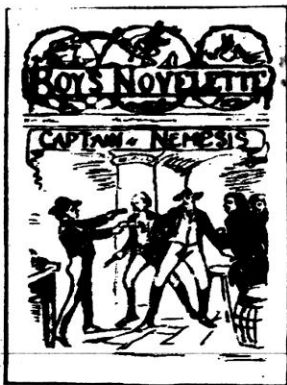


The Collectors' Digest.

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The Boy's
Novelette
(about 1889)
No. 23. Vol. 1.

Story by
J.N. Pentelow



The
Collectors'
Digest



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NOVEMBER 1952

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

FROM THE EDITOR'S CHAIR

Shock!! Last month you would see a rather criptic notice telling of the necessity to speed up the Annual. Let me explain.

Just after returning from my holiday I got a shock, a real shock, for Mr. Wood, of the duplicating agency, told me he might shortly be giving up his business and going to South Africa. This has now become a certainty and he will be leaving early in the new year.

Now, for six exhilarating, eventful years, through sunshine, storm and stress, our little magazine has never once feiled its readers. This has been in no small measure due to the splendid cooperetien of Mr. Philip Wood. It has not just been just a business transaction on his part, he has taken a real genuine interest in the venture he helped to launch. For instance, round about the first of the month I begin to address and stamp the envelopes. Then one evening I go down to his premises with the packet under my arm, there to find the month's issue awaiting me. I get busy slipping them into the envelopes, and piling them in fifties. As they

have to be passed over the G.P.O. counter I leave them, go off contentedly to supper, and Mr. Wood makes the journeys to the post office next morning. That's just an example of his friendly gestures.

Well, what of the future? I was naturally a little perturbed at first, but Mr. Wood assures me that there is every likelihood that the business will be taken over by a friend who will carry on the good work. That is a relief for it would be far less easy for me if the job had to be done out of York. Anyway, the next two numbers will come along just as of yore and the Annual will catch the Christmas mails for the sixth time.

And there I will leave it for the moment.

+ + +

Articles: I was telling you last month of the interesting chat I had with Mr. G. T. Hollis, of the Oxford University Press. One of the questions he asked me was about copy - did I ever find myself short of it? I was able to assure him that never once over the six years had I had the experience, in fact, it was the least of my worries. He said that was really remarkable, for usually with house, staff and similar magazines, after the first enthusiasm had worn off the poor editor found he was left to write most of the magazine himself.

Well, I have been in a happier position, thanks to the loyalty and enthusiasm of so many members of the clan. But, for the first time, I do find my articles file getting rather thin. So what about replenishing it? That applies to all of you, including Hamiltonians. And a special word to Lee fans again. Bob Blythe tells me that so far there has been little response to his appeal for support. This is really inexplicable. In preparing the Annuals "Who's Who" I am impressed by the considerable number of Lee-ites we have, and the large collections many of them possess. Yet so few of them trouble to get down to the job of giving their favourites their rightful place in the sun. It's a real mystery, for in those nine hundred odd numbers there's boundless opportunity. Now, what about it, Lee-ites.

And I might say that the articles we have had recently on papers like "The Modern Boy" and "The Boys' Magazine" have caused a lot of interest. Let's have more of them. Also more of those which go much further back like that by Harry Stebles in this issue. They all help to make a real good blend.

The "Annual": All goes well. Since last writing I have received J. Breeze Bentley's "Levison at Greyfriars", (You know where his last year's article was placed in the voting); Eric Fayne's "Single to Happiness" which deals with outstanding single stories in Gem and Magnet; and Harry Dowler's "Arthur S. Hardy, Sport Story Writer". Yes, we're getting on. And, oh yes, the cover by Bob Whiter. Some of you, Roy Bennett especially, have appealed for something Christmassy. Well, you're going to get it.

+ + +

A Fleet Street Friend Passes. The Street of Ink lost one of its greatest and most lovable characters when Ian Mackey died with such tragic suddenness during the Labour Party Conference at Morecambe. A few minutes before he had made a speech on behalf of his Press colleagues, a speech which some declared was just about the wittiest of the whole conference.

"Ian Mackey's Diary" in the "News Chronicle" was also one of the finest columns in present day journalism. He wrote delightfully with real pawky Scots humour on almost every topic ^{under} the sun, by no means least on the grand old papers in which we are interested. He must have been an avid reader of them in his youth, for more than once he devoted his whole article to whimsical comments on Greyfriars, St. Jim's, Sexton Blake and the rest. It is sad to think he will write no more.

