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No 384

DIGEST



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STORY PAPER COLLECTOR

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COLLECTORS' DIGEST

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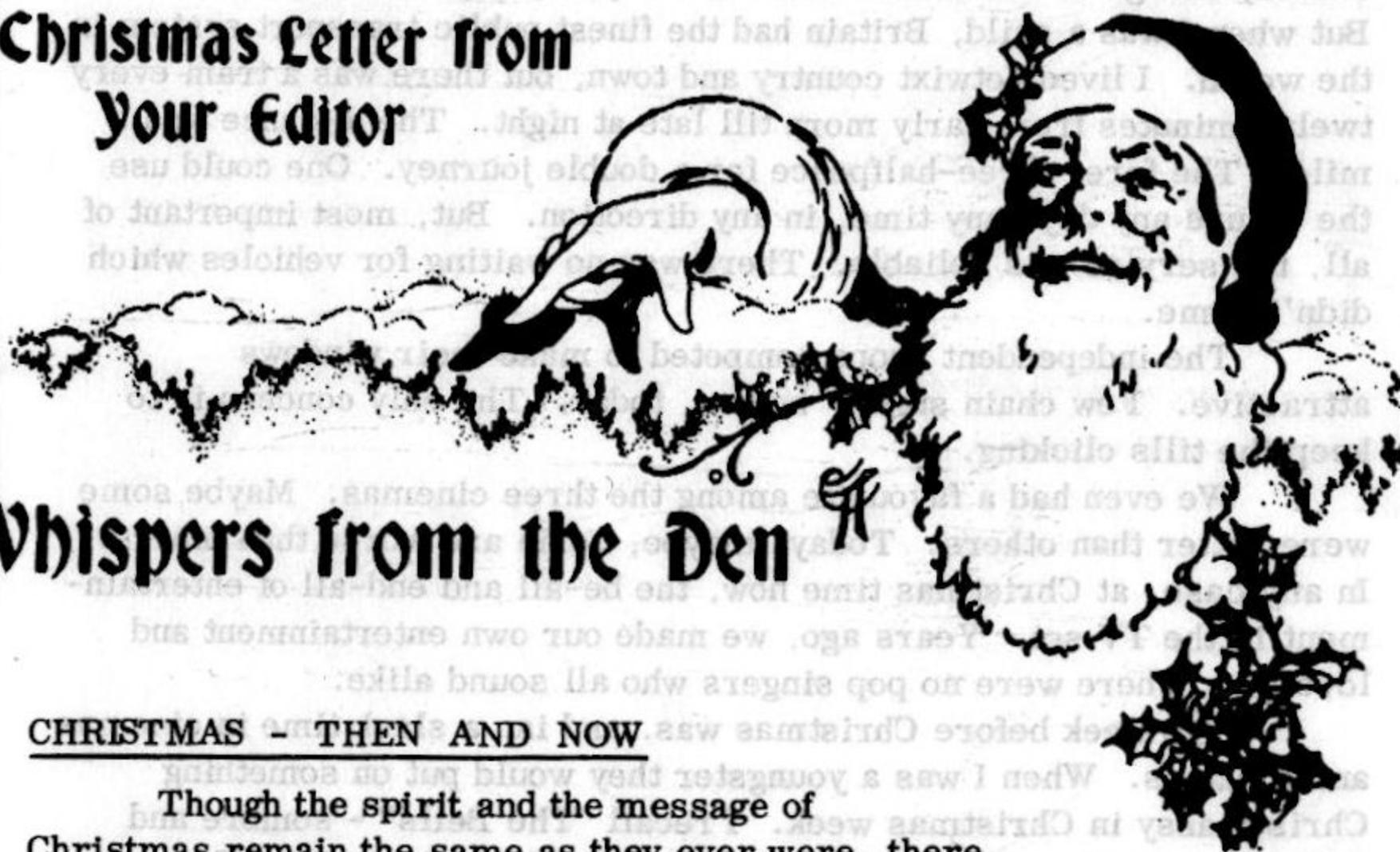
Christmas Letter from Your Editor

Whispers from the Den

CHRISTMAS - THEN AND NOW

Though the spirit and the message of Christmas remain the same as they ever were, there is really a vast difference in the Christmas of today and the Christmas when I was a boy. I am glad that I have vivid memories of Christmas as it was before the second world war changed everything. Memories are the prime reward for getting long in the tooth.

When I was a child the simplest things brought delight in a



manner which would be impossible for the modern child who has so much.

Today most things are standardised, the great value of standardisation being that it makes most things so cheap. At least, that was the argument. In fact, it didn't work out, as we all know.

In distant days, there was individuality. Nowadays all towns look depressingly alike; all the shops look alike; all the buses look alike; all the trains (when the staffs deign to run them) look alike; all the little complexes of little cinemas look alike; even the sexes look alike.

Most folk have cars now. That's important, for it makes life easier, though at Christmas time all the parking places look alike. Full. But when I was a child, Britain had the finest public transport system in the world. I lived betwixt country and town, but there was a tram every twelve minutes from early morn till late at night. The distance was a mile. The fare, three-halfpence for a double journey. One could use the return any day, any time, in any direction. But, most important of all, the service was reliable. There was no waiting for vehicles which didn't come.

The independent shops competed to make their windows attractive. Few chain stores bother, today. The only concern is to keep the tills clicking.

We even had a favourite among the three cinemas. Maybe some were better than others. Today, maybe, some are worse than others. In any case, at Christmas time now, the be-all and end-all of entertainment is the TV set. Years ago, we made our own entertainment and loved it. There were no pop singers who all sound alike.

The week before Christmas was, and is, a slack time in cinemas and theatres. When I was a youngster they would put on something Christmassy in Christmas week. I recall "The Bells" - sombre and deliciously eerie. There might be Marguerite Clarke in "The Seven Swans". And a memorable one, Betty Bronson in "Peter Pan". The latter had a fine musical score, played by the cinema orchestra. It had a lilting theme tune. I can still play it on the piano, though I have long forgotten its name. Those films seemed to turn up Christmas after Christmas, but they all had the right atmosphere.

And after Christmas, there were the pantomimes at the little

suburban theatres. My father loved panto. "The side-shows are always so good," he used to say.

In the world of the weekly papers, the greatest individuality of all was to be found. Think of the Gem, the Magnet, the Boys' Friend, the Popular and the Nelson Lee. Each of them was a school story paper, but each had its own personality. You would never mistake the Gem for the Magnet, or the Popular for the Nelson Lee. Each had its especial charm, and at no time more than at Christmas.

One of our younger friends, writing recently, commented that his children would ask: "Dad, can I have tuppence for my comic?"

In the post-war years, all children's papers were lumped as comics, and that's possibly exactly what they were. Though I doubt whether comics could be bought for tuppence in the post-war years.

But it was not ever thus - as Frank Richards observed once or twice.

I'm darn sure that I never, in all my life, asked for "tuppence for my comic". I would say "Mum, can I have tuppence for my Gem?" (I always went to Mum - she was an easier touch than Dad.) Or "Mum, it's Magnet day today. Thanks, Mum!"

Mind you, I liked a comic - a real one - at Christmas time, when there was snow on the covers and ice on the headings and ghosts in the weird stories inside. "Val Fox - and the Ghost of Thorn Grange". I only bothered much about comics - real ones - at Yuletide. And I liked the fictional characters - Pansy Pancake or P.C. Cuddlecook - far better than those lifted from real life - Charlie Chaplin or Nellie Wallace. I would say, "Mum, the Butterfly's out today. I wonder whether you could spare three-halfpence - oh, thanks, Mum." Or "Are you going down the town, Mum? I wonder whether you would bring me 'Merry & Bright'. I wouldn't mind a 'Boys' Friend', too, Mum, if --- No, I know you're not a millionaire, Mum. What's that? You'll bring me them if I sweep up all the leaves in the garden? What! With my back!"

