

STORY PAPER

COLLECTORS DIGEST

DECEMBER
1980

NO 408

VOL.
34



A
MERRY
CHRISTMAS

PRICE
10 30P

H. WEBB

Large old collection just purchased. Many interesting items. These include Bullseyes (the $\frac{1}{2}$ d. ones), Boys Comic Journals, Aldines, Cheerful Library, Half Holiday, Thriller Library, 1st Rate Library, O'er Land Sea Library, New Penny Mag., Book Bits, British Boys, Gentleman Journal, Boys Weekly Novelette, Boys' Own Library, Boys' Own Mag., Penny Mag., Young Men of G.B., Judy, Boys' Weekly Reader, Marvel, U.J's, Pluck, Boy Ill. News, Triumph Library, Funny Pips, Boys' Leisure Hour, B.F. Weekly and library.

Many, many more including some of the less known ones. Far too many to list.

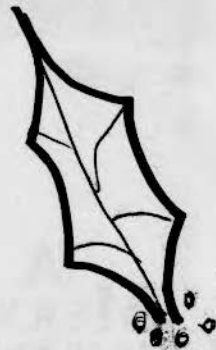
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May you have the Spirit of Christmas which is Peace, the Gladness of Christmas which is Hope, and the Heart of Christmas which is Love.

THE GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PAST

From Danny's Diary this month we learn that, way back in the distant year of 1930, our famous diarist was enjoying the Cavandale Abbey series as part of his Christmas festivity. So it is exactly fifty

years since that memorable series featured in the Magnet.

It is a sobering thought that any of us who strolled nonchalantly into the newsagent's shop, planked tuppence down on the counter, said "Magnet, please, Mr. Booker!" and got "The Mystery of Cavandale Abbey" in return for our money, must be, in all likelihood, in our sixties today. Getting a bit long in the tooth, in fact, and with heads full of memories.

"Cavandale Abbey" is arguably the Magnet's finest Christmas of all. Not only does it have everything for the perfect Christmas fare, it is also most superbly written. What on earth has a youngster in the nineteen-eighties to compare with it? In the reading line, at least - nothing!

I would go a little further with my sobering thought. Plenty of much younger people have enjoyed, and wax enthusiastic about, the Cavandale Abbey series nowadays - but it is those who bought it in its pristine newness who know it the best of all, and have the fondest memories of it.

It is instructive to compare it with the Reynham Castle series of seven years later. Good though Reynham Castle was, in the Christmas stakes, it lacked a good deal of the style and quality which made Cavandale Abbey what it was.

My own favourite Magnet Christmas series is what I call "the Bunter in the attic series, set at Wharton Lodge", with a striking character sequence featuring Hurree Singh. It is a very pleasant coincidence for me - and I am sure for all of you, as well - that Roger Jenkins has contributed a fine essay on this very series in this issue of C.D.

But it would be hard to find a better-written Christmas series, redolent with atmosphere, than the Cavandale Abbey one that Danny was reading exactly fifty years ago this day.

AUTHORS AND ARTISTS

In the year 1960, our London O.B.B.C. decided to restrict its discussions and competitions to papers published not later than 1940. Which meant that papers to be discussed had to be more than twenty

years old.

Another twenty years have gone by since 1960 - so now, if the rule is still in operation, papers to be discussed must be more than forty years old.

Club rules seem at times to be rather of the piecrust variety, and one wonders whether it is still strictly observed. Generally speaking, I would think it must be.

Since the war, stories by authors have been replaced by stories by artists. Children no longer seem to read, which is inexplicable to those of us who found, in our youth, that reading was the spice of life. The result is that the older folk among us recall with pleasure the authors who gave us Harry Wharton, Sexton Blake, Nelson Lee, Betty Barton and so on. People in younger age groups set up pedestals on which to place the artists of post-war years. The last great story-papers ended with the war. Anyone much under fifty has grown up in the age of the "comic", a term which covers a multitude of sins as it were.

Fortunately, owing to the reprints, and the fine facsimiles from Howard Baker, and, dare we say it, to Collectors' Digest, the joys of yesteryear have spilled over to reach plenty of younger folk today, so the demarcation line is not so defined as it might be without them.

It will be a sad day if the artists eventually take over entirely from the authors.

REMARKABLE REMARQUE

Some twenty years ago, in a Let's Be Controversial article, I quoted from Remarque: "To forget is the secret of eternal youth. One grows old only through memory. There's much too little forgetting." I expressed the view that Remarque was talking through his hat. I commented: "I can't believe that remembering the Gem, Magnet, Nelson Lee, and Union Jack is going to hasten the departure of what is left of youth. If it does, it's a pleasant way to grow old."

Charles Hamilton agreed with me. He wrote, in what was to be one of his last letters to me: "Memory is the continuity of life. So far from ageing us, it keeps us young. The man who can live his youth over again in memory will never grow really old. When one reaches the armchair state of existence, pictures from the past take the edge off

Father Time's scythe. Let us keep up-to-date by all means, and find what pleasure we can in income tax and atomic fall-out. But if we want to live long and like it, let us keep our memories green."

A HOLE IN THE GROUND

Warren Bell wrote a pleasant school story under that title, and Andrew Garve wrote a splendid thriller with that name. My own little tale may tickle you, and it is a true one.

I was walking home from the little general shop, not far away, when I saw that, under the incessant rain of recent times, a deep hole, about a foot square, had suddenly appeared in the footpath. Back home, I rang the local council to report the hole and its exact position.

That should have ended the matter, but it didn't. For the next three hours we were connected with the local council. Our phone kept ringing - and it was always the local council. Their light kept flashing - and it was always Excelsior House.

After a couple of hours, the lady at the council switch-board said: "We're getting quite old friends, aren't we?" Madam went to a neighbour's phone to report to the supervisor. The local council reported to the supervisor, and asked for help, as all their emergency calls were ringing our phone bell. Three hours later, our lines were separated. It was a welcome separation.

I wrote to the telephone manager, as it seemed likely that we might be charged for a 3-hour local call. They are allowing 70 units on our next bill, whatever that means. How things have progressed since the bad old days when we used to say ELMBRIDGE 4647.

STAR, NOOS, & STANDARD

In "The Blue Carbuncle" Sherlock Holmes sent an advertisement to be placed in all the London evening papers. The papers named were the Globe, Star, Pall Mall, St. James' Gazette, Evening News, Standard, and the Echo. So there were at least seven evening papers in London in Sherlock's day.

When I was a boy, and for many years afterwards, there were just three. "Star, Noos, & Standard," the newsboys used to shout.

In fairly recent times, the Star gave up the ghost. And now the

Evening News, which claimed for countless years to have the largest evening sale in the world, has gone. So now there is just one left.

It's sad to see old traditions fade and die. I rarely see an evening paper now. They don't come out so far as north Hampshire. But I remember the Evening News of some dozen years ago as an excellent paper.

What killed it off? Television to some extent, of course, but one would have thought that the commuters on their way home would like a paper to read in the train.

I saw the paper a few times when Madam was in hospital in Wimbledon, and it seemed to be that the quality had lessened sadly. And, at something like two bob a time, it is hard to think that it was not priced out of existence.

