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COLLECTORS

No 324

DIGEST

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VOL. 27

DECEMBER 1973



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JUST CHRISTMAS

One likes to think of Christmas somehow - just think about it

Christmas does not need any long speeches. It is Christmas, and those chums of mine who are of older growth know what it is when memory plays on the strings of life.

Some, when they think of Christmas, like to picture old England in the grip of the frost with stinging white roads on which the horses' hoofs clatter, and a pale blue sky, with scarlet hips and haws bobbing in the bare hedges, and the ring of the skates on the village pond, while from far away across the valley comes the clash and crash of the Christmas bells. Others like the soft, mild Christmas, with spring whispering at the door. It is all according to taste.

But Christmas means love and peace on earth; a roaring log fire, a good book to read, and a whole heap of cheery wishes all round.

So often during the year I have, in my editorial, been grumbling about something or other, I fear. Christmas is not the time for grumbling. It is possible to crowd all the good feeling in the world into Christmas-time 1973. There will be room.

It is possible to send to the rightabout the unhappy memories of life, just as it is possible to get a good firm hold of the message of the Christmas bells - a message of peace and kindness.

I'm cheating. Most of the ideas which I have just written down were expressed by editor Hinton in one of the Companion Papers over fifty years ago. Maybe the roaring fire, mentioned above, gave me away. It was an editorial which I, ever the sentimentalist, have always loved and remembered. And that is my only excuse for passing these old Christmas thoughts on to you now.

So have a wonderful time, this Christmas. May Yuletide bring something wonderful to every one of you. God bless you all.

CHRISTMAS TREBLE NUMBER

Up till 1917 almost all periodicals had their Double Numbers at Christmas time. Some of us looked forward to them all the year through, and those of us who were not about at that time, to enjoy them when they originally appeared, get a great kick out of browsing over them all these years later. So we are well acquainted with Christmas Double Numbers. I, however, have only ever come across one Christmas Treble Number.

In 1905 the "Marvel" had passed under the control of that great Edwardian editor, Hamilton Edwards. And he it was who presented the

Christmas Treble Number of the Marvel - price 3d. The main attraction was a 70,000 word story of Jack, Sam and Pete, entitled "Pete's Christmas." The length of stories in those days, and, in fact, of plenty of many years later, including the Sexton Blake tales of the twenties - is something to marvel at. It is certainly evidence of the popularity of the three adventurers in those days, and this long tale was described as the third, full-length story of the characters.

But that was only half of it. There were in addition a long complete ghost story entitled "The Ghost of Abbeycroft" by Reginald Wray; a complete detective story by Cedric Wolfe entitled "At Dead of Night"; a complete school story "by a popular author" entitled "Armitage's First Term"; a long instalment of a school serial by Henry St. John; plus articles, jokes, tricks, etc.

As a novelty the treble issue was "edited by Pete", and it was said that Pete's editorial was worth, in itself, the 3d. which the whole issue cost. The total number of words in the issue was 150,000. Truly they gave value for money in those days.

It is impossible to say whether the venture was a success, but, so far as I know, there was not another Christmas Treble Number.

SIR ALAN COBHAM

The recent death of that great British airman, Sir Alan Cobham, reminds us that the first serial about Ken King of the Islands in Modern Boy was stated to have been written by him. Even though the names of both Sir Alan Cobham and Charles Hamilton were linked together in the author's by-line under the title, there were many references, over a number of weeks, to Sir Alan as the "author of our South Seas serial."

Many years later, Charles Hamilton claimed that he never knew anything of the occurrence, which, as we have pointed out before, was really unlikely. The common sense explanation was that Cobham was paid for the use of his famous name, and the author was paid to allow another man's name to be credited to the story. It is merely a matter of passing interest nearly fifty years later.

A great man, Sir Alan Cobham, whose name will always be remembered in aviation circles, even though we cannot credit him with those superb "King of the Islands" stories.

WHERE'S MY C.D. ?

This magazine is printed in York, and the finished copies come in large parcels, early each month, to Excelsior House. To avoid delays, we always pay the not inconsiderable "special delivery" charge on each parcel, and, on top of that, VAT has to be paid on the postal charges. Though the Aldershot deliveries have, up till recently, been fairly good, the November issue, travelling under "special delivery" flags, took exactly a week in transit. The explanation given for this sudden deterioration in the parcel services is that parcels for the Aldershot area, "in the interests of efficiency", are now carried beyond Aldershot for sorting - in fact, to Southampton, about 60 miles away. Once sorted, the parcels for this area are sent, three times a day, by articulated lorries, back to Aldershot.

Owing to the Christmas holidays, the January issue will almost certainly be a day or two late, even if the post office gets its affairs in order. Please be patient.

THE MOST WONDERFUL NEWS OF THE YEAR

Two of our most enthusiastic supporters - both of them Sexton Blake fans - will have become man and wife by the time you read these lines. Bette Pate, whom I have loved from afar for a long time for her unselfishness and sweetness and wisdom, is marrying Vic Colby, whom I have always admired for his loyalty and common sense. In far off Australia, this happy pair marry at about the same time that the only daughter of our beloved Queen weds the man of her choice. What a splendid item with which to wind up the Old Year's editorials.

On behalf of our readers, this magazine wishes long life and happiness to Mr. and Mrs. Vic Colby. We are just full of joy for this splendid couple.

THE ANNUAL

Our new Annual will soon be with you, if you have not forgotten to order it. I hope you will enjoy it. A merry, merry Christmas to all my readers, and a happy New Year.

THE EDITOR

Danny's Diary

CHRISTMAS 1923

Jimmy Silver & Co. came back from Canada to Rookwood in time for Christmas. The long Canadian series has ended, and, in some ways I am sorry, for I had got to like Skitter Dick, Baldy Bubbin, Blazer the horse, and the Windy River Ranch very much.

In "Tricked by the Cowpunchers", Baldy gave a week's notice to Mr. Smedley, his boss, and advertised his services in a local newspaper. But Skitter Dick changed the advertisement, so it appeared that Baldy had found a big money bill and was trying to find the owner. And Baldy had a high old time with many odd claimants of the fictitious cash.

Then came "Homeward Bound" and "From Ranch To Rookwood", which told of the Fistical Four's journey home from Canada, bringing with them an American boy who is to be a pupil at Rookwood. In "Lick in the Limelight", Texas Lick lassoed Mr. Dalton, and only by a stroke of luck showed his pluck and avoided being expelled from the school.

In "Lick Lays the Ghost", quite a long Yuletide tale in the Boys' Friend Xmas Number, Lick goes as a guest to Jimmy's home, the Priory. On the journey they come on Billy Bunter, on his way to join the Greyfriars chums, and Lovell tips Bunter to take the rise out of Lick with some ventriloquism. But Lick has overheard the plot, and Bunter's ventriloquism misses fire for once. Then, at the Priory, Lovell, who doesn't like to be beaten, tries to scare Lick by playing ghost. But once again Lick comes out on top by laying the ghost - Lovell.

December has been a bad month for weather, but the whole of 1923 has been a very wet year with a great shortage of sunshine. Coal has gone up by 1/- a ton to 52/- a ton for the very best coal. Coke is now 33/- a ton.

There was a general election this month on the 6th, a very foggy day. It seems that the new party called the Labour Party has done well, but we shan't know the full result until January.

Milk has gone up to 4d. a pint.

