number of stories based on current films. But Will Spearing persisted, showing that he was an established favourite. His exploits now seemed up-to-date, for one or two of them brought in Sexton Blake and Tinker. Rather curiously, all the time he was flourishing in Pluck he had been gradually fading out of the Union Jack.

During the Great War his appearances in Pluck became desultory, and when finally the paper faded out of existence he seemed to have been dropped altogether and he never reappeared in any other periodical.

In the late 'twenties a reader wrote to the editor of the Union Jack, asking for a revival of Will Spearing and the charming Nell Renard. He must have been thinking of the Pluck series, for I have no knowledge of Nell Renard appearing in the Union Jack, unless possibly it was in a Spearing serial, The Bogus Policeman. The editor replied to the effect that there would be a big difficulty in the way of this resuscitation, as

he was no longer in touch with the author of the Spearing stories - a rather mendacious statement, as, although he certainly couldn't get in touch with Norman Goddard, who died in the Great War, other authors were still living and writing who had penned tales of Spearing. However, he wound up by saying that it was unlikely that a character of seventeen years ago would appeal to readers of a later day.

So Spearing remains a figure of the past, a character who was overshadowed by Sexton Blake in the pages of the Union Jack, but who blossomed into personal fame in another periodical.

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(S. Gordon Swan contributes "They Were Already Famous" in the 1970 Annual.)

THE BOWMAN LODE

When a famous Liverpool eccentric died last year Frank Shaw, writer and publisher, not unknown to Merseyside followers of our hobby and in these pages, was lucky enough to find a printer friend had a large quantity of Bowman's writings for old boys' papers and comics going back to 1911 when Bowman, still at school, had his first piece in Merry and Bright. The last that can be traced was a Judge Jeffrys story in a 1938 Rover. During the war Bowman, a pacifist, was imprisoned under 18B (unjustly he insisted) and while in prison was made a knight by another 18B detainee who claimed to be King of Poland. After the war the now Sir Frederick Bowman confined his activities to politics and editing local papers and, after a successful TV appearance, died in poverty, aged 75.

In his time he had been musician, playwright, actor both on stage and screen, a fighter in many causes and, at all ages, a picturesque character. He attended Merseyside O.B.B.C. meetings in the 40's, in a velvet suit with a flowing bow. For readers of C.D. what Frank Shaw is finding in the pile of periodicals, including women's papers for which his mother wrote (she was also leading lady in plays he wrote and performed in often at theatres managed by him), much to interest O.B.B.C. members with letters to and from Companion Papers' editors and Union Jack editors, hundreds of film stills of the period now being entered by Danny, programmes, covers, theatre posters, a mine of nostalgia. "I am," says Mr. Shaw, "still digging into it. It is hoped that the results will be put before C.D. readers eventually. It is such a find as many dream of. For one thing I think it will throw quite a new light on the substitute authors. Many of the Bowman creations before the first World War in Fun and Fiction, Dreadnought, etc., appear again in the 20's in the boys' papers current then e.g. Karnak."

IN THE 1970 ANNUAL: Bob Blythe introduces the early E.S.B. story "Plague of Weed" - and Jim Swan writes on "The Rover."

The final part of our special Christmas story, selected from an obscure series of more than 60 years ago.

CHRISTMAS AT CLIVEDEN

"That is my letter you have in your hand! Give it to me at once!"

"It is not! It is ---"

"I saw the writing, and the postman just told me there was a letter for me. Give it to me at once, you cad!" cried Poindexter.

Ralph's eyes glittered. He thrust the letter into his pocket.

"I shall not give it to you. It is not yours. Complain to Mr. Lanyon if you like."

Ralph Lanyon turned to stride away. Poindexter, flaming with anger, sprang towards him and gripped his arm.

Lanyon swung round his hand, and caught the boy a savage blow on the side of the head. Poindexter reeled, and fell heavily against the hall-stand. But that was a little too much for Dick and Micky.