CHRISTMAS PRESENT

By the time that this Christmas Number of C.D. reaches you, our 1980 edition of the C.D. Annual will not be far behind. Happy reading, this Christmas!

Here at Excelsior House, I'm sure that the editorial office will still be going strong over Christmas and the New Year. I shall probably be tapping away for part of Christmas Day and Boxing Day, and I am likely to see the New Year in over the keys of my typewriter. Like the Windmill, we never close.

But our printers do, naturally, and so do the postal people. We wish them a grand time. So, if your C.D. is a little late coming through in January, please be patient, and don't be too quick to get out a piece of cardboard to write me a stiff letter.

Finally, here I am - Wishing you all the Joys of an old-fashioned Christmas and a Year of Happy Days ahead.

THE EDITOR

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Mr. R. F. (Bob) Acraman of Courtfield, Ruislip, Middlesex, wishes it to be known that another person of the same name, i. e. 'Bob Acraman' described as living in Weyhill, Hampshire, is completely unknown to him, and is no connection whatsoever with his family, and that he has never seen or spoken to him.



DANNY'S DIARY



DECEMBER 1930

A fortnight before Christmas, my brother Doug gave me the new Holiday Annual. I expect he read it himself before he gave it to me, but it was a kindly thought. "A sort of pre-Christmas present, Danny," he told me, and I really felt humble. I went upstairs right away to his room and unmade the apple-pie bed I'd just made for him.

The Holiday Annual isn't really as good as it used to be. It costs 6/-, and it seems a big book, but the paper is very coarse, so it seems thicker than it really is. The earlier ones had 360 pages, but this year's has only 280 pages - quite a bit less.

Mr. Macdonald's cover of a boy on a motor-bike is very nice, but, apart from the three main tales - one for each school - there isn't a lot to interest me. Too much adventure and historical stuff. Still, the main tales are good. "Mark Linley at the Cross-Roads" is obviously from a very early Magnet. "Troublesome Tom" is obviously from a very early Gem, for it is about Tom Merry at Clavering - and this one is lovely.

The Rookwood story is "French Leave" in which the chums cut class to go to a circus, and save their own bacon by helping a Mr. Bright who left his footsteps in the snow.

Even so, it's really the worst Holicay Annual so far, and I have them all in my cupboard.

There is good news for those people who buy the Daily Telegraph each day. The price has gone down from 2d. to 1d. It's always nice when prices come down.

In the Test Match against South Africa at Johannesburg, we lost. South Africa won by 28 runs.

The first issue of the Nelson Lee this month is the Christmas Number. It has 52 pages, but, of course, the pages are not all that big, and there are a goodly number of advertisements. The St. Frank's tale is "The Phantom of the Grange". A crowd of boys and girls spend Christmas at Parkington Grange, the ancestral home of K. K. Parkington -

and there are a couple of ghosts for good measure. A festive affair, though the mystery is soon solved. Next week, still at the Grange, we had "Handy, the Conjuror". Only a very short tale of five chapters. The main story is a detective one of Lee, entitled "The Death Grip".

The next week saw the start of a most unusual series, and very far-fetched: "Jake Diamond's Foes". Chicago comes to London, and the St. Frank's chums get mixed up with Jake Diamond and Al Capone, the American gangsters. Handy's house is subjected to machine-gun fire. In real life, Jack Diamond was shot and seriously injured in a New York hotel last month.

Nothing very outstanding at the pictures this month - for me, at any rate. The first was a war picture "All Quiet on the Western Front", all about German soldiers. Next a silent picture "The White Hell of Pitz Palu" which was instructive. Then Cyril McLaglen in "Balaclava", and with this one there was a lovely Laurel and Hardy comedy entitled "Blotto".

Greta Garbo was in her first talking picture "Anna Christie", with Charles Bickford as her leading man. Also in it was Marie Dressler. It was pretty awful. Then a German film, a silent one, entitled "The Blue Angel" starring Emil Jannings and Marlene Dietrich. It left me very cold. After that we saw Buster Keaton in "Free and Easy" which I liked, though it is not so good as his short comedies used to be. Finally the second war film "Journey's End" with Colin Clive, with British soldiers this time. Not so good as All Quiet, but fairish.

The very earliest Rio Kid stories have come out in the Boys' Friend 4d. Library. The tale is entitled "The Rio Kid" and it is tip-top, though I had read it all before.

Two quite good tales in the Schoolboys' Own Library this month. The first was "The Complete Outsider" which told of the arrival of Aubrey Angel and his feud with Sir Jimmy Vivian. The second was "The Ghost of the Priory" in which Mr. Silver's Rembrandt is stolen and the culprit is Mr. Spencer, his secretary. Then it goes on to holiday adventures with Coker and Co. in the picture, and the Fistical Four being late back for the new term, where they find that Peele has pinched their study.

The Modern Boy's Christmas Number came out in the second

week, and it had 56 pages, but there were twenty full-page advertisements and loads of other adverts, so it was not as generous as it sounds. The Captain Justice tales by Murray Roberts during the month were "The Mine of Lost Hopes", "S.O.S.", "The Ship of Fear", and "The Pirate's Bluff". There are tales by Alfred Edgar, and a series by Jones Minor of St. Agnes School.

The Gem Christmas Number was the first of the month, going on with the over-strained adventure series about the boys on a great airship. In the Christmas tale "The Red-Man's Vengeance" they are in the Rockies. Next week they are in South America in "The Tyrant of Urudor", and that ended the series. The tales were not very long, and there are a lot of other tales, plus big ads, in the Gem.

Next week an amazing thing was the return of the real Martin Clifford with "George Washington Junior" about Crooke ragging Railton. Not really anything special, but it seems wonderful after what we've had for a long time.

Final of the month "Skimpole the Spartan". Skimpole gets another "ism" - neo-Spartanism. No bedclothes - and baths in icy water. Brrrh!

Our wonderful post office in Britain handled ten million parcels in the seven days ending Christmas Day - and Christmas Day was on a Thursday this year. The postman knocks rat-tat when he puts a letter in the letter-box, but when it's a parcel, and he wants an answer, he gives a double knock - rat-tat, rat-tat. And I rush to the door.

The postal people really did wonders, for in the few days up to Christmas there were dense fogs all over the country, and especially thick ones all round London.

The Popular is limping on with its hotch-potch of stories. The very early Jimmy Silver tales are there every week. In the Christmas Number there was an extra-long Rookwood tale entitled "The Ghost of the Priory". (So we have two different ghosts at the Priory this Christmas, the other one being in the S.O.L.) The Popular ghost is actually Jimmy Silver's uncle John, who has left the army, falsely accused.

I must add that with the third week of the month, Greyfriars is back in a serial entitled "Poor Old Mossoo" in which Wharton has a feud

with the French master. It has the same title every week, but it says "The End" at the end of each instalment. I remember reading it a little while ago in the Magnet.

Which brings me to the Magnet itself, really tip-top for Christmas. First tale is "The Schoolboy Form-Master". Mr. Prout is away for a fortnight, and his place is taken by Mr. Moon. And Mr. Moon's place is taken by the disguised Wibley. Good fun.

