

The Collectors Digest.

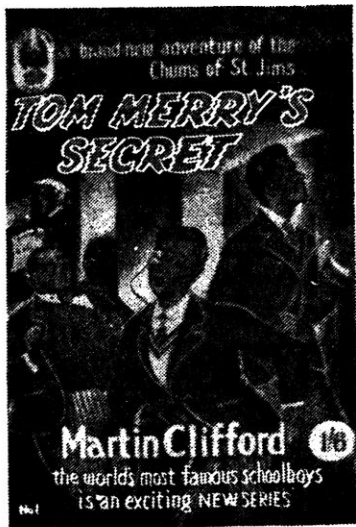
JANUARY 1952

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Editor, Miscellaneous Section:
Herbert Leckenby, Telephone Exchange,
C/o Central Registry, Northern Command, York.

FROM THE EDITOR'S CHAIR

A Happy New Year to All, and Good Hunting

According to Plan: Exactly a year ago tonight, December the 19th, I was busy mailing the Annual. I have just returned home from the same pleasant task. Round about 10 p.m. I made my sixth journey to the G.P.O. and dropped the last of the packets into the mouth of the letter box. It seemed choked and I heard a voice say from somewhere behind it, "What the h—l's all this lot." I did not enlighten the voice. As I walked home I gave a sigh of relief, for it's no small responsibility preparing our Annual. I had accepted quite a lot of half-guineas, and was expected to deliver the goods. Supposing someone much concerned with its production had fallen ill at the eleventh hour; or something else had happened to wreck our plans! I more than once had shuddered at the thought. However, praise be, right from the time we fixed the date for the first article to be typed everything travelled on oiled wheels.

Glancing through a copy after a well-earned supper it seemed to me that it would bear comparison with its

predecessors. There may be a few small errors and two or three changes of address came along too late for insertion. These and other corrections will appear elsewhere in this issue.

The lists we used to fill up pages are a little hazardous, but that couldn't be helped. They will come in useful anyway.

If the price of paper had been a comparatively minor item in cost of production as it used to be, we could have displayed the articles better; as it is they have a crowded look, but that's inevitable. The situation is the same as during the First War when our favourite papers had to appear with tiny type, small illustrations and nutshell editor's chat.

Well, I'm off to bed to dream of a bright Christmas and to hear voices saying, I hope, "It's worth a guinea a time, not half."

.. .. .

Next Day. I've just received a letter from Harry Homer: he asks, "Whom shall I write about for next year's Annual?" There's enthusiasm and quick service for you. I'm suggesting Leon Kestrel or Plummer. What do you think?

Roger Jenkins, too, is thinking of tackling Bunter. Oh yes, he'd find something fresh, don't worry. And I've some articles in hand which will still be topical. Looks as if we shall have the next Annual ready round about midsummer!

.. .. .

A Change of Surroundings. Some of you know that cheerless, prison-like room in which I spent most of my working day. Well, I've now moved on to a switchboard in another barracks a little further along the road from York. It's now known as Imphel Barracks, 'phone number York 53621. When you enter the barracks gate you turn right and walk along about 50 yards when you will see my room facing a stretch of green turf. It's a cosier room with a decent electric fire to give you a warmer welcome if you care to call when you are passing this way.

.. .. .

Acknowledgement: I should just like to say how much I appreciate the scores of greetings cards I have received, many of them from friends I have never seen. I am sure you

will realise it is impossible for me to acknowledge them individually. If too, I have failed to reply to letters containing queries recently I am sure you will admit I have a good excuse if I blame the Annual. However, I shall now be able to get a breather, so if you have questions to ask you will hear more promptly from

Yours sincerely

HERBERT LOCKTBY.

Postscript. Christmas Day. Views on the Annual are already flowing in my post or 'phone, and gee! why, we seem to have scored again. I particularly like this tribute from Wilfred Darwin to his fellow artist, "Verdict - Better than ever. Cover design very striking. Bob Whiter's best."

You can perhaps imagine the thrills I got as these voices came over the lines with their sincere congratulations - John Shaw's. Jim Hepburn's, Bob Whiter's, for example. Oh, what perfect timing to bring about a happy, contented Christmas for me. - H.L.

THE ANNUAL

Amendments and Corrections

Page 12. Right-hand column. Statement that Greyfriars Herald was back on New Year's Day, 1919, is incorrect. Date was 1/11/1919 as stated page 13, left column.

Page 71. Should read: Pre-Sexton Blake Stories.

The Collectors' Who's Who.

Page 109. G. R. Adsley's group should read 5(a) (b)

Page 111. Robert Blythe's address should read
46 Carleton Road.

Page 38. The list of Sexton Blake Stories in Boys' Friend Library was supplied by H.C.N. Price, Margate.

Changes of Address received too late for publication:

Page 111. E. V. Hughes, 38 East Front Road, Pagham Beech,
Bognor Regis, Sussex.

Page 123. Rowland Storey, c/o R. Jobling, 4 Byron Street,
Shieldfield, Newcastle.

Page 121. A.Wright Rhodes, H.Q.Intelligence Div., Wehnerhe,
D.E., B.A.O.R. 19.

Page 116. John Gunn, Gunn's Guest House, 1 Stratford Square,
Nottingham.

THE MEN WHO WROTE FOR BOYS

No. 4. - Maxwell Scott

By Herbert Leckenby

Already a good deal has appeared in our pages about Maxwell Scott still remembered with affection by men with grey in their hair. Early on, Stanley Maidment told us a lot about him, then came one of our big 'scoops' - the extracts from the author's diaries; later Harry Dowler gave a vivid description of his holiday in the very house in which his idol had written his stories.

Nevertheless, this series would not be complete without him, so I will set down some of my personal recollections and views.