They sprang at the man from Chicago, and Ralph Lanyon found himself struggling with two athletic juniors, who clung to him like cats.

Either of them he could have knocked out in a few seconds, but the two together were a larger order. He struggled with them furiously, dragging them to and fro.

Poindexter was springing to join in the fray the next minute, and his sinewy arms came round the rascal's neck from behind.

Half-choked, and wholly overpowered, Ralph Lanyon was dragged backwards, and he went down to the floor with a crash.

All three juniors fell upon him, Poindexter on his head, Dick Neville on his chest, and Flynn on his legs. The unfortunate man gasped painfully under the three weighty forms.

"Hold him!" panted Dick. "We've got the beast now!"

Ralph Lanyon struggled frantically. He seemed to attach a great value to Poindexter's letter, for he fought like a tiger to retain it. But the odds were

too heavy against him.

Dick and Micky pinned him down by sheer weight and strength, and Poindexter dragged the crumpled letter from his pocket.

"Got it!" exclaimed the American chum. "Look! 'My dear Lin,' that's how it begins. Isn't it my letter right enough?"

"Of course it is! Fancy the fellow being cad enough to read another chap's letter! My hat! He - he ought to be fed on tinned beef, or something fearful like that."

"Let him go now," grinned Poindexter, putting the letter in his pocket. "I've got it safe. Let the beast get on his hind legs."

The juniors released Ralph Lanyon. He staggered up, white with fury. The three chums drew close together, prepared for an attack; but the fellow seemed to realise the hopelessness of making one, and with a savage oath he turned away.

* * * * *

Poindexter opened the letter slowly, a wrinkle of thought upon his brow.

"I don't quite get the hang of this, I guess," he remarked. "What should that chap want to read my letter for? He comes from Chicago, and it's plain he's a pesky rascal. Can he know anything about popper's business, I wonder? Can he be up to some game, and on the trail for information? I don't quite get the hang of it."

"Read the letter," suggested Micky Flynn. "Sure it may have something in it that'll explain."

Poindexter read the letter out. He had no secrets from his chums of the Combine. The note was a brief one:

"My dear Lin. -- I am sorry I have not been able to fetch you away for Christmas as was arranged. It may be possible yet, but I don't know. I am in London now, and I think we are on the track of that rascal Phipps, who absconded

from our Chicago counting-house with nearly fifty-thousand dollars. The detectives have tracked him across the ocean, and it is known that he was in London as late as two days ago. He has been living here quietly under the name of Harris, and we should have had him if he had not somehow got a hint, and fled before we could seize him. He seems to have disappeared from London, but the detectives are still hopeful. As I am the only man in England who knows him by sight, I am wanted on the spot, but I shall try and run down Christmas Eve to see you, whether the rascal has been captured or not. If that can't be done, I shall see you Christmas Day. Tell your chums I am sorry the affair has gone so awry, but we'll make it up to them, I guess. In haste, from your loving popper.

"Cyrus K. Poindexter."

"Well, I hope they'll catch him, that's all," said Dick Neville. "As for us, it doesn't matter. We seem to be getting some excitement this Christmas anyhow."

"Sure and we are, Micky darling. As for that spalpeen Lanyon, he's a dirty scoundrel; and I shouldn't be surprised if he was a giddy criminal. Oh, crumbs!"

A heavy hand descended upon the Irish lad's shoulder. The three boys were standing by the angle of a building, and Ralph Lanyon had suddenly come round the corner. Whether he had heard the American junior reading out the letter or not they did not know.

His hard face was inflamed with rage. He had certainly heard Micky's uncomplimentary reference to himself, and he was furious. He boxed the Irish lad's ears right and left.

"Take that, and that, and -- oooh!"

Micky was struggling helplessly in an iron grip, but his chums were not long in coming to the rescue. Poindexter and Dick stooped together, and gathered snow. Two snowballs flew at the same instant, and both caught Ralph Lanyon full in the face. He staggered back with a gasping grunt, and released Micky.

