

The
Collectors'
Digest

Re-drawn from
Union Jack No.
1422, 17th of
January, 1931 by
Robert Whiter.



(Vol. 6) No. 62.

PRICE 1/6. POST
FREE. FEB. 1952.

Robert
Whiter
'52

THE
OLD BOYS' BOOK
COLLECTOR

Art Cover designed by C.H.Chapman. Minimum 32 large (10" x 8") pages. First-class illustrations include portraits of Lewis Jackson, G.W.M.Reynolds the first St.Jim's Cover, etc. The nine starred articles are headed by:

Frank Richards - In Reminiscent Vein
Lewis Jackson - Kestrel in Retrospect

plus "Hamilton's Leading Men", "The 1st Greyfriars Herald", "That Dreadful Mr. Reynolds", The 1st Vanguard Library", "Jack Sheppard", etc.

For future presentation: C.Maurice Down on Editing the Companion Papers, C.H.Chapman on Illustrating "The Magnet", and reminiscent articles by Michael Poole and Clive R.Fenn.

No.1 ready by 1st March. Annual subscription (four issues) 8/- post free. Single copies 2/-. Printed to order, so please book your copy now from.. ..

Tom Hopperton, Courtlands, Fulford Rd, Scarborough

Billy Bunter. aged 29



"Bunter" Campton may be a man, but he holds his buns like a boy"

News Chronicle Reporter

THOSE 50 school chaps who applied for Bunter's part in the coming Greyfriars series on television will be disappointed.

Chosen yesterday to play Bunter is a 29-year-old actor named Gerald Campton. He has a wife and two little Bunters - Anthea (6) and Anthony (3). And - I say chaps, this is a bit thick - he hasn't even a paunch.

TV producer Joy Harington is arranging for him to have a false stomach, arguing that an underweight Bunter who can act is worth two overweight Bunters who can't, plus his weight in jam tarts besides.

News Chronicle
29. 1. 52



"The Collectors' Digest"



Vol. No. 62

Price 1s. 6d.

Post Free

FEBRUARY 1951

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

FROM THE EDITOR'S CHAIR

The Annual's Triumph. Yes, there's no doubt we did it again, for scores of letters say with undoubted sincerity, "The best yet," so I shouldn't be human if I didn't believe it.

The voting papers are flowing in (you'll see the present position on another page) and I have read with particular interest those which add comments. In some cases voters have taken the opportunity of expressing forthright views on articles they dislike. In a few instances these apply to articles which are high up in the ballot. Nothing strange in this, of course, just a case of one man's meat, another man's poison.

I have had, too, some splendid suggestions for next year's Annual. One I particularly like came from W. T. Thurbon, of Cambridge. He asks for one on Arthur S. Herdy, King of Sport Story Writers. Well, seeing Herdy wrote some of the finest football and boxing stories ever written there's plenty of opportunity for a smasher. I think I can tackle that myself.

Then Eric Payne is going to tackle quite a popular Charles Hamilton character, but one who up to now has been

neglected. That will be no longer true when Eric has finished. And others are planning. Nice work.

And now for the other side of the medal. Sorry, but I must, for I am really alarmed at the time of writing at the number of subs. for the Annual still to come in. There are far more than last year at this time. It is a bit of a worry for with every one in we shall just get clear by the skin of our teeth. However, with this reminder I feel confident the lines on my brow will be smoothed out.

- - - -

A New Venture and the Policy of the C.D. As readers will be aware, Tom Hopperton is launching a new collectors' Mag. Well, since he joined our circle some months ago he has given plenty of evidence that he can write a pungent, knowledgeable article, and I shall be sorry if it means they will cease to appear, or not appear so often in the C.D. Now it is Tom's opinion that there is not sufficient space in the C.D. to allow writers to spread themselves in a lengthy article. This is perfectly true, don't I know it. But picture my dilemma. Being the recognised organ of the Clubs and collectors generally, news of all that is going on is demanded, and there's quite a lot going on at the moment (see Hamiltonia). Thus a blend of topicality and nostalgia must be the keynote, a record of yesterday, to-day and tomorrow, together with crisp, down to business articles. We could, of course, increase the number of pages (if we could be sure of the paper), but that would inevitably mean an increase in price, and I have a feeling that would be inconvenient for a number of our members, for there's no doubt money is getting tighter.

Another problem is that the Hamilton fans are far more energetic in writing articles than those of other groups. They are all welcome and I give them as much space as possible: even so it means I have to try the patience of good contributors, as Peter Walker, for instance. Oh I can assure you, it's not all a bed of roses being editor of a hobby magazine.

Then readers claim space to air their views in the Letter Box. Well, that's all to the good. See what it has meant in the campaign for the return of the St. Jim's-

Greyfriars artists to their proper spheres. So I am confident the C.D. is just right as it is.

As for the Annual, well it's evident there's no need to say anything about that.

One of us. "Picturegoer", January 19th, in a write-up on the new Charlie Cheplin film, says, "Chaplin's half-brother, Wheeler Dryden, plays the part of a doctor in 'Limelight'. When there's no film in production Dryden is one of the permanent studio gang."

Look out for "Limelight".

Yours sincerely,

HERBERT LEEKENBY.

"THE ANNUAL" BALLOT

Leading Positions

Points

1. The Remove Form at Greyfriars	105
2. St.Franks - Success or Failure	92
3. That Enduring Magic	86
4. Herry Wharton, Captain of the Remove	82
5. The Long Arm	79
6. Monograph on Yvonne Cartier	72
7. Grandfather liked them fierce	51
8. Inside Fleetway House	51
9. Every Story a Gem	46

(Six points awarded for placing first, five for second, down to one for sixth.)

WANTED: "Union Jack" 896. Sexton Blake Libraries 1st Series, 54, 57, 219, 229, 233, 241, 253, 271, 276, 283, 307, 312, 325, 256, 258, 260, 366, 371. 2nd Series, 1, 8, 16, 21, 25, 35, 41, 42, 73, 77, 52. Good prices offered. Josephine Packmen, 27 Archdale Road, E. Dulwich, S.E.22.

Many thanks to all fellow collectors who have supplied my wants in the past.

FOR SALE: Magnets, Gems, Schoolboys' Owns, Nelson Lees. S.A.E. reply. Horsey, 60 Salecombe Road, Walthamstow, London, E.17.

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

THE MEN WHO WROTE FOR BOYS

No.5 - Allen Blair

By Herbert Leckenby

Some nine years ago my first hobby friend, Harry Dowler, came to spend a memorable ten days holiday in York. After we had clasped hands almost the first thing he said to me was "I've had a letter from Allen Blair." There and then he drew it from his pocket, and I read it in the street. It was written from the heart of blitz-ravaged London and there was a touch of pathos about it for the once vigorous writer of numerous stories for boys said "I am an old man now approaching the end, and I find life very trying." Later on I wrote to Allen Blair myself, and I believe Harry did also, but we never heard from him again. We had a fear that like so many of his day he had passed on. One point of interest about that letter was that it was signed William J. Bayfield, which revealed for the first time his real identity.