Maxwell Scott started his long career as a writer of boys' stories in 1894. It was a modest beginning for they were of ten or twelve pages in length in the humble half-penny Marvel, Union Jack and Pluck. There was a notable feature, however, for several of them concerned Nelson Lee, a detective who was destined to become almost as famous as Sexton Blake. The stories must have caught on, for when Pearson's started the Big Budget in 1897 they immediately snapped up Maxwell Scott. For them he created another detective, Kenyon Ford, a carbon copy of Nelson Lee. Here again it was complete stories at first, followed later by more ambitious serials.

Although I had read some of the complete stories in the papers I have mentioned, and also in the later days of the old Boys' Friend, it was not until the Boys' Friend became a penny in June 1901 that I began to sit up and notice Maxwell Scott. For in that memorable No.1 of the penny "Green 'Un" there started "Birds of Prey". It was given pride of place on the front page with a thrilling picture by Arthur Clarke, who was to be associated with many a Maxwell Scott Nelson Lee story in the future.

What a grand yarn that was! I recall it still, 50 years on: the detective at grips with one of those organisations of crime - The Order of the Ring: at its head The Chief, The Squire and The Doctor, not forgetting the long-skirted, wasp-waisted, dark-haired female confederate,

Lady Ursula. From then on for many years stories by Maxwell Scott followed each other in rapid succession in the *Hermsworth* and *Peerson* papers, and also Cassell's "Chums". As is well known now he was actually Dr. John W. Staniforth, with a practice on a wild part of the Yorkshire coast. How he managed to look after his patients and write the stories he did is a mystery. Maybe in those days people did not fall ill so often, or perhaps some may say they did but couldn't afford a doctor.

Anyway, with "Birds of Prey's" concluding chapter came a new serial, "The Silver Dwarf". This had a plot which Maxwell Scott used on several occasions in later stories - a wronged or missing heir with the proofs hidden in some object which took his detectives in a chase to distant lands. In this story the Silver Dwarf was a small statuette and before his quest was over Nelson Lee had travelled right round the world and through a second story "The Missing Heir".

Exactly a year after the start of the penny Boys' Friend, the Boys' Realm was born. In its first volume appeared two Nelson Lee stories, "Nelson Lee's Rival" and "The Hidden Will". These also were good yarns, but they were illustrated by Fred Bennett instead of Arthur Clarke, which in my opinion made them appear less attractive. Came another year and the "Boys' Herald" - 1903. In No.2 started "Nelson Lee's Pupil". This deserves a place in history for the pupil was Nipper, another wronged heir who when things were righted after adventures on land and sea, became Richard Hamilton. Yes, in 1903, four years before the coming of Tom Merry - a score for the Leeites, methinks, here. It is rather surprising this story has not had more attention than it has; however, perhaps we can devote a special article to it sometime.

The mystery solved, Nelson Lee adopted Nipper and sent him to St.Niniens to be educated. Seeing how much time he spent at St.Franks later, he should have been a well read youth! Stories concerning his adventures at this first school were "Nipper's Schooldays", (*Boys' Herald*), "The Captain of St.Niniens (*Boys' Friend*) and "The Fighting Fifth" (*Boys' Realm*).

As happened when E. S. Brooks took over Lee and Nipper years later, some of Maxwell Scott's were a mixture of

detective and school story. An example was "Detective Warden Nelson Lee" wherein the detective took on the job indicated at a prison near the school. He was after still another wronged heir who it was found was actually at the school under another name. One more was there also, another Dick, and a second ward of the benevolent Nelson Lee.

In these stories, and another called "The Black House", Maxwell Scott, probably acting under orders, attempted to introduce a lot of slap-stick humour. Invariably each instalment had an exciting picture, and a funny one. Where I was concerned, at any rate, the stories lost some of their appeal.

Quite a number of other yarns took Nelson Lee into the realms of sport - both cricket and football. In one "The Football Detective", he proved to be quite a clever forward. This appeared in the Boys' Herald. In these stories he introduced the actual English League clubs with the changes in the table frequently displayed. Yet we had it on the authority of his son that Maxwell Scott never saw a professional game in his life. This does not appear to have handicapped him in the slightest, for his "Hard Pressed" in the "Big Budget" ran for over 40 weeks.

Favourite though he was of mine, there was something about his writings which always amused and rather puzzled me. In taking his detectives roaming by land and sea he went to any amount of trouble to get his timings right. He must always have worked with a Bradshaw and a Lloyds Shipping List by his side. Despite this he was guilty of a number of pet phrases which he used time and time again in the same story. A typical example was "Quivering with Excitement". It was never "trembling" or "shivering" but ever "quivering". Others which I used to love to look out for were "Like an arrow from a bow", "In less time than it takes to tell" and "As the reader will remember".

However, he was a past master at pecking a succession of genuine thrills into an instalment without falling back on the fantastic, so we could forgive him such lapses.

It would be impossible to name all his serials in the space at my disposal. Here are a few that come to mind at random. "The Great Unknown", "A Son of the Sea", "The Golden Quest", "Britain Across the Seas" (all in the Boys' Friend), "The Iron Hand" and "The Winged Terror" (Boys' Herald),

"The Iron Skull" and "The Red Hand" (Boys' Leader);
"The Seven Stars", "Hidden Gold" and "Lorrimer's Legacy"
(Big Budget.)

When writing for the "Boys' Leader" his detective was
Vernon Read; for "Chums" Martin Dale, and, as I have
already stated, Kenyon Ford for the Big Budget.

Idol as he was of mine in my boyhood, there is one
circumstance about his stories which always makes me feel
hot under the collar when I think about it. Long after
his death (at Hinderwell, January 3, 1927) some of his
earliest stories, "The Silver Dwarf" was one, were republished
not under his name, but that of a mysterious John Andrews.
There may be a reason, but the life of me I can't think what
it would be. To me it was as much sacrilege as if "David
Copperfield" was credited in a new edition to some Tom Noddy.

The average present day schoolboy, immersed in American
"comics" with their sadism and strip tease girls, would
probably scoff at a story by Maxwell Scott. Ah well, maybe,
but in the days when that genial Yorkshire doctor's pen was
so busy writing for boys, the words juvenile delinquency
were seldom heard in the land.