Join me in the memory of an old, old Christmas, when a Magnet was a Magnet, and a Rainbow was a Rainbow.

THE ANNUAL

All those who want the new C.D. Annual will have ordered it by

now, and it will soon be coming your way. I feel that all our contributors have excelled themselves this year. I hope it will give you lots of pleasure at Christmas, and to turn back to, to renew enjoyment, as the tomorrows become yesterdays, and the years go by. Quite a few people have written in this month to ask: "What about Mr. Buddle?" Well, we have brought him back this year. His new adventure is entitled "The Haunting of Mr. Buddle".

And now, dear friends, as I end the last editorial of the year, there is just one final thing to say. I wish you all a Very Happy Christmas, among those you love, and may the New Year bring you everything that you yourself hope for.

THE EDITOR

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Danny's Diary

DECEMBER 1928

The new Underground station has been opened at Piccadilly Circus. It's worth seeing. Also, not far away, at Marble Arch, a brand new cinema has opened. It is called the Regal. To start it on its way is a talking and singing film - they call them talkies. It stars Al Jolson and is called "The Singing Fool".

The first Ken King story this month in the Modern Boy is "A Fatal Fortune". It carries on the story of the great pearl of Gola which brings peril and misfortune in its train. Ken shoots it into a thousand pieces, out of the thieving fingers of Black Harris.

The next week brought "£500 Reward". They find an appeal for help in a bottle which they fish out of the lagoon.

Then came the Christmas Number, which wasn't all that Christmassy, though the stories were good. The George Porson story by George E. Rochester was "The Ghost of Cross Roads Inn", and it was nice and spooky. The Ken King Christmas tale is "The Phantom Fiddler". The ketch, Dawn, is completely fog-bound, and out of the thickness come the eerie strains of a violin. Then THUD - and the adventure gets going.

Next week brought "Ken King's Island Christmas" in which the ketch is attacked by Wolf Williams and his gang. Final tale of the year is "White Man's Luck". There is a night attack, a great hurricane, and a valuable cargo has to be thrown overboard.

A man named Baird has invented something called television. As well as hearing people on the wireless, we shall be able to see them - this year, next year, some time, never. If some of them look as awful as they sound, it won't be much of a treat. But I'll believe it when I see it.

At Cardington, in Bedfordshire, they are just finishing off building the R.101, the world's most wonderful airship.

Doug bought me the Union Jack one week. It contained "The Crime of the Christmas Tree", which was as good as it sounded.

I had both the Schoolboys' Own Libraries this month. "Harry Wharton's Christmas Number" was good, but "The Ghost of St. Jim's" is a perfect dream of a Christmas tale. There is a Tap! Tap! Tap! at St. Jim's as the ghost goes his rounds.

Our King is still very ill. Six Councillors of State have been appointed, and they include the Queen, the Prince of Wales, the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Prime Minister. Dr. Lang is the new Archbishop of Canterbury.

The month's first yarn in the Nelson Lee Library is "The Rotter's Awakening". Simon Kenmore, the bullying senior, has disappeared, but he has actually come into Junior School, posing as Walter Kenmore, his own brother. And, as Walter, he earns high praise for himself. The last tale of this series is "For He's a Jolly Good Fellow". After some exciting adventures, a great change comes over Kenmore, and he reforms. An unusual story. The following week brought "The Return of Ezra Quirke". Reggie Pitt finds himself the owner of Raithmere Castle, and the castle is said to be haunted. Quirke, who turns up afresh, is afraid to enter the castle for fear the unknown Presence will strike.

My brother Doug has been to the Palace Theatre in London to see a new Musical Comedy entitled "Virginia". George Gee is the star. I hoped Doug would take me, but he took his new lady friend, Lavinia Wills. But I have been to the pictures a good many times, mainly with Mum. We have seen Wallace Beery and Raymond Hatton in "Fireman, Save my

Child"; Theodore Roberts in a big spectacular named "The Ten Commandments" which is fine; Fred Thompson and Silver King in "Silver Comes Through"; Richard Barthelmess in "Glitter"; Reginald Denny in "Good morning, Judge"; Bebe Daniels in "Swim, Girl, Swim"; and one of the most exciting and funniest films I have ever seen, Monty Banks in "Play Safe".

The Popular with its red, white and blue cover is the most attractive paper in the shops. The first Rio Kid story is "The Vengeance of Chief Many Ponies". The Apache falls foul of Sheriff Watson of Frio, waylays him, binds him spread out on the back of a horse, and drives the horse out into the desert.

Next week, the Kid sets off in "The Death Ride" to save his old enemy, Sheriff Watson. But the following week, in "The Outlaw who Kept his Word", the Kid is captured by Watson's men. But, in the night, Watson sets the Kid free. Then came the Christmas Number, with a lovely, simple little tale, "The Rio Kid's Christmas", in which the Kid rides to fetch a doctor to a sick nester at Christmas.

Final Kid story of the month is "The Cattle Thieves" in which the Kid reaches the Sampson Ranch, and finds that rustlers are at work on the herds.

There has been a terrible earthquake in Chile, with hundreds dead and injured . . .

In the Gem, "The Jazz Schoolboy" is Herries with his cornet. In "Just Like Cardew", Cardew ceases to be lackadasical, under the influence of Miss Molly Harwood. Then the Christmas Number with "The Haunted School". A poacher named Luke Crow plays ghost as a spectral monk. Then two stories: "The Curse of the D'Arcys" and "The Mystery of Eastwood House". Trimble, Cousin Ethel and Doris Levison are in the Eastwood House party. Different members of the party disappear, and there is a cavalier ghost. Ethel and Doris promise a kiss to the one who solves the mystery. There is an old butler named Barton, and he's the culprit. Wally solves the mystery, but doesn't claim the kisses. I don't blame him.

There has been a violent gas explosion in London in the Kingsway, and there were several fires between the Kingsway and Shaftesbury Avenue. Quite an exciting time for the people in town. Nobody was

seriously hurt.

The magnificent Magnet. I call it that because the tales are deliriously delightful these days. The first of the month is "Who Punched Prout?", a sequel to a tale last month. It was Bunter who did the deed, but Coker is blamed, and people sympathise with Prout because one of his form has punched his nose. So when Bunter confesses, Prout is only too ready to forgive our Fatty. Next, another tale about masters, and a gorgeous one it is. "The Form Masters' Feud" is between Mr. Quelch and Mr. Hacker, and it is caused by a plump youth who is handy at imitating other people's voices. Then an extremely good and unusual 3-story Christmas series, re-introducing the sea lawyer, Soames, from that lovely South Seas series. Soames is after the fortune of Redwing's uncle. Soames kidnaps Redwing, keeping him prisoner in the haunted cave; then Vernon-Smith is kidnapped, in his turn; finally, at the eleventh hour, it is Harry Wharton & Co. who comes to the rescue. The titles are "The Phantom of the Cave", "The Clue of the Coral Knife", and "Hunted Down".

Doug, as usual, bought me the Holiday Annual, and I enjoyed it over Christmas. It cost 6/-, but it is not really as good as it used to be. It is now, for the first time, printed on very thick, coarse paper, so that it seems to be bigger, though there is really less reading matter. There is a variety of short items, including Billy Bunter's Annual. The main stories are the one from the old Red Magnet in which Bunter dived into the empty swimming-bath and lost his memory, and the old Blue Gem tale in which "Tom Merry Minor" is a monkey which they took away from a cruel man named Fur Cap.

I bought Doug a gramophone record for his Columbia portable. I got him "Sonny Boy" (from the new talking picture "The Singing Fool" which is on in London). It is a Layton and Johnstone record, and on the reverse side is "For Old Times' Sake".

By a coincidence, Doug also bought himself a record of "Sonny Boy" played by Albert Sandler and his Orchestra. On the reverse side of this one is "Somebody, Somewhere". Both records are very good.