Allen Blair, as I will call him here, had the distinction of helping to start off the penny Boys' Friend on its long career. That was in June, 1901, of course. It was his first serial, and we who remember it always refer to it as "The Boys of Repley College". Actually, though, for the first three instalments or so it was called "Through Thick and Thin". The editor then announced that as there was another school story, in book form, with that title, it had been necessary to change the name of Allen Blair's serial.

The new author evidently found favour, for no sooner had it finished than another of his commenced. It was not a school story but one of a kind Allen Blair came to specialise in - the poor boy starting off in the world, going through trials and tribulations, ultimately finishing well up life's ladder. This particular story in the Boys' Friend was called "Pluck Will Tell". How I revelled in that story in my schooldays! The hero was a Scots boy, Neil Campbell, and Arthur Clarke, the artist, usually portrayed him in knickerbockers and a tam-o'-shanter. Allen Blair's name had a Scotch flavour about it, and he had a

fondness for heroes from across the border, for "Only a Highland Laddie" followed "Pluck Will Tell" in the "Boys' Friend", and another laid in the same country, "A Lad o' the Lowlands", appeared later in the "Boys' Realm".

I recall an amusing incident in connection with "Only a Highland Laddie". As I have oft-times said before, my father frowned on most of my reading matter and the "Boys' Friend" was no exception. He was lecturing me one night about the copy of the "Green 'Un" I was reading by the fire. I handed it to him at the page I had before me saying protestingly, "Why, I don't see much harm in that, dad." The picture on the page was from "Only a Highland Laddie" and showed the hero in his nightshirt praying at his bedside. He glanced at the story for a moment or two, then passed it back without comment. Maybe it was not a very convincing argument, nevertheless, he left me in peace for that evening. Strange how one remembers a little incident like that after half-a-century of time - or is it?

When the Boys' Realm came along, with the Boys' Friend just one year old, Allan Blair was given pride of place, the front page, with the opening instalment of his "The Muff of Melthorpe College". A school friend of mine was so delighted with the start of that story that he obtained a fat exercise book and declared he was going to copy out the whole story. He hardly got as far as most people do with new year resolutions. His name was Mellish, by the way. If he had continued he would have written just about as many lines as his less likeable namesake at St. Jim's in his mispent career.

Another "poor boy" story Allan Blair wrote was "A Boy in a Thousand" in the early days of the Boys' Herald. It interested me because many of the scenes were laid in a printing works, a place I was familiar with at the time.

Allan Blair had a pleasant straightforward style, with his heroes and his villains poles apart. He was a little too fond of coincidences. One can forgive one or two in a story, but not several. And occasionally he turned out what in my opinion at anyrate was a poor story. "Peter the Page" in the "Boys's Friend" was one of them. And there was the curious case of "Heir to a Million" in the "Boys' Realm". This ran about seven weeks, then appeared to be

brought to an abrupt conclusion. I have a distinct recollection of seeing an admission by Hamilton Edwards, the editor, that the story had not been as successful as he had hoped. Yet a year or two ago, when I obtained some Boys' Realms of the period, I couldn't trace the admission; nevertheless, I am confident it did appear.

There was another occasion when Hamilton Edwards gave Allan Blair the headlines, but in a different way. The astute editor told the readers of the Boys' Herald of how some very remarkable real life happenings had come to his notice, of how he and "Mr. Allan Blair" had had a long and serious talk, and how they had decided to reveal those happenings to the world in the form of a new serial to be called "Always Honest". The story duly appeared under their joint names, and it was followed by a sequel "Honesty Wins".

When two authors set about a story I've often wondered how it's done. Do they take turns in writing chapters, or does one do the writing, and the other rest content to look on and give a bit of advice now and again? Anyway, in this particular instance it seemed to be a typical Allan Blair story. Probably he wrote the whole of it and Hamilton Edwards' foreword was just a flight of fancy.

Anyway, that editor evidently had confidence in the author with a Scottish pen-name, for he engaged him to write the serial when the Union Jack was raised to penny status in 1903. The story was "The Chums of Ashbourne School".

Other serials which come to mind were "Storm Island"; "A Lad O' Liverpool"; and "Only a Jew Boy" (all in the Boys' Friend) "The School in the Backwoods" (Boys' Realm) and "Clive Clare" a circus story in the "Jester".

More familiar to the younger members of our collecting circle will be the stories Allan Blair wrote for the Sexton Blake Library. According to my records he contributed 90 of them, only three others writing more. If we allow an average of 70,000 words we get a total of 6,300,000, quite an impressive one.

Although he did not create any special adversity for Sexton Blake, he was one of the best of those hundred and odd authors. Some of his stories were: "The City of

Horrors"; "Secret of the Tomb"; "The Mystery of Hanging Sword Alley"; "The Case of the Millionaire Blackmailer"; "The Affair of the Seven Mummy Cases", and "The Masked Forgers". Enticing titles, aren't they?

Allen Blair also wrote for some of the Fleetway House adult papers. One serial was "Slaves of the Pen" in the "Penny Pictorial".

Yes, another of the gifted band who wrote in the halcyon days of boys' weeklies.

HAMILTONIA



Conducted by Herbert Leckenby

Of a truth there's plenty in store for Hamiltonians this month of February - the Autobiography (we hope); the new Tom Merry books, Greyfriars on television. No wonder I wish we could publish the C.D. on elastic.

Now, for a start: here's some **very interesting** news about the 1/6 Tom Merry books. You would see from Messrs. Hamilton's letter which appeared last month that they asked me if I had any suggestions. Well, I grasped the opportunity to tell them that they would please all the fans if they could get R. J. Macdonald to do the illustrations. They promptly replied saying they would try. They kept their promise, for a few days later they 'phoned Len saying Mr. Macdonald would do the covers starting with the two March numbers.

How's that for proof of the influence of the C.D. and the members of our circle? A real feather in our caps. It bucks me up no end.

Regarding the television programme starting on February 19th, it has been decided to repeat it in the evening at 3 p.m. for the benefit of the "old boys".

Reporting this in the London "Evening Standard", George Campey who advocated it last March, also comments, "Joy Harington prepares to select Master Bunter from the short list whittled out of the 50 applicants. They are all right physically, but ----."

Method's there's a lot of significance in that "but". The "Yorkshire Evening Post" in a leader also wondered

if we are going to get the authentic Bunter of the real Frank Richards. Gerry Allison followed this up with a lively letter in which he suggested Joy Herrington should consult the men who know.

I have also to thank James Warren of Sunderland for a very interesting cutting from the Newcastle "Sunday Sun". In a long article "Billy Bunter Still a Magnet", the columnist, who certainly knows his Greyfriars, commenting on the Bunter audition, says:

"One of the surprising things this past few days has been the ease with which fathers recounted (mostly to fellow fathers at the office!) the exploits and escapades of the imperishable band of schoolboys who seem destined never to be displaced in our affections."