Then the Christmas series, and wonderful it is. In "Billy Bunter's Christmas", the Owl is hiding under a railway carriage seat when Lord Cavandale is attacked. Bunter is the means of saving Lord Cavandale, and, as a result, manages to get himself invited as a guest to Cavandale Abbey.

Next week, in "The Mystery of Cavandale Abbey" it is clear that the earl is in some danger from someone. Bunter manages to save him a second time, and Bunter has permission to ask his Greyfriars friends to join him. Is the attacker Captain Lankester or Mr. Parker?

Last tale of the month is "The Phantom of the Abbey". Ferrers Locke is called in. We know now why Cavandale is being attacked. He is the owner of Maharajah, the horse which will win the big race, though Black Prince was the original favourite, and heavily backed. At the end of this story, Captain Lankester is exposed and kicked out - but there is still a killer at the Abbey. Lovely series which goes on next month.

Dad is going to take Mum and me to a London theatre on New Year's Day, and they let me choose what I would like to see. I half thought of "Peter Pan" which is at the Palladium this year. Then I half-decided on "Evergreen" at the Adelphi, which stars Sonnie Hale, Jessie Matthews, Jean Cadell, and Joyce Barbour. But I finally decided on "Aladdin" at the Dominion Theatre (it hasn't been opened long, this theatre) and the stars are Lupino Lane, Ella Retford, and Nellie Wallace. I am looking forward to it very much, and Dad has bought the tickets which are 10/6 each for stalls.

(EDITORIAL COMMENT: S.O.L. No. 137, "The Complete Outsider" comprised a series of three Magnets from the summer of 1918. The original titles were "Angel of the Fourth", "Kicking Over the Traces", and "Sir Jimmy's Enemy". Neither Angel nor Sir Jimmy ever seem to have been very popular, and they had almost faded out by the Magnet thirties.

S.O.L. No. 138, "The Ghost of the Priory" comprised the last Rookwood story in the

Boys' Friend of 1922 and the first seven stories of 1923. The titles originally were "The Phantom of the Priory", "Trailing the Spectre", "Run to Earth", "A Merry Meeting", "An Amazing Match", "Pulling Coker's Leg", "All Lovell's Fault" and "Jimmy Silver's Strategy". The Rookwood tales in the B.F. at that time were very short indeed.

In the Popular Christmas Number "The Ghost of the Priory" was a reprint of "Jimmy Silver's Christmas Party" from the Christmas Double Number of the Boys' Friend in 1916. It was the most reprinted of all Rookwood tales.

The "Poor Old Mossoo" serial in the Popular comprised an excellent pair of Magnets - "The Ragging of Mossoo" and "Harry Wharton's Feud" from the Spring of 1926. The first Rio Kid B.F.L. was No. 266.)

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BLAKIANA

Conducted by JOSIE PACKMAN

Well here we are with Christmastime 1980. How this year seems to have flown by. It hardly seems anytime since I was writing the 1979 Christmas greetings. I wish all my readers a very Happy Christmas and a peaceful New Year. Just a little reminder that I am very short of material for Blakiana so will some of you get out your pens and paper and get down to writing something for the New Year.

LOCKED ROOM MURDERS and other impossible crimes

by Robert Adey

Published by Ferret Fantasy, 27 Beechcroft Road, Upper Tooting, SW17 7BX. Price £8 (obtainable by post from the publisher).

This book is a fascinating bibliography having 1,280 alphabetical entries of impossible murder and crime stories from Abbot to Zangwill. Each entry gives the authors name, book title, publisher, year of publication, the name of the detective and an outline of the problem. At the back nutshell solutions to each problem are provided with an analysis showing that there are twenty different ways of breaching a locked room. A most interesting introduction surveys the whole field of this type of crime fiction.

It is very gratifying to find Sexton Blake authors treated on the same level as classics like G. K. Chesterton, Conan Doyle and Austin Freeman. Among old favourites such as Agatha Christie, Earle Stanley

Gardner, Sapper and Edgar Wallace we find names well-known to hobbyists; Dixon Hawke has six entries, Nick Carter, A. M. Burrage and Rex Dolphin with one each and some unexpected names as well - Joseph Conrad, P. G. Wodehouse, H. A. Vachell, Israel Zangwill and one real surprise, Herbert Beerbohm Tree. Blakiana is well covered as the following entries show: J. W. Bobin (Union Jack No. 1069), E. S. Brooks (Union Jack No. 1077), John Drummond (SBL 3rd series Nos. 94 and 100), Gwyn Evans (SBL 2nd series, Nos. 171, 313 and 723 and three other entries), Rex Hardinge (SBL 3rd series, No. 176 and one other entry), Pierre Quiroule (three Granite Grants - Union Jacks 1087 and 1103 and the famous Bismarck Memoirs), Desmond Reid (SBL 4th series, No. 501) and Donald Stuart (SBL 2nd series, No. 470). Other familiar names included are Berkeley Gray (Calamity Conquest), Victor Gunn (five Ironsides entries) and Gerald Verner (six entries).

Nelson Lee is not left out either but under the authorship of Maxwell Scott. Two short stories, unknown to me, "The Hermit of the Rigi" and "The Professor's Gold" in Union Jacks of 1894 seem to be Lee's only experience of impossible crime.

This listing taken at random gives our authors 38 entries. A closer study may unearth more.

This is a book of absorbing interest to browse through, puzzle over and speculate about. It is equally fascinating to go from problem to solution or play it in reverse. Reading the solutions before the problems often prompts the thought, "What fantastic problem could possibly have a solution such as this?" On the other hand some are so ridiculously simple they are quite impossible to solve. Beware, however, don't read the solutions to books you propose to read and spoil your enjoyment of them unless you have a really awful memory. This is a book worthy of a place, close to hand, in every crime story lovers library. If it can be criticised at all it is that some of the entries are rather too condensed to be really informative but Mr. Adey has done us a great service by collecting together such a mass of information and is to be congratulated on his handling of the material.

SNOWTIME

by Raymond Cure

Snowtime can be anytime between November and March, and

sometimes April. Sometimes a little earlier, sometimes a little later. Not that we get a lot in our part of the world though even we were transformed into a Winter Wonderland in late March 1980 and on one occasion a layer of snow covered our town on May 10th a number of years ago, though it went in a couple of hours. So snowtime can be anytime in the course of five months or so, but snowtime as we know it is in December and more particularly around the third week being most welcome if welcome at all, on the 24th to 26th inclusive.

Unfortunately there are times during that most jolly of seasons in which there is no snow, you can have pouring rain, a gale, fog or sunshine but no snow, and with your selection of Christmas numbers of the Old Boys Vintage before you, surrounded by festoons of holly and mistletoe, the Christmas tree twinkling in the corner and memories of yesteryear haunting your thoughts, there seems to be something lacking with no snow.

Fortunately, just as the sun always shines on the righteous so the snow always falls on the readers of the Collectors' Digest or the C.D. Annual and of the vast array of seasonal literature still in circulation in the form of the old papers among which the Union Jack takes its place.