(EDITORIAL COMMENT: S.O.L. No. 89, "Harry Wharton's Christmas Number" comprised a story from the Red Magnet of the early autumn of 1913 plus another tale on the same theme from the end of the year 1913. Both tales lost a few chapters. S.O.L. No. 90, was "The

Ghost of St. Jim's", the famous Gem Christmas Double Number of 1908 in which the pageboy, Binks, played ghost, under the influence of "blood and thunder" periodicals.)

* * * * *

BLAKIANA

Conducted by JOSIE PACKMAN

Well here we are once again with the December issue of our favourite monthly magazine and once again I would like to wish you all a very Happy Christmas. Also many thanks to all who have contributed articles throughout the year so that we can all find something to enjoy each month. Most of us were rather disappointed with the Sexton Blake serial but we have been informed that it was meant for the children. It has always been a mystery to me why Blake should be relegated to the Children's Hour and not Sherlock Holmes treated in like manner. By the way did anyone else notice the Union Jack Tinker was reading in the second episode? I just managed to get a quick look, it was the story called "The Clue of the Second Goblet", No. 1256. Those who visited the Cambridge Club a few years ago will remember seeing the silent film which was shown, the film unfortunately broke down just before the end. Anyone wishing to read the story may borrow it from my Sexton Blake Lending Library.

A SECOND HELPING FOR CHRISTMAS

by J.E.M.

Back in the 1930's we used to get a lot of Blakian "second helpings". Detective Weekly eked out its last sad days with reprints from the Union Jack, while, towards the end of its own life, even the UJ had begun to serve up old fare (e.g. the famous Criminals' Confederation stories). This process could involve some fairly ruinous cutting and re-writing but it must be said that any re-hash at least gave a tit-bit to those who missed the original offering.

A re-hash of anything, however, is best avoided at Christmas time and it is not surprising that there was little of it on Sexton Blake's yuletide menus. One notable exception was a story by Donald Stuart. He wrote The Crimson Smile for UJ 1523 (24th December, 1932) and it was unusual not only in becoming a Christmas reprint but in making its second appearance only six years after its first, turning up in Detective Weekly 304 (17th December, 1938) as The Clue of the Painted Smile. Repeats generally came after a greater time lag; those Crim. Con. stories, for instance, saw a good twelve-year gap between first and

second servings.

A classic yuletide mystery set against a background of provincial pantomime, *The Crimson Smile* was illustrated throughout by Eric Parker. The UJ's cover, a dramatically simple one, shows the interior of a room with a french window. Outside, in seasonably thick snow, a huddled figure trying to force an entry, peers in ... For the Detective Weekly reprint Parker produced a cover which was more ambitious if, perhaps, less successful. He depicted Blake, Tinker and Inspector Coutts opening a vault in a snow-covered graveyard. Dominating the drawing, as a piece of montage, is the huge, framed portrait of a smiling woman. The total effect, though eye-catching, is pretentious and unconvincing.

Of the five original interior drawings from the UJ, four were used again in the DW repeat and, in my view, the one omitted sketch was the best of the lot, since it truly "set the stage" for the story, showing Blake and Co. in the theatre where the panto is being rehearsed. The scene depicts a startled company of stage hands, chorus girls and producer being given news of murder by Blake himself and, without this drawing, some of the story's essential atmosphere is lost.

So far, the second serving seems less attractive than the first. But what about the main ingredient - the story itself? This at least is unspoiled, apart from some trivial changes in chapter headings and, of course, the revised title (what, for goodness' sake, was wrong with the original?). The story's plot is one of Stuart's most ingenious. Its background of small-time theatre in the Thirties is well caught (had Stuart some first-hand knowledge?), while the leading characters positively sparkle. Tinker was never more Tinker-like nor Coutts more typically himself: old, familiar friends in excellent form.

Blake too is at his most impressive. I have often felt that Donald Stuart and Gwyn Evans gave Blake more depth than some of the other writers - a little more emphasis on brain and a little less on brawn: a true rival to Sherlock Holmes in fact. Certainly Stuart excels here in his account of Blake's solution to the mystery. Excitement, suspense, high class detection and an unflagging Christmas flavour (complete with happy ending) make this yarn a worthy successor to Stuart's Mr. Midnight and The Witches' Moon.

The story has something else as well. I have referred in another context to the real knowledge one could get from the Sexton Blake saga. At school, in the Physics laboratory, we learned something about Light and Optics, while those lessons in the Art Room helped to enlighten us about the nature of colour, but how many of us were ever told anything about Samoiloff lighting? It was certainly left to Donald Stuart to enlighten me about this particular phenomenon - and all in the easily digested narrative of a Christmas thriller. More about this particular bit of art and science here could only spoil your enjoyment of a splendid story. Enough to say, get hold of it for yourselves and don't worry whether it is The Crimson Smile (UJ) or The Clue of the Painted Smile (DW).

The second serving might have poorer trimmings than the first but, unlike a good deal of re-hashed Blake, all the essential ingredients are there. And, after all, we must be grateful to join a Blakian feast however it is served.

THE UBIQUITOUS LEGION

by S. Gordon Swan

P. C. Wren's famous tale "Beau Geste" popularised The French Foreign Legion in the nineteen-twenties, leading to a spate of films and books about this regiment. But long before this, in 1907 to be exact, the Foreign Legion figured in a story of that title in The Union Jack. Almost needless to say, it was by W. Murray Graydon.

Tinker had been harshly reprimanded by Blake for being duped by a pretty girl and allowing a wanted murderer to escape. "It is the old story," Blake said. "A woman is at the bottom of every piece of mischief. It has been so since the days of Delilah, and it will always be the same. The boy has been beguiled by a pretty face; by a temptress with a plausible tongue." Blake threatened to consign Tinker to a clerical job in the City, since he would never make a detective.

Later Blake repented his words. "I forgot my own youth," he said to himself. "I was just like him once, easily beguiled by a pretty face and a sweet voice, trusting all women before I learned how false and treacherous they could be." No doubt these pessimistic remarks about the opposite sex would arouse the ire of Women's Libbers today; Murray Graydon must have been in a jaundiced mood at the time.

Blake had intended to apologise for his harsh words in the morning, but the morning was too late. Tinker had gone, Blake did not know where until later. All this is a preliminary to Tinker's joining the Foreign Legion. The lad's age at this period is ambiguous; sometimes he is depicted as a young boy, at others he appears old enough to join the army.

I do not propose to elaborate on the plot. Suffice it to say that complications ensue. The commandant of the Legion turns out to be General Chanrellon, whom Blake had met in a previous story, "The Legion of Honour". On that occasion the detective had thwarted a Royalist conspiracy in France, baffled the designs of General Chanrellon and won the Legion of Honour for his services to the Republic. The murderer whom Tinker had allowed to escape had also joined the Legion. The lad did not know this criminal by sight but the murderer knew Tinker and thought the young detective was on his track. Before long all the protagonists found themselves embroiled in desert war with the Kabyles, and many lives were lost before the end, when Blake and Tinker were reconciled.

There were at least four other tales of the Foreign Legion in the Sexton Blake Saga, but these followed on the publicity engendered by Beau Geste. In the Union Jack entitled "The Legion of the Lost" Blake and Tinker substituted themselves for two new recruits to that regiment in order to secure the release of a young Russian who had joined us. As in P. C. Wren's story there was a sadistic sergeant-major who proved to be an excellent soldier in battle. In The Sexton Blake Catalogue this story is credited to G. H. Teed, but I cannot accept that he wrote it as the style bears no resemblance to his work.

Teed did write one Union Jack with a similar title, "Lost in the Legion", which was one of the Roxane series. Comparison of these two yarns will reveal the difference in styles. The true authorship of "The Legion of the Lost" is doubtful but I would suggest either J. N. Pentelow or S. Gordon Shaw as possibilities.