Well, the "Autobiography is coming in which the cause of it all will modestly tell us how it happened, but it seems to me it requires also another hand to tell the whole astounding story of how all this has developed from an insignificant halfpenny paper which first saw the light forty-four years ago. How about it, Fleetway House?

However, that's enough from me for now. But I want you to send me along your views on the three big coming events, television, the Autobiography, and the new "Tom Merry" books, to provide plenty of interesting copy for future numbers.

== ==

Oh, here's something else interesting. A writer to "Daily Mirror's" Live Letters on January 18th asked: "I have happened across the expression, "Thick as leaves in Vellombrose". Expound please."

"The Old Codger" replied: "A farrago of nonsense written by Milton in 'Paradise Lost' and probably the most quoted words of it! The actual phrase is "Thick as autumnal leaves that strow the brooks in Vellombrose." If Mr. Milton had been a journalist, used to checking the facts, he wouldn't have written it, because Vallombrose, the Benedictine convent in the Apennines, some sixteen miles from, and high above Florence in Italy, stands amidst magnificent woodlands of Pinetrees, and pine trees have no leaves to strow the brooks, either in autumn or any other

season, either in Vallombrosa or elsewhere."

So now you know, Magnetites.

====

I was sorry we were unable to give you Tom Hopperton's "School and Sport" in full last month. However, here's the rest of the tragic story.

"SCHOOL AND SPORT"

By Tom Hopperton

(continued from last month)

The choice indicates, I believe, that Clifford Clive was writing at the top of his bent, and that the eventual failure of the paper was in no way because of lack of care or attention on his part. Many years afterwards, he stated that the Courtenay stories were, in his opinion, the best work he had produced, and there is nothing more natural than that, in the electrified atmosphere of "School and Sport's" initial struggle for a place in the sun, his inspiration flowed from the same fount as that treasured best.

For Harry Lovell to surmount his obstacles and take the captaincy occupied five numbers. What then? "They used to say at the A.P. that a 'barring-out' was a sure card to play." (Frank Richards, 1951.) Clifford Clive, 1922, agreed with him. A substitute Headmaster was imported, whose acid tyranny precipitated a revolt. The record now becomes more than a little cloudy, for diligent enquiry has failed to unearth any copy after No.7, in which the barring-out tale began, although Mr. Hamilton certainly wrote the continuation which filled No.8, and after he felt constrained to cease writing for the paper, H.A.Hinton did as he had done in "The Gem" and "Magnet" and brought in a substitute writer. Anyway, whether the paper ran for nine or ten issues, or even the twenty with which it is credited (on what evidence I don't know) in the 1947 "Annual" matters little. The important part for our purpose ends with No.8, and that yarn we have in reprint form.

The stories are thought-provoking in the extreme. In the initial bid for popularity, strong plots were hurrying events along at a much faster pace than in the contemporary papers, where the series form was well developed. The

berring-out, for example, was over in two weeks, while the Remove could have been relied on to hold out for anything up to three months. This was inevitable. It took about four years to assemble the permanent residents at the older schools, and most of the sub-plotting which allowed the series to combine length with unflagging interest depended on the developed characteristics of the leading boys. The final atmosphere of St.Kit's was still to be worked out, and the interest of the reader had to be maintained by dramatic plots while the constructional work on the cast proceeded. It is significant that there was no house division and there could have been none of the concentration on conflict that kept the characters of the St.Jim's juniors so curiously static. As at Greyfriars, it was in the stars that the that the stories would have stemmed from developing subtlety and complexity in the delineation of the characters.

In view of the foregoing, it is not surprising that the boys of "School and Sport" were sketched, rather than etched. Herry Lovell was so much the creature of circumstances that his character had not crystallised: Algy derived something from D'Arcy and a little more from Meuly, although quite distinct from either: Bunny Bootles was a not unfamiliar blend of fatuity, mendacity and greed, but seems to me on a close comparison to be further advanced than the contemporary Owl along that mellowing road which sublimated Bunter's early dross — perhaps because he was not circumscribed by Bunter's stock situations. The fourth cardinal point of the St.Kit's compass, Bob Reke, appeared from Australia in No.5, when his vote tipped the election to Lovell, and formed a bluff, even rowdy, contrast to the others. What further importations would have been made we shall never know, but, with "The Gem" and "Magnet" in mind, we can do more than guess.

Taking all in all, the stories were certainly not inferior to their competitors, and Hinton could count himself a most fortunate editor in having prevailed upon Clifford Clive. One could really have gambled that the combination of editor and author must have been infallibly successful, but there were factors other than the mere established strength of the A.P. weeklies to take into account. Mr.Hamilton speaks of his old colleague with a certain affection as a good chap (as does Clive R. Fenn) and

no-one should know better. As editor of "School and Sport", however, H.L. Hinton showed some peculiar traits. He was "chancing his arm" from the start, as the paper was under-capitalised, and the format was a grave editorial blunder. Some slashing of the stories might have been expected with No.7, when the page height was reduced by $1\frac{1}{2}$ " and the number by four (ominous sign!) but the length of the feature stories was miscalculated from the start. The poor author, acting on instructions, turned out each week yarns from which 5,000 words were coolly hecked. This would have been galling under any circumstances, and how much more galling when each batch of copy brought in reply hearty and genial letters — none of which contained a cheque! In short, Clifford Clive received not so much as sixpence for his efforts, and while he took it philosophically, I gather that the same gentle resignation was not featured prominently in some other quarters.

A little was saved from the wreck. Non-payment meant that the copyright remained with the author and, with some of the names altered, the entire run was serialised in "The Boys' Friend" and subsequently reprinted in the S.O.L." That was perhaps not much to show for a venture begun with such high hopes, but Clifford Clive can at least derive now some comfort from the fact that external factors alone sank "School and Sport". On merit, St.Kit's could have held its own.

LESSER LIGHTS

By Roger M. Jenkins

When we think of school stories by Charles Hamilton, inevitably there springs to mind such old favourites as Greyfriars, St.Jim's, and Rookwood. Second thoughts might produce Cliff House, Highcliffe, Rylcombe Grammar School, and Ceder Creek, all of which had stories written about them in their own right, and some of them were mentioned incidentally elsewhere. But these were only a few of the many schools created by Charles Hamilton. Let us glance through our copies of the Schoolboys' Own Library and see if we can discover some more.