Members and friends of the O.B.B.C. have their own brand of potted snow. There among sprays of holly, hanging mistletoe and a forest of Christmas trees, you will find flurries of snow carpets of snow or a fierce snow-storm. Among those pages snow will fall in all shapes and sizes. Be assured readers, that snowtime for readers of "The Nelson Lee", "The Magnet", "Gem", or "Union Jack" is Christmastime.

Christmas Day 1979 though cold, was bathed in sunshine and though there was little sunshine for the twelve days of Christmas there was no snow and that's where the Union Jack comes in.

Turn its pages and thundering through the snow at breakneck speed towards you, roars a stage-coach loaded with portly gentlemen, full of Christmas cheer, drawn by four horses with horns ablowing and the local yokels waving a welcome from outside their snow-covered country cottages.

"The Black Carol", "The Crime of the Christmas Tree", "Nirvana's Secret", "The Mystery of the Siping Vampire", "Mrs.

Bardell's Christmas Pudding" and "Mrs. Bardell's Christmas Eve" or "The Phantom of the Pantomime", you name it! and you've got it. Snow covers the forest of pine trees howbeit snow stained with blood, snow piling against Mrs. Bardell's pantry window, snow whirling over the glamorous Nirvana (Tinker's heart-throb) as she plods through it on her errand of mercy. Snow falling steadily on carol singers outside Baker Street as they warm the hearts of Sexton Blake, Tinker and Inspector Coutts with their Christmas Melodies, snow falling through the darkening sky. Even the great Charles Dickens could not conjour up so much snow in the whole of the Dickens Saga, as the Sexton Blake recorders. As I write it appears that the village of Siping (famed for its Vampire) and a visit from Sexton Blake, is also fairly snowbound.

So for Christmas 1980, whatever the weather, why not get out your selection of seasonable editions of the Union Jack's or raid the Library of Josie Packman. Even if the sun does shine on that greatest of all days, you will be able to enjoy the seasonable weather.

Go ahead, enjoy yourselves - after all it is Snowtime!

* * * * *

NELSON LEE COLUMN

"THE JOYS OF CHRISTMAS"

by C. H. Churchill

In the Nelson Lee Library over the years E. S. Brooks gave us many fine stories describing the Christmas adventures of the boys of St. Frank's. Naturally most of these took place at various stately homes spread around the country to where the St. Frank's party had been invited.

Mr. Brooks gave us fine descriptions of these lavish parties and the entertainments that went with them. We read of dancing, skating carnivals on the lakes, theatricals, to mention only a few of the things that went on. There was, of course, humour in many of the stories, this largely being provided by Fatty Little and his appetite and the antics of E. O. Handforth in various ways plus the scheming of Willy of that ilk.

Many of the yarns contained an eerie episode too, with hauntings by spectral figures. Brooks could write very gripping stuff of this

nature and his explanations of the manifestations were always most convincing.

I always think that the best of all the single Christmas numbers was No. 130, "The Phantom of Tregellis Castle". This one was all drama with no time for comedy and was absolutely first class.

The best series, I consider, was Nos. 446 and 447, "The Schoolboy Santa Claus" and "The Ghost of St. Frank's" in December 1923. The first one was, I maintain, one of the most unusual Christmas stories ever to appear in a boys' paper. While describing the adventures of Nipper & Co. staying on at St. Frank's for the festive season, it included the return home, apparently destitute, of one, John Hewitt, a local who had gone abroad some years earlier and of whom nothing had been heard. While attempting to find employment he fell foul of various hard hearted local people, including Farmer Holt. In the end he was revealed as being wealthy and the new owner of Bellton Chase. He had pretended to return poverty stricken in order to find out the genuine people prepared to accept an apparent waster. The story also included sequences of the St. Frank's party aiding snowed-up villagers and also delivering parcels of goodies to the many poor children of parents who were victims of the miserliness of Farmer Holt.

In the second story it was thrills all the way with an intruder in the school trying to frighten everybody away so that he could have a clear field to search for rumoured treasure.

All in all, the Christmas stories by E. S. Brooks in the Lee were really something, the ghostly parts told with tenseness and drama and the comedy parts described with all the mastery of his pen.

A LOOK INTO THE PAST

by R. J. Godsave

It is strange how events which have happened during the post-war years have so altered people's way of living that some of the Nelson Lees written by E. S. Brooks in the 1920's would appear to be somewhat out of keeping in the 1980's. The Solomon Levi series of 1920 which was an account of the tussle between the owner of a second rate cinema in Bannington and Solomon Levi's father who intended to build a super cinema on the site of a house in the Bannington High Street; said to be haunted. o.s. No. 338, "The Schoolboy Cinema Owners".

In this day and age the majority of cinemas have been converted into Bingo Halls, with those remaining showing films which are far from suitable for the family to see. The advent of television has killed the cinemas as we knew them. The cinemas in the 1920's gave great value for the sum of 9d. to just over the shilling. One could have an evening's entertainment which usually consisted of two major films, two or three minor films, the Pathe Gazette and in the super cinemas an orchestra or organ entertained the audience.

Soon after the Solomon Levi series came the ill-fated airship trip which was destined to end on the treacherous coast of Mordania, a small country in the Balkans. The adventures of the St. Frank's party in this mountainous country started with an April Fools joke on the St. Frank's juniors by Lord Dorrimore who invited the boys to spend Easter at Dorrimore Hall in Stowmarket, Suffolk. How the boys spent the night at an empty orphanage nearby is Brooks at his best in a humorous vein. The Mordanian venture was extremely thrilling with the sequel being enacted at St. Frank's and in London.

Times change with remarkable rapidity, and I really think that the majority of people in the 1920's thought that private and air-taxi aeroplanes would be the everyday method of transport in the 1980's. Articles have appeared in Nipper's Magazine to this effect, in a glimpse into the future in fifty years time, etc. Although there are great changes in many ways, it can be said that in the ordinary lives of the average person there is little change.

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DEATH OF Mr. E. A. COOMBES

We deeply regret to record the death of Mr. E. A. Coombes of Swanage, after a long illness. Mr. Coombes had been a keen and loyal reader of this magazine for a great many years, since early days.

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FOR SALE: S.O.L. No. 355, Magnets 1213, 1219, Gems 982, 937, £1 each.

JOHN GODDARD, 44 BAKER STREET, POTTERS BAR

HERTS., EN6 2EB, POTTERS BAR 59555

DO YOU REMEMBER?

by Roger M. Jenkins

No. 166 - Magnets 1349-51 - Wharton Lodge Series

Over the years Billy Bunter accompanied the Famous Five on many holidays, with varied excuses being offered to the reader, usually by way of a reward or by means of blackmail. The Christmas series for 1933 made something of a change in that no-one would have Bunter for the holidays, and he was left to his own resources, which were even less attractive than usual. Mr. Bunter had suffered more than the customary setback on the Stock Exchange, and he and his wife were spending Christmas with relatives at Southend. The aunt who was having Bessie made an express stipulation that neither of her brothers was to accompany her, and so it was Uncle George who drew the short straw - both Sammy and Billy. Mr. George Bunter was not hospitably minded and he became extremely cross to learn that cakes, puddings, and cold fowls were missing from the pantry. One thing led to another, and when Billy Bunter was given notice to quit by Uncle George he embarked upon the novel scheme of camping out in an attic at Wharton Lodge as a stowaway.