Yours sincerely,

HERBERT LECKENBY

FOR SALE: 50 consecutive issues "Marvel" Nos. 902-951 (1921-1922) in mint condition. 7 "Pluck" Nos. 233-370 (1909-11). 6 "Marvel" Nos. 617-791 (1915-19). 3 "Boys' Friend" green weeklies (1903-06). "Tom Merry's Own" (Mendeville) mint. Large bundle very old "Boys' Own Papers". Will accept £3 for the lot, plus 2/6d. post and packing. Adsley, 17 Abergarw Road, Brynmenyn, Nr. Bridgend, Glam.

FOR SALE, EXCHANGE and WANTED: Magnets, S.O.L's, Nelson Lees, Holiday Annuals, and Monster Libraries. Also for disposal Champion Annuals 1926 onwards and Tom Merry books 4/- each. G. Highton, 14 Greyhound Road, Willesden, London, N.W.

COLLECTOR'S MISCELLANY, No. 21. Free for S.A.E. Parks, Printer, Saltburn-by-Sea, Yorks.

POPULAR PAPERS OF THE PAST

No. 21 - Our Boys' Journal. (Bretts)
Wed. Aug. 30/1876 - Wed. Feb. 14/1883. 338 Numbers.

By Harry Stables

Brett gave as a reason for starting "Our Boys' Journal" that he had received so many requests from "Boys of England" and "Young Men of Great Britain" readers to republish favourite stories from those papers that he had decided to start a new journal which would contain one new story and two re-printed ones.

As my collection starts at No. 53, the first number of Vol. 3, I can't say much about the early numbers. It was Boys of England size, 12 inches by 8½. There were sixteen pages, three columns to a page of easily read type printed on fairly good paper. Edwin J. Brett was Editor.

Though the stories were well written, paragraphs rarely exceeded two sentences, and the conversation was melodramatic and stagey.

In No. 53 there were three serials and two series of stories running. Also serial articles on "The History of the Russian Emperors", and on "Summer Recreations". There were also Puzzles, Jokes, Poems, and adverts for Bretts' other publications, together with "Our Letter Box", comprising answers to correspondents. The two latter took the place of an Editor's Chat. Free gifts were included every fortnight, so boys of that period got a good pennyworth. The gifts varied. A sheet of scenes or characters for a model theatre, or a model-building ready to cut out and stick together, or a picture.

The Journal's pictorial heading had Britannia as the central figure, but instead of carrying a trident her left hand rested on an anchor. A lion stands at the other side. Three flags form each end of the design, and in between these and the central figure are figures symbolical of Sport, Learning, Army, Navy, History, and one, a Crusader, that may be either History or Religion.

It is impossible to enumerate all the serials that appeared in this paper. Whether they were new ones or re-prints was generally indicated in announcements appearing about a fortnight before the story commenced.

Christmas Numbers were extra ones sold with the paper

for the week in which they were issued. A notice in No.64 says "The grand Christmas Number of OUR BOYS' JOURNAL will be published with No.66." Among the stories it contained was one entitled "The Ghostly Bells, or, The Fifth Grave from the Porch". The price of the double number was twopence.

No.82 (March 20/1876) gave us "Young Jack Harkaway at School", and "His Adventures in Search of His Father". There was a note to the effect that it was written in America, and was one of the many brought into existence by the success of the English-written ones and therefore had no connection with the Jack Harkaway stories in "Boys of England".

The illustrations, though unsigned, were excellent and averaged one to each instalment of a serial; but though the serial stories were limited in their number of illustrations the articles were not. One on British Butterflies ran for nine weeks and gave pictures of seventy-five butterflies.

The fortnightly gifts had now ceased, but others were issued occasionally.

"Young Jack Harkaway at School" was followed in No.94 by "Young Jack Harkaway; or, All Among the Pirates"; and this in turn, was followed in No.109 by "The Isle of Palms; or, The Lest Stronghold of the Black Flags." This was the third and last part of "Young Jack Harkaway's Schooldays". Evidently adventurous journeys to dangerous realms by St.Frank's and other schoolboys were not very original after all.