In The Sexton Blake Library Murray Graydon (again) gave us "The Deserter of the Foreign Legion" and some years later John W. Bobin contributed "The Mystery of the Lost Legionnaire", an excellent tale in which Aubrey Dexter appeared. In most of the foregoing stories

Blake joins the Legion to track down a wanted criminal or to find a missing person. In any event, the Legion provided a colourful background for romances. Some years ago I read it had been disbanded but from time to time one sees references to it, so one is left to wonder at its ultimate fate.

- U.J. 162 The Legion of Honour by W. Murray Graydon
- U.J. 216 The Foreign Legion by W. Murray Graydon
- U.J. 1291 The Legion of the Lost by ?
- U.J. 1478 Lost in the Legion by G. H. Teed
- S.B.L. (2nd) 169 The Deserter of the
Foreign Legion by W. Murray Graydon
- S.B.L. (2nd) 367 The Mystery of the
Lost Legionnaire by John W. Bobin

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Nelson Lee Column

"LOOKING BACK" by C. H. Churchill

I was introduced to the Nelson Lee Library way back in December 1919 when I was ten years old. My elder brother brought home some of the "Mr. Martin" Barring out series from the bookstall in our lower market. We were very grand, you see, having two markets in Exeter, the Higher and the Lower! On reading these I was "hooked" on the Nelson Lee and it always remained my favourite story paper from then on. During the next few years my brother purchased the Nelson Lee each week and, of course, I was all agog every time he brought one home until he had finished it and passed it on to me.

Our lower market opened on Saturdays only and the stallholder charged 2d. for five copies of anything. If one had any books to return he gave 1d. for five. I had many transactions with him over the next few years and so was able to obtain earlier Lees as well as Union Jacks, Gems, Populars, etc., etc.

Christmastime is the time for remembering and on thinking back to those years long since gone I can select the Christmas Lees which, I consider, the "pick of the bunch". It is an easy task now for me to

look them up as I have all the old small series in my collection.

I know everyone's tastes differ but with due deference to others I consider No. 130, "The Phantom of Tregellis Castle" to be the best of them all. Admittedly there was no humorous episodes in it, such as in No. 394, "The Ghost of Somerton Abbey" with Fatty Little stuffing himself, etc., but it was first of all the longest story, 64 pages, and was a really gripping affair altogether. Another favourite of mine was and still is No. 446, "The Schoolboy Santa Claus" together with the next number "The Ghost of St. Frank's". (What awfully thin paper was used for the covers of these two!)

Passing from the sublime, I consider the poorest Christmas number to be No. 186, "The Mystery of Grey Towers". After such a great start with No. 130 this one is very poor and I feel dear old E.S.B. must have had an off day when he thought up this plot. However, he more than made up in after years with all the succession of fine tales that followed along.

There were some good Christmas stories in the later large Lees, but I do not think that, as a selection, they can be compared favourably with those in the old small series. Furthermore, the covers in these old numbers were almost all first-class efforts and much superior on the artistic side than anything that was to come afterwards.

HANDFORTH MINOR

by R. J. Godsave

In the autumn of 1922 E. S. Brooks departed from the usual series of eight Nelson Lees and wrote a dozen or so single Lees. Incidentally, the cover drawings of these single Lees were of exceedingly high standard in both design and colouring.

One of these Nelson Lees was important in that the introduction of a character who was destined to become one of the leading characters of the Lee saga. In an almost casual way Brooks introduced to his readers the younger brother of Edward Oswald Handforth in o.s. No. 386 "Handforth's Minor".

Just over two years previous the Clement Heath series gave the Lee readers an insight into the Handforth family with the introduction of elder sister - Edith. No mention was ever made of Willy Handforth. Even McClure, when Handforth announced to his chums that his minor

was arriving that afternoon as a scholar, stated that he didn't know that Handy had a minor. Be that as it may, Brooks created a character that was to carve a niche in the hearts of the Lee readers.

Having all the characteristics of his elder brother, with some extras, enabled him to make himself the leading light of the Third Form. In his previous school his companions were children, in a way of speaking. There had been practically no fighting and the whole run of life had been different. Willy quickly realised that such a way would not do for St. Frank's, and it would be necessary to use his fighting ability ruthlessly.

As in real life it is difficult to keep secret any discreditable action one has performed or been accused of performing such actions in the past. Willy had a secret, which unfortunately for him, came to the knowledge of Ralph Leslie Fullwood through his connection with some Yexford College juniors. According to them a boy by the name of Handforth had been expelled from his school - Sellcombe - for cribbing exam papers answers.

With such a lever as this Fullwood resorted to asking Edward Oswald to advance him a loan of £2 and if he forgot to ask for it back he would be pleased to keep quiet about the whole affair.

Naturally, Willy was interrogated by his elder brother and admitted that he had been expelled and was about to go into fuller details but was cut short by the shocked Handforth who thought such a confession was all he wanted to know. Although Handforth had paid £2 to Fullwood he had second thoughts and forcibly took the money back. Fullwood in revenge broadcast the whole affair and the whole school was now aware of Willy's disgraceful act.

In the Third Form Willy was put on trial and was sentenced to either be sent to Coventry for the rest of the term or fight Owen minor, who was considered to be the best fighting man in the Third. Willy chose to fight and soon it was obvious that Owen minor had met his match. From then on Willy with the aid of his fists became the leader of the Third Form.

It was left to Sir Edward Handforth to right matters. In a visit to St. Frank's to see how Willy was getting on Sir Edward on hearing of Willy's school action had become public, accused Handy who thought that

Willy's expulsion was true and also the disgrace that followed, of daring to believe that his brother could be guilty of such an act. Although Willy had actually been expelled it was for only three days. During his absence from the school the real culprit was caught red-handed stealing more exam papers answers, and Willy returned to the school his honour cleared.

By a few words Willy could have explained he was innocent of the accusation of cribbing exam papers answers, and would not have had to bear the scorn that he was subjected to. The very fact that he refused to explain his innocence showed that he possessed a great strength of character and that he had faith in himself. Even at that early age he showed all the qualities of leadership.

It does seem to me that a character such as Willy can, in a way, take over and leave an author with no option but to carry out the character's wishes to the full. Should an author wish to push such a character into the background there is little doubt that he would soon hear from his readers as to the reason for this action.

A case in point regarding the difference in characters is the old series which introduced both John Willard and Archie Glenthorne. Both had the same start but Willard soon fell by the wayside while Glenthorne rose to greater heights.

* * * * *

WANTED: Greyfriars Holiday Annuals; also Tom Merry's Own Annuals. Please write with particulars to - J. JONES, 11 GILLINGHAM HOUSE, ROCHESTER ESTATE

WALKER, NEWCASTLE-ON-TYNE, NE6 3HQ.

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Another Friars, Saints and Connoisseurs **GRAND CHRISTMAS MEETING** at Courtfield, 17th December (full details C.D. Annual). Annual subscription £1.40, includes 16,000 word Courtfield Newsletters, reports, complete with photo's and scores of letters. Details from your host below: R. F. (BOB) ACRAMAN, COURTFIELD, 49 KINGSEND, RUISLIP, 31025 who extends **CHRISTMAS GREETINGS** to all.

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WANTED: P. G. Wodehouse books; P. G. Wodehouse by R. B. D. French; William Tell Told Again; Not George Washington; The Globe; By-the-Way Book. Also copy of the Luck Stone by Basil Windham (pseudonym of Wodehouse) serialised in Chums 1906 - 1908. Please write to:- FERGUS HORSBURGH, 40 Ballantyne North, Montreal West, Canada.