FOR SALE: 130 Nelson Lees 1921-1923. 6 bound vols. Magnet
1934 (in blue cloth); 25 copies Boys Realm 1904, 7 bound
vols. B.O.P. 1877-1891-1900; 27 Wizards 1930, 50 Wizards
1937-8; 48 Wizards 1937; 12 Wizards 1929; 72 Skippers
1931; 34 Skippers 1938; 15 Skippers 1930; several Bunter
and Tom Merry books; 24 loose "Boys' Own Paper" 1890-1897.
Also Bessie Bunter of Cliff House and Jack of All Trades.
Offers to E. Hervey, Ring O'Bells Church Street, Stoke-on-
Trent, Staffs.

WANTED: Blue-covered Gems containing Talbot stories.
Price to Robert Ferish, 24 English Street, Longtown,
Cumberland.

WANTED: In good condition. "Union Jacks" 896;908;910;
969;1030;1032;1040;1051;1052;1053;1115;1454. Good price
paid for any of these numbers. L. Packman, 27 Archdale Road,
East Dulwich, London, S.E.22.

RESULT OF COLLECTORS' DIGEST VOTING CONTEST. Heat 4.

There was a large entry for the Fourth and Final Heat in this Contest. The following is the order in which the various series were placed by the general vote.

- 1st. C. The Lancaster Series.
- 2nd. F. The Popper Island Series.
- 3rd. D. The Holiday Annual Series.
- 4th. B. The Richard Steele Series.
- 5th. A. The Ravenspur Grange Series.
- 6th. H. The Crocker Series.
- 7th. G. The Maccolini Circus Series.
- 8th. E. The Alonzo, the Great, Series.

The Lancaster Series was an easy first, taking the lead right from the start and keeping it throughout the contest. It undoubtedly deserves its place.

The Popper Island Series, in securing second place, shows the undoubted popularity of the barring-out theme. Both the above series pass into the Final, which is now to be fought.

It will be noted that the Ravenspur Grange series was placed 5th, a fairly low placing for a fine thriller series. This series was minus Bunter, which suggests that readers like their Bunter.

The surprise of the vote is the fact that the Alonzo series came last. It is the first time that one of the earlier series has been placed so low. It may well be that Alonzo is not a very popular character, or it could also be that the more fantastic type of story does not have such general appeal.

Two voters came very close together in the results, and awards will be made as follows:-

- A postal order for 15/- has been sent to Stanley Impson, "Stanfield", Jerningham Rd., Nr. Norwich.
- A postal order for 5/- has been sent to George W. Fuller, 10 Court Place, Brighton.

The Editor thanks readers for their keen support, which has made these contests such a great success. NOW turn to the GRAND FINAL, send in your vote, and help to give this interesting competition a bumper finish.

OLD BOYS' BOOK CLUB

London Section

Christmas Meeting at Cherry Place, December 16th.

The climax of the Festival of Britain year as regards the Brotherhood of the Happy Hours was reached at the excellent Yuletide meeting of Bob Whiter's "Cherry Place". A grand attendance, which included three of our Brighton friends, Robby, Bill Jardine and Harold Bushby, enjoyed a very memorable and festive time. Chairman Len opened the proceedings in his best style and after the usual formalities gave a very good account of his visit and lecture to a local youth club, the subject obvious to all, viz. the old well loved books of our youth. Len also stated that his well filled scrap-books are available to all members. The new official stationery of the club was shown and approved. The illuminated address for presentation was well in hand, thanks to the committee of three that were elected last month. A discussion on an idea that was brought up a couple of years ago, to wit, a club badge on a design by Bob Whiter. It was agreed that the other clubs be asked as to their opinions as the more badges required the cheaper the cost.

The Australian O.B.B.C. first news letter was then circulated round. After some more official business, the festive side of the meeting was then thoroughly enjoyed. I set the ball rolling with a paper on the famous Yuletide Sexton Blake author Gwyn Evans. This was well received and in the eight question quiz on the subject Josie Peckman and Charlie Wright deadheaded for the first place, and Jim Perrett was a good third. The lights were then put out and Bob Whiter gave a reading by candlelight of a chapter from the "Magnet", "The Wraith of Reynham Castle" which introduced the Christmas Ghost. This was well received, and then Bob Blythe conducted two of his original Quiz contests. Around the walls were placed "Nelson Lees" and "Magnets" blindfolded as it were. Members had to guess what the titles were in one of them and in the other what was the main character on the cover. The former dealt

with the Christmas numbers and also Barring-out adventures. The result of this one was a triple dead-heat as Len Packman, Bob Whiter and Cliff Wallis tied for the first place. The second quiz was won by Cliff Wallis, Len Packman was second and Ron Crollie was third. Locke was the key word for the Eliminator quiz and Len was first, Bob Blythe second and Ron Descon third. As a result of the contests our worthy chairmen keeps his place as quiz champion for the year 1951. Character studies were indulged in and caused many a laugh. Two rounds of a quiz saw many intelligent questions asked and this was greatly enjoyed. The spread was very good and seasonable and reflects credit to the ladies who worked with a will. Greetings all around the walls from all the various characters homes and shodes and the box of bonbons with the favourite scrap book drawings of Sexton Blake, Gussy, Rio Kid, Handforth etc. were greatly admired, and when came the bell for call-over and locking up, all left with the happiest of memories.

Annual General Meeting at 12, Ashburnham Place, Greenwich, S.E.10, on January 20th.

Copies of "Billy Bunter Butts In", a very fine story, have been despatched to all who ordered them, but if anyone has been forgotten, kindly notify me.

UNCLE BENJAMIN.

OLD BOYS' BOOK CLUB
(Northern Section)

Christmas Party, December 22nd, 1951.