The first school that meets our eye is St.Kit's. There is a strange history connected with these stories. When

Mr. Hinton left the Amalgamated Press in 1921 he began a paper of his own entitled "School and Sport". For this paper Charles Hamilton wrote stories about St.Kit's under the pseudonym of "Clifford Clive", but fine though the stories were, the paper never had a chance against its many rivals sponsored by the great publishing Houses, and it ran for only seven weeks. Nevertheless, they were reprinted in four copies of the Schoolboys' Own Library, though this time the pseudonym was "Frank Richards". These were the only stories in the Library to have originated in a paper not published by the Amalgamated Press. No.64, entitled "Parted Chums", deals with the arrival at the school of Herry Nameless, a boy whose parentage was not known. (This theme seems to have a special appeal to Mr.Hamilton - compare, for example, the character Jack of All Trades). At any rate, the new boy soon made friends with the immaculate Aubrey Algernon St.Leger, and eventually won the good opinion of the latter's father, Lord Westcourt. The second volume, No.70, entitled "The Boy Who Found His Father" relates how St.Leger's uncle, Colonel Wilmot, discovered that Herry was his own son whom he had believed had been drowned at sea, and the third volume, No.136, entitled "Who Shall Be Captain?" recounts how Herry Wilmot became Captain of the Fourth. The last volume, No.138, was entitled "Up the Rebels", a title which speaks for itself. A perusal of these stories inevitably causes one to wish that "School and Sport" had had a much longer career. St.Kit's was worthy of a much better innings than it had.

If St.Kit's is but a name to many collectors, St.Dorothy's must seem even more obscure. Unlike the majority of the Hamilton schools, St.Dorothy's was situated in Warwickshire, not in South East England. Schoolboys' Own Library No.192, entitled "For His Brother's Sake", relates how Redfern minor sacrificed himself for his brother in the Sixth. The reprint is far too abridged to read well, but in spite of this we can see here, and in No.194, entitled "The Captain's Enemy", the same inimitable hand at work.

Grimsdale was a North Country school, situated on the borders of Lancashire and Yorkshire. The stories appeared originally in the Ranger, "the spanking weekly treat" that

replaced the Popular. The Ranger was meant to be a challenge to the Thomson papers, and it contained a number of serials intended to cater for readers with bizarre tastes. This must be the reason for the uncharacteristic style of the Grimslade stories. There were no less than seven of these in the Schoolboys' Own Library - Nos.232,238,242,248, 252,254, and 256, and all of them have that queer touch of the Thomson House papers in them. Dr.Semmy Spershott was the fighting headmaster of Grimslade, and was not averse to boxing with his pupils instead of flogging them. He was the real hero of the stories, though ostensibly Jim Dainty, the new boy of the Fourth, who was at first a complete rebel, was meant to co-star with the fat German boy Fritz von Splitz. No doubt the Grimslade serial was the best in the Ranger, but Hamilton fans probably find little lasting pleasure in stories about the school from which no boy was ever expelled.

The High Coombe stories, which were reprinted from the Modern Boy, were a variation of the Grimslade theme, but with much greater effect. Mr.James McCann, like Dr.Semmy Spershott, was a strickler for discipline. But there the resemblance ended, as a perusal of Schoolboys' Owns No.290 "The School for Slackers" and No.299 "The Live-Wire Head" will show. High Coombe was, like Highcliffe, in a state of decay, and the new headmaster had all his work cut out to eliminate the spathy that existed among the masters and the boys. These are stories that will well repay the collector who cares to spend a few hours reading them; lovers of Charles Hamilton's work will find them unusual but stimulating. Charles Hamilton himself has declared that they are some of his finest work.

Oakshott was a Sussex school, and, like High Coombe, the interest centred around the Fifth Form. But though the stories were ostensibly school stories, the hero was in reality a schoolboy detective, Len Lex. Schoolboys' Own Library No.353, "The Schoolboy 'Tec", relates how Len Lex discovered which of the masters at Oakshott was the notorious burglar known as the Sussex Man, and No.371, "Asking for the Sack" is also a detective story, but an even more entertaining one.

With No.371 our delvings into the Schoolboy's Own Library come to an end. Perhaps the most significant fact

that has emerged is the ease and mastery displayed in the story-telling; it is impossible not to be impressed by the versatility of Charles Hamilton, and the astonishing manner in which he indelibly conveys the atmosphere of every school in a few short chapters, whether it was the air of patent sincerity of the St.Kit's stories or the pleasant note of sophistication struck by the tales of Oakshott and High Coombe. Whether the series were long or short, the reader could always be certain of one thing: Charles Hamilton would give of his best.

GROWING OLD GRACEFULLY

By P. A. Walker

It was a lovely day in June. Blue skies and high white clouds. A fresh breeze, and warm sunshine. I washed and shaved with a song on my lips, a song I'd heard on the radio called "This is my lovely day", or something like that. I donned a clean shirt, and decided that I could wear my new suit. A brand new suit! A choice grey pin stripe, with double-breasted jacket. A suit which made me feel dashing and cavalier.

Confident.

With a dark maroon tie, and light grey shirt I felt as though I should either be in the front row of a male chorus, or an up-and-coming Socialist M.P. about to address his constituents. I felt, and knew, that I looked youthful and gay.

So I sallied forth to the local bus stop. Imagine my feelings as I was kicked over the edge of my precipice by a remark, not intended for my ears, from a very choice young lady to her girl friend, equally choice, as they preceded me on to the bus:-

"Who is that old geezer?"

Me! Old geezer?! No, surely not! I glanced around, but appeared to be the only other person in sight. Yes, they meant me! What a blow! And then it dawned on me. To them, mere teen-agers, I was old. I had just passed the 40 mark. I was positively senile. Of course, I was old. I could remember things. I could remember the 1914-1918 war. I could remember Players at ten for sixpence.

I could remember the 1920's, when radio was an affair of cats-whiskers, and you had to find a suitable spot on the chunk of crystal in order to bring in the Savoy Orpheans. I could remember the Palace of Industry at the Wembley Exhibition. I could remember the arrival of the "talkies" and Al Jolson in "The Singing Fool". I could remember.....

And then it occurred to me. There was something else I could remember which nobody could take away. A cherished memory of lovely days, when, in the summer, the sun always seemed to be shining, and it always snowed at Christmas. I could remember red-covered Magnets, and green-covered Gems. What memories are conjured up by the very thought of these!

As I sat on the bus, I reflected that with the passage of the years the number of memories also increase. And the more I reflected on this matter of memories, the more I realised that life in itself is a matter of a storehouse of memory. It is, admittedly, rather difficult to differentiate between pleasant memory and downright sentimentality. As I grow older, I must confess that I become more confused. The early contempt I felt for certain things which I considered should be relegated to the limbo of the past, I now realise are, to somebody, a very real thing. As we go through our day to day existence, I suppose our ultimate goal is the achievement of security, which never seems to arrive. Our memories consist mainly of pleasant ones, usually relating to holidays and high days. A change of job, of surroundings, of people. We remember the beginnings and endings of wars, the day we had our first love affair, the trip we had to the Isle of Wight. Our first experience of joining up. The first bomb we heard explode. We all have our individual memories.