Occasionally the back page was filled with Comic Pictures, but these had an atmosphere of "Ally Sloper" or "Judy" about them.

About No.127 "Our Letter Box" ceased to be a weekly feature, though it still appeared at irregular intervals, and a little later faded out altogether.

In No.155 started "Oscar of Albion", or, a Briton's Revenge", picturing Britain in Druidical Times. It deserves mention here because Brett published the author's name. It was given as Leigh Bow.

There started in No.119 a reprint serial from "Young Men of Great Britain", "The Scapegrace of the School; or, The Adventures of Dick Lightheart". This was now followed, in No.160, by a sequel bearing the tremendous title of "The Scapegrace at Sea; or, The Adventures of Dick Lightheart On the Sea, Under the Sea, On the Land, and in the Centre of the Earth." I don't wish to cast any aspersions but the

under the sea portion introduced a mysterious Captain Homo who owned a submarine boat. He didn't, however, call it "The Nautilus". The story was as long as its title as it ran to ninety-one chapters. Then in No.194 it was succeeded by another sequel, "The Scapegrace of London". One illustration to the latter gives an idea of the kind of humour prevailing in those days. It depicts a lobster hanging by the claws between two gentlemen. One claw holds number one gentlemen by the nose while the other holds number two by the ear.

In No.218, Oct.27/1880, three serials started. "Alone in the Pirate's Lair", "Who shall be Leader?", and "Chevy Chase". These were the three serials that appeared in No.1 of "Boys of England". Evidently, Brett's original intention of one new story to two old ones was beginning to slide overboard. As three other serials were still running, that particular number had six serials besides part of the first story in a series that started the previous week. It also had a serial article.

Boys of those days liked even their sports articles fierce, and football, fencing, and fishing were replaced by lion-hunting, gorilla-hunting, and kindred pastimes.

Christmas Numbers were got out early. The one for 1881 was published with No.275 on Wed. Nov. 30th. The week before this a serial appeared which had not been previously announced. "The Fatal Cord, a tale of Backwoods Retribution." The author was Capt. Mayne Reid, who had previously written it specially for "Boys of England". A portrait of Mayne Reid occupied the front page in No.277.

In No.302 appeared a new school tale "Unlucky Bob; or Our Boys at School". Unlucky Bob was one Bob Cherry; but, in this case, Bob Cherry played the part of Billy Bunter, for he was the fat boy of the school. The illustrations depict him as a comical looking figure, somewhat less than Bunter both ways. He wore check trousers; his Eton jacket seemed on the point of bursting; and his "topper", perched on the back of his head, would have turned D'Arcy green - but not with envy.

Author's names were becoming quite a feature, for in No.313 came "Jack Steadfast; or, Wreck and Rescue", by James Greenwood. and shortly after, in No.328, "Paul Derwent; or, Driven to Sea". The author, of course, was Percy St. John.

There was no indication in No.338 that anything untoward was about to happen. A notice on the back page said that in No.339 would begin "Frank Freeland; the lad who won the Victoria Cross", and a second serial "The Yellow Chief", by Capt. Mayne Reid.

No.339 never materialized; but the "Boys of England Re-Issue" No.463, dated Feb. 27th, 1883, appeared with the headings of "Our Boys' Journal" and "Young Men of Great Britain Re-Issue" in small facsimile over its own title block. The serials from both papers were taken over, and that particular number contained ten serials besides a short story belonging to a series. It says much for the Editor's generosity that the additional serials were accommodated without unduly inconveniencing the regular readers of the "Boys of England Re-Issue"; but it took that poor thing nine weeks to get back to normal.

TOM MERRY'S OWN

Mandeville Publications, 10/6d.

Yes, it's all from the same master pen this year, every word of it. True, the foreword bears two signatures - Frank Richards and Martin Clifford - but that won't puzzle you.

Pride of place is given to "The Ghost of Billy Bunter", seventy pages of it. "Tom Merry's Christmas Present" is only a little shorter. And this isn't the only story in which St. Jim's plays a part, in particular D'Arcy. For there's "A Lodging for the Night" in which we meet Jack of all Trades once again. A really fine yarn this.

That old favourite King of the Islands reappears in "Jimmy the Shark" and a Carcroft story completes the 208 pages of good, clear type.

Maybe Rookwood fans would have preferred a Jimmy Silver story in preference to the Carcroft one; that's my only criticism.

