

The ⁷⁰
Collectors'

Digest

(Vol. No. 2)
No. 14.

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(Vol.2) No. 14

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FEBRUARY 1948

Next Issue : March 1948

Editor Miscellaneous Section:

Herbert Leckenby, Telephone Exchange,
C/o Central Registry, Northern Command, York.

FROM THE EDITOR'S CHAIR:

Comments on the Annual have arrived by almost every mail since our last issue, including some by air from overseas. They have been a veritable joy to read and we again publish a few extracts. Our sincere thanks to all and a special expression of gratitude to those who sent a 'little extra' as they put it, to help reduce the deficit.

We have also had to apologise to three who have been members of the circle of collectors for quite a long time, for by some strange oversight,

their names were omitted from the "Whos Who". The three who had a right to grouse were Wilfred Darwin (who drew that excellent page of Sexton Blake characters), Tom Satchell and Frank Keeling. A few errors have also been brought to our notice, incidentally showing how carefully the Annual has been read. We propose therefore when we feel sure there are no more, to publish these errors and omissions, so that holders of copies can amend them, for we do wish to make this ambitious effort of ours as authentic as ever possible.

One thing we are sure we can say with confidence, that more letters have been exchanged among collectors since the publication of the Annual than ever before, and that reminds me of a nice little gesture on the part of one of the clan. More than one of my correspondents have told me that on Christmas morning they received a copy of one of the popular papers with the sender's good wishes. The member who thought of this kindly idea was Harry Dowler, of Longsight, Manchester, and I can assure him his action was greatly appreciated. I have reason to believe he sent quite a number.

We are already receiving suggestions for next year's Annual. Two correspondents would like to see a complete list of 'Magnet' titles. Whilst we appreciate their enthusiasm, I am afraid this is hardly a practical proposition for those 1600 odd titles would take up about half the pages of an Annual the size of the present one. However we can assure members of the Hamilton group that there will again be plenty about their favourites. We are thinking of a history of the Magnet and maybe the Gem, with probably lists of the more popular series like the travels abroad and so on. And oh yes, that reminds me of a friendly word of advice I wish to give to those who in their enthusiasm have an urge to write St. Jims or Greyfriars stories and send them hopefully to some publisher.

The advice is the same as Mr. Punch once gave to those about to get married - Don't. For these days there is only one individual who has a right to pen stories about the famous characters, and that right is held by the writer who created them.

Just as we were going to press we received a very interesting letter from Mr. E. S. Brooks, written to Mr. Robert Blythe. It is all the more timely in view of the duel between Mr. Fayne and the Leeites. You will find it in the Letter Box feature.

Here is something else of great interest to collectors. Mr. Blythe tells me he is arranging to have monthly meetings, probably on Sundays, for those in the London area. It is intended to have discussions, auctions, exchanges, etc. All those interested should get in touch with Mr. Blythe. Of course, those further afield are also cordially invited if they can arrange to attend.

So there's another step forward in the praiseworthy idea of getting the members of the clan to meet each other.

Yours sincerely,

Herbert Leckenby

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(Mr. Frank Pettingell needs no introduction. Londoners will have heard him on the West End stage, more will have seen him from a seat in a cinema and millions heard him on the radio. Here he gives an intriguing account of his experiences whilst appearing in a play concerning the notorious Sweeney Todd. More of your delightful reminiscences, please Mr. Pettingell - Ed.)

FRANK PETTINGELL LOOKS BACK.

"Sweeney Todd the Demon Barber of Fleet Street, or, The String of Pearls". A legendary Drama, in Two Acts. First performed at the Britannia Theatre, 1842".

Such was the title of the first play about the monster barber. I am not sure whether this was the first occasion upon which the English public encountered this grim name. Probably a "blood" of the late 30's or early 40's had launched him into popular knowledge. At least, this was the initial physical presentment in a gory drama written by George Debbin Pitt. The M.S.S. would be valuable if it could be found. (Incidentally I possess a huge collection of manuscript plays which I purchased during the war. These all came from the archives of the Britannia, Hoxton.) I have had, but unfortunately don't still possess, the assignment book of these plays, and in many instances the allotting of complete rights of ownership and production are scribbled by the poor authors on backs of envelopes or bits of foolscap, most of them being parted with for 35/- or 50/-!