Is there any better memory than one which recalls the pleasure of reading about Herry Wharton and Co. winning that thrilling battle on Little Side? Of Smithy, bent on questionable pursuits beyond the austere precincts of Greyfriars School? Of Levison and his minor? Old Figgins of the New House, and Cousin Ethel? The rascally Cutts and cool Cardew? The terrific thrill, as we handled, almost reverently, the brand new smelling copy of the Magnet on those delicious Monday mornings. The new Boys' Friend 3d Library which contained a magnificent, new, long complete story of the famous chums of Greyfriars School. The browsing through the piles

of books on old bookstalls for a glimpse of that exciting terra-cotta coloured cover which denoted an early Magnet, or that pale lime green which meant an early Gem. These are memories which we forty-year olds cherish, and nothing on earth can replace them.

As I sat on that bus these thoughts gave me solace, and compensated for the loss of youth which, it seems, is, as I was told, fleeting. I remember the day the first Holiday Annual was published. It was early in September 1920, A warm, summery day. It had taken me quite a long time to save up my pennies and odd sixpences to ensure that I could buy this mammoth production. In fact, I have a recollection that I had to forego my Boys' Realm and Penny Popular for several weeks. But, after much publicising on the part of the editor of the Companion Papers, the Holiday Annual appeared, and we held it in our hands for the first time. I recall that to some extent I was rather disappointed with the front cover, and was thrilled to bits with the lists of the famous characters from Greyfriars, St.Jims and Rookwood. And I recollect that, as appears customary with annuals of this type, too many pages were filled up with boring stuff dealing with "How to Make—" or "Fun and Games for your Christmas Party." Who, may one ask, reads these things? And who practises them? I, like thousands of other schoolboys wanted stories about Greyfriars, St.Jims, and Rookwood. Of Nelson Lee and Nipper, and St.Franks. I remember the arrival on the scene of a Boys Friend 3d. Library containing a grand story by Martin Clifford entitled "After Lights Out". Then there was the discovery in a London bookshop of that grand yarn "The Boy Without a Name." Later followed the establishment of the "Schoolboys Own Library" as a regular monthly, and I can recollect having to sometimes slit the top of the pages where they hadn't been cut correctly. What a gigantic thrill is that memory of the arrival of the Christmas Number! Later, in November, the Gem made its appearance with a two-colour cover, followed in early December by the Magnet. Do you remember the joy of finding the chapter-headings suitably decorated with holly and snow? The Editor's Chat festooned with Christmas bunting?

When you come to think about it, those of us who can now see very clearly the approach of middle age, who now glance with some concern at the greying hair, who have lived through two

world wars, seen the advent of radio and the bombing aeroplane, we forty-year olds have got some memories. So I smiled as I watched those two gorgeous girls alight from the bus, their white teeth brilliant against the scarlet gash of their mouths, their nylon clad legs gleaming in the bright morning sunshine.

OLD BOYS' BOOK CLUB

London Section. Annual General Meeting. January 20th.

The fourth anniversary meeting since its inception saw a good gathering at Charlie Wrights abode, Greenwich. Complete with a fine cake graced with four candles and a small globe of the world a very fine time was had by all. The chairman opened the proceedings in good style, his well chosen remarks being well received. Minutes of the last A.G.M. were read and also a very lengthy correspondence. The Hon. Treasurer's report shewed a very sound financial position and the secretary's report for the past year was well received. On a proposal by Harry Homer and seconded by John Geal the present officers were re-elected en bloc, the voting being unanimous, as was also the thanks to the officers for their past labours. Next to be discussed was the forthcoming issue of the Gold Hawk Tom Merry Books and it was with the greatest of pleasure that the club learned that R.J.Macdonald will be illustrating future numbers thanks to the recommendation of the worthy chairman, Len Packmen. When the anniversary cake was cut chairman Len thanks the host and hostess for their very fine effort on the present occasion and then Len's co-founder of the club, Bob Blythe, added his congratulations. "Chums" altogether then settled down to the Eliminator Quiz and intense competition saw a tie for first place between Ron Deacon and Bob Whiter with E.Reynolds third. Replies from the other clubs were read as regards the club badge and it was decided to await their decisions. Chairman Len then announced that he would be accepting an invitation to visit the Midland club next April, on the occasion of their first annual party. The vice-president, Herbert Leckenby then phoned the meeting and had some very interesting conversations with most of the attendance. And thus we face the future with high hopes and the continued success of our great hobby. Next meeting at Blackheath, hosts the popular Deacons on Sunday February 17th. UNCLE BENJAMIN.

NORTHERN SECTION. Meeting, 239 Hyde Park Road, Leeds.

January 12th, 1952

(NOTE: As I was "on the stage" part of the time, thoughtful Gerry Allison volunteered to write the report for this occasion. Thanks, Gerry. - H.L.)

Outside, a brilliant full moon and sparkling frost. Indoors, a roaring fire and the warm comradeship of the Old Boys' Book Club.

Bill Williamson again deputized for our absent Chairman, Reg Hudson, who we sincerely hope will be with us again soon. Bill gave an especial welcome to Ernest and Mrs. Hubbard of Sheffield who were among the 14 members present.

After the minutes and report of the Xmas party, Secretary Norman Smith announced that the branch has now a muster roll of 80. During the past month three new members having joined. These are Mr. F. Lees, Oldham; Mr. V. Smith, Manchester, and Mr. D. V. Everingham, York.

Followed the report from Treasurer/Librarian. Gerry Allison stated that at the end of 1951 the Club had £9.7.10¹/₂ in hand, whilst the library now had over 1000 books, and was valued conservatively at £50. A satisfactory position indeed.

Gerald also acknowledged the gift of 12 Marvels from W. T. Thurbon of Cambridge. These included No.1 and Mr. Thurbon has suggested the formation of a collection of No.1's to be known as The Herbert Leckenby Collection. This, as a token of appreciation to the Editor of the "Collectors Digest" for his work on behalf of the hobby.

After these, and other business matters, the meeting heard a very enjoyable talk given by "our Herbert" on "The Joys and Sorrows of a Collector". This was a real treat and full of delightful human touches ranging from tragedy to sheer comedy. There was a very warm ovation for the speaker when he ended his talk.

Then we had an Elimination Quiz on the keyword "Chips". During the solving of this, tea and biscuits were served, and the silence was only broken by the clink of tea-cups, and the murmuring of the engrossed competitors. Tom Roach was the winner with 17 points. Tom showed a remarkable knowledge of minor characters in the lesser known books and he won comfortably, being given a free loan of library books (Gems) as a prize.

Then we let our hair down, and joy and good fellowship reigned supreme! A very happy meeting.