The title of the first Magnet of the month, "The Coker Challenge Cup", really told everything. One of those strings of sporting events

which I always find very tiresome.

But the next Magnet was great fun, when Billy Bunter starred as "The Rebel of the Remove". It all centred round a large cake purchased from Chunkley's by Mr. Quelch. Bunter was to be punished for purloining the cake, but, for once, he wasn't guilty. Next week "True as Steel" was rather heavygoing reading. Owing to the scheming of Skinner, the Bounder and Redwing quarrelled, and, for a time, public opinion was against Redwing.

Then the Magnet's Christmas Number. In "The Gipsy's Return" Mick Angel reappears, and invites the Famous Five to spend Christmas with him and Aubrey Angel in a castle named Lochmuir in the Highlands of Bonnie Scotland. Final story of the year was "The Phantom of the Highlands" in which the party sets off for the north. There is a weird old Scot who plays the bagpipes in his cottage. He is Sandy Bean, who is "fey". And there is the ghost of a laird who haunts the castle. All very Christmassy. Billy Bunter sees the ghost, and decides to take himself off to spend his Christmas elsewhere. Finally an icy hand is placed on Wharton in the middle of the night.

The American film companies are buying up cinemas in London and in other big English cities. The Tivoli in the Strand has been bought by Metro Goldwyn Mayer, and the Rialto has been bought by Universal. The companies will show their own films in these cinemas.

Doug likes continental films - at least, he makes out he does. I suspect he is showing off. I went with him to see Greta Gustafsson in "The Saga of Gosta Borling." Doug kept saying "Wonderful!" as the film ground on, but I found it a giant bore. It is a Swedish film. Getting more normal, this month the family has been for a number of visits to the pictures, and we have seen Dorothy Dalton in "Dark Secrets"; Betty Compson in "Woman to Woman"; Buck Jones in "The Purple Phial"; Marion Davies in "Little Old New York" (Marion, one of my favourites, pretended to be a boy in most of this one); Charlie Chaplin in "The Pilgrim"; Pola Negri in "Bella Donna"; Douglas Maclean in "Bellboy 13"; and Mae Marsh and Ivor Novello in "The White Rose". I liked the last one very much, and it was directed by D. W. Griffith.

In the Nelson Lee Library they have started the St. Frank's Magazine. It is rather on the lines of the Greyfriars Herald, but I think

I like it better.

The Nelson Lee caught the Christmas spirit with a vengeance. In the Christmas Number the main story was "The Schoolboy Santa Claus" and it was packed with festive fare. Owing to a blizzard, a dozen or more of the chums have to stay over Christmas at St. Frank's. The Head, Dr. Stafford, was a brick, and allowed the boys to use some of his private rooms for their Christmas. There is a son who comes home to his village mum after being away for ten years, and there is the final jingle of the sleigh when Nipper becomes Father Christmas, and the boys take toys and gifts to the children of some of the village families.

The next story, ending the old year, was "The Ghost of St. Frank's", and the chums, still at the school, run into some very eerie adventures. There is a "thing on the stairs". And Willy Handforth is followed by an extraordinary shape. Although we get an explanation of the Christmas mystery, it looks as though there are some more mysterious events to occur in the New Year.

Not long before Christmas seven men were killed in a Sheffield colliery owing to the breaking of a haulage chain. More tragedy when the French airship "Dixmunde" was lost with 51 men on board. But good times for the people of Marylebone where the district's first public library was opened.

Death on the roads is getting truly fearful. There were 2979 deaths in road accidents on the streets of Great Britain in 1923.

The splendid series of Tom Merry versus Cardew has run throughout the month in the Gem. In the first tale of December, "Tom Merry's Rival", Cardew managed to become junior House Captain in place of Tom Merry, though Tom remains junior captain of the school. It sounds a rather mixed-up arrangement. Cardew's success came about because Tom Merry refused to canvass for votes.

In "Captain Cardew" the two captains clashed, and Tom Merry resigned, playing into Cardew's hands. "Skipper and Slacker" was the next one. Now that Cardew has the job, he finds he doesn't want the work and responsibility. He and Tom Merry become even more bitterly at daggers drawn.

"D'Arcy's Christmas Party", in the Christmas Number, included both Tom Merry and Cardew, and the daggers are not sheathed for the

holidays. In fact, Cardew becomes more cunning and Tom becomes more angry. Still at Eastwood House, in "The Vengeance of Cardew", Cardew employs a ruffian named Mike Lomax to attack Tom Merry. But, through a change of programme, it is Levison who is the victim of the plot of the treacherous Cardew, and it is Cardew's own pal who gets the brutal beating from Lomax.

Lovely tales, but the St. Jim's stories in the Gem are so short these days. There are other items on the programme, though I don't read them, and there is a new serial named "Tom of the Ajax."

In the Popular, over the Christmas weeks, they have been running an old Gem story which was once named "The Ghost of St. Jim's" in which the White Monk walks around St. Jim's while Mr. Selby has a visit from a mentally affected relative named Mr. Wynde. There was also a story of Highcliffe called "Frank Courtenay's Christmas."

For Christmas Doug, as usual, bought me the new Holiday Annual. It cost him six bob. The story I liked best was "The Schoolboy Treasure Seekers" about Tom Merry in the South Seas, which I also have in a Boys' Friend Library. Long ago, it appeared as three stories in the Gem. Another lovely tale was a long one about Cedar Creek called "How Father Christmas Came to White Pine." There is a good Rookwood tale called "Morny's Master Stroke", and "A Great Man at Greyfriars" about how Martin Clifford went to that school.

(EDITORIAL COMMENT: Greta Gustafsson, mentioned by Danny this month, was soon to go to Hollywood and change her name to Greta Garbo.)

* * * * *

BLAKIANA

conducted by Josie Packman

This month of December 1973, is the 80th since our well-loved detective Sexton Blake appeared in the pages of the $\frac{1}{2}$ d. Marvel, the precise date being 13 December, 1893. To celebrate this occasion I have been able to include items concerning both the early period and the very latest period of the Blake Saga. I trust everyone will be pleased that the "Inside Information" from Walter Webb's Notebooks has been very kindly sent to me by John Bridgwater. He was very lucky to find them amongst

some Union Jacks he had purchased some time after Walter's death, just a little something rescued from the flames which consumed so much of Walter's letters and notes of a lifetime. As this is also our Christmas issue may I take the opportunity to wish you all a very Happy Christmas and a more peaceful New Year, and also to thank everyone who sent me such wonderful articles for Blakiana.

THE SEXTON BLAKE LEGEND

by S. Gordon Swan

When Frank Ellaby arrived in Victorian London and paid a visit to an office in New Inn Chambers, he unwittingly started off a chain of adventures that were to extend far into the next century and encompass the globe. For the man from Australia's appointment was with a private detective who had been recommended to him by M. Jules Gervaise of Paris - an investigator named Sexton Blake.

"Sexton Blake," we are told in "The Missing Millionaire" (No. 6 of the $\frac{1}{2}$ d. Marvel) "belonged to the new order of Detectives. He possessed a highly-cultivated mind which helped to support his active courage. His refined, clean-shaven face readily lent itself to any disguise, and his mobile features assisted to clinch any facial illusion he desired to produce."