The magic of a Magnet Christmas was never better exemplified. Not only was the weather seasonable ("The Surrey hills gleamed white through the December dusk"), but the cosy intimacy of Wharton's own quarters was described in pleasing detail, with an outside staircase leading to french windows in Wharton's den, his bedroom opening off, and a corridor passing both rooms and leading up to an attic that Bunter chose as his hide-out. The descriptions of the log fire in the den and the attractive teas laid by servants in that room afforded the reader a glimpse of comfortable seclusion, where the juniors could congregate on their own, as if in a study at Greyfriars, and chat confidentially about matters in hand.

Bunter's antics in this story were varied and amusing but never repetitive. He essayed forth in the middle of the night to raid the pantry, and later he took the opportunity of a fancy-dress party to wear a domino like Bob Cherry's and eat his fill of the refreshments as well as annoying many of the guests at the party. When it was decided to lock up the larder at night, Bunter began to appropriate Wharton's books and

sell them at a second-hand bookshop in order to raise money for feeds at cafes. His improvisations for evading detection at Wharton Lodge as well as for obtaining necessary sustenance were both inventive and hilarious.

Bunter was not the only mysterious prowler - there were, in fact, two others - but he was the centre of attraction throughout the whole series, the anti-hero whose manners and customs were deplorable but whose fate touched the reader deeply, and of course at the end of the series he became an accepted guest in the mansion where his antics had upset everyone, both above and below stairs. In the last of the great Magnet Christmases, Charles Hamilton showed the reader just what could be made of the really superb setting of Wharton Lodge. It is a truly delightful series, with not one dull patch. At this festive season of the year, one can only read and admire.

* * * * *

THE CHRISTMAS VAC

At Christmas, as always, I shall be celebrating the Festive Season with Harry Wharton & Co. Once again they have invited me to spend the Christmas holidays with them, and the choice of where we go is entirely mine.

The first thought that comes to my mind is Christmas at Wharton Lodge. We should have a wonderful time. There would be skating on the lake, snowball fights, a Fancy Dress Party, and probably a trip to the Panto at Wimford on Boxing Day, but best of all the Christmas Day Festivities.

The old hall decorated with holly and mistletoe, a blazing log fire and Christmas dinner of turkey, plum pudding and mince-pies. Then Christmas night when it is dark outside and the snow is falling and the wind is whistling round the chimney pots we can sit by a huge log fire and listen to Colonel Wharton telling his Christmas Ghost Story.

Or, perhaps, we shall spend Christmas at Mauleverer Towers with Lord Mauleverer. It is a wonderful place, portraits of Mauly's ancestors and suits of armour decorate the old hall and there is always a chance we may see the ghost of the Red Earl lurking in the dark corridors. Hospitality there is boundless. There is sure to be a

wonderful party on Boxing night with the Cliff House girls as honoured guests. Even Bunter may turn up uninvited. We may even find him hiding in an attic, he will wedge in somehow, he doesn't seem keen on spending Christmas at Bunter Court. I wonder why?

But I have finally decided. This year I choose to spend my Christmas in a haunted Elizabethan mansion called Polpelly on the coast of Devon.

Smithy has invited us to go with him and Redwing to hunt for the lost treasure of a sunken Spanish galleon wrecked near there in the days of the Spanish Armada. It is a wild solitary place built on the steep side of a coombe. It will be rather like camping out as there is no electricity or telephone, and only one old caretaker called Daniel, but Smithy's pater has ordered everything money can buy to be sent from Pilverton so even Bunter will have enough to eat.

John Redwing is already there getting everything prepared.

There is a ghost too, (guaranteed by local tradition) of Squire Polpelly, whose ghost has been searching for hundreds of years for his lost Spanish dubloons.

We may get snowed up for Christmas but that won't worry us even if we have to wait till New Year for our Christmas cards and Bunter has to wait a bit longer for his postal order. What's the odds as long as we're happy.

Yes, I am definitely going to Polpelly for Christmas.

(This excellent little article appears anonymously. It evidently got separated from an accompanying letter. When submitting items for consideration for C.D., please make sure that your name is on the article. - Ed.)

* * * * *

Populars from June 1928 to October 1930 required. State issue numbers available and price.

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* * * * *

GEMS WANTED URGENTLY. Will pay your price or very liberal exchange for following Gems (must be binding condition): 816, 822, 839, 841, 935, 936, 952, 953, 1020, 1034, 1035. Magnets 526, 530, 547. My copy of above back to you. Have lots of Magnets, Gems, SOL, B.F. weeklies, Pops, G. Herald for exchange, inc. these Gems: 17 between 48 - 85; 17 between 262 - 411; most in vg cond. Also 14 Mags in top cond. between 463 - 490; 25 between 1090 - 1137.

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REVIEWSD'ARCY MAXIMUS

Martin Clifford
(Howard Baker: £5.95)

It would be very difficult indeed to find a finer set of school stories than the seven St. Jim's tales included in this volume. It should be placed before the lofty people, whom one comes across now and then, who belittle the work of Charles Hamilton, and who do not accept him as the world's greatest writer of school stories.

The seven tales come from Gems of the early and mid-twenties, a period which, long ago, Roger Jenkins gave the true and charming metaphor of the Indian Summer of the Gem.

The St. Jim's stories were fairly short at this time, but the rare quality of the plots and the writing is more than ample compensation for any lack of mere length.

The opening stories in the volume comprise the 4-story series concerning Oliver Lynn, the Schoolboy Pug and the cousin of St. Leger of the Fifth. It is outstanding for its character work, when, so believably, the chums of Study No. 6 are less than generous to the rough diamond in their midst, proving that there are dark patches in the whitest of us. The outcast of the study, so believably once again, uses his strength as an ex-professional boxer, to bully the youngsters who have slighted him. The weak and snobbish St. Leger is beautifully presented, and Cardew, that boy of strange, restless, and often quixotic character, is made true to life.

The story throughout is exciting and unpredictable. It ends sadly with a sigh, as so many real-life stories do. One of the best series ever in the Gem, in my own opinion.

The fifth tale, the title one, "D'Arcy Maximus", is charming, about a boy and his donkey.

Sixth on the list comes "The House-Master's Mistake", one of the most delightful singles that Hamilton ever wrote, about Mr. Ratcliff accusing Cutts of theft - and being compelled to apologise publicly for his hasty error. Most knowledgeable critics regard this one as a Hamilton "classic".

Finally "Gussy's Speculation", a 1925 tale, concerning Gussy's adventures with a shady share-pusher. Hamilton himself seems to have been a gambler on the Stock Exchange, and here we have a theme to which he returned now and again at that time. An amusing and interesting little yarn.