The long awaited event was held at 239 Hyde Park Road, starting at 4 p.m. The postponement from the original date, the 8th, prevented a number from being present, nevertheless, 18 were there. They included Tom and Mrs. Hopperton from Scarborough, Mrs. Leckenby (York) and Brian Honeysett (St. Annnes-on-Sea). Unfortunately, greatly to our disappointment, continued illness prevented the presence of our chairman, Reg Hudson. That was the one shadow over a very successful and happy evening.

The tables were laden with good fare reminiscent of pre-war days. Mrs. Gerald Allison and Miss Vere Coates

ere to be heartily congratulated for a "reight good do". We should have been in a bad way without the ladies.

The tables cleared away, photographs were taken. Then Mrs. Allison's husband, Gerald, he of the fertile brain, came into the picture with a programme which kept things going merrily until nearly 10 p.m. First a Twenty Questions session, with Breeze Bentley, Tom Hopperton, Horace Twinham and myself comprising the team, and Gerald as Question Master. Un-Gilbert Harding like he never lost his genial smile or his temper, despite the fact that the team scored eight out of ten.

Followed "Who Killed Gosling?", a short play which caused much amusement and had a surprise finish.

Then came "A Country Morning Remble" a short story with twenty blanks which the company had to fill with names of Greyfriars characters. Wrinkled brows here whilst Gerald smiled.

Everyone then settled back whilst "Breeze" read an extract from an old time Gem Christmas number, a Dickens-like description of a reel old-fashioned Christmas spent at Huckleberry Heath.

There were other enjoyable items on the programme, but I mustn't over-run my space.

Yes indeed, the Party seemed a long time coming, but it was the verdict of all it was well worth waiting for.

Next meeting Saturday, January 12th, 1952.

H. LACKENBY,

Northern Section Correspondent.

OLD BOYS' BOOK CLUB - Midland Section

Report of Meeting at the Townsend Club,
Birmingham, on November 25th.

Present were Chairman, Secretary, Treasurer, and thirteen other members. Chairman Jack Corbett announced that Mr. C. H. Chapman had expressed great pleasure when he wrote regarding his recent visit to Birmingham. Furthermore, Mr. Chapman is delighted to become Honorary President of our Club. This is indeed a proud moment for us. Herk! did I hear a voice from London say "one proud moment of

many so proud"? Well, to all who peruse this report I say "We asked Mr. Chapman to be OUR President because only the best is suitable for the best, and he certainly is one of the best. We had another nice little write-up in the Birmingham Mail together with a picture of our new president "doing his stuff" and prints of the photograph will soon be available to all who want them, price approximately 3/- each. Frank Willison gave an interesting talk on the Old Papers, and he certainly can put it across. Some of his points were (i) The St. Jim's stories were better than Greyfriars up to about 1926, then the Magnet improved considerably. (ii) The early companion paper to the Gem was Pluck. (iii) He said that F.R. told him in a letter that when he dons the mantle of Martin Clifford he finds Bunter merely an also-ran as compared with Tom Merry & Co. (iv) Frank Willison holds the yarns by Cecil Hayter in very high esteem, and if you want a good insight of the old papers, get hold of Sexton Blakes, Populars, and Boys' Friend Libraries of pre-1920 issue. After Frank's talk we had a quiz and the three Daveys romped home easy winners, and received a Magnet each. We made another new member and I am sure that Betty Jackson thoroughly enjoyed herself on her first night. The Club stationery bearing details of officers of the Club is for sale to individuals; six sheets and six envelopes 1/6 plus postage.

The December gathering will be a BUNTER BEANO XMAS PARTY on December 15th same place.

Cheerio All,

PETER MELLOR, Secretary.

(Beware, Peter! I fancy I can hear London calling "Hi! who was it who found Mr. Chapman?" - Ed.)

Can anyone please help with the following Magnets: 881, 882, 925, 795, 797, 798, 799, 779, 906, 907, 940. I also need many other numbers between 730 and 960. Cost of Airmail on lists forwarded gladly refunded. Will pay your price. I have about 50 Magnets and Gems 1919 onwards and hundreds of Lees, Modern Boys, Scouts, etc. for exchange. Charles van Renen, Box 50, Uitenhage, South Africa.

WANTED: Boys' Magazines, No. 332 onwards. Please state price. W. Derwin, 76 Western Road, East Dene, Rotherham.

HAMILTONIA

Conducted by Herbert Leckenby

My word! What a spread nearly all the national morning papers, and many of the provincial morning and evenings gave the Bunter television audition held on December 3rd. The "Daily Mirror" gave it the front page. Ian Mackay devoted his delightful diary to it, and the dignified "Daily Telegraph" allotted half a column, and Reynolds News the following Sunday an amusing cartoon. It was apparent that all the news hawks had known their Greyfriars even though Ian Mackay surprisingly made Bunter speak through the mouth of Inky. They all wrote light-heartedly, looking upon the coming of Bunter to the television screen as a good lark.

But my post-bag shows that there's a shaking of heads among the faithful. So far I have not received a single letter from a Greyfriars member of our circle who is looking forward optimistically to February. All say in effect, "None of the substitute writers, even the experienced ones, succeeded in donning the mantle of Charles Hamilton. Not one gave us the real Bunter. How on earth then can a school-boy who had never read a Magnet, and who was a babe in arms at the time it died, portray him convincingly on the screen?" They add, "There's far more to it than a matter of girth, eating jam tarts and saying, "I say you fellows" in a squeaky voice."

Yes indeed, it's on a par with expecting a player of small parts in a third-rate theatrical company to take on Hamlet in the West End.

And it must be remembered that although Bunter was a great part of Greyfriars, he wasn't the whole of it, and they'll have to be very careful in choosing the other characters. Are they going to make Bob Cherry distinct from Frank Nugent, say? There will be trouble if they don't. I know a chap down Wood Green way incidentally who could play Bob Cherry to the life if they could only manage to reduce his inches.