The 1927 Christmas series began with true Hamiltonian irony. Bunter's Uncle George wrote promising him an inestimable treasure, chosen with special regard to his needs. Bunter talked about banknotes and motor bikes, Skinner & Co. wondered, and Fisher T. Fish even stood Bunter a tea on the basis of using a sprat to catch a mackerel. When the present at last turned up, it proved to be a shilling edition of "A Christmas Carol" with the inscription 'Read and reflect'. The delay was caused by Uncle George looking round for a cheap edition.

It was at this point that the irony seemed to depart from the story, and a serious note was introduced. Bunter being in detention, he read "A Christmas Carol" and was so impressed by the magic of the master that he became a reformed character. He offered his umbrella and watch to a poor man, Mr. Sempronius Skelton, who turned out to be an eccentric millionaire masquerading as a tramp in order to find a true assistant for his philanthropic work, and Bunter was invited to spend Christmas in a palatial Park Lane mansion.

It was not long, however, before Bunter realised that servants, relatives, and even the poor themselves regarded Mr. Skelton as a near lunatic. The magic of Dickens that Charles Hamilton praised so highly in No. 1036 was shown to be quite impracticable in No. 1037 in such episodes as the one in which the poor set upon Mr. Skelton and robbed him, and in which Bunter was ordered by the millionaire to give his boots and overcoat to a poor boy. By constantly changing gear, so to speak, the story gradually showed the stark reality which the good intentions of Mr. Skelton failed to perceive.

There was very little in the way of Christmas happiness in this tale, even though Leonard Shields' illustrations were attractively surrounded with holly. Instead there was a feeling of disillusionment, a suggestion that benevolence was a sign of insanity. It could be, of course, that Charles Hamilton was merely intending to underline the dangers of unreasoning philanthropy, but it was not until No. 1038 when the venue was changed to Wharton Lodge that the 1927 Christmas began to cast off an aura of uneasy cynicism.

LET'S BE CONTROVERSIAL

No. 226. CHRISTMAS 1913

The firm of men's outfitters, Horne Bros., occupy a soft spot in my heart. For many years their Oxford Street branch was our school's official clothing supplier, and excellent they were. Their latest advertisements - on hoardings and in the press - have caught my eye. They announce: "You have the Body; We have the Clothes."

That, in its turn, reminds me of Fisher T. Fish, who nearly 70 years ago was the first editor of the Greyfriars Herald, and, being a business man, he thought about the advertising potential of the Herald. "You have the Tummy - We have the Tarts" he suggested as an advertisement for Mrs. Mimble and her tuckshop. And the Head of Greyfriars was invited to advertise "You have the Boy - We have the School".

One wonders whether the bright person who had the idea of the Body and the Clothes may have been a Greyfriars fan in 1913 - or in 1928 when the story was reprinted in the Schoolboys' Own Library.

Danny's Diary, this month, reminds us that it is exactly fifty years ago this December that "Harry Wharton's Christmas Number" was one of the attractions of the Schoolboys' Own Library. This particular S.O.L. included a Magnet entitled "The Greyfriars Herald" from early October 1913. Fisher T. Fish starred in a number of tales in 1913. Now he got the idea of a Greyfriars Herald, and he admitted that the source of the plan was "Tom Merry's Weekly" which he had seen on a visit to St. Jim's. Fishy, of course, made a muddle of it, and so the "Herald" was taken over by Harry Wharton & Co., as was inevitable from the first. Nearly three months later came another "Herald" story, at the end of 1913, entitled "Harry Wharton's Christmas Number". The two stories were combined to make the S.O.L. in December of 1928.

Stories of the "Greyfriars Herald" and of "Tom Merry's Weekly" were usually fairly amusing when taken in small doses. The S.O.L. "Harry Wharton's Christmas Number" was just a bit too much of a good thing, with two long tales on the subject joined together to make a whole book.

Whether the "Herald" and the "Weekly" were particularly feasible as school magazines is a moot point. Certainly, if they were supposed

to appear regularly, they were not. The idea of boys at school bringing out a "weekly" is absurd, though as something which appeared occasionally it was reasonable enough. Boys, with their favourite weekly papers at the back of their minds, love the thought of anything of the sort, but they would soon get tired of anything so time-consuming. Of course, it was admitted that "Tom Merry's Weekly" was misnamed - the production appeared at irregular intervals, we were told. But, for a long time, "The Greyfriars Herald" actually appeared, either as a separate entity or in the Magnet, every week, and so it seemed apparent that schoolboys were supposed to be producing a school magazine each week.

Most readers, no doubt, accepted it for what it was - a pleasant if nonsensical novelty - but there were plenty, who liked to live in a world of make believe, who really regarded the "Herald" as a real thing.

"Harry Wharton's Christmas Number", in late December 1913, was not the 1913 Christmas Number of the Magnet. There had been a Christmas Double Number a week earlier - a number, embellished for the first time, with a cover in colours. The story was "The Four Heroes".

This is a story which has never received much attention in the pages of C.D. and of the C.D. Annual. In fact, while the Christmas stories of the blue Gem have been praised to the skies and have deservedly become famous, the Christmas tales of the red Magnet have been almost entirely ignored. "The Four Heroes" received no mention at all in Roger Jenkins's History of the Magnet, so far as I remember.

It is a long yarn, well told, and skilfully plotted, even though it is a flawed story. The Bounder stars in it. In trouble with his form-fellows and with his form-master, Vernon-Smith, with an apparent knowledge of human nature, plots a deep plot.

The Head receives a banknote from an anonymous "Colonial Visitor", who is compelled to leave England immediately. The anonymous Colonial Visitor claims that he was given heroic aid by some Greyfriars junior, and he asks that the banknote shall be presented to the unknown young hero. Bunter claims to be the hero, as does Skinner, as does Bolsover, as does Snoop. Each of the claimants relates a different version of the heroic incident. Skinner's version, because it is supported by an eye-witness, Stott, is accepted as the true one.

Just as the reward is being presented to Skinner, the Bounder

steps forward and announces that there was no Colonial, no heroic act, no hero. He, the Bounder, had set up the whole thing to make fools of some of his school-fellows.

The flaw was - and I have commented on this sort of thing before - the assumption by the author that the good lads have a monopoly of all the virtues, while the black sheep monopolise the vices. An unpleasant character is not, of necessity, dishonest, nor is an apparently very nice lad above certain dark deeds. Maybe, the high moral tones of the Magnet tales made the assumption necessary, and we were all the better for it.

The Bounder is expelled for his trickery, but the final chapters are played out in a Christmas gathering at Wharton Lodge, where he wins a pardon as a result of saving Bunter from icy waters. Colonel Wharton sends particulars of the genuine heroic act to Dr. Locke.

The weakness of the single Christmas story of this type is that the following week we find Greyfriars back to normal, still in the Autumn Term. In fact, "Harry Wharton's Christmas Number" followed "The Four Heroes".

Over in Gem country that year, 1913, readers enjoyed what was probably Hamilton's most famous and best Gem Christmas story, "The Mystery of the Painted Room", a rare title which was never used again though the story was reprinted several times. The tale fitted snugly into a Schoolboys' Own Library under the title of "The Eastwood House Mystery". And when it was reprinted in the Gem of the mid-thirties, I persuaded Mr. Down, way back in the summer, that the tale should be published in two parts to avoid the drastic pruning which so many of the great blue Gem yarns suffered at that time. It was done successfully.

It was claimed that "The Four Heroes" and "The Mystery of the Painted Room" were each 50,000 words in length. Somebody's typewriter must have been busy in that run-up period to Christmas 1913.

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"A Merry Xmas and a Happy New Year to all Friends", from:-

CAPT. JOHN GUNN and WINIFRED GUNN

65 WALTON GARDENS, GRANTHAM.

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WANTED: Any copies of "The Schoolgirl" magazine of the 1930's. Notify price to Mrs. M. BARRIE, 19 Amberley Road, Gosport, Hants., PO12 4EN.