For most Gem readers at the time, it is probable that the "full supporting programme" counted for little. All these years later, one can say that a number of the supporting stories are well worth reading. Macdonald's large illustrations to the short-type St. Jim's tales are excellent.

The dust-jacket announces "The Gem Renascent" which sounds a bit pompous. Don't be put off by it. It's a grand book of grand Hamilton yarns. Hamilton at his best.

MICK, THE GIPSY

Frank Richards
(Howard Baker Special: £15)

Another of the splendid volumes in the Howard Baker Book Club "Special" series. And it is, indeed, special. The contents comprise a 5-story series from the late autumn of 1923, and a 3-story Christmas series from the same year. As we have mentioned before, stories from this period are not generally so well-known, which makes the volume particularly welcome.

Both series feature Mick, the gipsy boy, who saved the life of Sir Hilton Popper, and, when the baronet wished to reward him, expressed the desire to "go to Bob Cherry's school".

It is one of the "missing heir" series, which means that heavy contrivance is much in evidence, but Hamilton, like Reed, always handled contrivance so extremely well that it became a delight to the reader. Always predictable, the series is nevertheless entertaining throughout.

When Mick arrives at Greyfriars, there is comment about his likeness to Aubrey Angel - a likeness which does not please Aubrey Angel and brings out the worst in his nature.

Mick's contacts with Aubrey's father, Sir Philip, are related in fascinating fashion, and, at the end of the series, it is no surprise to the reader when Mick turns out to be Aubrey's brother who was stolen by gipsies when a baby. But, though no surprise, it is all heart-warming for the reader who had guessed the outcome long before. And the remorse of Aubrey at his treatment of his long-lost brother makes very, very pleasant reading.

Mick leaves Greyfriars, but he comes back in the Christmas series (actually a few weeks later) to invite Harry Wharton & Co. to go to the castle of Lochmuir, his property, with his brother, to spend Christmas. There is a quaint old Scottish character, Sandy Bean, and there is a wraith to cause some seasonable shivers.

This is not one of the great or most memorable Hamilton Christmases, but it is all intensely readable, there is a quaint and convincing setting in the Highlands, and, above all, there is some charming seasonable prose.

Another truly worthy volume to join the others.

Back to early in this Century for our Classic Serial.

THE REFORMATION OF MARMADUKE

Marmaduke had been doing regular cricket practice for some days now, and had learned to know one end of a bat from the other. He had also learned to bowl without braining anybody with the ball. To his astonishment, he found that compulsory cricket practice was not such

a terrible infliction after all.

After an hour at the nets he felt much better, physically and mentally, and he began to understand something of the spirit of the game.

Blake walked across to the heir of millions.

"Hallo, Marmaduke" he said genially. "How are you getting on in the New House?"

Marmaduke looked at him suspiciously.

"Pretty well," he replied.

"Glad to hear it. Of course they were all awfully pleased to see you back at St. Jim's?"

Marmaduke coloured.

"No!" he said shortly.

Blake looked astonished.

"No? You're joking, of course. You're just the kid to suit the New House, and it is exactly the place for you."

Marmaduke, suspecting sarcasm, did not reply.

"I hear you are taking up cricket," said Blake. "Staggering humanity with your performance at the wicket."

"I am learning," said Marmaduke. "It is not such a silly game as I thought."

Blake slapped him on the shoulder.

"Good for you!" he exclaimed.

"I'm jolly glad to hear you say so. By the way, you're in Figgy's study, aren't you?"

Marmaduke nodded.

"Then you're in the secret?"

"What secret?"

Blake looked mysterious.

"Oh, if you're not, I'd better not tell you anything," he said. "I thought you knew all about it. You know, what Figgins & Co. are getting up for Saturday."

Marmaduke started.

"You don't mean to say your know!" he exclaimed.

Blake laughed carelessly.

"There's precious few things go on at St. Jim's that I don't know, I can tell you that," he said.

"But Figgins was keeping it a dead secret from you School House fellows."

"Well, it wasn't much use, was it?" laughed Blake.

"No," said Marmaduke, in wonder. "But how do you know? Figgins said that anyone who let out the secret would be cut by the whole house."

"He did, did he?" murmured Blake.

"Here, Smythe!" It was Monteith's voice. The head prefect of the New House came up in rowing flannels. "I want you."

Marmaduke looked at him sulkily, with a vivid recollection in his mind of a late licking.

"What do you want?" he snapped.

"I want you to steer for me. My fag's playing cricket, and you will do just as well."

"I don't want to."

Monteith grinned.

"Really? You distress me. But I want you all the same."

"I don't know how to steer."

"Then it's time you learned. Come along."

"Shan't!"

Monteith's brow darkened.

Marmaduke tried to run, but the prefect's grip fell on his shoulder. Marmaduke uttered a cry of pain.

Holding him by the shoulder, Monteith marched him down to the boat-house. Blake looked after them with knitted brows.

"What a bit of rotten luck!" he exclaimed. "Just when I was going to get the whole story out of that kid, too!"

It was a bitter disappointment.

Blake strolled down to the river, to keep an eye open for Marmaduke when he

should come ashore again.

Marmaduke had not submitted with a good grace. He knew more about steering that he admitted, and he was determined that Monteith should not benefit much by his steering.

Monteith gave Marmaduke a twist which sent him flying into the boat which was already afloat. "Take your seat!"

"I don't want to come with you."

Monteith stepped into the boat, and gave Marmaduke a box on the ears. The junior plumped down in his seat.

"You'll do as you're told," said the prefect. "Give me any more of your cheek, and I'll duck you in the river."

Marmaduke made no reply, but his eyes gleamed wickedly as he took the lines.

The prefect shoved off, and got out his oars, and the boat glided away towards the bridge. Beyond the bridge was the Pool, the most dangerous spot in the river for swimmers. A boy belonging to St. Jim's had been drowned there once, and so the spot was invested with a mournful kind of interest for the juniors.

Marmaduke knew nothing about that. To his eyes, the Pool was simply a broad sheet of water fringed with willows, quite peaceful to the eye. The skiff shot through the bridge, Marmaduke steering. A boat came pulling from the opposite direction against the current.

"Hello, there," shouted a junior from the second boat. "Keep out of the way, can't you?"

Mellish and Walsh, both School House juniors, were in the boat.

Monteith's boat was certainly following a most irregular course, due to Marmaduke's steering. The prefect glared

at him.

"What are you up to, Smythe?"

Marmaduke scowled. He was intending to bring about a collision with the other boat, if he could contrive it, sullenly reckless of the consequences. He was in a mood for dangerous mischief.

"Look out, Monteith," shouted Mellish. "Can't you manage a boat at your time of life?"

Monteith snapped his teeth with rage.

To add to his fury, a voice came from the bridge. Jack Blake was looking over the stone parapet.

"Mind you don't fall overboard, Monteith," bawled Blake. "You'll get your feet wet if you do. You ought to learn to swim before you take a boat out, you ought."

This was rough on Monteith, who was really a first-class oarsman. His eyes blazed as he laid his oars inboard and plunged towards Marmaduke. The latter started to his feet, jerking the lines anyhow as he did so.

Crash!

The two boats crashed together with a terrific shock.