Report of the Christmas Beano of the MIDLAND SECTION

We had the big L-shaped lounge of the Townsend Club and when I arrived on the evening of Saturday December 15th Jack Corbett and the three Deveys had transformed its inner look with loads of holly and mistletoe and they were busy blowing up a couple of dozen balloons. I know now what they think of me because they piled the balloons on to me and said I was just the man to fill them up. The Townsend Club is a teetotal establishment, and Jack Corbett did not say what was in the case of bottles he had brought along. An examination of some revealed that their original labels had been obliterated with white labels bearing the innocent inscription **MRS MIMBLE GREYFRIARS POP**. We decorated the walls with Magnets, Gems, S.O.Ls etc. Then members rolled in. There were 20 club members and 4 friends altogether. Our Treasurer's wife, Mrs. Gregory, had come with Norman, and we all hope that she will come again. Let's not forget the charming lady singing by the piano, Miss Fletcher. It was our first meeting with her and we sincerely hope to repeat the pleasure. What did we have to eat? Sandwiches, cakes, fruit tarts, jelly, trifle, stewed fruit, apples, oranges, coffee and tea. I wish you all could have seen the cake kindly presented by George Smellwood. It was large, heavily iced, delicious, and rich. On top in icing was written OLD BOYS BOOK CLUB, and all round were pink icing panels bearing the names of the club officers and Greyfriars characters. Dancing, fun and games followed. Then a scene from a Magnet Xmas Ghost Story at Wharton Lodge was read by Mr. Devey in candlelight. Followed George Smellwood (who is a professional conjuror) and his assistant Miss Woolley, who entertained us for a short period. Fifteen-year old Wilfred Devey then left the room to fetch in "Marjorie Hazeldene" for a three-episode Greyfriars charade. Marjorie was Yours Truly wearing a blonde wig, a print frock, a string of beads, rayon stockings, pink and lemon bows on my shoes, and loads of cream, powder, and lipstick. I was knitting a grey jumper. Wilfred was very good as Bob Cherry. An awkward moment when Wingate (Wilfred's father) found us alone in Greyfriars cloisters. The whole room was in hysterics. Photos of this were taken.

I'll finish up with hearty thanks to Albert Clack and Arthur Fletcher for their fine efforts at the piano. Cost of this event to each person 4/-. O.K. eh!

PETER L. MELLOR,
Secretary.

MERSEYSIDE SECTION. 9th December, 1951.

The meeting opened 7.30 p.m. There was a good attendance, despite the bad weather. The minutes and statement of accounts were read by the secretary, who availed himself of the opportunity to present to the section a framed drawing of "Gussy" by Bob Whiter.

The chairman then gave a very interesting account of his recent London visit; he was very impressed by the warmth of the welcome he received from our Southern friends.

After refreshments, there was a general discussion on hobby topics, followed by brisk library business, ably conducted by W. Horton, and the meeting closed, after a most enjoyable evening, at 9.30 p.m.

F. JASE, Secretary.

6th January, 1952.

Proceedings opened at 7.30 p.m. After the secretary had read the minutes and submitted a statement of accounts, the chairman gave a detailed and interesting report on the progress made during the past month, particularly with regard to press publicity. If the results anticipated from this source materialise a busy and successful 1952 is assured for the section.

After refreshments the company participated in a most entertaining quiz. This was followed by library business (incidentally our librarian, Bill Horton, informed us that we now possess approximately 100 books and papers, which is most gratifying in view of the section's short period of existence.)

Next meeting, 3rd February, will feature a talk by Jim Walsh on one of his favourite extracts from the "Magnet".

F. CASE, Secretary.

OFFERS INVITED for Specimen Number One copies of Gem, S.O.L. and Penny Populer. Bill Martin, 93 Hillside, Stonebridge Park, London, N.W.10.

THE NELSON LEE COLUMN

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

I'm afraid that this month's column is going to be rather skimpy, for two reasons. First, have you ever had a feeling of lassitude, particularly when you've got a cold coming on, when you just can't rake up the energy to do anything? Well, that's me at the moment! Secondly, unless I write something now I shall be too late for inclusion in this number. So what's a chap to do? Personally, I'm taking the line of least resistance and giving myself a holiday.

However, so that the N.L. will not be completely out of the picture, I'm giving the lists of the titles and serials.

Finally, before I sign off, I would like to ask your help. You know it's an awful strain on the old gear box at times to know just what to write about, but unless someone offers their services it rests with me to keep the flag flying each month. So how about it some of you 60 odd N.L. collectors? Particularly wanted are articles on the various characters.

And so to 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.32, Rays of Death, by John Breerley. The Fags' Union. 33, K.K.'s Secret. 34, It's an Old Spanish Custom. 35, K.K.'s "K"ompany. 36, Unmasked, by John Breerley. Handy's First Prize. 37, Glutton and Goalkeeper (Brook's name does not appear as the author of this story.) 38, Hendforth the Hypnotist. 39, K.K "K'nabs the Kudos. 40, The Avenger, by John Breerley. Safety Last. 41, Archie's New Valet. 42, Hendy's Firework Fiasco. 43, The Last Round, by John Breerley. Saints v. Friars. (In this story for the first time Greyfriars is featured. Brooks' name is not given as the author. Personally I think it was written by one of the "Magnet" sub-writers.) 44, K.K.'s Birthday Party. 45, Trevers Trouble "Tressure". 46, The Phantom of the Grange. 47, The Death Grip (?Brooks) Handy the Conjuror. 48, Fake Diamonds Foes. 49, Gunmen at St Franks. 50, "Put 'em Up, St.Franks".

and the Serials.

1st N.S. No.160-173. Rivals of the Rampart, by Stanton Hope. Reprinted in Boys' Friend 4d Lib. 2nd Ser. No.263.

174-185. The Island Castaways, by A. S. Hardy. Rep. B.F. 4d Lib. 2nd Ser. No.246.

1st N.S. No.186 to 2nd N.S. No.3. The Four-legged Eagle (Ferrers Locke and Jack Drake). 2nd N.S. No.3-22, The Iron Speedman, by Alfred Edger. Rep. B.F. 4d Lib. 2nd Ser. No.299. No.23-49, Knights of the Road, by David Goodwin. Rep.B.F. 4d Lib. 2nd Ser. No.315. 50-68, The Valley of Hot Springs, by Ledbrooke Black. 69-83, The Phantom Foe by John Brearley. Rep. B.F. 4d Lib. 2nd Ser. No.362. 84-106. Outlawed, by David Goodwin. Rep. B.F. 4d Lib. 2nd Ser. No.347. 107-128, The City of Gold, by Herbert Ford.

From here to No.141 there were no serials.

142-155, Cock of the Walk. Reprinted from N.L. 1st N.S. No's 21-25.

WANTED: In good condition. "Union Jacks" 896, 908, 910, 964, 969, 1030, 1032, 1040, 1051, 1052, 1053, 1059, 1115, 1454. Good price paid for any of these numbers. L.Peckman, 27 Archdale Road, East Dulwich, London, S.E.22.

FOR DISPOSAL: Odd numbers Union Jack, $\frac{1}{2}$ d Pluck, 1d to 2d Boys' Friend, Red Arrow, Nelson Lee, Modern Boy, Ranger, Bullseye, Surprise, 1d Gem, Rover, Stariler, Wild West, Boys Magazine, 1-146, Early Aldine Libraries. Scores of Victorian Journals. Sell or Exchange for Boys of London, Ally Sloper, Aldine Libraries, $\frac{1}{2}$ d Union Jacks. Grainger, Alexandra Road, Redruth, Cornwall.