This drama gave to the patrons of the Britannia, many thrilling situations; in the first two minutes the chair was reversed, plunging Mark Ingestrie to the cellar below. A little later Todd returned, with the curiously carved casket c

containing the string of pearls and his very next customer was the "well known lapidary, Jean Parmine". The jewels were offered to him, and he became "a bit awkward", threatened enquiries and was incontinently "polished off" too. Then the barber's boy, Tobias is clapped into an asylum by Todd, and Todd's partner in the pie making business is shot by him and that scene closes with Todd dragging the body to the ovens. This episode is preceded by a scene where the new furnaceman, the "comic", eats heartily of the stock of pies until in one is discovered a button. From then onwards it is suggested that the juicy items are composed of Todd's victims, done up in nice crusts for Mrs. Lovett's customers. It is nearly thirty seven years ago since I played in this gloriously creepy play. I was cast for the keeper of the madhouse, Jonas Fogg, and for Jean Parmine. I had sustained fourteen parts already that week, my first with that management, and we played "East Lynne" (in which I had two parts) before Sweeney Todd that Saturday night. When it came to my scene as Parmine I, quite mentally exhausted by this time, mixed up some of my lines to Sweeney; this was a difficult scene always, for it was full of sums of £12,000, £50, and £8,000 respectively. I was quite a bit muddled and my employer, who was playing Todd, thought the best method to save the situation was to cut my throat with a blunt razor and muttering "you don't know it" gave the signal to the stage hands to reverse the chair. Down I plunged to the cellar on to a mattress, and to the signal of "I've polished him off!" tore upstairs to change into the make-up of the madhouse Doctor.

I have never read any Sweeney Todd stories though I've read many publications dealing with Dick Turpin, Claude Duval, Sixteen String Jack, Spring Heeled Jack and others who really existed. Yet Mr. Todd never came under my eyes until this

week when I purchased a short story about him. This has no illustrations, no mention even of the publishing firm, but is, I think, a penny issue about 1903.

Our friend Henry Steele this year sent me a programme of "Sweeney Todd" produced at the Elephant and Castle, 1928, with Wilfred Lawson as Ingestrie. I should think that he and I are two of the few modern actors who have played in this "epic".

Of course, Sweeney Todd is as much a legendary creation as Sawney Beane, the Scots cannibal of the 15th century, who lived in a cave with thousands of naked kinfolk and pickled and ate the travellers along the desolate shores of Scotland.

I look at my copy of "The Blue Dwarf", in which Turpin, Tom King, Rob Roy, and Jonathan Wild appear. The first two even go Indian fighting in America: after adventures amidst hordes of Mohicans, led by one Chinjackgood, a name suspiciously like Chingachgood of the Fenimore Cooper novel - they return, they make their journey to Scotland, still on the side of the distressed beauty, and having, in Turpin's words "acquired a taste for deer shooting" and still arrayed in Prairie outfit, slouch hat, fringed trousers etc, they encounter Rob Roy! This was a Hogarth House publication. In "Black Bess, or The Knight of the Road", Turpin encounters Sixteen String Jack, Claude Duval and others who lived at a different period from these.

These absurd anachronisms; yet, in spite of all I prefer them to the outrageous figures who flourish in my son's comic and adventure papers. They include Captain and Mary Marvel, who fly without wings and whom no bullets can injure; Batman, who flies in a cloak and is also shot proof; Fire-man, who, is a sheet of flame in the shape of

a man. These are, I agree, in Canadian and American comics, of which there seem to be thousands in this country. But what tripe, with their "Gee's", "Scram", "Get outa here" etc, and their tough, small brained heroes and dizzy girls.

I should think the most popular and continuous hero of the juveniles of this and last century was Dick Turpin. Our friend, Edwin J. Brett the propagator of so many fine boy's journals, seemed to be the one publisher who didn't use Dick as a vehicle for romance.