"The - the baste!" gasped Micky, staggering away, and falling in the snow. "The bastely baste! Give him socks, ye kippers!"

Dick and Poindexter were giving the ruffian "socks." They gathered snowballs like lightning, and pelted Ralph Lanyon right and left.

He sprang at Poindexter like a tiger, and grasped him; but a snowball in his left ear from Neville bowled him over, and as he staggered, Micky sent one in his right ear that set him upright again. He muttered savage oaths between his gritted teeth.

But he was getting the worst of the encounter, there could be no doubt about that, especially as the active juniors soon got to a distance, and pelted him with deadly aim, dodging all his frantic rushes and attempts to seize one or another of them. Muttering savagely to himself, he beat a retreat at last towards the house.

"Hurrah!" shouted Poindexter. "Give him a send-off."

The chums were not slow to do so. They rained snowballs upon the hapless rascal, and he broke into a run, and was glad to gain the shelter of the porch.

The chums were jubilant. They had routed the enemy, and though Micky at least had received some hard knocks the victory was with them, and they were satisfied.

"The beastly ruffian!" said Poindexter. "I guess he was hiding there, and heard me read the letter, kids. What can his interest in the matter possibly be, I wonder?"

"Perhaps he's a friend of the chap who robbed your pater," suggested Dick Neville, struck by a brilliant idea.

Poindexter started.

"My hat! There might be something in that, kids. Why should he be so anxious about knowing what was in popper's letter? His looks and actions show that he's afraid of something. Specs said that he's come from Chicago without warning. Specs didn't know why he had returned to England all of a sudden. By the Ghost of George Washington, kids, he may know something about the robbery! He may be a confederate of Phipps!"

It was a startling idea. Yet, as they thought it over, it seemed to the chums that there was probably something of truth in it. Otherwise Ralph Lanyon's conduct was hard to account for.

"I'll tell you what," went on Poindexter. "I'm going down to the village to send a wire to my popper in London, asking him to come here, and telling him what I suspect."

"Good," said Dick Neville. "We'll all go. My hat! That chap's face makes my blood run cold. Let's get away before he comes this way again."

The chums ran through the snow towards the school gates. A few seconds later Ralph Lanyon glared out into the whirling snow.

The wind and snow blinded him for a moment; but he gazed again. The deep tracks of three pairs of boots in the snow caught his eye. He muttered an imprecation, and was about to rush from the house when a hand fell upon his arm.

"Ralph! What is it - where are you going?"

He flung off little Mr. Lanyon's detaining grip, and rushed into the snowy night. The master of the Fourth stood in amazement and dismay, wringing his hands, the snow blowing into his face as he stood there looking out.

Ralph Lanyon darted across the Close on the track of the Combine.

* * * * *

"He's coming!"

Poindexter and Flynn looked round, to see the figure of little Mr. Lanyon, wringing his hands.

"Buck up, ye gossoons!" muttered Micky Flynn.

The chums ran out into the road. The wind whistled about their ears as they set their faces towards Clivedale and ran.

Thud, thud, thud! in the snow behind them came the footsteps of the pursuer. Ralph Lanyon was running hard, with desperate determination.

A wild Christmas Eve, and a wild way of passing it. The juniors' hearts were in their mouths as they ran through the whirling snow.

Deep was the snow under foot, and they sank to the ankle at every step; deep and thick were the whirling flakes.

"Keep it up!" gasped Dick Neville.

They ran still harder, but the dull

pounding behind them was louder and nearer. Good runners were the chums of the Fourth Form; but a desperate man, straining every nerve, was behind them.

Poindexter's foot slipped in the snow and he went down on his hands and knees. Dick and Micky came to a halt instantly.

They knew only too well, how great their danger was, but they were not the fellows to desert their chum.