EXCHANGE: Girl's Own Annual's Vol 2.3.4.10, not in good condition. For any of the following: The Union Jack (G.A.Henty) Vol.1.3.4. Boys Own Annual, Vol.1 to 9. Chums Vol 1 to 10.12.14. Young England Vol.2 60 34, 39. or any G.A.Henty, first editions. I am also willing to pay, moderate prices only, for any of the above. R.A. McGerva, 220 Sissons Road, Leeds 10. Yorkshire.

WANTED: Brooks "Green Triangle" yarns; Non-St.Jims Gems; any Populars. E. V. Hughes, 38 East Front Road, Pagham Beach, Nr. Bognor Regis.

LETTER BOX

(1)

Hamilton & Co. (Stafford) Ltd.
1 & 2, Melville Court,
Goldhawk Road, W. 12.
31st December, 1951.

Dear Mr. Leckenby,

Thank you for your letter of the 29th inst. The answer to your query as to whether supplies of our Tom Merry titles can be obtained direct from us is "Yes". The price will be 1/9d, postage paid, and an appropriate note to this effect will be included on the pamphlets sent to you.

Thank you for your suggestion re utilizing the services of the original artist, Mr. R.J. Macdonald, for our covers. I think this is an excellent idea, which we will investigate immediately. However, I will say to you that, in our opinion, our present artist is equal in stature to Macdonald, and we feel very sure that the actual reproductions will come up to the best of Macdonald's work. However, I do appreciate there is an underlying reason for the use of one of the original artists, and thank you for your suggestion.

Your remarks regarding Fleet Street are also greatly appreciated, and we had already got something like this in mind.

With sincere thanks for your kind co-operation,

Yours truly, for HAMILTON & CO (STAFFORD) LTD.
H. ASSAEL, Director.

.....

(2)

15th January, 1952.

Dear Mr. Leckenby,

Thank you very much for your copy of the January issue of "Collectors' Digest." I think you have done very well with the reproduction of the cover of our first Tom Merry title having regard to the handicaps of the paper used.

I note that the original which was sent you is still in use at the moment, but no doubt you will be passing it forward to Mr. Packman for return to us in due course.

May I take this opportunity of registering my appreciation for your very kind co-operation. If there are any additional suggestions which you care to offer to help promote sales of this series, I can assure you they will always be welcome. Yours sincerely, for Hamilton & Co. (Stafford) Ltd.
H. ASSAEL, Director.

Frank Richards Still Busy

January 14th, 1952.

Dear Herbert Leckenby,

Many thanks for the C.D. to-day: still as good as ever. The enclosed leaflet makes quite interesting reading too. It has so long been my desire to see my books in paper backs at a moderate price, that I am as pleased as Punch now that it has happened.

But I am sorry to have to tell you that the projected monthly will not materialise after all. It turned out to be incompatible with other commitments, and so had to be dropped. I still hope, however, that something of the kind will be coming along later in a rather different form from a different quarter. In the meantime I am not very sorry to have a breathing-space, for I am up to the ears in the new Tom Merry books: and I do want to keep one day a week free for some very special work I have lately taken in hand.

With kindest regards,

Always yours sincerely,

FRANK RICHARDS.

FOR SALE: Tom Merry's Annual (first edition) 4/-; S.O.L's Nos. 366, 369 and 393 bound, 4/-; bound vol. of 14 Nelson Lees 1931 odd complete tales, 6/6d; 7 Rangers 2/-; Thomson books for the last three years 4d dozen; all plus postage. P. J. Checkley, 18 Tarlington Road, Coundon, Coventry.

Magnet Titles (contd.) (S) denotes Substitute.

831 (S) The Greyfriars Newspaper. 832 (S) The Waywardness of Wibley. 833 (S) The Greyfriars Flood. 834, Coker's Brainwave. 835 (S) Meuly's Amazing Adventure. 836 (S) Bunter's Poor Relation. 837 (S) The White Feather. 838 (S) The Young Pretender. 839 (S) Duffer and Hero. 840 (S) The Rebel of the Second. 841 Fishy's Treasure. 842 (S) True to His Word. 843, Pen's Pal. 844 (S) The Plundered School. 845 (S) Inky's Peril. 846, Too Clever of Skinner. 847 (S) The Secret of Shark's Tooth. 848, The Berring of Bunter. 849 (S) Capped for Greyfriars. 850 (S) The Outcast of the Remove.

DO YOU REMEMBER 'KINEMA COMIC'?by S.F.Armitage

"Hope you will get a little nostalgia out of it" said Herbert Leckenby in an accompanying letter to a 1930 "Kinema Comic" which he was kind enough to send me recently after I had mentioned that this publication and its stable companion "Film Fun" (the only one of the pair now running) formed my earliest literature. And although comics are a bit outside the scope of the O.B.B.C. I hope readers may be interested in a few brief reminiscences of those papers as I knew then around 1920.

As many collectors know, fictional humorous adventures of current film comedians formed their staple attraction each week, so that looking back to early issues gives a fair cross-section of the star comedians who were popular at the time. For instance, the issue of 8th Nov. 1930 contains the pictorial adventures of Chester Conklin, Louise Fazenda, Lloyd Hamilton, Syd Chaplin, Ford Sterling (one of the "Keystone" cops), Ben Turpin and Charlie Conklin, Harry Langdon and Walter Forde.

However even then the cinema had begun to change, and its effects reached down even to the "fan" comics. The early 1920's, when I read "Film Fun" and "Kinema Comic" were the days when the two-reel comedy (silent, of course) reigned supreme and formed a recognised and indispensable part of any cinema programme. The number of comedians (mainly American) was far larger than today, although goodness knows we are in greater need of laughter in the cinema than ever we were.

I knew many of these comedians through the pages of these comics long before I ever saw them on the screen - some, in fact, I never saw. Names which come back to mind, in addition to those

already mentioned, are Harold Lloyd, Snub Pollard, Larry Semon, Jackie Coogan, Grook (the clown), Max Linder (the French comedian), Slim Sumnerville, Polly Moran, Mabel Normand, Mack Swain, Buster Keaton, Charlie Murray, and a host of others. The greatest of them all, Charlie Chaplin, never appeared in either paper, having already been copyrighted by "Chips" or "Comic Cuts" (I forget which).

How many of these comedians are remembered to-day? Many have died, and few survived the introduction of sound films. All were featured in American comedies, and as few if any British comedians appeared to have made a name at that time, "Film Fun" and its companion were inevitably all-American in character. To-day almost the reverse is the case, and in "Film Fun" British stars such as George Formby, Claude Hulbert, etc. predominate. However, as comedians are not anything like as prominent in cinema programmes to-day, I should imagine that their adventures in print have not the same appeal for the present generation of children - although, of course, I may be wrong. My own children seem to read it with avidity, so it is probably the adventures rather than the subject that attract.