Look what happened to Ian Mackay; after that Bunter error of his he came along with over a column dressed in sackcloth and ashes, under the heading, "My apologies to Greyfriars O.B.'s. In that whimsical way of his he described how an avalanche of letters had fallen on Bouverie Street.

Said he, "This is the Fat Owl of Fleet Street, squealing for mercy. I am grovelling in the dust and the objectivity of my crawlingfulness is terrific."
and this:

"To judge by the storm this has raised I might have said that "Das Kapital" was written by Waldron Smithers or "Macbeth" by Noel Coward. When I attributed a remark of Seneca's to Blaise Pascal a few weeks ago, not a pen was raised to brain me. But this bit about Billy Bunter has opened the gates of Acheron and all hell is loose upon me."

There was lots more of it with quotes from letters he had received. Then, I'll be blessed if he didn't make another bloomer by calling Mr. Quelch headmaster of Greyfriars. That brought him more trouble.

Well, it's to be hoped Joy Herington has noted what happened to Ian Mackey, or there may be a danger of his Christian name being very inappropriate round about next February.

How about soliciting the services of some of our members as expert advisers?

Some of our younger readers may never have heard of "School and Sport", that plucky, or foolhardy (whichever way you look at it) venture of 30 years ago. As it was started as a rival of the Gem and Magnet it may be thought it hardly comes under the heading of Hamiltonie, but it does, as you will see when you read Tom Hopperton's graphic description of a tragic story.

"SCHOOL AND SPORT"

By Tom Hopperton

Among the shoal of boys' papers started in the years after the 1914-18 War, there is one which holds a peculiar fascination for me, not so much for what it was, but because of what it might have been. "The Gem" assumed its final form almost by accident, as Tom Merry had to expel his contentments and St. Jim's only supplanted Clavering as an after-thought, while "The Magnet", which had a Minerva-like birth, was launched on the strength of less than twelve months' popularity of its friendly rival. When "School and Sport" saw the light on 17th December, 1921, however, its new school of St. Kit's was being developed from the ripened experience

of fourteen years of St. Jim's, thirteen of Greyfriars, and six of Rookwood. Given a fair field, it should have been the king of them all.

An added spice was given, too, because of my idea that the paper, resulting from differences in Fleetway House, was a "breakaway" by Charles Hamilton and H.A. Hinton, deliberately designed to meet and beat their A.P. successes. Thanks to the kindness of Mr. Hamilton, who has unrevell'd for me some of the remarkably tangled skein of the short-lived weekly, I now know that this was not quite correct. Although nominally owned by Popular Publications Ltd., it was Hinton's child, and Mr. Hamilton, while yielding to persuasion to write for it, disclaims any intention of entering into competition with his own papers, which loyalty to his publishers would have precluded. He thought, and still thinks, that in those so different days there was room for everyone and that "School and Sport" could have lived happily by the side of the A.P. publications. Not unnaturally, he found that not everyone shared that view! He inclines, too, to the belief that Hinton thought as he did, but, while I diverge from his opinion with the utmost diffidence, it is difficult to conceive that the editor was thinking of anything but direct competition with "The Gem" and "The Magnet". He copies their unique make-up of a 30,000 word school yarn featuring the same cast continuously - even drawing in the same author - and the matter is surely clinched by the prior publicity which included circularising readers of the other weeklies, whose names and addresses could only have been obtained through Hinton's official connection with the A.P.

Sentimental reasons presumably kept "The Boys' Friend" and "The Boys' Realm" to their traditional - and awkward and outmoded - format. Why an editor as experienced as Mr. Hinton chose to duplicate it in 1921, and why he was content with the less than mediocre drawings of R.H. Evens are likely to remain unsolved mysteries. He was better served with the serial. "The Cruise of the 'Tartar'" was above reasonable reproach, probably because "John Winterton", the reputed author, had all the earmarks of being Duncan Storm.

The play's the thing, though, and it is on the main stories by "Clifford Clive" that our interest centres. The opening series, putting it in bald outline, deals with Harry

Nameless, a boy of unknown parentage, going to St.Kit's School on a scholarship, being befriended by a deceptively languid aristocrat named Algernon Aubrey St.Leger whom he rescues from drowning, discovering that his father is Colonel Lovell, St. Leger's uncle, and breaking down the largely snobbish opposition to him in the school until he becomes Captain of the Fourth. There is nothing particularly original in this type of plot, which was used in "Boys of England" way back in 1875, while in 1915-16 Frank Richards had sent Frank Courteney to Highcliff under somewhat similar circumstances in the Boys' Friend Library. I am not one of those impossibilists who demand brand-new plots in every issue of a boys' weekly: the point is, why this particular type of plot, which is admittedly dramatic but - despite the smooth and convincing narration - contains more inherent improbabilities than most.

(To be continued)

THE PICK OF THE SERIES. No.12

The Fantastic Series

Charles Hamilton has the happy knack of making the impossible seem probable, and the fantastic fairly likely. But rarely did he lead us into the realms of the far-fetched, and even when he did the reader did not have the feeling that the events of which he had been reading just could not have happened. In the fantastic class, one would probably place the ALONZO THE GREAT Series (5 stories, 1933), when Alonzo Todd became possessed of the strength of a giant. It was fantastic, but it was grand reading. There was some skilful character painting, too, when Alonzo, usually so meek and mild, became a smug and domineering reformer under the influence of his unaccustomed power. In this class, too, would fall the BUNTER, THE BILLIONAIRE Series (7 stories, 1934). Interesting and readable, like all Frank Richards' work, this series, where Bunter becomes possessed of enormous wealth, did not reach the heights of the Alonzo series, chiefly because Bunter became a little tedious with his fatuity. In the Gem, one could probably place the tales of Glyn's various inventions in the fantastic class, but they were grand fun all the same. Who can ever forget the Line Machine, or the automatic Bowler, though these inventions were probably not far-fetched at all? But with Glyn's life-like model of Gussy, which deceived the masters, Martin Clifford rather over-stepped the limits of reason? And why shouldn't he?