Last year there were some adverse comments on the illustrations. There won't be this, for the dust jacket comes from the pencil of our own R. J. Macdonald, and it's a real work of art. He does most of the inside illustrations too. It's just like old times.

Final thought. How does the master do it?

Postscript: Just as I completed this came a letter from the Reverend A. G. Pound. He says:

"In Tom Merry's Own" there is a story of Jack of All Trades meeting Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. It is extremely good. That is no overstatement. It is in my opinion, the finest story that Charles Hamilton has written for years. It is the real D'Arcy - not just the chump, but the gentleman, and as such the very best of all Charles Hamilton's characters. It is a story to recommend to everyone. It can be read and enjoyed by people of all ages - a perfect little masterpiece."

Mr. Pound also comments favourably on the other stories.

LETTER BOX (Contd. from p. 356)

Now You Fellows

32, Normacot Road,

Longton,

Stoke-on-Trent, Staffs.

8/10/52

Dear Sir,

Will you send me particulars of the Old Boys Book Club? I am crippled with Infantile Paralysis, and reading is my only comfort in life. Some years ago I had a good collection of Gems, Magnets, Boys' Friends etc., but had to sell them to help my mother when my father died.

Yours sincerely, R. FONE.

(Note:- I have had some correspondence with Mr. Fone, and I feel that if any member blessed with good health could help him in his lonely hours by sending him any odd copies they feel they could spare they would be helping in a good cause.

H.L.)

Treasure "Down Under"

Quote from a letter from Ernie Carter, 2 Cooper Street, Kingsford, Sydney, Australia.

"We struck a treasure chest in Sydney recently - Syd Smyth, Frank Jones, and myself - a collection we bought up - 600 Nelson Lees, 400 Magnets, and 800 Gems!! So you never know what is round the corner, do you? It cost us a considerable sum but was worth it."

(Amazing, isn't it? - H.L.)

Roger Jenkins had an interview with Frank Richards on October 20th, and has written an interesting account of it. Look out for it next month.

HAMILTONIAN

Conducted by Herbert Leckenby

Tom Merry Back at Clavering. Did you know about this, you fellows? In the "Sun" (Amalgamated Press) dated October 25th, there started "Tom Merry's Schooldays" a serial which takes right back to the very beginning! Yes; way back 45 years. The first instalment hurries through the Clavering days and prepares for the departure to St. Jim's. There's been a bit of revising, of course. Dr. Holmes arrives in a car, for instance; otherwise it's very much the same. To add to the nostalgia, there's two illustrations by R. J. Macdonald. I wonder if there is a day coming when we shall really have the Magnet or Gem back once more.

The "Radio Times" Comes a Cropper. My word! The "Radio Times" didn't half make a bloomer the other week. In a cross-word puzzle a clue was "Jolly Tom of Greyfriars" (five letters). Sure enough they gave the answer the following week as "Merry". I wonder how many raps on the knuckles they got. Anyway, they did bow their heads and publish in very small type at the bottom of a column the following:-

Wrong College

The crossword set by Peter Wood
On the whole was rather good,
But when we came to clue twelve down
The answer there raised quite a frown.
Unless the storybooks are liars
Tom Merry wasn't at Greyfriars,
The hero at that famous college
Was Harry Wharton, you'll acknowledge.

Arthur Tyrer Liverpool 11.

Liverpool, eh! How about Frank Case doing a bit of sleuthing again, and track Mr. Tyrer down? Looks like a prospective member for the Merseyside Club.

Coincidence? The "Carlisle Journal" on August 8th published the will of - Mr. Charles Vernon-Smith, Greyfriars, Springs Road, Keswick. Our alert readers don't miss much, do they? Thanks, Mr. Robert Ferish.

Recently Eric Fayne journeyed by air ^{to Singapore} and stayed a few weeks there. Well, as you will remember, one of the best Magnet series of long ago took some of the Greyfriars there. Here vividly he compares their journey with his. It's rather long but I am sure you will agree it's worth all the space devoted to it.

BILLY BUNTER'S SINGAPORE, - and MINE

Way back in the peaceful Thirties, Billy Bunter, with Harry Wharton & Co., Ferrers Locke, and Wun Lung visited Singapore. Twenty years later, in the August of this year of grace, Nineteen Hundred and Fifty-two, I followed them. I wonder what changes I found from the Singapore of Bunter's famous visit.