Mellish and Walsh were both standing up at the moment, and the concussion sent them into the bottom of their boat in a heap, while Monteith's skiff capsized. In a moment, the prefect and Marmaduke were struggling in the water.

The rage had gone out of Monteith's face, and it was white as wax as he came up to the surface. The terrors of the Pool were present in his mind, and he was only a very average swimmer. He struck out

for the shore.

The School House boat, rocking dangerously, was swept away on the current, which jammed it into the bank in the mass of weeds and rushes.

Blake ran down from the bridge and reached the bank. He saw a dark spot far out on the water. It was the wet, matted hair of Marmaduke Smythe.

A hand shot up in the air from the river, and then head and hand disappeared. Blake kicked off his shoes and tore off his jacket. He was the finest swimmer in the School House, and as plucky a lad as any in the whole of England. He was in the water in a flash, swimming for the spot where he had seen the drowning boy.

There was a shout from the bank. Men and boys were running down to the water. Monteith, gasping and exhausted, reached the bank and was helped ashore. Then every eye was turned upon Blake.

Marmaduke came up again. Blake reached him, and grasped his hair. He shifted his grasp to the back of his collar.

Blake had reached Marmaduke, but his attempts to reach the shore again were foredoomed to failure. With his burden, he was whirled away to the centre of the Pool, and once went right under.

Across the river, Mellish and Walsh were making frantic efforts to push off their stranded boat. At last it was clear, and came out into the water. Mellish began to pull hard, but it had all taken time.

Kildare, captain of St. Jim's, came running down to the bank in his cricket flannels. Without even pausing, he threw his hands together, and went off

the bank in a dive.

If any swimmer could live in the Pool, it was Kildare, the champion athlete at St. Jim's. He seemed to move like lightning.

Under went Blake's head again, but he still clung to Marmaduke.

"Blake!"

From the mists of semi-consciousness, Blake heard Kildare's voice close at hand.

"Kildare! Help!" He gasped out the words faintly.

"I am here."

A moment more and Kildare's grip was upon him. Treading water, Kildare supported both Blake and Marmaduke. The latter was unconscious, and Blake was too sensible to embarrass Kildare by struggling.

From the bank rang out a cheer.

Mellish and Walsh had at last succeeded. They would have been too late to save Blake, but for the captain's gallant intervention. Kildare, strong as he was, was gasping when the boat reached the spot, and Mellish gripped Marmaduke. The unconscious boy was drawn into the boat.

Five minutes later they were ashore, and willing hands seized Blake and Marmaduke and bore them off to the school at a run, while Kildare followed more slowly.

(MORE OF THIS OLD, OLD
STORY NEXT MONTH)

* * * * *
A Merry Xmas and Happy New Year to all
Hobby Followers.

R. J. McCABE, DUNDEE

News of the Old Boys' Book Clubs

SOUTH-WEST

The S.W. members met at Tim Salisbury's home on 5th October, for the second time this year. Weather was good for those who have to travel distances for a "get together" in this area.

We were very pleased to have Bill Lofts here again, and he gave us his interesting talk on Overseas Magnet readers. After a grand tea his treatise continued. We were also glad to welcome Darrell Swift who had come down to join us from Leeds via London.

There were the usual lively discussions on Frank Richards' writings and also Nelson Lee.

We all signed a "Get Well" card for Jack Parkhouse who was in hospital, but is now better and we hope he will be able to come to the next meeting in Spring 1981.

MIDLAND

November 1980

Your correspondent was unable to attend our latest meeting owing to an attack of influenza and the following account is taken from notes supplied by one of our lady members, Christine Breteil.

Win Brown, a founder member of our club, told members of its early days and how she attended an inaugural meeting of fifty people. Win had recently met an old member, Carol Scott, which had reminded her of our club's early days.

Geoff Lardner also spoke of how he had visited Howard Baker at Wimbledon and his interest was awakened and he now has a very handsome set of books.

Harry Evans, who is a postal member, offered to pay for all the refreshments at our Christmas meeting on 16th December, a grand gesture on his part. Harry is 80 years old and a relation of Gwyn Evans of Sexton Blake fame.

The meeting closed at 9.30 and we meet again on 25th November. Tom Porter and I hope to be there on this occasion.

In the meantime our very best regards to all O.B.B.C. enthusiasts.

J. F. BELLFIELD - Correspondent.

CAMBRIDGE

The Club met at the home of Bill Thurbon on Sunday, 2nd November. Apologies were received from the Secretary who was recovering from an operation. The Club were very happy to know that he was now home from hospital.

The main item on the programme was a talk by Mike Rouse on the musical show "Sweeney Todd". Mike described the background, theme and setting of the play, illustrating this with excerpts from the tape of the music. Mike quoted from contemporary writings and reports on the conditions of life in the London slums in the middle of the 19th century. He thought the writer of the play had been moved by the study of the appalling life of the London poor of the period to put on a show which was a Victorian "penny dreadful", staged in a form bordering on the operatic. Mike also explored the origins of the Sweeney Todd story, which apparently first appeared in Thomas Prest's "People's periodical and family Library" of c. 1846-7. The Tod Slaughter melodramas were also recalled.

Bill Thurbon remarked that his flat was a very suitable place for the subject of the talk, since it was over a barber's shop, and had a trapdoor in his bathroom! After enjoying Mrs. Thurbon's tea arrangements were made for the following meetings; the December meeting to include a symposium on "Biggles", and the January meeting a talk by Bill Lofts.

Bill Thurbon undertook to draft a notice in connection with a proposed scheme for postal membership. The meeting closed with a vote of thanks to Mrs. Thurbon for her hospitality.

LONDON

Walthamstow Meeting, 9th October, 1980

Two very funny readings, both with origins from Edwy Searles Brooks and his pen name of Victor Gunn, were given by Ray Hopkins and Eric Lawrence respectively. The first one by Ray was from Nelson Lee

Library, Old Series, number 225, with the date of 27th September, 1918, and entitled, Sir Monty's Ordeal. It was extremely humorous and was greatly enjoyed by the attendance. Eric Lawrence's reading was from a Victor Gunn story and it featured Ironsides and Sergeant Potter.

A jumbled anagram quiz dealing with names of boy and girl characters, was conducted by Laurie Sutton. Maurice Corkett was the winner.

From newsletter of the 13th November, 1963, Bob Blythe read extracts and one of these was about the visit of Edwy Searles Brooks to the forthcoming Christmas meeting of that year.

Bob Blythe conducted the Greyfriars Remove Form Entry examination. Those present had to write down in concise form the reasons or objections to William George Bunter's candidature. Whilst Bob was adjudicating the short essays, Bill Bradford conducted a Railway Stations Quiz. Laurie Sutton and Ben Whiter both gave the most answers.

By now, Bob Blythe had completed the judging and it was Maurice Corkett who was adjudged the winner. Prizes of books were available for the winners.

The Christmas meeting will be held at the Ealing home of Bill and Thelma Bradford, on Sunday, 7th December. Kindly inform if intending to be present. Phone 579 4670.