I recollect the wet nights in Manchester when I first saw four gloriously coloured pictures on a bill outside a little newsagents shop; and announcement of the forthcoming production of the "Dick Turpin Library". These pictures were the splendid work of Robert Prowse, a Bohemian who looked like a large Buffalo Bill. They were issued four numbers every and later in that year "Claude Duval Library" made it's bow. The covers by Prowse were artistically grouped and "the costuming and lighting" were magnificent. Very unobtrusively "The Robin Hood Library" was running conjunctly, again illustrated by R.P. "True Blue" covers were usually his work too, to my mind there has never been a boy's artist to compare with him in effective situation, grouping and colouring. "The Red Rover Library" was very well written, and the covers were in black, white and din red. "Spring Heeled Jack" followed the stories by Charlton Lea, who seemed to prefer that all his heroes should be young men of high birth, the unhappy ward of wicked uncles, and whose stories, with the exception of the "Blackbeard" (Red Rover) series, quickly palled.

One character Lea created was John Bonadventure Hepburn, a Scottish of fortune with Duval. He was a magnificent braggart who died too soon for

me. "Tune Blue" produced a fine author in Marston Moor. He created my favourite rogue, a manly scoundrel calling himself Plain John Smith of Barbadoes. Merton Pike, a splendid historical writer for the Amalgamated Press, was well known under another name as an author who did fine work for "Battles of the Nineteenth Century", and also for many magazines.

Henry T. Johnson was a versatile writer, both historical and school stories came equally easily from his pen. To revert to comedy, do you remember in "The Jester" the doings of Happy Ike (American tramp) and the Bunsey Boys? These latter are still before me as the Katzenjammer Kids in a Yankee Comic and my daughter is looking at them with enjoyment.

This has been a wandering contribution hasn't it? But I wanted it to be chatty and comfortable, as I am, while I write it on this mild Sunday afternoon. Let the cynics sneer at us, who, well into the fifties, find happiness in re-opening the magic pages of our old friends who meant so much to us when youth was new and pennies scarce.

Frank Pettingell.

Afterthoughts.

"Chums", published many yarns by Mr. S. Walkey who wrote pirate stories, grand stuff, too. The variety of characterisation, and the wonderful contrasts in type were worthy of more experienced appreciation than of we boys!

Derwent Miall wrote exquisite stories for the Henderson firm, historical and modern romance, and well worth re-publishing.

F.P.



The Leeites Reply to Mr. Fayne.

14th January, 1948.

Dear Mr. Editor,

Our old Friend Eric Fayne confirms what most of us already know and lamentably regret - Edwy Searles Brooks' interest in the "Old Lee Days" is dead.

But does it really matter? The people who count are still very much alive! Nelson Lee, Nipper, Handforth and the rest are as virile as ever the moment a well preserved cover is opened. St. Franks is not dead, and that's what counts!

Yours sincerely,
Leslie Vosper.

3, Montgomery Drive,
Sheffield, 7.

Dear Mr. Editor,

Certainly Mr. Eric Fayne's condemnation of the Lee stories was ruthless but apparently he is so anxious to start a controversy that he omits to give us any reasons for his dislike.

I should be very surprised to learn that any author of old boys' books created stories simply as a labour of love and I can readily understand Mr. Brooke's attitude in deserting a sphere that is no longer of general interest.

Yours truly,
L. M. Allen.

Mr. E. S. Brooks tells the Inside
STORY.

January 25th 1948.

Dear Mr. Blythe,

Many thanks for your letter. I was very glad to hear from such a stalwart old reader of my stories as yourself. To get right down to cases, I think the real reason why the Nelson Lee Library ceased publication was due to the fact that the public lost interest in it. It was in competition with the Magnet and Gem, and they were not only much older publications, but confined themselves strictly to school stories. The N.L.L., on the other hand, had to have a detective interest in the tales—because Nelson Lee himself was a detective. This, in my opinion, always tended to divide the interest, since the stories were neither true school stories, nor true detective stories, but fell between two stools.