Frank Ellaby had been robbed in Australia fourteen years before by a man named Calder Dulk and his wife; this pair had also kidnapped a little girl who had been left in the care of Ellaby's sister, whom he found to be dying. Ellaby remained in Australia long enough to become a millionaire, then set out to trace the couple who had betrayed him and stolen the child.

In the course of his investigation Blake found that Calder Dulk and his wife were associated with an organisation of criminals known as The Red Lights of London, and founded by one Leon Polti. This was a brotherhood of burglars, forgers and the like - a forerunner of Robert Murray's conception, The Criminals' Confederation. Polti had a sister, Nizza; actually, the two were one and the same.

Sexton Blake did not play a great part in this story as the trend of the narrative largely followed the other characters, Blake's partner, Jules Gervaise, making a brief appearance. Of course the stolen child, now a young woman, turned out to be a missing heiress, who had fallen in love with a young man bearing the unfortunate name of Ernest Truelove.

"The Missing Millionaire" was followed by a sequel in next week's issue (No. 7) entitled "A Christmas Crime." Not possessing this number, the present writer can only quote from a description of the story given in the editor's chat at the end of No. 6.

"In the early part of the coming story, Frank Ellaby (most unlucky of millionaires) is robbed on Christmas Eve, being struck with a heavily-loaded stick, and thrown into a pond near by. Ernest Truelove appears on the scene at that moment, but a blow from the cruel stick leaves him insensible. Some hours later he recovers sufficiently to be able to crawl to the house near by, and give the warning.

"Christmas Day dawns, and although the friends of Frank Ellaby discover signs of a terrible struggle, his body cannot be found. Sexton Blake determined to solve the mystery, but even he is baffled. It was Ernest Truelove's wedding-day, too, but in that household, where joy should have held sway, sorrow reigns instead.

"Later on in the story Jules Gervaise goes to Paris to follow up a clue, but falls into the hands of a gang of ruffians, who have for their motto "Dead Men tell no tales," and having robbed and murdered their victims, cast their bodies into the Seine. Surprised at not hearing from his partner and friend, Sexton Blake fears the worst, and goes to Paris to seek him out, or learn the truth.

"The detective eventually meets his friend in the most mysterious manner possible. This incident in itself is sufficient to form the plot of a whole story. It is rather a case of Jules Gervaise discovering Sexton Blake than vice versa. Some idea of the exciting nature of the story may be gathered from the picture on this page, but we leave our readers to judge for themselves whether we have over-estimated the merits of the story. We feel sure their verdict will be favourable to us."

"The picture on this page" depicts two men struggling in the car of a balloon, with the caption underneath:

"Sexton Blake and Jonas Finch fought desperately, each struggling to become the sole occupant of the car, which every minute threatens to overturn and cast them into space."

There were two more stories in the ½d. Marvel, one of them under the name of Harry Blyth; then the detective was transferred to the Union Jack, where he was to remain for many years, well into the

twentieth century. But during that time he was to change his address several times and to appear in many other periodicals, too numerous to mention; he was to be portrayed on the stage and screen, and later on television.

In the meanwhile a host of interesting characters had been introduced into the Saga, notably the irrespressible Tinker, the faithful Pedro, the garrulous Mrs. Bardell. The last-named, as created by W. Murray Graydon and called by him Betsy, was inclined to be of an eccentric nature, but she is best known as depicted by later authors - particularly Gwyn Evans - a warm-hearted, kindly soul, whose first name had been changed to Martha.

Then there were the inspectors: Spearing, who spoke like a telegram and was destined himself to become the hero of a long-running series in Pluck, and also to be portrayed on the stage; the explosive Courtts, probably the most popular of them all; the more restrained but stalwart Inspector Harker; the ill-fated Rollings.

The notorious criminals who featured in the Saga, dating from the advent of George Marsden Plummer, are too many and varied to quote here. Some of them, too, achieved such fame - or infamy - that they figured in independent stories of their exploits in which Sexton Blake played no part.

It is eighty years since Frank Ellaby walked into the office in New Inn Chambers and unfolded his story of treachery, robbery and kidnapping, and since that long-ago day the name of Sexton Blake has become a household word ... And his adventures are by no means done with; we shall hear of him again.

(S. Gordon Swan writes in the 1973 edition of Collectors' Digest Annual.)

GLEANINGS FROM WALTER WEBB'S NOTEBOOKS presented by John Bridgewater

No doubt most of the Sexton Blake fans already know most of the information given here, but there may be some of our new friends waiting to learn, and some old ones to re-read.

First, what is known of Harry Blyth, who, it has now been established, created the character whose adventures have been read by millions? Up till the year 1955 very little. Then the late Harry Blyth's

son was contacted by a devotee of the Sexton Blake stories and several interesting facts came to light. Harry Blyth was living at Peckham Rye when he wrote his first Sexton Blake story. Alfred Harmsworth commissioned him to write a series of detective stories. He asked his son - Harry junior - a lad in his teens, which name he liked best for his hero, Gideon Barr or Sexton Blake. Young Harry plumped for Sexton Blake. Blyth used the pen-name of Hal Meredith because it had a family connection, Meredith being his mother's maiden name. He used many others, three of them being "Major Daring", "Captain Sinclair" and "Policeman Paul". He was a freelance and never on the staff of the Harmsworth Press. When Alfred Harmsworth asked him to start the $\frac{1}{2}$ d. Marvel with a series of detective yarns - he, Harmsworth greeted Blyth by saying "So you are the crime merchant," Blyth replied "Just as you are the newspaper merchant." Harmsworth liked anyone who stood up to him. They all feared him in the office. For many years Harry Blyth ran his own paper in Glasgow called the "Chiel" (subtitled Scottish Punch). It ran for 363 issues commencing 17 February, 1883, and finishing 25 January, 1890. He also had an interest in the Theatre Royal, Glasgow, for which he wrote one of the most successful pantomimes. He was a very busy man, having three serials running in English and Scottish papers. Writing for the Harmsworth Press was just a sideline, and for the first story of Blake he received the sum of £9.9.0d. which included the price of the copyright of Sexton Blake as well.

Harry Blyth was born in 1852. He died of typhoid fever in February 1898, at the early age of 46. He left several unfinished manuscripts of stories and obituary notices appeared in all the well-known papers of that period, for he was a popular man of the time.

DEMISE OF SEXTON BLAKE

by Deryck Harvey

I sometimes wonder how long it is before nostalgia sets in. Ten years? It is more than a decade now since the demise of Fleetway's old, or rather their "new look" Sexton Blake Library. The last issue was in March 1963.

The remarkable thing, I find, is that I'm already nostalgic about those later books, and not necessarily for the reasons you'd think. Oh, the stories were alright. When Blake had been updated a few years

before, I'd accepted the facelift as an inevitable circulation booster. No, the fact is I pine for the ephemera to be found on the inside front and back covers of the 4th series issues, and especially the two or three pages devoted to the editor's "Magazine Section". Quite deliberately a "cult" of Sexton Blake enthusiasts was being encouraged, and I felt very much a part of it.

Come browse with me! First of all, the series now contained not only portraits of Blake and his associates but also, for a spell, photographs of some of the authors. In one memorable illustration, Blake and his authors were all shown together at a Christmas Party. Confusing? Gimmicky? A ruse to make every issue a collector's item? Not to me, it wasn't. Already a legend, Blake became, to me, an even more human character. Even when some of the stories had passed into oblivion, some of these bits and pieces lingered in the memory.