Two of Mr. Hamilton's finest "fantastic" stories should not be placed at all in the "Pick of the Series" for they were tales specially written for the Holiday Annual. A delightful

fantasy of St. Jim's, in which Glyn invented a time-eliminator, and a fine Grand Guignol sketch of Greyfriars in which, one, Parkinson, sold his soul to the devil in order to become a great footballer. Both stories turned out to be dreams at the finish, the only time that the maestro used this artifice in his writing. Perhaps they would have been out of place in the Gem or Magnet. They were just what the doctor ordered in the Holiday Annual.

THE NELSON LEE COLUMN

All communications to Robert Blythe,
46 Carleton Rd., Holloway, London, N.7.

Doubtless, many of you saw an item in the sports news about a month ago, concerning a brilliant new idea in football, when Wolves in the second half of their game with Charlton turned out wearing bright yellow luminous shirts.

Arsenal too, placed a strip of wood coated with luminous paint to show the position of the goalmouth. A bright idea, you thought. But I wonder how many of you remembered that E.S. Brooks wrote a story using these 'new ideas' in 1930? i.e. Second New Series No.42, 'Hendy's Firework Fiasco'. Hiding my head in shame, I must confess that I didn't, but it wasn't long before it was pointed out to me by Cyril Banks of Huddersfield, and since then others have written.

Some time ago, in one of the Annuals, appeared an article entitled "Topicality was the Keynote". How true that is when applied to our author! In the case I have mentioned above it was more than topical - it was prophetic! Brooks was both. On the topical side a few series come readily to mind. When the great Scout Jamboree was being held at Arrow Park in Birkenhead in 1925 we had the St. Franks Scouts Series. (It was one of these stories "The Lighthouse Scouts" which marked my introduction to the Nelson Lee and eventually to collecting old Boys' Books. Strange how small things alter one's whole outlook on life. Had I not been interested in Scouting I shouldn't have bought that Nelson Lee. No Nelson Lee no collecting, no C.D., no club and no new circle of friends. (There's a moral to all that if only I could think of it!)

During the great floods in East Anglia and elsewhere in 1927 he gave us "The Flood at St. Dranks" series. On the occasion of the Test Match between England and Australia in 1921 and again in 1926, he gave us two excellent cricketing yarns. Some may be of the opinion that the first of these,

dealing with Jerry Dodds arrival and how he came to play for Australia in the Test Match, a little too far-fetched. Perhaps it is - to adults. But I feel that Brooks was proving himself to be no mean adept at child (particularly boy) psychology. At a time when the biggest cricketing event for years is taking place, what healthy-minded boy doesn't like to picture himself playing in these great matches? Brooks knew that, so he gave them Jerry Dodd and made him do what most boys dreamt of doing themselves. Ernest Lawrence was another case in point. A boy beating professional boxers at their own game? Fantastic! Maybe. But not to the boy who read the stories. To the reader he was Lawrence as he was Jerry Dodd.

However, I'm developing an argument I hadn't meant to start, but there's enough material there for a full length article. Maybe I'll do it some day!

To resume. When the Wembley Exhibition was on we had "Wembling at Wembley". And what about the famous disappearance of Col. Fawcett in the Amazonian jungle in 1920. That provided us with one of Brook's best known series. St. Franks in the Amazon, El Dorado and the White Giants.

Brooks could even make archaeology an interesting subject (a subject hardly calculated to make the average school-boy delirious with joy at the prospect of reading about it) but following the unearthing of a considerable find of Roman relics, he gave us the "St. Franks Fresh Air Fields" a story of life on a farm with the discovery of a Roman tomb as added interest. Truly, whatever else might be said against him, no-one can deny that he was topical.

How about his "prophetic" side? Many of the machines and other gadgets he employed have received nothing but scornful laughs and expressions such as "ridiculous" from certain collectors. But let us see whether they were so ridiculous after all. In Brook's very first story in the N.L. he brought in a midget submarine. This was in 1915. They weren't funny in 1945!

In the 20's when aircraft was beginning to develop to the stage we knew before the war, and before the big passenger-carrying planes were in use, Brooks was there with his giant planes bigger and better than anything then known (I'm thinking in particular of the plane used to take the juniors to

New Anglis in 1922) but to be a reality in the years to come.

Do you remember the submarine with runners on the top to take the St. Franks juniors under the ice to Northeastria, up near the North Pole? Laughable? Yet wasn't that very thing done by the Belgian, Professor Piccard?

Then again, what about his ship on gigantic caterpillar wheels that was used to cross the Sahara Desert on one occasion? I grant you that such a thing hasn't come to pass just yet, but if I'm not mistaken something similar was actually used, on a smaller scale of course, not so many years ago.

And so I could go on, but I think I've said enough. But bear in mind, those of you who scoff at some of Brook's queer inventions, he's had the last laugh on more than one occasion. He may yet have the last laugh on others.

Before I go on to give you this month's quota of titles and serials, I must apologise for a glaring error in last month's column. I made the statement that it was in "Archie's Christmas Party" (i.e. 2nd N.S. 152-154) that the cinematograph projector was used. This was not correct. This gadget was used in the Reithmere Castle Christmas series 1st N.S. No's 137-139). My only excuse is that I was writing from memory. Had I checked with the books I shouldn't have made such a mistake. However, my thanks are due to Ernest Hubberd of Sheffield for pointing it out.

And so for the titles:

Note: Where two titles are given, the first is the detective, and the second is the school story. Where only one is given then that is a full length school story.
2nd N.S. No.21, The Test Match Mystery, by Hedingham Gosfield (?pen-name), Dished! Diddled! Done! 22, The Vital Clue, bt E. Sinclair Halstead (?E.S.Brook's home was at Halstead, Essex). 23, The Lone Flyer, by Robt. V. Comrade, The Test Match Tenants. 24, Shanghaied, by S. B. Halstead (?Brooks) The Schoolboy Glider. 25, The Island of Ships, by S.B. Halstead. The Remove's Good Turn. 26, Trapped in the Sergesso, by S. B. Halstead. Handy's Helping Hand. 27, Galleon Gold, by S. B. Halstead. Hoaxing the Head. 28, The Legion of the Lost, by Robt. V. Comrade. The River Rivals. 29, "As You Were" at St. Franks. 30, The Mystery Master. 31, Archie's Awful Threat.