Dick caught Poindexter by the arm and dragged him to his feet again. The running figure behind loomed up, and two desperate eyes gleamed as a right hand rose and fell.

Dick gave a gasp of horror. A life-preserver was sweeping down upon Poindexter's head, when Dick flung himself recklessly at the scoundrel, to save his chum.

The shock diverted the blow; the weapon swept down, but met with no resistance, while Dick clung tenaciously to the ruffian's arm to prevent him from again using the weapon.

Micky Flynn, his teeth hard set, fastened like a cat upon the scoundrel, and gripped his left arm. Poindexter scrambled up and gripped him round the body.

They struggled furiously. The juniors felt that they were fighting, if not for their lives, for something very like it. The ruffian fought like a tiger, striving to tear his hand free to use the life-preserver.

With a tremendous effort he succeeded, and the weapon rose, but a blow from the swift American knocked it from the savage hand.

It dropped into the snow, but the ruffian's fist clenched and was driven with fearful force into Poindexter's face, and he fell half stunned.

With a snarl the ruffian tore himself from Dick, and Dick fell into the snow. Micky was still clinging to Ralph Lanyon like a cat, but a savage grip was on his throat now.

It seemed as if the ruffian was to win; he required but a few moments to free himself, and once the life-preserver was in his ruthless hands again ---

A tall, fur-coated figure came into sight. A traveller, coming from the

direction of the village to the school - a powerful form, stick in hand.

"Waal, what's all this, anyhow?"

A sharp voice, with a nasal twang.

Poindexter gave a yell of delight.

"Popper!"

"Help!" gasped Micky. "Help! He's --"

Dick Neville was springing to his aid again. But he was not needed. The tall stranger took in the situation in a second.

His heavy walking stick circled in the air, and came down with a terrific crack on Ralph Lanyon's head. The ruffian dropped into the snow as if he had been shot.

"I guess he won't get up in a hurry," said the tall gentleman complacently. "I don't quite get the hang of this. Is that you, Lincoln G.?"

"Yes, popper," shouted the delighted Poindexter. "Lads, this is my father. Dad, these are the chums I told you about - Neville, Flynn. So you've come down after all, and just in time to save us - to save our lives, I believe, pop."

"This is mighty queer. I arrive at the village," said Mr. Poindexter, "and couldn't find a vehicle to make this trip in the snow for love or money, so I set out to walk, I calculate. But I never expected to meet you on the road, Lincoln G. What's the blessed game, anyhow?"

Poindexter hurriedly explained. While he was talking, Dick and Micky secured the hands of the stunned ruffian. He was showing signs of returning consciousness.

In a few minutes he was himself again, but his wrists were fastened together by a couple of stout neckties.

"Got him!" said Dick triumphantly.

"You rotter, it's our turn now."

The ruffian, with his hands tied behind and his brain swimming, hardly attempted resistance. He was hurried along by the juniors, Mr. Poindexter bringing up the rear, with his stick ready for use. But it was not needed.

They passed through the gates, and tramped through the snow towards the door of the School House.

Ralph Lanyon was bundled into the hall. Mr. Poindexter fixed his keen grey eyes on the sullen, savage face. Then he uttered an exclamation.

"Gee whiz! So this is where we meet again, George Phipps!"

Poindexter uttered a cry of amazement.

"Phipps?"

"Yes, my boy; that's Phipps, who was in my employ in Chicago, and bolted with fifty-thousand dollars!" said the Chicago magnate. "He's got it still, unless I'm mistaken."

The Form-master smote his forehead.

"Heavens!" he groaned; "I feared it - I - I suspected it! Oh, what shall I do? I am ruined."

Mr. Poindexter looked at the little man curiously.

"How does it worry you?" he asked.

"and who are you, anyway?"

"I am a master here," said Mr. Lanyon miserably, "and I have the misfortune to be that villain's cousin, and his disgrace is mine. Once before he brought me to shame. But after this I can never hold up my head again. I shall have to leave Cliveden. I am ruined! But I cannot ask you to spare him, after --- Besides, what am I to you?"