The correspondence columns in the "Magazine Section" were both lively and curiously intimate, and I've read them many times since. At once I forgave Howard Baker, the editor, the repeated propaganda in his footnotes: "... double the circulation ... buy extra copies and pass them round among your friends ..." A strong plea came in issue No. 409, dated July 1958, following a controversy over Blake's New Look. "... those who read and re-read a 1928 Blake story while refusing to buy and support the 1958 Sexton Blake Library" the editor claimed, "are of no use to us - or to Sexton Blake". Victor Colby of Australia, responded with a will (issues 419 and 420, December 1958). He confessed to buying three copies, one for my collection, one to read and re-read, and one to pass around". Alas, I felt the writing was already on the wall for the Sexton Blake Library as we knew it, and so it proved. One daring correspondent asked point blank if two authors, W. Howard Baker and Peter Saxon, were one and the same man. A non-committal answer rather than an outright denial seemed to settle the issue beyond all doubt. Blake's readers were hawk-eyed, you see - another twiggid that "Desmond Reid" was simply an editorial pseudonym.

Did you know that Blake had been decorated? Had it not been for the "Magazine Section" I might never have known - I'd missed the story. In a footnote (issue No. 438, October 1959) the editor explained that

Blake was decorated with the Distinguished Service Order, at Buckingham Palace, for "Extra service above and beyond the call of duty." The event was recorded in issue No. 413, W. Howard Baker's "No time to Live".

This 4th series of the S. B. L. has been much-maligned by longer-standing enthusiasts. I loved it; and, although I had already been a collector of the 3rd series for a good ten years, I think my nostalgia starts there.

I had two more reasons to be grateful to those letters to the editor, and their footnotes. The first was an introduction to "Collectors' Digest" so frequently and generously mentioned. The second was a letter (issue No. 461, October 1960) from a regular contributor, solving, once and for all the mystery behind the fascinating conjunction of his initials. It was signed in full: "William Oliver Guillemont Lofts". I'd often wondered:

* * * * *

Nelson Lee Column

THEIR GIRL CHUMS

by Mary Cadogan

The girls play a prominent part in the sagas of both St. Frank's and Greyfriars - and I for one very much enjoy the stories in which they are featured. There is no doubt that the St. Frank's boys seemed to enjoy more straightforward relationships with their girl friends than Harry Wharton & Co. achieved with Marjorie Hazeldene and the girls of Cliff House. I think this happened for two reasons: firstly Marjorie Hazeldene was created by Hamilton in 1908, many years before Irene Manners and most of the Moor View School girls came into being, in the comparatively modern, emancipated period of the 1920's. Also Brooks was a married man - and Charles Hamilton was not. The atmosphere existing between Marjorie and the Greyfriars boys was idealistic, though at the same time extremely deep and sincere. Hamilton's heroines have an aura of gracious charm even though they have lived through the Edwardian into a more modern era. Brooks' heroines at Moor View seem to be practical, down to earth characters, although they are obviously also extremely feminine and attractive.

Irene looked extraordinarily attractive - in Handforth's eyes particularly - as she stood there ... "By George," said Handforth pathetically. "It's - it's ripping to see you again, Renie!" He grabbed her by the shoulders, pulled her towards him, and kissed her enthusiastically.'

This demonstration of affection does not deter Irene from her carefully plotted against the boys - who are well and truly tricked, ousted from St. Frank's and end up by presenting themselves at the local workhouse which the girls persuade them will be their new school premises.

Nipper, to get even with the Moor View girls for this jape, later decides to impersonate a lecturer in Dietetics who is to visit Moor View school. He plans to spoof the girls, but William Napoleon Browne conceives the same idea, and so successfully carries it out that he persuades Miss Charlotte Bond, Head of Moor View, to change the school drastically. (An orange or half a grapefruit with dry wholemeal bread for breakfast; stewed apple and lettuce for lunch; no tea, and a slice of lemon with a tablespoonful of bran for supper.) Although the girls are delighted that their plan has succeeded, Nipper and Handforth feel remorse a day later when they notice Mary Summers and Irene Manners getting hollow eyes and sunken cheeks. (So soon!) Even so, their comments are not overflowing with chivalrous intent:

Nipper says. "'I rather think we ought to do something. If the other had been fine, cricket would have kept our minds off the starving things, and we should have forgotten all about them. As it is, we ought to do something on a wet afternoon.'"

So they smuggle a feed into the Moor View girls, who are caught in the act of enjoying their lavish tea by Miss Bond. At her order to the girls to throw the food on to the rubbish dump they mutiny - and take refuge at St. Frank's, where they go on with the lavish tea! Miss Bond, who has been captivated by William Napoleon Browne's magnetism, will not believe she has been spoofed --- till he appears before her, disguised as the cranky dietician --- and strips off his disguise. So great is his persuasive charm that he makes her see the humour of the situation, and she does not report him, or punish the Moor View girls. His honour is restored, and harmony reigns again between the boys and

S. (Mary Cosgrove writes in the 1972 edition of *Collectors' Digest Annual*.)

Various friendships exist between the boys and the girls; Nipper likes Mary Summers, Archie Glenthorne admires Marjorie Temple, and of course the most fascinating one built up by E. S. Brooks is between Edward Oswald Handforth and Irene Manners. Moor View School for Girls is first mentioned in NELSON LEE Old Series 436, (13.10.19 Alf Brent and Archie Glenthorne when out walking discover that a large family house half a mile from St. Frank's has been turned into a girls school.

"'Just think of the chances you'll have, Archie, for acting the chivalrous hero," says Alf. Archie started. "Between you and me, old lad, I'm a dashed nervous chappie when it comes to young ladies, he confided. "I mean to say, young ladies have the effect of making go all hot and bothered; I get so frightfully flustered and what not'. Alf, old scream, I view the future with much misgiving.'"

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"'Handy's a susceptible bounder, isn't he?' ... "I don't know about that," said Grey, "I believe he's a bit soppo about Irene ..."

"'My dear chap, he's like putty in the hands of any girl, provided she's pretty and flattering to him," interrupted Pitt keenly. "He can be as hard as iron with the Remove and just like melting wax with a pretty girl!'" (Then Reggie unfolds his plan to pose as a nurse and cajole

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 The girls, as an April Fool's trick, take over St. Frank's during the
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 girls installed.

Irene looked extraordinarily attractive - in Handforth's eyes particularly - as she stood there ... "By George," said Handforth pathetically. "It's - it's ripping to see you again, Renie!" He grabbed her by the shoulders, pulled her towards him, and kissed her enthusiastically.'

This demonstration of affection does not deter Irene from her carefully plotted against the boys - who are well and truly tricked, ousted from St. Frank's and end up by presenting themselves at the local workhouse which the girls persuade them will be their new school premises.

Nipper, to get even with the Moor View girls for this jape, later decides to impersonate a lecturer in Dietetics who is to visit Moor View school. He plans to spoof the girls, but William Napoleon Browne conceives the same idea, and so successfully carries it out that he persuades Miss Charlotte Bond, Head of Moor View, to change the school drastically. (An orange or half a grapefruit with dry wholemeal bread for breakfast; stewed apple and lettuce for lunch; no tea, and a slice of lemon with a tablespoonful of bran for supper.) Although the girls are delighted that their plan has succeeded, Nipper and Handforth feel remorse a day later when they notice Mary Summers and Irene Manners getting hollow eyes and sunken cheeks. (So soon!) Even so, their comments are not overflowing with chivalrous intent:

Nipper says. "'I rather think we ought to do something. If the other had been fine, cricket would have kept our minds off the starving things, and we should have forgotten all about them. As it is, we ought to do something on a wet afternoon.'"