LETTER BOX

(1) All About the New Tom Merry Books

Hamilton & Co (Stafford) Ltd.
1 & 2, Melville Court,
Goldhawk Road, W.12.

28th December, 1951

Dear Sir,

Mr. Frank Richards has suggested that, as Editor of the "Collector's Digest", you might be interested to hear from us regarding a new series of paper-backed novels featuring Tom Merry & Co. that we will be commencing to publish in February, 1952. I see that some advance mention of this was contained in your December issue of "Collector's Digest".

The enclosed advance copy of a leaflet which we are producing clarifies details of this new series, and we should be grateful if you could include details in your first available issue. Alternatively, we will have available on Friday, 4th Prox., a supply of the enclosed leaflet, and you might consider including a copy of the leaflet with each copy of your periodical for distribution to your subscribers.

If, with your background of experience of Tom Merry fans, you are able to make any suggestions to us regarding the further promotion of these publications, we should be most grateful for your assistance.

Yours faithfully,

for Hamilton & Co.(Stafford) Ltd.

H. Assael, Director.

(Any suggestions, fans? If the leaflets are received in time they will be included with this issue.- H.L.)

(2) They Back up Bob Whiter

(Numerous letters have been received supporting Bob Whiter's plea for the return of the old artists. The two following are typical. - H.L.)

Dear Editor,

Bob Whiter echoes the sentiments of a good many of us, I am sure, when he deplores the illustrations in this year's "Tom Merry's Own". When I opened my copy I was appalled by the shocking attempts at drawing contained therein. The one, for instance, which supposedly depicts Bunter emerging

from the films after being the victim of Coker's tar attempt is enough to make an old Magnet reader weep. If we cannot have the old artists I for one would rather remember the old familiar forms and faces as they were. These new attempts to portray the old characters savour too much of the comic strips, which, to my mind, disfigure the book-stalls of to-day.

Yours sincerely,
ERNEST A. HUBBARD.

(3) The Modern School, Surbiton.
16th December, 1951.

Dear Mr. Editor,

I am delighted that Bob Whiter has made the suggestion that an effort should be made to let Mr. Chapman illustrate the Greyfriars books, and Mr. Macdonald return to his first love, Tom Merry.

It is all that is needed to make these fine publications perfect.

Could not you use your influence to get the respective publishers to consider this grand suggestion?

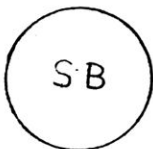
Yours sincerely,
ERIC FAYNE.

Patience Please!

Dear Mr. Leckenby,

I am extremely sorry to say that we have had some difficulty about paper for the Autobiography and, in consequence, feel that it would now be desirable to hold over publication until the New Year as by the time copies will be ready it would tend to get lost in the welter of Christmas books. We are also hoping to arrange for publication to coincide with the television programme which should give it an excellent send off. I appreciate that there will be considerable disappointment at the delay but it seems best to take this decision in all the circumstances.

With kind regards, Yours sincerely,
CHARLES SKIDTON.



Blakiana

JANUARY 1952

Edited by H.M.Bond. 10, Drw Wen, Rhiwbina, Cardiff.

THE ROUND TABLE.

It gives me great pleasure to give most of this month's space to details of the newly formed Sexton Blake Circle. No doubt you will be wondering what the new sign at the top of this page means. Well it is the sign of the S.B. Circle, a sign which will be used whenever and wherever Circle matters are discussed or articles by its members are featured. During the past few months I have discussed various plans for the inauguration of the Circle. It was at first suggested that an Annual Blake Convention should be held at a place convenient to all Blake lovers and at a time to suit them. Due to the determination and untiring efforts of Harry Honor, Rex Dolphin and Bill Colombe the whole thing has been speeded up and already the first meeting has been held in London. On page two you will be able to read the minutes of this meeting and on succeeding pages be able to form some idea as to what the Circle intends to do in the future. Let me say here and now that it has my wholehearted support and all possible space will be given to Circle activities in Blakiana. I trust contributors to these pages will understand the importance of this new venture and not be too disappointed if their articles are delayed a little. Let us all hope that 1952 will be a great year for our favourite character and may the Sexton Blake Circle thrive and be instrumental in giving us a clearer picture of the very complex Blake history. H.M.B.



THE SEXTON BLAKE CIRCLE.

Minutes of First Meeting.

Held at the Charing Cross Hotel, Sunday, 2nd December 1951.
2.30 - 6.30 p.m.

Attendance. Bob Blythe, Bill Colcenbo, Rex Dolphin, Harry Honor, Lon and Josie Packman, Horton Price, Ben Whiter, Charlie and Olive Wright and Archie Young.

The above named are the FOUNDER MEMBERS.

Minutes.

In an initial address Harry Honor stressed that should it be decided to form a Sexton Blake Circle, it must be stressed at the outset that there must be no thought of any clash with the Old Boys' Book Club of which most, if not all of those present were enthusiastic members. But Sexton Blake collecting needed much specialisation owing to the way in which the vast field was split by an almost total lack of chronological order in the publications. For example, if a "Tingot" collector decided to go for a certain series, once he had found the first and last numbers, nothing else remained but to get hold of them but if a Blake collector wished to collect Robert Lurray's Confederation series he had to do work of research covering a period of almost fifteen years and then might not be certain of having a complete list of titles. Another point was the amount of extra work caused by lack of information and published inaccuracies. This field might well be split into areas of specialisation with Archie Young becoming, for example, the expert on Anthony Skene and his work, while Bob Blythe might perform a like service for that of Edny Searles Brooks. The point must be stressed that this should be a purely working body, not a social one. It was to be greatly regretted that Maurice Bond had not been able to see his way clear to coming up to London for this meeting and he should be kept fully informed as to

the result of it. Another point of importance was the future position with regard to dealers and mounting prices following the regrettable passing of John Hedcraft from whom one could always be sure of a square deal.