BEN WHITER

NORTHERN

Meeting held Saturday, 8th November

November has set in distinctly chill and drear, but there was a fine turn-out for our meeting.

The minutes continue to show our worthy Secretary in sparkling form, and our 'business' was as usual transacted in a manner that quite belied the dry old connotations of that word. Discussion time revived that ever-open question: how far can one detect the works of the master purely on the internal evidence of literary style? The great painters of Renaissance times, of course, entrusted some of the routine background work in their canvases to their more gifted apprentices, and we were prepared to concede that so prolific a writer as Hamilton possibly had the aid of an editorial research team in, for example, his foreign holiday

series, with their remarkable authenticity of detail. The Chairman reminded us of other prolific geniuses, however, and pointed out that he couldn't even copy out the works of Mozart in the scanty time that Mozart had in which to compose as well as write them out. A perennially fascinating topic for those of us with - at best - merely mortal gifts.

The month's quiz, a varied and teasing batch of questions, was presented by Jack Allison and won by Bill Williamson; Geoffrey Wilde, Keith Atkinson and Harry Blowers were just behind. Geoffrey himself had another teaser for us - he even gives us prep these days! A letter-square which, properly scanned, yields a roster of hobby names is apparently so rich in cryptic possibilities that he left a copy with each of us and isn't even asking for answers till January!

Part of his generosity is accounted for by the fact that next month we hold our Annual Christmas Party, and some of the evening's business was given over to advance planning. Self-catering once again, but there should be the usual cornucopia of festive fare, including, we gather, a little magic and mystery. The date: 13th December, at the Swarthmore Centre, from 4.15 p.m. onwards.

JOHNNY BULL

* * * * *

NOTE TO READERS

Owing to pressure on space, the final article in our Biography of a Small Cinema series is held over till next month.

* * * * *

The Postman Called

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

VICTOR GILES (Barking): "The Reasedale School Mystery"! I remember it well! At least, I think I do. This is the story in which a schoolboy detective tracks down a secret society, is it not? I must have been about twelve or thirteen when I read it. A splendid story, I agree. I gave it away some years later in a fit of teenage mental aberration. I had yet to learn that good stories like wine, mature with the passing of time, but unlike the latter can be retasted and enjoyed again and again!

I'm sorry to see that "Biography of a Small Cinema" is coming to

an end, like all good things, I suppose. It has been a thoroughly entertaining series. Even if I didn't agree with your assessment of the relative merits of the two versions of "Showboat". Having seen the MGM film several times, and found it delightful, I remember hurrying home one evening to catch the earlier version which was being put out on BBC 2, and being left with a feeling of comparative disappointment, I must confess. It has Paul Robeson, of course, and at least one song unaccountably left out of the later picture, but Allan Jones contrasted poorly with Howard Keel in the leading role I thought.

ROGER SANSOM (East Barnet): Yes, indeed, Mr. Editor, Ronald Colman did play Raffles in the cinema. I had an idea of it when I wrote the Blakiana article you refer to, but in the reference books I was using, I could only find the names of David Niven, and of George Barraud, an actor unknown to me. I found a reference to the Colman film just after I'd posted the article. It was called simply "Raffles".

I thought of trying to get Colman's name inserted in what I'd written, but I never remembered that good resolve until I read my own article in print.

W. O. G. LOFTS (London): Regarding your query on David L. Smith, he only wrote the one title you mentioned for Blackie in 1922 when it was reprinted in 1933. The B.M. catalogue says after the story, etc., which suggests other tales in the volume. The author is not listed in Men Behind Boys Fiction, so he must have been very obscure - unless of course he wrote under some other name. On the subject of titles I always remember one in the S.B.L. entitled 'Collapse of Stout Party' and was mystified what it exactly meant!

Mrs. N. COOKE (Oxford): I wonder if, when you talked with Charles Hamilton, you ever asked him why he abandoned Lumley-Lumley for the tiresome Levisons.

LEN WORMULL (Romford): I well remember Ronald Colman in Raffles. Later on I saw David Niven in the name part, but for me Colman will always be the definitive screen Raffles. Along with C. Aubrey Smith and other English actors, he belonged to Hollywood's cricketing fraternity.

Thanks for the cinematic memory as provided by your Biography.

There can be few films in your wonderful catalogue that I did not see at the cinema, and most times I could pin-point the year of your showing. What a stupendous way to go out with "Singing In The Rain".

T. KEEN (Thames Ditton): I certainly recall the "Raffles" film starring Ronald Colman, but in fact had quite forgotten that David Niven appeared in a later version!

The Ronald Colman film was made in 1930, with the gorgeous Kay Francis as his leading lady. The cast also included two other Britishers, Bramwell Fletcher and David Torrence. Oh dear, almost half a century ago!

The Sexton Blake and the Nelson Lee 'fans' had a field day with the October issue of the C.D. We Greyfriars and St. Jim's addicts were not so lucky.

Mrs. M. CADOGAN (Bromley): I was interested to read your comments on Harold Avery. I have very affectionate memories of this writer's books, mainly because he was a boyhood favourite of my father's. It was my father who introduced my brother and myself to Hamilton's stories, as he had been a Gem fan in his youth. He had, when we were children, only kept one of his boyhood books. This was Avery's "A Triple Alliance". I read and re-read it, knowing every word and every line of every picture. Somehow it got lost as the family moved from one house to another, and after my father's death, when I inherited his books, I mourned its loss. Like you, however, I later obtained a copy of my favourite Harold Avery story thanks to the kindness of Norman Shaw, who presented the book to me when he heard how my father had loved it.

(EDITORIAL COMMENT: We have had a very large number of letters from readers who well recall Ronald Colman as "Raffles". It is impossible to quote from so many, but we are very grateful to all who wrote in on the subject.)

* * * * *

WANTED: Lion 152; also Champion, Dick Turpin, Radio Fun, Film Fun.

ROBERT GILMOUR, SWALLOWDALE, BINGLEY AVENUE

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WANTED: Howard Baker facsimile, Vol. No. 22, "Billy Bunter's Christmas", "Cavendale Abbey".

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MY THIRD OF A CENTURY WITH "C.D."

by J. R. Murtagh, New Zealand

Congratulations on reaching your 400th issue. Little did I know when I received the first issue of our wonderful little magazine way back in 1946 that I would be writing this - 400 issues and nearly 34 years later.

I still have all the issues of C.D. and the Annuals. Browsing through early issues I found I had written several articles I had forgotten about. I must have had more time and energy all those years ago.

One I well remember was "Reprinted stories of St. Frank's" which I wrote for the very first C.D. Annual. I was very proud of this because of the amount of research required to cover the reprints in the Monster Library, Schoolboys Own, 3rd Series Nelson Lees, serials in the Gem and some of the Lees.

I'm afraid that because of lack of time I haven't written much for the C.D. in recent years, but my enthusiasm is just as great as it ever was and I have plenty of ideas for future articles which I hope to send along in the near future.

Meantime, good luck and I look forward to the next hundred issues of happy memories.

Edited by Eric Fayne, Excelsior House, 113 Crookham Rd., Crookham, Nr. Aldershot, Hants.
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