So they smuggle a feed into the Moor View girls, who are caught in the act of enjoying their lavish tea by Miss Bond. At her order to the girls to throw the food on to the rubbish dump they mutiny - and take refuge at St. Frank's, where they go on with the lavish tea! Miss Bond, who has been captivated by William Napoleon Browne's magnetism, will not believe she has been spoofed --- till he appears before her, disguised as the cranky dietician --- and strips off his disguise. So great is his persuasive charm that he makes her see the humour of the situation, and she does not report him, or punish the Moor View girls. His honour is restored, and harmony reigns again between the boys and

S. (Mary Cosgrove writes in the 1972 edition of *Collectors' Digest Annual*.)

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REVIEW

THE DURABLE DESPERADOES
(review by Deryck Harvey)

William Vivian Butler
(Macmillan, £2.75)

Not only Sexton Blake gets full credit in this book for longevity and successfully-concluded cases, but also Nelson Lee and Norman Conquest.

In writing a thesis on popular between-wars detective fiction and the "gentleman outlaws," Mr. Butler has been at great pains to make his facts fully-detailed and deadly accurate.

He has even consulted our own Bob Blythe, a founder member of the London Old Boys' Book Club, and the recognised authority on Edwy Searles Brooks and his characters, Lee and Conquest.

Mr. Blythe has estimated Brooks' total literary output at a staggering 36,135,000 published words, surpassed in the genre only by the phenomenal John Creasey.

For this study, however, Brooks' major achievement is claimed to be the creation of a new kind of villain for Sexton Blake, "an exuberant character called Waldo the Wonder Man," who was impervious to pain and resistant to bullets.

Blake's adversaries are as well-considered as the great detective himself. "A Blake writer wouldn't have been human if he didn't acquire a greater fondness for his own creations than for the central communal ones."

Mr. Butler claims that although Blake and Co. had long been resident, it was at Fleetway House where the "gentleman outlaw" genre of the 1930's was finally born.

It was here that Monty Haydon, controlling editor of "The Thriller," gave chances to Leslie Charteris and the Saint, and John Creasey and the Toff.

Before his death in June, Creasey himself described Haydon as "midwife to the Saint and the Toff and several others."

No-one who has revelled in the adventures of Blake, Lee, Conquest, any Edgar Wallace adventurer, the Saint, the Toff and the Baron, the Graemes' Blackshirt, and other heroes, will be in any position to resist this book.

No. 114 - Magnets 1036-7 - Bunter the Benevolent

The 1927 Christmas series in the Magnet began in splendid fashion with Bunter expecting from his Uncle George a present of "inestimable value". He was quite certain it would be a cheque for a large sum of money, and even Fisher T. Fish was sufficiently impressed to stand treat in the tuckshop and his study in hopes that his sprat would catch a mackerel. After some waiting, a shilling edition of "A Christmas Carol" arrived. It appeared that Uncle George had had difficulty in obtaining this cheap edition, and that this had occasioned the delay. Bunter read the famous story when he was in detention, for want of anything better.

Up to this point, the normal Greyfriars atmosphere was maintained, but the remainder of the story veered round alarmingly in all directions. Bunter, now under the influence of the benevolence of Dickens, became truthful and kind-hearted. He offered his umbrella and watch to a shabby-looking man, even though he knew that it was injudicious to help poor people, as it made them fancy they had a claim on you. The shabby man turned out to be Sempronius Skelton, an eccentric Park Lane millionaire much given to philanthropy, who had been looking for a sincere assistant. An enormous Rolls Royce came to fetch him to Park Lane to spend the Christmas holidays there.

What is so puzzling about this pair of stories is trying to discover Charles Hamilton's real feelings about the situation portrayed. His love of Dickens is well-known, and he refers to Bunter as being affected by the magic of the master. Bunter's benevolent instincts were presumably to be commended (though had they been permanent the loss of the old Bunter would have marred the future stories). Mr. Skelton was rather inconsistent in many ways, but his charitable instincts were also very creditable. Yet despite all this, the philanthropic excursions to the East End were clearly odd at the best of times and farcical when things went wrong; the servants regarded Mr. Skelton as slightly touched and looked upon Bunter as a young rogue; and when Mr. Skelton went abroad for his health, Bunter was literally kicked out of the mansion, a fate which he presumably deserved because his philanthropic inclinations had

then departed.

There is an elusive attractiveness about the series which is difficult to explain. The adult reader can obtain some wry satisfaction in this fascinating account of how Dickensian charitableness fails to work in the twentieth century, and young readers of the day no doubt felt highly entertained by the unusual events related with such verve and panache. It was not the cosy Christmas series that began their wonderful sequence in 1929, but it was at least both seasonable and amusing. In 1927 it would have been churlish to have demanded anything more.

(Roger Jenkins writes in the 1973 edition of Collectors' Digest Annual.)

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LET'S BE CONTROVERSIAL

No. 187. THE ROOKWOOD CHRISTMAS STORY

Rookwood enjoys much affection from Old Boys, and deservedly so. It is not, perhaps easy to pinpoint exactly why most of us love Rookwood so much, for it can hardly be claimed that many of its players were particularly outstanding as original character studies.

Nevertheless, it had something, obviously. Some plots remain peculiar to Rookwood till this day. Others were first tried out at Rookwood, and later transferred to either Greyfriars or St. Jim's or both, not usually with any increased success. Repeated themes seldom impress more when served as a re-hash. So Rookwood had its splendid hours, locked away in our hearts as precious memories.

In one sphere, however, Rookwood was very much a third to Greyfriars and to St. Jim's. And that was in Christmas stories.

There was really not one Christmas story of Rookwood which lingers very lovingly in the mind.

In 1915, Rookwood's first Christmas, there was no Christmas at all for Rookwood, even though the Boys' Friend had a mighty Christmas Double Number with a glowing coloured cover. The slightly sombre series concerning Jimmy Silver's rather racketty Uncle John, had just ended with John Silver joining the army. The Rookwood tales were comparatively quite long at this time, and Macdonald was doing all the Rookwood illustrations.

But there was no Christmas story. There was a double length tale of Rookwood, concerning rivalry with Bagshot School, in the Double Number, but this double length tale pretty obviously was two Rookwood tales of normal length, joined together to make one long tale.

Yet Hamilton had written a Christmas tale, which, for some reason, was not published in 1915.

At Christmas 1916, in another fine double number with a cover in glorious technicolor, a double length Rookwood story appeared, concerning Uncle John who had deserted from the army and who was hiding and playing ghost in Jimmy's home, the Priory. And, without much reason, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was a guest at the Priory, and solved the mystery.

Without any doubt, this 1916 Christmas story had been written in 1915 for the Christmas issue of 1915. It was fully illustrated by Macdonald, who, by Christmas 1916, had long departed from the Fleetway House and was in the navy.

The story had clearly been finished in ample time for Christmas 1915, otherwise Macdonald would not have illustrated it. Yet, for some unfathomable reason, the tale and the illustrations thereof were held over for a year. And now, in 1916, the tale was published slap in the middle of the famous Mornington-'Erbert series which was then in full swing.