Bunter and his friends were escorting Wun Lung to the latter's home in China, so that he might be free from the devilment of the mandarin, Tang Wang and the Red Dragon Tong. In the thousands of Chinese whom I brushed shoulders with this August, I wonder if I met any of the emissaries of the fiendish mandarin. If so, they left me alone, though the smell of garlic which emanated from their persons sometimes made me wonder if they were trying to poison me. At any rate, I saw plenty of Red Dragons in Singapore's Chinatown.

Frank Richards called Singapore the "Queen City of the Far East". Nobody to whom I spoke had ever heard it referred to quite so euphemistically, but it is certainly an interesting city. Whether it has any right to be called the Queen City I cannot say, but it is certainly the "Lion City". The name Singapore comes from two Sanskrit words, "Singa Pura", meaning "Lion City", and recalls the time before the arrival of Islam when Indian influence was predominant. Even to-day, the Malays call it "Tumasik", - Sea Town, - because of its mangrove swamps and its proximity to the sea.

Harry Wharton and Co. threw Malayan silver dollars (worth 2/4 to-day) into the sea, and watched them being dived for by the young men of the "Orang Kallang", sea people. To-day they could not do that, for just before World War Two the practice was stopped after one of the divers was eaten by a shark.

As the "Silver Star", Ferrers Locke's yacht, approached the Lion City, Bob Cherry said emphatically, speaking of the view, "Glorious". And Johnny Bull said "Jolly!"

They were both right. As the passenger leans over the deck-rail and watches Singapore island come into view, he will see it turn from a mauve-tinted mound set in an emerald sea into a strip of land, lush with green vegetation and speckled with warm patches of colour. Palm trees give way to the famous sky-line of the city, with the great Cathay Cinema towering in the background like a stern sentinel.

Actually, I did not see it like that when I first arrived in Singapore, but I was really just as fortunate as Bob Cherry. I arrived by Air, - and going into Singapore by Air is an unforgettable experience. As the plane approached the island in the blazing red sun of early evening, I saw the beauty of the coastline, broken here and there by patches of red and white that mark the built-up areas. This panorama soon gave way to a view of the extensive harbour, and, as the plane banked, the Singapore River became visible.

But the greatest beauty of Singapore to me at that moment was that I was meeting my very best pal there, - the finest fellow in the world. However, I am digressing.

Billy Bunter did not appreciate the view of Singapore harbour, as the graceful yacht steamed in.

"It's hot!" grunted Bunter. "Now we're going to be cooked in Singapore." He was right. Singapore's climate is hot and humid with an average maximum temperature for the whole year of 86 degrees F. and a minimum of 75 degrees F. Personally, it suited me down to the ground. Rainfall averages 95 inches, though very little fell during my month in the Lion city.

Billy Bunter wanted something more material than scenery, so Bob Cherry informed him sarcastically that there was a tramway ashore. "I'm glad," snorted Bunter. "I'd like to see something civilised. I'm glad there's trams."

Well, there are no trams in Singapore to-day. I could not find anybody who ever remembered a tram there. I asked our "wog" whether he had seen trams in the Lion City. He could not understand me, so I drew what I thought was a fair picture of a tram. He nodded in delight.

"Oh, yes," he informed me. "Plenty of babies' cradles in Singapore."

That was my last effort at Art in the Lion City. It is probable that there were trams when Billy Bunter went to the Far East twenty years ago, for there is a system of dilapidated and dirty trolley-buses at the present time.

When they went ashore, Bunter commented, "Fancy motor-cars here, you know." Harry Wherton replied, "Fathead! There are hundreds of cars here!"

And so there are. Huge post-war cars, seemingly in their millions, race at break-neck speed all over the island. I have been in towns all over Europe, but I have never seen a traffic system so terrifying as that of Singapore. Cars big and small but mostly big,- taxis in swarms,- motor-cycles,- trishacars,- they tear along en masse. When you drive along, they pass you on either side, roaring through where there is a small opening, or even where there isn't. Accidents give a continuous performance. The death-rate on the roads is enormous. Fortunately they have big families in the Lion City, so perhaps the loss of one or two now and then is not noticed. I have driven in the rush hours of London, Paris, Brussels, Genoa, and York without turning a hair. But I was a craven coward on the roads of Singapore.