The guide to members was then gone through point by point when it was put to the meeting that a decision be made as to whether or not a SEXTON BLAKE CIRCLE was to come into being.

The vote of approval was unanimous.

Followed the election of the following officers:-

| | | | | | |
|-------------------|-----|-----|-----|-----|--------------|
| Chairman... | ... | ... | ... | ... | H. F. Honor. |
| Vice Chairman ... | ... | ... | ... | ... | L. Packman. |
| Secretary.. | ... | ... | ... | ... | R. Dolphin. |
| Treasurer.. | ... | ... | ... | ... | C. Wright. |

After long, full and free discussion, with several points put to the vote, the following points of order were passed as a Guide to Members of The Sexton Blake Circle:-

Guide to Members.

1. The name of the Circle shall be THE SEXTON BLAKE CIRCLE.
2. The object of the Circle is to further research into Blake matter and increase the interest in Blake among collectors of old boys' books. Also to discuss and allocate fields of study to the members of the Circle; the results to be studied at a future meeting and published in "The Collectors Digest" if required and then double-checked by at least two other members for accuracy and completeness.
3. The Circle to meet at least thrice a year.
4. The venue of the meetings to vary and to be arranged by mutual consent.
5. The Circle to be affiliated to The Old Boys Book Club.
6. Eligibility for membership extends to either sex but the prospective member is required to have either a collection or a knowledge of the subject large enough

or deep enough to render him or her eligible to take part in the work as outlined in paragraph two - love of the subject alone is not sufficient. He or she must sincerely wish to take some active part in such work and to have the results of any such work governed by the conditional clause contained in the final sentence of paragraph two.

7. Membership of the Sexton Blake Circle is confined to twelve, but husband and wife will count for one membership.

Other business.

It was provisionally decided that the next meeting be held on Sunday, April 20th 1952, at the house of Bill Colcombe in Southend. This on the express invitation not only of Bill himself but of his Mother. A sincere vote of thanks to her was passed unanimously.

It was decided after discussion to shelve for the present any idea of a library for financial and storage reasons.

A collection was made of a shilling per head to help pay for the tea and it was decided that levies in future would depend on expenses incurred by secretarial duties.

It was decided not to launch any magazine but to stand firm behind "The Collectors Digest".

It was decided to create Honorary Membership only for past Members but that visitors to meetings would be made welcome.

It was decided that the first and most pressing need was a full and detailed catalogue of "Union Jack" numbers, dates, titles and story details - a section of which was entrusted to each member.

The meeting broke up at 6.30 after a vote of thanks had been passed to the Chairman.

Charing Cross Hotel.
London. 2.12.51.

Chapter Six.

But, at his best, Graydon was quite good, though it is necessary to turn to the pages of "The Boys' Friend" to find him in this mood. Then, for Hamilton Edwards, he wrote a serial entitled "Sexton Blake in the Congo" which, beginning in the early part of 1907, ran for about six months. This yarn, one of the best and certainly one of the longest Blake adventures published during that year, described how Blake, at the request of H.M. King Edward VII, journeyed into the wilds of Africa, accompanied by Tinker and Pedro, in order to ascertain whether there was any truth in the reports of brutalities which had reached England, concerning the terrible sufferings of the natives in the Congo region in connection with the obtaining of rubber.

Way back in 1884 a congress was held in Berlin at which fourteen European Powers were represented, for the purpose of opening the interior of Africa to trade, and it was agreed upon to recognise the Belgian Protectorate, the dominion of King Leopold over the vast region watered by the mighty river Congo and its tributaries. By the terms of that concession, to which Great Britain gave the seal of her authority, it was stipulated by Belgium that trade was to be free, the natives protected and slavery abolished. "But", demanded William Murray Graydon fiercely in his author's note, "how have those promises been kept? What has been the history of the Congo Free State? It is written in letters of fire and blood. Read and learn the truth. Follow Sexton Blake in his wanderings, and see, through his eyes, the terrible sufferings of the poor negroes, the fiendish cruelty of the black soldiers of Belgium, and the staggering bloodlust of which officers and agents, all prompted by greed of the gold fruit of the rubber plant. When will King Leopold see the fateful handwriting on the wall? How much longer the reader may well ask, will Great Britain and Europe permit these awful crimes against God and humanity. How much longer?

One can imagine with what indignation and wrath Murray Graydon wrote these words, for it was in scathing tones of contempt that he upbraided the tyrannical slave drivers of Africa's interior as, week by week, he unfolded his bitter story of their shameful behaviour. Told with much more vigour than the author was wont to display, this tale of Blake was, besides being topical, one of the detective's most noteworthy exploits.

Quite a good effort was that entitled "Sexton Blake, King's Messenger" in No.140 of the Union Jack. The author, Mark Darren, gave quite a lot of prominence to a meeting between Sexton Blake and King Edward VII, which resulted in the criminologist making the long journey to Russia, accompanied by Tinker and Pedre. To go into the story in detail would take up far too much space, briefly it concerned the celebrated trio's endeavours to deliver safely into the hands of the Tsar of Russia a letter written in cryptic cypher by H.M. King Edward, the code of which was secreted in the small cavity of a ring.

Chapter 7 next month.

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Ed. VANGUARD LIBRARY: Wanted, Nos. 1, 7, 9, 31, 33, 39, 42, 49, also copies or information of stories after No.68 by Charles Hamilton and Frank Drake, and of final issue. Any help greatly appreciated. Tom Hopperton, Courtlands, Fulford Road, Scarborough.

YOU'VE GOT YOUR ANNUAL

BUT

HAVE YOU FORGOTTEN YOUR SUB?