Had the unfortunate Pentelow been editor at this time, we should probably have sought some fell reason for what happened. But Pentelow was not the editor. Hinton was the man in charge. It is a Christmas mystery even more insoluble now than any found in the tales.

Incidentally, down the years, this tale was reprinted many times in other periodicals. It was probably the most reprinted of all the Rookwood yarns.

1917 brought the last of the Double Numbers, though there was not a coloured cover this time. Jimmy Silver had a different guest at the Priory this year - none other than Lattrey, who had made himself despised throughout Rookwood. Sorry for the outcast, Jimmy took him home, but Lattrey exerted his evil influence on Jimmy's young cousin, Algy, and was soon shown the door of the Priory. This one was a really good Christmas tale, restrainedly written, though few people remember

it much.

After this, for some years, Owen Conquest abandoned the conventional Christmas story. I am not suggesting that that, in itself, mattered a lot. Providing the atmosphere was right, a story set in the school, could be just as attractive, as we saw in the Gem with "Nobody's Study" of 1912 and "The Ghost of St. Jim's" in 1911, or even in the earlier "Ghost of St. Jim's" in 1908.

In 1918 there was no Christmas Number at all in the Boys' Friend (or in many other papers, either, for that matter) and the Christmas season was marred by a substitute Rookwood tale - and subs are a rarity in the Rookwood history.

The 1919 Rookwood Christmas was at the school when "The Ghost of Rookwood School" turned out to be Lattrey yet again up to his tricks. In 1920, Owen Conquest turned to his alter ego, Martin Clifford, and lifted the plot from the 1911 Gem Christmas story. Mr. Bootles was visited at Rookwood by his nephew, Captain Digby, who suffered from nerve trouble and played ghost in his sleepwalking adventures. As a bit of makeweight, the Captain went to Jimmy's home for Christmas, and in a New Year story, helped to capture a burglar. But at this stage the Rookwood yarns were so short that it was difficult for any author to make much of them. The 1920 Rookwood Phantom brought none of the brooding, eerie atmosphere which had made the Gem's 1911 Ghost an outstanding story.

In 1921, there was an influenza epidemic so the boys were quarantined at Rookwood over Christmas, under the charge of Mr. Manders. It was a poor Christmas, and the basic silliness of the theme did not help it any.

1922 brought a seasonable little series, once more set at the home of Jimmy Silver. This time we had yet another secretary stealing yet another Rembrandt, with Mornington yet again well in the holiday picture. It was one of the best Rookwood Christmases, though the stories by now were pitifully short.

With the coming of the Canadian series in 1923, however, the length of the individual stories was permanently increased, giving more scope to the writer. This year it was the one with Texas Lick, the slightly tedious American boy, going with Jimmy Silver to the Priory.

Possibly the best of the Rookwood Christmases came in 1924 which started off with Lovell accidentally snowballing the Head, for which fearful offence he was ordered to spend his vacation at school. I'm not sure whether the sentence really made sense, but Lovell won back the Head's good opinion, and eventually joined his chums at the Priory. This was probably the longest Rookwood Christmas series, with some adventures introducing Harry Wharton who was then in the middle of the first Rebel Series in the Magnet.

Rookwood's final Christmas, in 1925, saw a change of venue, with the chums going home with Lovell to Somerset where he got into conflict with an irascible uncle in some amusing if not memorable little yarns.

It is, perhaps, a little surprising that Owen Conquest, who gave us some truly delightful summer holiday series, never really excelled himself at Christmas time. Or is it partly that Rookwood is less well remembered? If so, it could be put down to the fact that the large Boys' Friend was never an easy paper to collect and retain in good condition. That would be an argument which could hardly hold water, for the whole Rookwood series was reprinted in the Popular, many of the stories featuring in that paper several times. After Rookwood ended in the Friend, the Popular was almost never without its Rookwood tale right till the end. And, of course, so many of the adventures were reprinted in the S. O. L. and the Holiday Annual. But, maybe, reprints did not strike quite the same note, splendid though they were.

(When the Greyfriars Herald was put on the market nearly 60 years ago as a remarkable halfpenny separate entity it was a joint enterprise of editor Hinton and author Hamilton. After only 18 weeks, Hinton was ordered to close down the paper. Hamilton had written most of the contents, and when the paper ended there were still plenty of his short items in hand, including a number of his Herlock Sholmes stories. This is one of them.)

HERLOCK SHOLMES'S CHRISTMAS CASE

"Christmas to-morrow!" said
Sherlock Holmes.

I started.
"My dear Sholmes!" I murmured.

Herlock Sholmes smiled.

"You are surprised, Jotson, to hear me make that statement with such positiveness," he remarked. "Yet I assure you that such is the case."

"I acknowledge, Sholmes, that I ought no longer to be surprised at anything you may say or do. But from what grounds do you infer --"

"Look from the window upon the slushy streets and the hurrying crowds, all indicative of the approach of Christmas."

"True! But why to-morrow precisely?"

"Ah, there we go a little deeper, Jotson. I deduce that Christmas occurs to-morrow from a study of the calendar."

"The calendar!" I exclaimed in astonishment.

"Exactly!"

"As you know, Sholmes, I have endeavoured to study your methods, in my humble way, yet I confess I do not see the connection --"

"Probably not, Jotson. But to the trained mind it presents no difficulties. Look at the calendar."

I obeyed.

"It tells you nothing?"

"Nothing!" I confessed.

Sholmes smiled again, a somewhat bored smile.

"My dear fellow, the calendar indicates that to-day is the 24th December."

"Quite so, but --"

"And as Christmas falls upon the 25th, it follows - to an acute mind accustomed to rapid deductions - that to-morrow is Christmas."

I could only gaze at my amazing friend in silent admiration.

"But there will be no holiday for us to-morrow, my dear Jotson," resumed Herlock Sholmes. "I have received a wire from the Duke of Hookeywalker, who -- Ah, his Grace has arrived."

Even as Sholmes spoke the Duke of Hookeywalker was shown into our sitting room.

Herlock Sholmes removed his feet from the mantelpiece with the graceful courtesy so natural to him.

"Fray be seated," said Sholmes. "You may speak quite freely before my friend, Dr. Jotson."

"Mr. Sholmes, I have sustained a terrible loss."

Sholmes smiled.

"Your Grace has lost the pawn-ticket?" he enquired.

"Mr. Sholmes, you must be a wizard! How did you guess --"

"I never guess," said Herlock Sholmes. "My business is to deal with facts. Pray let me have some details."

"It is true, Mr. Sholmes, that the pawn-ticket is missing," said the Duke in an agitated voice. "You are aware that the house of Hookeywalker has a reputation for hospitality, which must be kept up even in these days. It was necessary for me to give a Christmas party at Hookey Castle, and to obtain the necessary funds the family jewels were pledged with Mr. Solomons of Houndsditch. The ticket was in my own keeping - it never left me. I kept it in my own card-case. The case never left my person. Yet now, Mr. Sholmes, the card is missing."

"And the card-case?"

"Still in my pocket."

"When were the jewels placed with Mr. Solomons?"

"Yesterday morning."

"And the ticket was missing --"

"Last night," faltered the duke.

"How it had been purloined is a mystery - unfathomable."

"No mystery is unfathomable to a trained mind," said Sholmes calmly. "I will recover the missing pawn-ticket."

"Mr. Sholmes, you give me new life. But how --"

Sholmes interrupted.