I was always impressed, even as a boy, by the consistently bright and cheerful note maintained by the humorists who wrote the adventures week by week; it has a sprightly effervescence which never flagged, and there was a quip in every line. I have often wondered since how much these writers were paid for their task! Many of those hoary "gags" I occasionally spring on people to-day - and they always laugh. I should imagine some of those authors would make good script writers to-day. The main weakness was that the characters always appeared in the same dress in every adventure, and never altered their expression.

 B L A K I A N A

February 1952.

Editor: H.M. Bond, 10, Erw Wen, Rhiwbina, Cardiff, S.Wales.

You will probably wonder why the usual "Round Table" heading has disappeared this month. Well, I have been thinking that one cannot really have Round Table chats when one sits alone - for that is what I have been doing for the past month or two. Not a single article or suggestion has come along in support of this section's request and I am beginning to wonder if the old Blake enthusiasts have now completely forsaken their old love. I know that I have been rather lax in several ways in relation to the hobby, but in the light of the formation of the S.B. Circle and the efforts of one or two (notably Harry Homer) on behalf of the Man from Baker Street, I should have thought that at least a few letters would have arrived at No. 10. But no, January has been an absolutely dead month for correspondence.

I am now going to ask you all, once again, to write or send along some little contribution for Blakiana. I am not worried about the length of contributions or on what phase of Blake lore they deal with, but I MUST have material if this section is to continue. Should nothing be done in this matter it will be goodbye to Blakiana, and I am sure none of you wish this to happen. Come along chaps! What did you think of Harry Homer's "Yvonne" feature in the Annual. How would YOU improve Blakiana if you had the chance? What are your favourite Blake stories? How long have you been reading Blake and how were you introduced to him? Some of these questions might encourage you to "have a go"! 1952 should be a great Blake year. The formation of the S.B. Circle alone should give the hobby a fresh impetus. But you must play your part. Please heed this appeal and at the same time accept my most sincere apologies if you are one of those who have written to me in the past and failed to get a reply. I promise that ALL future letters and articles etc will be duly acknowledged.

H.M. BOND.

Chapter Seven.

Should this state secret fall into the hands of the powerful and aristocratic clique surrounding the Tsar's throne then the lives of thousands and the liberty of millions would be imperilled. Thus, with revolution and bloodshed as the price to be paid in the event of their failure to win through, Blake, Tinker and Pedro fought their way through, and it must be admitted that the author, in relating the many thrilling adventures the three underwent in their quest, gave us a very wealthy Blake narrative. In those days Pedro got quite a lot of the limelight without, however, reaping much reward for his doggy efforts. But on this occasion, in recognition of them, he was presented with a new collar, with a gold plate upon which was engraved the Royal monogram, and whilst no doubt this gift from H.M. King Edward was a proud moment in the lives of Pedro's masters, it is safe to assume that the bloodhound would much have preferred a nice jockey bone from the Royal household! One of the most unusual cases for Sixton Blake was when he had to deal with what related in the story "The Missing 12" (see U.J. No. 150). Thirteen husbands have deserted their wives and left them chargeable to the Rates, the Shenwick Board of Guardians offered the sum of sixty five pounds as reward for the arrest of the missing men, following a stormy meeting of ratepayers who, after unanimously condemning the guardians, called for the immediate resignation of the chairman, one Mr. Denby Grimes. With the next election seen to be fought out, and facing the prospect of getting kicked out of office, they were in a spot. It was in desperation that Denby Grimes called on his friend Sixton Blake, and begged the investigator's aid in tracing the vanished husbands. An unusual commission and hardly worthy of Blake's talents, yet the detective good humouredly decided to help his friend out of his predicament.

Chapter 8 next month.

THE SIXTON BLAKE CIRCLE.

All correspondence re above to Harry Homer, Yulden farm
Heathfield. Sussex.

ROBERT MURRAY - ANTHONY SKENEA COMPARISON

My knowledge of Robert Murray, the gifted author of the Confederation yarns, is very limited - in fact it is nil. I hope Mr. Murray's fans will forgive me for making this admission. I can assure them I do not mean to be unkind for the Union Jack Confederation yarns were my favourites until Anthony Skene's character Zenith started to appear in 1918. Murray of course was writing the Confederation yarns sometime before Skene started to contribute to the Amalgamated Press.

Where Robert Murray, in my opinion, most closely resembled Skene was in the fact that his (Murray's) best work was to be found roughly in his first twenty yarns culminating in the yarn where the Duchess of Jorsica appeared and where Reece got killed by a giant octopus. I don't think Murray ever did anything so good after that. The last mentioned yarn was, in my opinion, the opposite number of Anthony Skene's "Plague". Skene never produced anything so good again after "Plague".

I am not too sure whether my facts are correct here, but Murray seemed to go off the rails a bit in his yarn where John Smith, Reece and Sir Phillip Champion were finally tried and sentenced at the Old Bailey. John Smith was, I think, the President of the Confederation, Reece being only second-in-command yet by a peculiar anomaly Reece was reckoned the greater criminal genius - in fact in Anthony Skene's yarn "The Case of the Toxic Tulips" Reece was stated to be with Kestrel, Zenith and Waldo, one of the world's four greatest criminal geniuses. However, in the famous trial which Murray describes so well, John Smith, the President escapes the death sentence while Reece, who presumably acted under his orders and direction, gets the death penalty because of the greater magnitude of his crimes.

Murray's Sexton Blake was not such a big man as Skene's Blake, who weighed 200 lbs, except in the "Case of the Elsingham Legend" where for some reason he dropped to 180 lbs. Nevertheless Murray's Blake was capable of great feats of strength such as the occasion when although drugged by the Duchess of Jorsica he almost overcame $\frac{1}{2}$ a dozen men before passing out. This feat of endurance caused the Duchess not only to fall in love with Blake but even to propose marriage to him - only to be rejected.

Like Anthony Skene, Murray used G.H. Teed's famous woman character Yvonne only rarely. Skene introduced Yvonne into 3 yarns only, "Threaten by 3", "In League Against Him" and another yarn whose title I cannot recall. After that Skene dropped Yvonne and used the woman secret service agent Julia Fortune for feminine interest.

I don't think Murray ever wrote for the S.B. Library, whereas Skene did, and the latter writer seemed equally at home in the S.B. Library.

Finally I do not know whether it is due to the fact that the Amalgamated Press have a tight hold on their copyrights which prevents publishers for acting, but I have often thought what good novels some of the old Union Jack yarns would make. I refer to those which ran in a series like the five Union Jack yarns about the "Fifth Man" by Anthony Skene. I think Gwyn Evans used the "automatons" in his Union Jack yarns for one of his novels, and I once put the idea up to Anthony Skene as regards using his "Fifth Man" and "Gargoyle" stories as a novel.

However, good for you Mr. Skene and you Mr. Murray.

S. Young.