As for Eric Fayne's assertion that my interest in the "old Lee Days" is dead, I am afraid he is quite right. I came to the conclusion, long before the paper ceased publication, that I was flogging a dead horse. There were many hundreds of enthusiastic readers who wanted more and more; but a paper of that type cannot be kept going by a few hundred enthusiasts. The vast majority of the schoolboy public lost interest, and the circulation therefore declined. As it declined, so did my own enthusiasm. It is hardly fair of Eric Fayne to compare me with Frank Richards---in other words, the gifted and evergreen Mr. Charles Hamilton. As far as I know, he has never written anything else but boys' stories, and is still writing about Greyfriars; therefore, his enthusiasm is as keen as ever. On the other hand, I am now writing thriller novels for the adult public,

and I think it is quite natural that my own interest should lie in these. I was reading Charles Hamilton's inimitable school stories with immense relish when I was a schoolboy myself---indeed, I was a keen reader of the Gem and Magnet from the first number of each of these papers. But although I wrote school stories myself later on, I also wrote---simultaneously---many detective stories. It is not unnatural therefore, that I should now confine myself to the latter type of work.

I hope that all your points are now cleared up, and with very kind regards and thanks for your good wishes.

Sincerely,
 E. S. Brooks.

The St. Franks Stories.

Dear Editor,

Further to Mr. Murtagh's most excellent list of Nelson Lee stories in the Annual, I would like to add also-

There was a number 411 School Boys Own which was a reprint of Nos. 421, 422 & 423 Nelson Lees. This title was the last copy issued, just after the commencement of the last war.

Of the S.O.L's he mentions No. 4 was entitled "The Fighting Form of St. Franks" is No. 27 "The River House Rivals". Of the stories I can say nothing as I am not fortunate enough to possess them. There were also published in the "Boys Friend Library" Nos. 435, 439, 441 & 447. Containing St. Franks Stories which I cannot trace as being reprinted Nos. 441 & 447 were in the form of a serial.

E. McPherson.

Those Batchelor Masters.

Dear Mr. Editor,

The excellent letter of Mr. Prime strikes an interesting note. It is curious that apart from the three Headmasters, not one of the Masters at Greyfriars, St. Jim's, or Rookwood was a married man with children.

I think that in all probability there was a strict ruling at the three schools ensuring the celibacy of the beaks.

How well our Prince of Writers handled the characters of these men, with the exception of Ratcliff, Selby, and Manders, who were unconvincing and the type of master who would not be tolerated for more than a term in any school. But Quelch, the just beast - fussy Mr. Lathom, - pompous Prout, - and the nervous, rather forgetful Mr. Twigg were gems of character painting.

In passing, I fancy that the wives and families of the Headmasters were not heard of after the very early years of the old papers.

Yours faithfully,
Eric Payne.

Private Collector Exchanges parcels ("Lee", "Magnet", "Gem", "S.O.L" etc) Level Terms, Clean Copies Only. 12 to 50 - Joseph Baguley, "Moorings", Pensilva, S.E.Cornwall.

Collectors Duplicates urgently wanted for other Collectors, especially "Magnets", "Gems", "Populars" "S.O.L's" "Annuals". Your prices paid. William Martin, 93, Hillside, Stonebridge Park, London, N.W.10. Phone. Willesden 4474.

The Nelson Lee Column

Conducted by Robert Blythe, 81,
Alsen Road, Holloway, London, N.7.

Although I was expecting a certain amount of correspondence as a result of this column, I was pleasantly surprised by the amount of letters I have received expressing enthusiasm and support. It makes me feel that this column does fulfil a need. Representing as it does all Nelson Lee supporters, this column should be the first to refute Mr. Payne's criticism of E.S. Brooks. I thought it best therefore to contact Mr. Brooks himself and the result is published elsewhere in this issue in a letter from the author himself.

One suggestion made by Frank Keeling of Stanmore, Middx. is that readers could offer on loan, complete series in exchange for others they wish to read themselves. In other words a Nelson Lee Library in the true sense of the word. If any reader is willing to participate in this scheme let me know what is wanted and I'll pass it on.