"After leaving Mr. Solomons' establishment, where did your Grace go?"

"I had to call at the Chinwag Department of the Foreign Office, and from there I returned to Hookey Castle."

"You made no other call?"

"None."

"It is scarcely possible that a skilled pickpocket is to be found in the Foreign Office," said Sholmes thoughtfully.

"Impossible, Mr. Sholmes! Every official of that great Department is far above suspicion of being skilled in any manner whatsoever."

"True!"

"There is no clue," said the duke, in despair. "But unless the missing ticket is recovered, Mr. Sholmes, the Hookeywalker jewels are lost."

"You may leave the case in my hands," said Herlock Sholmes carelessly. "I may call at Hookey Castle with news for you to-morrow."

"Bless you, Mr. Sholmes."

After the duke had left, Herlock Sholmes lit a couple of pipes, a habit of his when a knotty problem needed great concentration of thought. I did not venture to interrupt the meditations of that mighty intellect.

He spoke at last.

"A very interesting little problem, Jotson. I see that you are puzzled by my deduction that the pawnticket was lost before his Grace had mentioned it."

"I am astounded, Sholmes."

"Yet it was simple. I had heard of the great social gathering at Hookey Castle. I deduced that his Grace could only meet the bills by hypothecating the family jewels. His hurried visit to me could have had but one meaning - I deduced that the pawnticket was either lost or stolen. Quite elementary, my dear Jotson. But the recovery of the missing ticket --"

"That will not be so simple, Sholmes."

Sholmes rose to his feet and drew his celebrated dressing-gown about him.

"I must leave you for a short time, Jotson."

"One question, Sholmes. You are going --"

"To the Foreign Office."

"But --"

But Herlock Sholmes was gone.

* * *

I confess that Sholmes' behaviour perplexed me. He had declared that the pickpocket could not be found in the Foreign Office, yet he had gone there to commence his investigations. When he

returned to Shaker Street, I did not venture to question him. The next morning he greeted me with a smile as I came down into the sitting-room.

"You are ready for a little run, Jotson?" he asked.

"I am always at your service, Sholmes."

"Then call a taxi."

Shortly a cab was bearing us away. Sholmes had given the direction to the driver - "Hookey Castle."

"We are going to see the duke, Sholmes?" I asked.

He nodded.

"But the missing pawnticket?"

"Wait and see!"

This reply, worthy of a great statesman, was all I could elicit from Sholmes on the journey.

At Hookey Castle, a gorgeous footman admitted us to the great mansion, and we were shown into the presence of the duke.

His Grace had left his guests to see us. There was a slight impatience in his manner.

"My dear Mr. Sholmes," he said.

"I supposed I had given you the fullest particulars yesterday. You have called me away from a shove-ha'penny party."

"I am sorry," said Sholmes calmly.

"Return to the shove-ha'penny party, by all means, your Grace, and I will call another time with the pawnticket."

The duke bowed to his feet.

"Mr. Sholmes, you have recovered it?"

Sholmes smiled. He delighted in these dramatic surprises. The duke gazed at the slip of pasteboard my amazing friend presented to him.

"Sholmes!" I murmured. I could say no more.

The Duke of Hookeywalker took the ticket with trembling fingers.

"Mr. Sholmes," he said, in tones of deep emotion, "you have saved the honour of the name of Hookeywalker. You will stay to dinner, Mr. Sholmes. Come, I insist - there will be tripe and onions," he added.

"I cannot resist the tripe and onions," said Sholmes, with a smile.

And we stayed.

It was not till the taxi was whirling us homeward to Shaker Street that Herlock Sholmes relieved my curiosity. He laughed.

"You are astounded, as usual, Jotson?"

"As usual, Sholmes."

"Yet it is very simple. The duke carried the pawnticket in his card-case," said Sholmes. "He called only at the Chinwag Department of the Foreign Office before returning home. Only a particularly clever pickpocket could have extracted the ticket without the card-case, and, as his Grace himself remarked, it was useless to assume the existence of any particularly clever individual in a Government department. That theory, therefore, was excluded - the ticket had not been taken."

"Sholmes!"

"It had not been taken, Jotson," said Sholmes calmly. "Yet it had left the duke's possession. The question was - how?"

"I confess it is quite dark to me, Sholmes."

"Naturally," said Sholmes drily.

"But my mental powers, my dear Jotson, are of quite a different calibre."

"Most true."

"As the ticket had not been taken from the duke, I deduced that he had parted with it unintentionally."

"But is that possible, Sholmes?"

"Quite! Consider, my dear Jotson. His Grace kept the pawnticket, for safety, in his card-case. On calling at the Foreign Office, he sent in his card, naturally. By accident, Jotson, he handed over the pawnticket instead of his own card --"

"Sholmes!"

"And that ticket, Jotson, was taken in instead. That was the only theory to be deduced from the known facts. I proceeded to the Chinwag Department of the Foreign Office, and interviewed the official upon whom the duke called. There was a little difficulty in obtaining an interview; but he was awakened at last, and I questioned him. As I had deduced, the missing pawnticket was discovered on the salver, where it had lain unnoticed since the duke's call."

"Wonderful!" I exclaimed.

Sholmes smiled in a bored way.

"Elementary, my dear Jotson. But here we are at Shaker Street."

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The Postman Called

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

M. OCKENDEN (Eastbourne): I am trying to trace the boys' paper in which the following puzzle picture series was published: The hero would be in a seemingly impossible situation. He might be tied to the wall in an underground room which was slowly filling up with water. However, the careful observer would see that he could escape by breaking the bottle that was conveniently placed near his feet and using the glass to cut the rope. He could then float up to the ceiling on the wooden table and get through the bars of the ventilator by smearing himself with the grease that his enemies had so carelessly left on top of the cupboard.

I cannot remember the date, but I imagine it must have appeared somewhere between 1946 and 1953.

(If any reader can help Mr. Ockenden, please write to him direct. His address is 68 Terminus Road, Eastbourne. - ED.)

MERVYN BRANKS (New Zealand): I have appreciated "Danny's Diary" - it has been covering the years when I was reading the old papers. In a year or two it will be coming to the period when I "grew up" - then I hope it to be as interesting as ever - perhaps less nostalgic and more instructive.

BRIAN DOYLE (Putney): As you rightly recall, Betty Balfour starred in the popular "Squibs" films in the 'twenties (Squibs, 1921; Squibs Wins the Calcutta Sweep, 1922; Squibs, M. P., 1923; and Squibs' Honeymoon, 1923). Squibs was a tomboyish, cockney flower-seller. A sound remake of Squibs was made in 1936 (again starring Betty Balfour), with Gordon Harker and Stanley Holloway, but this was not particularly successful.

Betty Balfour also starred in such silent films as Cinders and Love, Life and Laughter, and in talkies such as The Brat (1930), The Vagabond Queen (1930), Paddy-The-Next-Best-Thing (1933) and 29 Acacia Avenue (1945). I can find no mention of her appearing in Evergreen, as you suggest.

I can tell you that she is still alive at the age of 70, but I cannot discover exactly where she now lives.

PHILIP TIERNEY (Grimsby): I am very enthusiastic about Gordon Hudson's suggestion that the Greyfriars Saga should be continued by substitute authors.

Charles Hamilton's stories were usually related to contemporary events, and I do not share the view of sixth formers in the hobby (I regard myself as a third former) that his characters died with him.