Billy Bunter insulted a Malay gentleman by referring to him as a nigger. Frank Richards mentioned the quiet courtesy of the Malayan race, and, as usual, he was completely accurate. The Malays are a virile and carefree race. True sons of the soil, they are by nature courteous, and have a dignity which prompted Frank Richards, and other writers, to refer to them as "Nature's gentlemen".

Bunter wanted to take a Jinricksha, and as there was only one Jinricksha in sight, he characteristically decided to have that one himself. That was twenty years ago.

To-day there are no Jinrickshaws in Singapore. That colourful contrivance has been replaced since the war by the Trishaw,- or Trisha Car. It is really a cycle-rickshaw. Bunter could hardly have the experience of finding only one of these conveyances, for they swarm in every street. Thousands of Trishaws,- strange and colourful contraptions,- weave through Singapore traffic, giving motorists a headache with their unpredictable manoeuvres.

When the Greyfriars chums paid their visit to Singapore Frank Richards commented, "In Singapore, as in other cities of the Far East, one takes a rickshaw as one takes a taxi in the West."

That is hardly so to-day. Probably a few visitors have a Trishaw ride, just for the novelty. A thousand times during my stay over there, a Trishaw man slowed up beside

me, vigorously ringing his bell, and in weird jargon, invited me to ride. I never did, though, and I never once saw a white man riding in a Trishaw.

Most white folk ride in taxis, which swarm like ants, for the buses are dirty and pecked with natives. The experienced traveller does not ask the taxi-driver what the charge is. He pays what he thinks is a reasonable fare, - and leaves the driver cursing in some weird jargon. To avoid being swindled in Singapore is a full-time job, and it becomes quite a pastime.

While Billy Bunter was being kidnapped by the rascally rickshaw driver, the rest of the Co. went to the Botanical Gardens. So did I, following the example of the famous. It is an interesting spot. No doubt the chums were informed that it was in the Botanical Gardens that the Malayan rubber industry had its birth, and saw some of the oldest rubber trees in Malaya, - trees which have lived, maybe, since the start of the industry. The lake is beautiful, with water-lilies and lotus flowers, and I guess that the chums walked past the lake into the patch of virgin jungle, where bands of friendly, chattering monkeys descend from the trees, some tightly clutching their offspring to their breasts, to accept titbits from sightseers. My pal and I bought nuts from the crowd of Chinese schoolchildren at the gates, and fed them to the monkeys, in the same way that Bob and Harry did twenty years back.

All the same, I am rather surprised that the Greyfriars fellows did not go to Haw Par Villa, in preference to the Botanical Gardens. Haw Par Villa is a magnificent Chinese garden, with an open-air waxworks, a picturesque swinning pool, and a glorious view of the sea. Probably Ferrers Locke felt that the Chinese Chamber of Horrors, - which is really gruesome with a capital "G", - was not a fit sight for his youthful charges. But how they would have loved it.

On the way back from the Botanical Gardens the Greyfriars chums had a narrow escape from an Amok, - a Malay driven mad by sun-stroke or opium. His naked feet pattered up the street. I did not see any Amok myself, but there are plenty of naked feet. I found it a work of art to avoid the bare feet, until someone said that it didn't matter, as they would not feel it even if I trod on them. Of course, after you have survived the peril of a ride in a car round Singapore, a mad Amok seems harmless by comparison. And my pal and I

rode on a motor-bike some of the time.

Readers will recall that Bunter and Nugent were kidnapped by the villainous Ah Feng, and were hidden away in a low dive in Singapore's Chinatown. When my pal and I visited Chinatown, which we did on several occasions, the fiendish manderin, Teng Wang, was at the back of our minds, and we often looked nervously over our shoulders.

In this crowded area, - in its highways and byways, - one sees scenes reminiscent of any Chinese city with its teeming population milling in the five-foot ways. With our ears filled with the high-pitched cries of vendors and the chatter of women and children, we saw strange merchandise all around us. From the windows fluttered the family wash, - not on a line, but strung out on bamboo poles, looking for all the world like an array of multi-coloured banners.

One Saturday night, of all times in the week, we found ourselves lost in Chinatown. The air was filled with the babel of Chinese dialects, mingled with the crash and thunder of gongs and cymbals accompanied by the clicking of wooden sticks and the piping of flutes. The strange eerie atmosphere of the area took hold of us strangely, providing us with an impression of the Orient which will last through the years.