By co-incidence two readers, Len Allan of Sheffield and John



Herman of Southgate, both ask if the stories Nos. 129-140 2nd New Series are reprints of Earlier Maxwell Scott's yarns. The answer is, that they are not reprints of earlier Nelson Lee's, and I think I am fairly safe in saying that they are not by Scott at all. In fact the only Maxwell Scott stories that appeared in the Nelson Lee were in No's 7, 8, 13, 48 Old Series. Then Herbert Smith of Norfolk asks if Mr. Brooks wrote the early Nelson Lee's. I take this to mean prior to No. 112 O.S, as every St. Franks yarn was written by him. For your information, Mr. Smith, and also for others who may be doubtful, there is a complete list of the books written by E.S. Brooks previous to No. 112 "Nipper at St. Franks" Nos. 16, 21, 23, 25, 27, 28, 29, 32, 33, 35, 37, 38, 39, 41, 42, 44, 45, 47, 49, 50, 51, 53, 54, 57, 59, 60, 62, 63, 64, 65, 66, 68, 70, 72, 74, 75, 76, 77, 78, 80, 82, 84, 85, 87, 88, 90, 91, 93-107, 109 onwards. Just for the record it would perhaps be as well to mention (as far as my records show) who wrote the other stories. Nos. 1, 4, 11, 12, 14, 20 were in all probability written by William Murray Graydon. Nos. 3, 5, 6, 9, 10, 18, 56 all show similarities with stories by Mr. Graydon but the authorship is not certain. Nos. 2, 15, 17, 19, 22, 24, 26, 30, 31, 34, 36, 40, 43, 46, 52, 55, 56, 58, 61, 67, 69, 71, 73, 79, 81, 83, 86, 89, 92, 107, 108, were all by G. H. Teed, and Nos. 7, 8, 13, 48 were by Maxwell Scott.

So far only one chap, Mr. Keeling, tells me he is the owner of No. 1. That makes two. Are there any more? Well, that's about all there's room for this month.

Has anyone any more queries?

GOOD PRICES offered for Bound Volumes of early Magnets, also loose Magnets between 1908 and 1929. Eric Payne, 23, Grove Road, Surbiton.

(Our versatile contributor, Eric Payne, comes again with something to set you thinking - and argue about. Ed.)

FOREVER BUNTER.

by Eric Payne.

Our Editor recently, in reminiscent mood, made an observation to me which started me thinking.

"Why is it", queried he, "that when we speak of the Gem we invariably think of Tom Merry, but when we speak of the Magnet it is Bunter, and not Harry Wharton, who comes to our mind?"

All through the history of the Gem, Tom Merry was the king pin. Though for many years Tom Merry did not play the lead in a single story - though Talbot, Cardew, and Wildrake captured the spotlight and held it, as did Gussy in many delightful series, and Trimble and Grundy in some series not so delightful, and Levison with his reform and its results - yet for 33 years Tom Merry and Gem were synonymous, and indeed, still are.

Actually Tom Merry was sadly neglected after the first few years. Martin Clifford seldom "featured" him, while nothing the sub-writers did was worthy of consideration. Yet the Gem was Tom Merry.

Older readers, who remembered the Tom Merry of the early years, when he was the first and most famous schoolboy in fiction, were probably loyal to him over the years. But readers who joined the clan at the sixth, the ninth, and the eleventh hours, still think of Tom Merry when the Gem is mentioned.

How just, that Tom Merry should have come into

his own again in the last years before the Gem ceased publication, when Mr. Hamilton would tell us, I think, that Martin Clifford had a freedom in writing, which he had been denied in earlier years.

As Tom Merry stands for the Gem, so Billy Bunter stands for the Magnet. Though Harry Wharton played the lead in the Greyfriars stories far more often than Tom Merry did in the St. Jim's yarns - though the Greyfriars stage was far more consistently managed than that of St. Jim's - it is Billy Bunter, and not Wharton, who is synonymous with Magnet.