Why modernise the characters and settings? Well, Hamilton himself always moved with the times.

Why drag Greyfriars into the present day with the risk of spoiling past memories? No-one could be more old-fashioned in personal tastes than I am. But the present time, much as I dislike it, would not be quite so bad if Greyfriars were still part of it.

Why write new stories with masses of genuine Hamilton material available? Because so far as I am concerned, my enjoyment of reading the old stories, which I often do, is marred by a sad feeling that those wonderful characters are no longer with us.

I share with Mr. Hudson the hope that competent writers will be given the opportunity of bringing these characters back. And I would be delighted to welcome St. Frank's back as well.

CHRIS LOWDER (London): I notice O. W. Wadham mentioned the AP's Sun and Comet. They were always packed with historical stuff, which suited me down to the ground when I was a kid - Dick Turpin, Claude Duval, Max Bravo, etc., all by artists who were, and still are, great favourites of mine: C. L. Doughty, Pat Nicholle, Fred Holmes, Eric Parker. The artist who drew the Greyfriars and St. Jim's strips for both papers around 1955/57 was that latter-day AP stalwart, Reg Bunn, who went on to do "The Spider" for Lion, in the 1960's. Before he came into the comic business, he was a technical draughtsman with Rolls Royce, but gave it up in the late '40's when he went freelance. An admirer of the late C. H. Chapman, he drew every type of strip for the AP - western, detective, historical, war, science fiction, school story, etc. He delighted in drawing very fat men, maybe because he was on the large side himself - but he was also a master of cross-hatching (that rather old-fashioned shading technique artists used before the invention of artificial tone), which he laid on with an intricate ingenuity that drove art staffs mad, especially if they had to follow it.

You'll have noticed that I am, alas, speaking in the past tense. Reg died in 1970, unfortunately, in his late-fifties. In his field, he was a great artist.

GERALD FISHMAN (New York): I am always intrigued by Danny's Diary, an absolutely fascinating look at the past. I was wondering if he would ever reach the thirties, my period, and what a newsworthy period that was indeed!

TOM JOHNSON (Neston): J. Tomlinson asks about The Lost City. It was in fifteen episodes, released February 1920. Director: F. A. Martin. It starred George Chesbro and Juanita Hansen, with Frank Clark and Hector Dion. It was later made into a feature film, abridged from the serial. Juanita Hansen had a tragic life. She was a drug addict, and got seriously burned.

BILL LOFTS (London): The last Magnet substitute tale was published over forty-two years ago, whilst the majority of them were written half-a-century ago. I hardly think that the few remaining substitute writers would wish to write fresh Greyfriars tales in the twilight of their years. They have not only other occupations, but would also be far short of their best. In any case, what publisher would possibly contemplate such a project? The market is very, very poor for such material. Mrs. Ross Story wrote some excellent St. Frank's tales, which were approved by E. S. Brooks, but no publishers would contemplate such types of stories today. Unfortunately, the reprinted St. Frank's tales by Howard Baker Publishers were a complete flop, and were the lowest sales of any reprinted project.

CHARLES DAY (Keighley): Through my efforts, my local library now have on their shelves a dozen of the Baker reprint volumes, Magnet, Gem, Sexton Blake, and Nelson Lee. The borrowing rate of the Nelson Lee far exceeds that of all the others.

C. H. MATTHEWS (Market Harborough): I do not think that I have ever complimented you on the Slade tales. I think they are really good, and I have read and re-read the five or six that I have in the Annuals.

I am so glad that there is going to be another in the forthcoming Annual.

At first I rather disliked the 'odd' names, but I have long got over that. After all, did not Dornford Yates introduce some strange names in his wonderful books?

I think Buddle is a great character, and I would like to see a serial about Slade running in the C.D. Monthly. Would this be possible?

* * * * *

News of the Clubs

NORTHERN

Meeting on Saturday, 10th November, 1973

If you've ever gone into the wrong exam room by mistake then your feelings on being confronted by a paper for which you have not prepared must have been akin to ours when Harold Truscott presented us with his quiz.

Not that we were all utterly confounded, for Ron Hodgson came first with 22, then Ron Rhodes with 19 and Bill Williamson with 16.

But I'm afraid that many of us did not know what (or who) it was which has both intact, usually close to the ground, at Greyfriars. Or who was Mr. Railton's predecessor, or what was the name of the Captain of Clavering, or what was the last school that Charles Hamilton wrote about!

However, certain of our more erudite members spent some time trying to convince the rest of us how very easy it was!

Tea and sandwiches afforded a break before the next part of the programme, though here some censorship must be imposed - or we shall be divulging highly confidential matters relating to the Christmas Party of next month!

++ ++ ++

CAMBRIDGE

The Club met at 3 Long Road on Sunday, 11th November. The President welcomed new member Edward Witten to the Club. The Secretary read a letter from Dr. Peter Smith, of the Edgar Wallace Society, expressing his appreciation of the opportunity to attend the

Edgar Wallace meeting here.

Bill Lofts gave a talk on Charles Hamilton's "Western" stories, especially the Rio Kid, referring also to school holidays in a western setting.

Bill Thurbon gave a talk on the background of the Western stories. He passed round various westerns.

Neville Wood played a tape-recording describing the West of the Cattle Kingdom, and illustrated with sagas of the American West.

Deryck Harvey talked on Western films and film stars, recalling especially the B films and the players in them. He illustrated his talk with pictures from film magazines and from Danny Posner's collection of Western comics and magazines, including "Hopalong Cassidy" and others.

A highly successful meeting broke up with members carrying away memories of Buffalo Bill, Zane Gray, Gene Autry, Tom Mix, Colts and Winchester.

A vote of thanks to Danny and Mrs. Posner concluded the evening.

The next meeting on 9th December, will be the Club Christmas Party, 3 Long Road, at 5 p.m. Cambridge would welcome members of other Clubs who might care to come.

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LONDON

It was Blakiana's turn for the November gathering as Josie Packman had a good attendance and a well balanced programme. The Evening Standard correspondence of recent editions re the Edwy Searles Brooks and Charles Hamilton controversy as to who wrote the most words in the old papers and books was the subject of a debate. Three of the epistle writers, Messrs. Blythe, Doyle and Lofts expounded their views and were then followed by most of the remaining company present. A fine start to the meeting. Breaking new ground, Maurice Corkett gave his very first talk, subject, "Why I Joined the Old Boys' Book Club." His reminiscences of yesteryear were interesting and his main preference is Nelson Lee.

Bill Lofts gave another interesting talk and mentioned the visit to

the Fleetway House of Charles Hamilton when he met both Hinton and Samways. Bill stated how most of the authors he met were informative. Bob Blythe spoke of the good publicity that the old paper got by means of the exhibitions, clubs and the like during the last quarter of a century.

Millicent Lyle's Greyfriars Competition as to what characters connected with that school would take first in case of a fire brought many amusing answers. Winner was Bill Lofts. Two Greyfriars pastiches, "Coker Comes a Cropper" and "Well Done Young One" by Laurie Sutton were well received.

Josie Packman's extra long competition was won by Bill Lofts, who suitably thanked the hostess for the excellent hospitality enjoyed. Next meeting at Courtfield, 49 Kingsmead, Ruislip, Middlesex, on Sunday, 16th December. Kindly inform Robert Acraman if intending to be present.

UNCLE BENJAMIN

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