BIOGRAPHY OF A SMALL CINEMANo. 57. ONE FOOT IN HEAVEN & ANCHORS AWEIGH

Our opening feature of the new term came from M.G.M., and was Edward Arnold in "The Hidden Eye". In the supporting bill was Pete Smith's Scrapbook; a Fitzpatrick Traveltalk in colour "Colorful Colorado"; a coloured musical half-hour "Nautical but Nice"; and two coloured cartoons.

The following week, from M.G.M., brought the ever-popular Tarzan - Johnny Weismuller in "Tarzan Escapes", which may have been a re-issue. Supporting items included one of Warner's Mack Sennett collections, "Small Town Idol"; a coloured Traveltalk "Shrines of Yucatan"; a Pete Smith novelty "Acro Batty"; and a coloured cartoon "The Weakly Reporter".

The following week we had, from M.G.M., Robert Walker in "What Next, Corporal Hargrove?", another in the modest but pleasant army stories. In the same bill was a half-hour coloured musical, "Barber Shop Ballads", which I am sure must have been great. If you are like me, you love the Barber Shop singing. (Our London chairman, Eric Lawrence is today a member of a fine Barber Shop group, as I hope he won't mind my mentioning.) A Passing Parade novelty "Woman in the House", and a coloured cartoon "Red Hot Riding Hood".

This was a Jeanette Macdonald term with a vengeance, for we played no less than three of her big musical films. The first, from M.G.M., was "Bitter Sweet". A coloured Barney Bear cartoon was "North-West Hounded Police". "Bitter Sweet" was in technicolor.

Next week, Jeanette Macdonald again, this time with Allan Jones in "The Firefly", from M.G.M. This was the one with the toe-tapping Donkey Serenade. There were two coloured cartoons in the big supporting show, one of them entitled "Draft Horse".

Next from M.G.M., Ann Southern in "Up She Goes". A coloured Traveltalk was "Scenic Grandeur" and a coloured cartoon was "Who Killed Who?"

Then came one of the M.G.M. giant musicals: Frank Sinatra, Gene Kelly and Kathryn Grayson in "Anchors Aweigh" in technicolor. This one is memorable for having the Tom & Jerry cartoon characters blended in with a marvellous dance sequence with Gene Kelly. A grand musical. Tom & Jerry were also in the coloured cartoon "Spring-time for Thomas".

Next, Jeanette Macdonald was back for the third visit, this time in the M.G.M. technicolor film "Smilin' Through" with Gene Raymond. This one was, of course, a musical. Years earlier, we had shown a non-musical version of the story with Norma Shearer in the leading part. A Bugs Bunny colour cartoon was "Tortoise Wins by a Hare", and a Pete Smith novelty was "Calling All Pa's".

The following week brought a magnificent double-feature programme. Top of the bill was one of my own favourite films of all time. This was "One Foot in Heaven" starring Fredric March. I have long hoped to see this one come on television, but in vain, so far.

It was shown on TV in the very early days of ITV, when they used to cut feature films drastically, an abysmal practice long mainly abandoned. Somewhere, I have the book of "One Foot in Heaven". This film came from Warner Bros. The second feature came from M.G.M. and was Marjorie Main in "Gentle Annie". I fancy this was one of the Tugboat Annie stories, the character originally created by Marie Dressler. A colour cartoon was "Porky's Duck Hunt".

Next week, another superb drama from M.G.M.: Greer Garson and Gregory Peck in "The Valley of Decision". "Hick Chick" was a coloured cartoon in support.

Then another delightful M.G.M. musical: Judy Garland and Mickey Rooney in "Strike Up The Band". In the supporting bill was a potted colour musical "Melody of Youth", a Tom & Jerry coloured cartoon

"Trap Happy", and a coloured Traveltalk "Where Time Stands Still".

To wind up a term of outstanding programmes came "The Princess Snowee and Your Editor". Heavens! What on earth made me put that? I meant, from M.G.M. June Allyson and Hedy Lamarr in "Her Highness and the Bellboy". In the supporting bill was a coloured cartoon "Pigs in Polka". And the Universal News in every programme.

A passing thought. The lengths of one or two of this term's films were interesting. "Anchors Aweigh" was 12,520 ft.; "The Firefly" was 11,542 ft.; "Strike Up The Band" was 10,759 ft.; and "Valley of Decision" was 10,652 ft. All mighty long. One noted the length to be a guide in booking the rest of the programme.

(ANOTHER ARTICLE IN THIS SERIES NEXT MONTH)

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Merry Xmas and a Happy New Year to all old friends at home and abroad, from:- JIM SWAN,
108 MARNE STREET, PADDINGTON, LONDON, W10 4JG, ENGLAND, P.S. The same
bloke who lived in Fifth Avenue in Pad. W10, up to five and a half years ago.

* * * * *
WANTED: Howard Baker hardback "Sexton Blake and the Missing Bullion" by Peter Saxon.
Contact - DR. K. J. BONUGLI, 109 BRITTEN RD., BASINGSTOKE

HAMPSHIRE. Tel. (0256) 62719

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FOR SALE: OVER 100 CHILDREN'S ANNUALS; many before 1940. Most at £2 each.
Felix, Tiny Tots, Jolly Times, Teddy Tails; Round the Year Story Book; Sing a Song of
Sixpence; Playbox, Rainbows; Tiger Tim's; Leading Strings; Grumpy's; Holiday Time;
Partridge's Children's Annual; Cassell's Boys - Girls; Toby Twin; Jolly Jack; Wilfred's;
Seven Goslings; Every Boy's Open Air Book. Many more. Some £3 each.

"OLYMPUS", SANDFORD MILL ROAD

CHELMSFORD, ESSEX.

The Postman Called

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

S. GORDON SWAN (Western Australia): I am late in commenting on derogatory remarks about Jules Verne but my August issue of C.D. did not reach me till 18th October. Whatever his shortcomings, some of this author's tales are eminently readable and one must always give him the credit for creating Captain Nemo and his submarine Nautilus which travelled under the Arctic Ice. Verne here foresaw what was to be achieved in fact a century later.

With reference to "Clipper of the Clouds", wasn't there a sequel "Master of the World", also featuring Robur? At any rate, this latter was filmed some years ago with Vincent Price in the leading role.

FRANCIS HERTZBERG (Wirral): It is indeed, as you say, strange that the Doyle agents missed Herlock Sholmes, when they spotted and stopped so many other versions at home and abroad, such as Mager's Sherlocko and Watso comic strip in America (re-named Hawkshaw the Detective in 1913).

I am always seeking similar parodies, both ancient and modern - and nowadays there are so many of them that the Doyle estate seems to have given up (currently Whoopee is featuring Sheerluck & Son).

T. HOPKINSON (Dukinfield): You are right when you say that Mr. Quelch is the finest schoolmaster in school fiction, although Mr. Steele, who replaced the Remove master, in the Courtfield Cracksman series must run a very close second. I, for one, was sorry he had to leave at the end of the tale, as he was quite a pleasant and likeable character.

W. O. G. LOFTS (London): Can any reader tell me if he has ever read or know of a story entitled "The White Chief of the Umzimvubu Kaffirs"? Apparently this did not appear in B.O.P./Chums/Young England or in hard-back. A.P. papers are also unlikely as they have been searched.

W. THURBON (Cambridge): I note your comment on my reference to "flickering pictures". I agree that in their latter days the silent films were very good pictorially, but you must remember I am of pre 1914 vintage and certainly the early films did flicker. This can be seen when

old films are run on T.V., as in the brief extracts in tonight's Richard Stilgoe programme, and even in the extracts from the filmed interview of 1923 with Conan Doyle in last night's "Crime Writers" show.

I agree, however, as I say, that the later films were very good.