I wonder whether Bunter was really the most popular character at Greyfriars. "Billy Bunter's Own Weekly", or something similar, was printed on the covers of the Magnets, for the last year or two of the Magnet's life. But if a vote of Magnet readers had been taken, would Bunter have headed it? I very much doubt it.

The third and fourth form of our clan would probably have plumped for the old fat man. But I doubt whether the older members would have done. I certainly shouldn't have voted for Bunter, though I love the Owl very dearly.

Mr. Hamilton duplicated Bunter many times. There were Baggy Trimble, Tubby Muffin, Bunny Bootles, Chunky Todgers and others. Each was fat, untruthful, cowardly; each bragged of his wealthy relations, none was any good at sports; each spelt in an amazing manner; Each was a copy of Bunter. Yet not one of these made much impression, while one - Baggy Trimble - was a blot on the Gem's escutcheon.

But Bunter (fiendishly mishandled by the sub-writers) has been for many years synonymous with Magnet, and is today, seven years after the suspension of his parent paper, the most famous

schoolboy in the fiction of all time, and the name Billy Bunter will live for ever.

Why? It will take one far more clever than I am to give the reason. Maybe because Bunter figures in almost every Greyfriars story that was ever written - but so did the Famous Five. Maybe because a large number of Magnet stories had his name actually incorporated in the title. Maybe because he appealed to the kids, for whom the Magnet was really issued. More likely, because he was often the unintentional means of righting a wrong - and because we all have a sneaking sympathy for anybody who is always in a scrape. And most of all, because of the uncannily clever writing of the world's greatest author of school tales.

Bunter changed, of course, in the passing years. In the beginning, he was a simple, kindly lad. As time passed, he became a mean, dishonest, unscrupulous bounder - not at all attractive. The white-covered Magnets of the 1917-1920 years were not kind to Bunter, and I imagine that at that time his popularity with readers stood at its lowest.

But when we come to the early thirties, we find a Bunter who is uncannily lovable - more like the Bunter of the early years.

Baggy Trimble was a vile, contemptible character. I have never heard a single reader say that he liked Trimble. For a considerable time, Bunter's character was like that of Trimble, and, I think, liked little more than that of the St. Jim's sneak.

But, about the time of the advent of the yellow and black covers, Bunter began to be different. Untruthful still, and not too scrupulous at times, but very lovable, and, as Bob Cherry says in the Stacey series, though a fellow's tuck is never safe with Bunter around, the old fat man would

never dream of touching anything else which did not belong to him.

With nearly forty years of continuous Bunter to look back upon, it is interesting to see the episodes which stand out.

Bunter losing his memory after a dive into an empty swimming bath; Bunter reforming on two occasions under the influence of Cora Quelch; Bunter going to St. Jim's in place of his cousin Wally; the latter coming to Greyfriars as a master. (Poor business the latter series - perhaps written by a sub) - Bunter going to Africa to use his ventriloquism on the natives; Bunter, very unattractive here, causing trouble among the Co. in the first series of Harry Wharton's feud with Mr. Quelch; Bunter trying to kow-tow to the mandarin, and finding it difficult to do in European trousers; Bunter joining a circus on at least three occasions - the Whiffles series perhaps the best; Bunter Billionairing; Bunter in peril from his cousin Carter; Bunter conspicuous by his absence in that one thrilling series where the Co. went to a relative of Nugent; Bunter as a stow-away at Wharton Lodge one Xmas. And the inimitable Bunter Court series. Here there were certainly two Bunters, one the complete ass, the other a cool, calculating master criminal in the "Plummer" manner. Yet the stories were convincing. There is no end to the happy memories which come crowding back.

And, because Bunter is synonymous with Magnet, for years we raised our voice in the cry "We want Bunter" - meaning, perhaps, we want Greyfriars. Frank Richards, at any rate, has taken us at our word, and given us a large portion of Bunter in his latest masterpiece.

So here's to Tom Merry for the Gem, and Billy Bunter for the Magnet.