"Not so fast," drawled Mr. Poindexter. "I don't know you, but - what sort of a galoot is this gentleman, Lincoln G? I trust your judgment? Is he likely to have been in cahoots with Phipps ---"

"Sir!" exclaimed Mr. Lanyon. "Sir, I --"

"Oh, no, dad," cried Poindexter hastily. "He's Mr. Lanyon, our Form-master. He's one of the best; we all like and respect him. He can't help that scoundrel being his cousin. It's rotten if he has to suffer for it."

Mr. Poindexter hesitated. Ralph Lanyon thought he saw a chance, and he spoke swiftly.

"Let me go - only give me a chance - the money is nearly all intact."

"H'm!" said Mr. Poindexter. "I don't know whether I ought to give way - but if what you say about the money is correct ---"

"I swear it is. It's in a black bag in my room."

"I'll go and get it," said Lincoln Poindexter. And he ran off.

In a couple of minutes he returned with the black bag. It was opened, and the rolls of banknotes which had so surprised Mr. Lanyon were exposed to view.

The Form-master groaned at the sight

of the proofs of his cousin's villainy.

"Now let me go ----"

"I believe," said Mr. Poindexter, slowly, "that this is something awfully like compounding a felony. But I'm not a pesky policeman, anyhow; and I don't let you off, mind; I only don't seize you, but leave it to the detectives to do their own work. For this gentleman's sake, and as it's Christmas-time, I give you a chance. On Boxing Day the hunt starts afresh!"

The rascal was released. In two minutes more he was gone from Cliveden for ever. The boys never saw him again, and neither did the Form-master, whom he had so basely wronged, and so nearly ruined.

* * * * *

And so the Cliveden Christmas was a merry one after all. Mr. Poindexter had regained nearly all the stolen money, so he was satisfied.

Mr. Lanyon had got rid of his rascally cousin without an open disgrace, so he was satisfied.

The only dissatisfied person, probably was Ralph Lanyon, fleeing through the winter weather for his liberty, but as he had received much less than his deserts, he did not count.

Mr. Poindexter carried off the boys on Christmas morning to his quarters in town, and they spent a happy Christmas after all.

NEWS OF THE CLUBS

MIDLAND

Meeting held on 27th October, 1970.

Eight members attended.

The anniversary number was the E. S. Brooks typescript of Fatty's Flag Day, a Blue Crusaders' story which appeared in the Boys' Realm No. 67, dated 27.10.1928 - 42 years old; the collectors' item was the menu card of the lunch party of the London Club held recently at the Rembrandt Hotel, Kensington. Both items were very much admired as they passed round.

After some discussion of the possible form of a Christmas Party, Jack Bellfield gave a reading from the Da Costa series in which Mr. Quelch reprimands Mr. Mobbs and exposes the villainy of Ponsonby. It is an excellent passage and Jack was applauded for his fine reading.

After the coffee break and the raffle, came another reading, this time from chapter one of N.L.L. (O.S.) 195. It is a description of a football match - at which E.S.B. was a pastmaster - between the Ancient House and the College House (Fossils v. Monks). At the end of the match the story swings quite suddenly, but quite naturally into another plane, with the introduction of a mysterious stranger who stalks away and vanishes through a gap in the hedgerow as Nipper

approaches to question him. This is Brooks at his very best.

The next meeting of the Club will be on 24th November, from 7 p.m. onwards.

TOM PORTER

Correspondent.

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NORTHERN

Saturday, 14th November, 1970.