JACK OVERHILL (Cambridge): There were five cinemas in Cambridge when I was a boy. I went to all of them. The films did flicker off - and often: in fact, so much that you wished that wouldn't happen when you went in; well, that was so with me. With the flicker there was sometimes a snappy sound, probably to do with the film running off the spool. There followed whistling, catcalls, and occasionally the stamping of feet, while the pianist tinkled away in the dark. Those breaks were long and short and a part of film-going in Cambridge in those days. After the first world war the silent films greatly improved and many were fine.

G. W. MASON (Torquay): Mr. Thurbon's perpetuation of a legend awoke memories of a dark hall with no soft, coloured lights, no arm-rests to the hard, wooden seats, even the tinkling of the piano would sometimes cease whilst the pianist had a cup of tea or performed some other function. In almost utter darkness, save for the film's flickering light, the usherette's torch-beam or the ignition of a cigarette, it was nevertheless a novelty to infants like me to witness such wonders for the price of a box of matches.

H. TRUSCOTT (Huddersfield): Further to your comments on W. T. Thurbon's letter in the C.D. for November, I should like to add that, certainly from roughly the beginning of the twenties, or perhaps even earlier, with such films as Madame Dubarry and The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari, silent films were certainly not flickering, unless they were badly projected. Today, on television, they often seem to flicker, simply because they are rarely projected at the correct speed. On television they are far too fast, as they are usually when they are occasionally shown in a cinema, or even at Film Societies, which do not have a projector that will project at the correct speed, and find it too expensive to hire one.

Mrs. MARY CADOGAN (Beckenham): Thank you for the November C.D. which is full of good things from its intriguing old Union Jack cover

until the very last page. I was particularly glad to see the Rio Kid mentioned, both in Danny's Diary and in the review of a story from The Popular recently reprinted by Howard Baker. I too found The Rio Kid's Christmas Gift extremely appealing; the Kid was very much in my mind recently when I was on holiday in California. Although this was not exactly his locale my husband and I travelled through many stretches of typical "Western" territory, where I wouldn't have been surprised to see the Rio Kid riding out to meet us at any moment!

I also, by the way, was intrigued to find a place called Cedar Creek, which of course conjured up shades of Frank Richards's famous fictional schooldays.

As you know it was the C.D. that first stimulated my own interest in writing and this has since brought me considerable fulfilment. So, on this mellow note, and bearing in mind that the next C.D. will be the December issue, I'd like to thank you again for all that you do to bring out the C.D. month after month. Perhaps if sometimes the effort of getting everything together and meeting deadlines seems a particularly hard slog it might cheer you to know that you are giving us all a little touch of Christmas from January right through to December!

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Your price paid or generous Hamilton exchanges for following in top condition: MAGNETS: 429, 443, 447, 526, 530, 547; GEMS 600, 720, 721, 722, 816, 822, 839, 935, 936, 952, 953, 1020, 1034, 1035, 1166. HOLIDAY ANNUAL 1941. May I wish the Editor and all fellow C. D. subscribers well for the Festive Season from all members of the Golden Hours Club, Sydney.

SYD SMYTH, P.O. BOX 284, RYDALMERE 2116, AUSTRALIA.

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SALE: C.D. Annuals, 1970, 1971, 1973, 1975, 1976, 1977, £4.00 each. Captain, Vols. 25, 1911, £4.50. Greyfriars Prospectus, £3.00. Magnets, Gems, Bunter hardbacks.

JAMES GALL, 49 ANDERSON AVE., ABERDEEN. Tel. 0224 491716.

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A Merry Christmas to all Old Boys and a happy retirement Stan Purslow, with many years of W.G.B. WANTED: No. 18 Howard Baker Facsimile. Your price.

R. G. ARNOLD, 40 LOCKINGTON CROFT, HALESOWEN.

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JIMMY PARRATT: please write to Fergus Horsburgh, 40 Ballantyne North, Montreal West, Canada.

News of the Clubs

MIDLAND

Ten members were at our usual venue, Dr. Johnson's Place, for the first meeting after our summer recess. All seemed in high spirits and ready for a lively discussion on the old papers that we love so much.

Our usual feature Anniversary number and Collectors' item were on show. These included Magnet 1498, "Harry Wharton's Amazing Relation" dated 31st October, 1936, and 42 years old to the day.

A reading by your correspondent came from a Merlin book, "Billy Bunter and the Bank Robber". It dealt with Smithy sporting a box apparently of playing cards for Quelch to see, but the box really contains Latin notes. Smithy is just trying to get Quelch to make a fool of himself by taking him to Dr. Locke and he succeeds.

Members asked why Dr. Locke noted for his keenness and perception, could not see that Smithy was trying to make a fool of his form-master, but it was pointed out that Charles Hamilton's skill in story-telling was such, the reader was more than willing to have his credulity stretched in his enjoyment of the story. Literary criticism has its limits. Who is there who has become disenchanted with Charles Hamilton because George Orwell attacked him so scathingly? Very few, I imagine.

With the attendance running into double figures it was a very encouraging start to the new term. But there is room for more and we hope for even better things still in the future.

We are all looking forward now to the new Christmas Collectors' Digest Annual. We meet again on 28th November, usual venue.

JACK BELLFIELD - Correspondent.

CAMBRIDGE

The Club met on Sunday, 5th November, at 99 Shelford Road, Trumpington. The Secretary circulated a photostat of a Laurel and Hardy series of drawings by W. G. Wakefield, sent by Terry Wakefield.

Jack Overhill circulated a number of albums of Brooke Bond Tea Cards, collected by his daughter which aroused much admiration.

Mike Rouse produced a large assortment of new books, which he circulated for inspection; this included two books on postcards, Peter Lewin's book on "The Fifties", a number of annuals and "The D. C. Thomson Firsts". The Secretary passed round a copy of "The Best of Chums".

Danny Posner gave a description of the publication history of "The D. C. Thomson Firsts". He explained how the initial doubts of the Thomson people had become wholehearted co-operation; the many technical difficulties which had to be overcome in the production of the book which had caused some delay in publication, and how these had all been triumphantly overcome. The members of the club expressed their thanks to Danny for giving them such an interesting insight into the production of a book from the conception of the first idea until final publication.

After enjoying Mrs. Overhill's wonderful tea, the meeting resumed. Adrian Perkins gave preliminary notice of plans for a celebration of the 30th anniversary of the publication of "The Eagle"; Keigh Hodgkinson said he had in hand plans for a film to celebrate the centenary of the publication of "The Boys' Own Paper" in 1879 which will occur next year.

Bill Thurbon read a brief paper tracing how the idea of lost cities used by Cecil Hayter, Reginald Wray, and E. S. Brookes in stories could be traced back to Rider Haggard. Jack Overhill followed with a reference to the Aldine "Robin Hood" Library, showing how much of these stories could be traced to "Ivanhoe". He posed the question, did this borrowing of ideas really matter to boy readers at the time they were reading these books? There was general agreement that so long as the story was an absorbing one, the borrowing of ideas did not matter, although looking back we now realised how much ideas had been reused. The meeting closed with a warm vote of thanks to Mrs. Overhill for her generous hospitality.

Next meeting 3rd December.

LONDON

Despite the bakers' industrial dispute, an excellent repast was provided at the Hume House, East Dulwich meeting. Josie Packman was

heartily thanked for her untiring efforts to give us such a good spread under difficult circumstances.

Her Sexton Blake reading and quiz were excellent, Jim Richardson being the winner and the recipient of the prize Josie kindly provided. It was pleasing to have Ray Hopkins back with us, and we enjoyed his reading of a Hamilton story "Redfern Minor" from the Boys' Realm of 1909. Millicent Lyle's Addresses Quiz resulted in a triple tie - Laurie Sutton, Ann Clarke and Bob Blythe.

Mary Cadogan gave an account of her visit to Bob Whiter while she was on holiday in Los Angeles. She had brought along a volume of the D. C. Thomson reprints of certain Number Ones of the Thomson papers. Also on display was the Howard Baker Holiday Annual for 1979 which contains No. 1 of the School Friend, to which Mary Cadogan writes an introduction.