ALL CORRESPONDENCE TO
H.M.Bond, 10 Erw Wen, R'iwbina, Cardiff.

THE ROUND TABLE:

Since my last chat Dame Fortune has, in her usual surprising way, smiled upon me. A week or so after Christmas I had the good fortune to obtain a number of pink covered "Union Jacks" of 1906-7 vintage. In addition to being in mint condition they contained a wealth of information, a lot of which was new to me. How grand it is to suddenly come across a few of your old friends of the past; to eagerly turn the pages and be confronted with a wealth of reading and illustrations that take you back to the days of your youth, or, as in this case even farther back, for I did not see the light of day until 1912. The first item of interest that caught my eye was in U.J. No. 201 dated 17th Aug. 1907. On the last page of reading matter was an advertisement for "The Penny Popular" announcing that a new series of Sexton Blake stories were to commence that week. There was a reproduction of the cover of the paper concerned showing Blake, in his shirt sleeves, with an antiquated (to us) telephone on the desk before him. The receiver was pressed against one ear and with chin in hand the detective was saying "Put me on to Scotland Yard,

QUICK!! Now this illustration of Blake did not portray the great man as we have now come to imagine him through the good work of Eric R. Parker. He had a lot of hair, in fact he looked as if he needed a haircut badly for the then fashionable sideboards were long and shaggy. But as soon as I espied that cover sketch I said to myself, "Where have I seen that before" and was, for a minute or two, puzzled, for I knew that this particular copy of the U.J. had never before come into my hands. A little thought and I dashed into the library and ran through my collection until I came to - YES! Of course! No. 1 of the now deceased "Detective Weekly". There sat Mr. Parker's Blake complete with modern dressing gown and revolver, before a modern 'phone with similar attitude and saying "Get me Scotland Yard, QUICK!" At once I wondered if the powers that be at the Fleetway House had been studying the methods of the Carmelite House of 27 years previous and it struck me that as Mr. Herbert Leckenby once said in the S.P.C. Sexton Blake IS eternal indeed. Only the times change. The man himself is still the same old Sexton Blake, still thrilling young and old alike, and I wished that the A.P. would adopt other old U.J. methods when presenting the modern Blake.

The first issues of the S.B.L. for 1948 look good! Have you seen them yet? I expect most of you will have by the time you read this. Rex Hardinge strays from his usual haunts in his first effort for the year. "The Gargoyle of Pelgelly" is as far removed from his Chinese and African stories as one could imagine. I cannot say I was impressed with the cover of this volume though. It smacked too much of the "cheap thriller", something which the Library seldom resembles. The other January volume by Lewis Jackson (still going strong) was something quite unusual, namely a boxing 'tec yarn. It is a long while since that noble art has found its way into the pages of a

Blake publication although, strangely enough, I have just been reading a 1927 U.J. dealing with Blake's struggle against Peter Brim (The Spider) in which the head of a second rate Boxing Academy, one Professor Crackstone plays a leading part. Incidentally I am following the Dr. Satira write up with another pen picture of an epic Sexton Blake struggle entitled "Blake's Stoutest Adversary" dealing with Mr. Brim.

Cheerio for now

H. M. Bond.

SEMI PERMANENTS OF THE SECOND SERIES.

by William Colcombe.

During the latter half of the 2nd Series of "The Sexton Blake Library" there were several characters, who, for the want of a better name I have called semi-permanents, that is, without the status of, say, Zenith the Albino, George Marsden Plummer, Huxton Rymer and Dr. Ferraro, they played a prominent part in several stories by their respective authors.

One of the first to appear was a creation of John G. Brandon, The Honourable Ronald Sturgess Vereker Purvale, (R.S.V.P. to his friends). The son of an Earl, grandson of a Duke, this aristocratic he-man with a fondness of stokeholes and decrepit ships of sail, with his inevitable monocle, seemed to have a genius for being able to involve himself in murder cases of a more sensational kind, or, as our old friend Inspector Court puts it "makes a darned nuisance of himself". With his broken nose and cauliflower ear he was a distinctive figure. He made his first appearance

in the S.B.L. No. 365, "The Survivor's Secret".