A large gathering on this occasion, including a first visit from Wilfred Stocks, of Halifax, who was cordially welcomed on our behalf by Chairman, Geoffrey Wilde. After the formal business, a discussion ensued as to whether we should make a special celebration of our 250th monthly meeting in January, or wait for our 21st birthday in April. In view of the closeness to the Christmas party, it was generally considered better to wait for our "coming of age" (old style!). Final arrangements were approved for the Christmas party, after which we settled down to listen to Jack Allison's reading of Gerry Allison's new look at Billy Bunter as a hero. Gerry put his case on two episodes in Bunter's life - his saving of Cora Quelch from the bull, and his drugging of Soames in the Treasure Island series. Readings of the appropriate chapters made this an entertaining study of the fat Owl - interrupted, appropriately by refreshments. The arguments produced a lively discussion on the difference between heroism and cowardice, and reactions in time of stress from the most unlikely sources.

A long meeting ended about 9.25 p.m.

JACK WOOD

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LONDON

The penultimate meeting of 1970 was held at "Friardale," Ruislip, the residence of Bob and Betty Acraman and their three boys. A good gathering of members were in attendance and Leslie Rowley, in

the chair, heartily welcomed one and all. He expressed condolences to Bob and Louise Blythe re their recent bereavement. Also the good wishes for a speedy recovery to Charlie Wright.

A lengthy discussion on meeting points and catering took place and at the end of the debate, points in question were settled. A possible venue in central London will be investigated when the hosts return from holidays.

Hamilton, Nelson Lee and Sexton Blake library sections all had good reports from their curators.

The eight Luncheon Meetings that have taken place were the subject of a quiz. Don Webster had the most correct answers and the runner-up was Bill Lofts. Afterwards the 'Don' gave a reading from "The Great Charlie" by Robert Payne, about Chaplin and where he obtained some of his mannerisms. Following this was the feed in the 'rag' and help yourself to home-grown apples, plus, of course, the welcome get-together. Bob Blythe then rendered a tape recording quiz. Brian Doyle was the winner with most correct answers and Ray Hopkins and Eric Lawrence tied for second place.

With the possible advent of "The Courtfield Cracksman" facsimile reprint, Winifred Morss read a chapter or two out and then held a quiz on what she had read. Rowley and Lawrence were the joint winners. Graham Wright filled the third place.

Bob Blythe read passages from the October 1953, number 16 club newsletter. Incidentally the potted biography was our Chadwell Heath member, Frank Byrne.

Next meeting on Sunday, 13th December, at 71 Olive Road, Cricklewood, London, N.W.2. Phone 452-8148. It is imperative that members, intending to be present, let the hosts Bill and Marjorie Norris know in good time.

With hearty votes of thanks to the hosts at Friardale, it was the journey home once again with happy memories.

UNCLE BENJAMIN

OUR NEXT CLASSIC SERIAL: "THE ONLY WAY" -

the far-distant Courtney story.

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

HARRY DOWLER (Stockport): The newly-published book "The Men Behind Boys' Fiction" by Messrs. Lofts and Adley must have been the result of long and painstaking work. It is a great book, and one which I will keep and consult frequently. But, having said this, I must add that it is disappointing in some ways. There are 361 pages, and the price of 4 guineas is very high, but the price is even stiffer still when you realise that the book is cluttered up with a large number of practically useless entries.

What, for instance, is the point of putting: CHAMBERS, Rex; SCOUT. There are a large number of entries of this description. We don't know if Chambers is his real name or a pen-name. What makes it odd is that there are plenty of authors' names in boys' papers that are not mentioned in this book. This sort of entry is all the more amazing when you have GOLSWORTHY, ARNOLD; CAPTAIN, when there is quite a lot of information available in Who's Who, and in "The Literary Year Book and Authors' Who's Who." The authors could have consulted old Who's Whos and old and new encyclopædias.

Another space-wasting idea is cluttering up the book with authors who are not boys' authors at all. Why waste nearly a page on Edgar Wallace when nearly full particulars of his life appear in many encyclopædias, and his full life story can be found in most libraries?

Most of the well-known authors could have been omitted for the simple reason that there is no fresh information, and if you want details of their lives, they can be found in many reference books.