Roger Jenkins, Hamilton Librarian for 25 years, was given a vote of confidence which was proposed by Bill Bradford and seconded by Thomas Wright. I was given a vote of confidence, also, as to the compiling of the club's newsletter. These two expressions of confidence by the club were accorded after some criticism had been received.

Bob Blythe read extracts from the Newsletters of October and November 1961, and he remarked how some of the members, who attended the meetings then, still come along.

The comfortable atmosphere was thoroughly enjoyed, and we all look forward to the Christmas gathering at the home of Bill and Thelma Bradford, 5 Queen Anne's Grove, Ealing, London W.5, on Sunday, 10th December. Kindly inform if intending to be present. (579 4670)

BEN WHITER

NORTHERN

Meeting held 11th November, 1978

Fourteen regulars were in attendance for this meeting, which was taking place, as the Chairman remarked, on a quite momentous anniversary.

Discussion time concerned our plans for next month's Christmas party, Darrell Swift's forthcoming visit to London, and - for those hardy

enough to have exposed themselves to it - the concluding episode of the TV Sexton Blake serial. This was considered to have touched rock bottom - or perhaps it should be sludge bottom. We couldn't see the point of doing the thing at all if it was to be such a malicious mockery of the originals.

First item on the programme was a quiz by Harold Truscott devoted to the contents of the first ten Holiday Annuals - those of the 1920's. This proved a memory-teaser, though as is often the case one recognised the answer the moment it was revealed. Ron Hodgson romped home a handsome first; the runners-up had only half Ron's score.

After refreshments we had the readings from Magnet 186, "The Only Way", which showed the interesting Sixth-Form triangle of Wingate, Courtney and Valence which perforce disappeared from the Magnet after Pentelow killed off Courtney in Magnet 520. We debated not only what the paper lost by this diminution, but in general the tendency of the Greyfriars cast to contract in later years, and we speculated too on the degree of editorial influence to which Hamilton had to submit.

Christmas Party: 9th December, at the Swarthmore Centre. Friends from other clubs always welcome, but it helps if you contact Mollie Allison first. Phone Leeds 756615.

JOHNNY BULL

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WANTED: Billy Bunter's Barring Out (D.W.), H. Baker Magnets, vols. 7, 18, 19, 21 to 25, 29, 37, 38, 39. Greyfriars Book Club volumes, Nos. 2, 3, 4. Holiday Annual (original) 1922. Original illus. by Chapman and McDonald.

JAMES GALL, 49 ANDERSON AVE., ABERDEEN. Tel. 0224 491716

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FOR SALE: Books by E. Wallace, Hadley Chase, 20p each. C.D. Annuals, 1971 - 1975, £1.25 each. Postage extra. WANTED: S.G.O. Libraries, Cliff House.

MAGOVENY, 65 BENTHAM ST., BELFAST.

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WANTED: Chums, Vol. 17 (1908/9) and "The Captain", Vols. 22, 23, 28 and 29. Please write to:
D. MORGAN, 22 HAYES RD., BROMLEY
KENT, BR2 9AA.

Merry Xmas to all. Special greetings to my friends Bill, Jack, Sam, Jim, George, Eric. Still need Victor Gaunt, Master Spy and Boys' Favourite Libraries No. 1 & 17, both by my old friend the late Edward R. Home-Gall.

ERN DARCY, 47 FISHER ST., MAIDSTONE

VICTORIA, AUSTRALIA 3012.

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WANTED: Numbers 1 to 10, Dixon Hawk's Case Books. Have Numbers 13, 16, 17, 19, 20 available for exchange.

BLIGH, 55 ARUNDEL AVE., HAZEL GROVE

STOCKPORT, CHESHIRE.

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REVIEWS

BUNTER AT ST. JIM'S

Frank Richards & Martin Clifford
 (Howard Baker: £4.50)

One of Charles Hamilton's most remarkable undertakings was early in 1919, when, with the Magnet and the Gem "synchronised", Billy Bunter went to St. Jim's as Wally Bunter, and Wally went to Greyfriars as Billy. Our young friend, Danny, of Diary fame, has commented "What a difference a writer makes!" Exactly! And no more so than in series like this where credulity has to be entirely suspended and an impossibly far-fetched and contrived plot becomes a delight when it comes from the typewriter of the man who, in his time, wrote the world's greatest school stories.

The double series ran for 15 weeks in the Gem, and a little longer in the Magnet. On account of its length, the need for the two schools to be synchronised, the twin series were only partially reprinted once before, so the majority of readers now will never even have seen it. Therefore it is an especial joy.

Clearly Hamilton was working in co-operation with editor Pentelow, though whose idea it was we shall never know. Hamilton wrote most of the stories, though Pentelow contributed a small number. They stand out like a sore thumb, for the styles of the two men were so different. It would be impossible to have the entire series in one volume, but the Howard Baker firm has compromised beautifully, and have included the 13 key stories from this astounding collection. There are five Magnets and eight Gems. The planning could hardly be better.

The Gem had the better of the bargain for the simple reason that Billy Bunter went to St. Jim's. Nowhere in the whole of Hamiltonia is the worth of Billy to his creator more evident.

After the main theme was exhausted in the Magnet, the stories, with Wally Bunter in the Billy Bunter slot, became very much run-of-the mill, and those tales are excluded. So, reasonably enough, the greater part of the new volume is given over to Billy Bunter's

adventures at St. Jim's. Plenty of readers will be happy, too, that all the Gem tales are illustrated by Warwick Reynolds.

The volume contains an introduction to the Bunter double series by Eric Fayne, editor of Collectors' Digest.

I don't like the dust-jacket, the pictures on which come from other tales. Of course, the 1919 papers had white covers, but that would have added to the period charm. But it is a very minor detail. A superb volume to cherish.

BILLY BUNTER GETS THE BOOT

Frank Richards
(Howard Baker: £3.95)

This is the first of a new series of books from the Howard Baker firm, and I must say that I find it very attractive indeed. With type re-set, it is a reprint from S.O.L. No. 286 of the later thirties. Beautifully clear to read, it is of perfect dimensions for any book-case, and I forecast immense popularity for the new series.

The original stories comprised four Magnet tales of late 1924, and four were really too many. The opening two are complete, but the final pair are heavily pruned. Don't let this put you off. Even with the pruning, this gorgeous bit of fun with Bunter expelled from Greyfriars and refusing to go, is satisfying reading, and unless you know the series well, you won't detect the cuts. The S.O.L. always had its own drawbacks, but its especial charm far outweighs the drawbacks.

"Bunter Gets the Boot" is the first of a series which gives great promise. It should ring the bell with all.

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THIS TIME IT'S BIGGLES

from Don Reed, Christchurch, NZ.

For years academics have laid literary characters on the chopping blocks and have ridden roughshod over the heroes of our boyhood. I don't know what they gain, or is there anything to be gained by breaking down our childhood and youthful illusions?

The latest character they have lifted from the past is that great air ace, Wing Commander Bigglesworth - Biggles to you and me.

Two professors at Sydney (Australia) universities have examined the Biggles books to see what influence they had on readers' attitudes. Their research was founded on the premise that writers 'emerge from, and in their turn contribute to a political culture'. What a shattering theory! In simple language could we say that authors, like ourselves, are largely products of our own environment? Of course it takes years of study to work that one out! And with that background of study and thought our experts have decided that Biggles is upper middle class; Ginger of his team is definitely a member of the working class. Algie and Bertie are aristocrats!

But Biggles, they say, also turns out to be a misogynist (to save you taking down the dictionary, that's a woman-hater) and there are also racist overtones showing through his character. These facts were scientifically presented at a Conference in Adelaide S.A. One wonders if they enjoyed reading the Biggles stories. They didn't say.