In Jehn G. Brandon's third Purvale story, (No. 411 2nd Series S.B.L) "The Tragedy of the West End Actress" we are introduced to two more characters who were destined to play a considerable part in future Brandon stories, namely Flash George Wibley, ex-cracksman who could make safes do anything but sing hymns, and now valet to Mr. Purvale, and Taximan Big Bill Withers, one time burglar and now earning a living (honestly) as a taxi-driver the ownership of which Mr. Sexton Blake and Mr. Purvale could no doubt have told a lot had they been in the habit of talking of such things. These three, with the occasional appearance of Lord Montague Chanways and other characters, became a regular feature of Brandon's stories and at times somewhat swamped the regular characters of Blake and Tinker.

In No. 349 2nd Series S.B.L. "Crooks Locket", Warwick Jardine introduced a new crook to Blake fans, dearth Tallon, international adventurer, a young Varsity man, who, swindles out of his rightful inheritance, determines to revenge himself at the expense of Society. He quickly became one of Blake's most formidable opponents and later he was joined by a female partner Sandra Sylvester, who first appeared in No. 369, "The Secret of the Sudan" under the name of Sonia March, and appeared in two or three stories with this name, but was then changed to Sandra Sylvester for some reason. They last appeared in No. 543 "The Seaside Cafe Crime".

TO BE CONTINUED.

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The Story of Dr. Satira. Part Five.by H. M. Bond.

Even the most hardened criminal might have felt a pang of remorse at the sight of his hapless victim lying on the floor in a pool of blood. Not so Dr. Satira. He gave a mirthless chuckle as he gazed down at the dead medico and muttered to himself that "dead men tell no tales". But little time was spent on reflection. The Doctor knew that he had to move fast if he was to survive and so he hastened about attending to his injured leg as soon as he had dumped the body of his victim into a cupboard. He was just on the point of searching for some fresh clothes to replace his own tattered and burnt garments when there was a sudden interruption as the house door-bell rang loudly. Cursing this fresh development Satira drew aside the window blind and observed a car standing outside the house. After quick thought he dashed to the cup-board and quickly removed slippers, glasses and dressing gown from the dead body and in a few minutes opened the front door in a leisurely and unhurried manner that would have deceived even Blake himself. It proved that the caller was a motorist who had sprained his wrist and needed it strapped up. Satira invited him into the surgery and while he proceeded to make preparations for tending his unwanted patient the latter informed him that he had just landed in England from South America and was driving to London to see his Lawyers regarding an estate he had come into on the death of a near relative. He had, he said, no friends in England, not having been in the Old Country for 32 years, and on hearing that Satira's brain worked rapidly. He offered the newcomer a drink - "You need a pick-me-up" he remarked as he calmly prepared a draught that would have killed an elephant! Dr. Satira certainly knew his stuff

as regards poisons! As soon as his second victim had slumped to the surgery floor, never to rise again, Satira grabbed the body, stripped it, and in a matter of minutes had all the necessary information regarding the visitor from South America that he needed and was driving in the latter's car in the direction of London. He drove on for some miles and then--in the beam of the powerful headlamps he observed a policeman, hand raised. For a moment he was in a panic, or 's near a panic as the hardened brain could approach and wondered if he should drive right on or take heed of the warning to stop. He chose the latter course. As he had feared the police were on the look out for HIM!

TO BE CONTINUED.

EXCHANGE of Magnets prior to No. 1370 - 16 Gem volumes, delightfully bound in blue cloth (Nos 997 to 1663); Holiday Annual 1941; 4 vols Chums, 1924, 1926(2), 1940; Bound vol Boys Friend (131 to 156); School yarns in excellent condition by following authors:- Michael Poole, Gunby Hadath, Hylton Cleaver, Alfred Judd, Talbot Baines Reed and others; Captain volume 1922 (Apr-Sept); 38 S.O.Lib; 19 N.L's and 26 odd Gems. Frank Snell, Rathgar, 6, Chingswell Street, Bideford, Devon.

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