In my opinion, there is so much space-wasting that the 361 pages could have been boiled down to about 200 pages with no loss to the book's value. There are a number of spelling errors of authors' names and in the titles of stories.

One entry GRAY, GILBERT (real name J. S. MARGERISON). In fact, Gilbert Gray was a pen-name of W. J. Bayfield (Allan Blair). No doubt at all of this. His style is unmistakeable. I cannot grasp this John S. Margerison at all. He is said to have been a prolific writer, usually with a sea background, in the 20's. But Gilbert Gray's story

"Rung By Rung" appeared in Boys' Leader in 1905, and was continued in Big Budget. It's a tale of office life, and is definitely by Bayfield (Allan Blair). The entry WILLIAMSON, C.H. (Boys' Friend Weekly 1st) I take it refers to Mrs. C. N. Williamson, the wife of C. N. Williamson. She was born Alice Muriel Livingston, and wrote a serial in the 1/2d Boys' Friend entitled "The Boy Millionaire." She and her husband collaborated in many stories. Consult any good encyclopædia.

I must put in a good word for Brain Doyle's "The Authors and Artists Who's Who" of 1963. I use and consult this splendid reference book very frequently. Despite the many imperfections of "The Men Behind Boys' Fiction" it is still a monumental work, and a vast contribution to our hobby, reflecting great credit on its authors.

T. W. WALKER (Widnes): Would there be any chance of reprinting the Dirk Power series of 1920? In book form. It was a wonderful series.

BOB BLYTHE (Kingsbury): In Bill Lofts article on Gerald Swan he says: "Enthusiasts of E. S. Brooks also know him as reprinting his old St. Frank's stories under the guise of new schools ---" From this one would assume that the Westchester and Whitelands stories were straightforward reprints with only the names and places altered. This is not correct. The old plots were used but the stories were completely rewritten. A small point perhaps, but it's worth keeping the record straight.

NORMAN SEALEY (Totton): When the way gets hard and weary, and I find I am "up against it," I always turn to C.D. and re-read again and again. During these day of strikes, demos, and bitterness - and loneliness - what, I ask, is better than to turn the clock back to peace and kindness with Tom Merry, Wharton, Bunter, Handy and the rest? A big "thank you" from me at least for the great pleasure I have received from C.D.

CHAS. DAY (Keighley): We have had a splendid volume devoted to C. H. Chapman and his work. Any chance of a similar book about Eric Parker? Personally, I find him the only portrayer of Sexton Blake.

Mrs. MARY CADOGAN (Beckenham): I liked your mention of Angela

Anstruther-Browne this month. I have recently read the series to which you referred, borrowed from the library of the Northern Club. (It is in School Friend 72 to 84, in 1920.) Angela is very like the reckless Vernon Smith, but Peggy Preston (like Redwing a true and faithful and dependable friend) is the special chum of Vivienne Leigh. Peggy is the pretty, scholarship girl from the North. Vivienne develops a dancing craze, and recklessly spends large amounts of money on dancing lessons - neglecting her school work, her school friends and activities in the process. She gets in with a shoddy 'set' from the village, who attend her dancing classes. Angela Anstruther-Browne, by now re-



instated at Cliff House after her earlier expulsion, sees that Vivienne is falling into bad ways, similar to her own a little earlier on. Angela is determined to save Vivienne from her own folly - but unfortunately has to go away to be with a sick sister. Angela makes Lorna Gray

promise to help curb Vivienne's dancing mania and extravagance, but Lorna, weak and easily influenced, herself becomes swept up in the dancing craze, and encourages Vivienne in her downhill path. Peggy Preston, with help from Babs and Co., remains a true chum to Vivienne throughout - and eventually they bring her back into the happy, healthy fold of the Cliff House Fourth chummery. (School Friends 112 to 115 in 1921.)

Angela pops up frequently in the history of Cliff House, and is always an intriguing character.