Harry Wharton and Co. were alarmed at a sudden terrific din which was approaching them along the road. It turned out to be a Chinese funeral. I frequently encountered this strange sight in the streets of Singapore.

The funeral procession consists of a string of lorries, each one of which bears the name of the deceased on a long banner round the vehicle. First comes a brass-band, with a terrific clashing of cymbals, playing lively tunes. Then comes the hearse, highly decorated and picturesque. The third lorry carries the mourners, clad in sackcloth and ashes, barefooted, and weeping loudly. They are protected from the sun by black umbrellas. Finally comes a vehicle laden with magnificent wreathes, and decorated with gaily-coloured banners. On the last lorry ride several people whose task it is to discharge deafening fire-crackers.

The entire cortege moves at a terrific speed, like everything else in Singapore. In passing, it is the claim of every Chinese in Singapore that he has enough gold in his teeth to bury him. One can well believe it. The golden leer of the Singapore Chinese is quite disconcerting.

While Nugent and Bunter were in durance vile, food was

brought to them, much to Bunter's relief. There was an appetising odour proceeding from the bowls.

"I say, what is it?" asked Bunter, eagerly

"Rice!" said the Chinaman.

Frank Richards explained that Bunter did not realise that "rice", with a Chinese, signifies a meal.

We do not know for certain what it was that Bunter and Nugent ate on that occasion, but Singapore is very famous for an old Chinese dish called "Nasi Goreng". The Hitlerish sound of the name is just a coincidence. Another popular Chinese concoction is called "Mer Mee".

My pal and I had both dishes placed before us on different occasions, but we just could not face up to it. The smell of it was too reminiscent of the fearful odours which emerge from the gruesome-looking Chinese eating dens, and the unsavoury food stalls which abound everywhere on the island.

Bunter enjoyed it, - but then, Bunter was hungry, - as usual.

The mention of "rice" brings to mind an interesting point. Legend has it that the bloodthirsty Javanese laid a curse on the island, making the soil unfruitful. Even to this day it is impossible to grow rice there, - and, in fact, very little of anything will grow on Singapore island.

Speaking of food, I think that Bunter must have been sorry to leave Singapore. He must have revelled in the superb ice-cream and orangeade, - so different from the sweetened whitewash we call ice-cream and the aerated water we call a soft drink over here.

Harry Wharton commented, "Lots of people speak English in Singapore!"

So they do, - but they are English people. I did not find one native, - Malay, Chinese, or Indian, - who had much command of our language. Even the natives in the government offices, and the shopkeepers, know very little of our tongue. The few sentences they have, they murmur with an American accent, - due to the influence of Yankee films.

In the cinemas, - English-speaking films are shown for the most part. But under the big screen, on which the picture is shown, is another smaller screen, on which slides are flashed in Chinese, explaining the story.

Another coincidence occurred when we saw the film "Macao" featuring Jane Russell. For when the Greyfriars chums left Singapore they went to Hong Kong. There, Billy

Bunter slipped away on a ferry to the Portuguese port of Maceo, where he visited a gambling-den to play Fen-tan. Harry Wherton and Co. went after him, of course.

The only difference was that the Co. found Billy Bunter in Maceo, while my pal and I found Jane Russell. We would rather have found old Billy.

Like the famous chums, I had to leave Singapore eventually, though I was not fleeing from the vengeance of the Menderin. On my way home, I stopped at Bombay, where it was my intention to visit Bhanipur. Enquiries, however, elicited the fact that the Nabob of Bhanipur, Hurree Singh, had left India to be in time for the new term at Greyfriars. But, in any case, the heat was far more exhausting than that of Singapore, - so perhaps it was as well.

Magnet Titles (Contd.)

"S" denotes Substitute.

1062, The Schemer of the Remove. 1063, Harry Wherton's Enemy. 1064, Playing the Game. 1065, Tried and True. 1066, In Borrowed Plumes. 1067, A Fortune at Stake. 1068, Billy Bunter's Book-Maker. 1069, Billy Bunter's Luck. 1070, Bunter the Boss. 1071, Billy Bunter's Circus. 1072, Bunter's Big Bluff. 1073, Billy Bunter's Bodyguard. 1074, Chums of the Circus. 1075, The Order of the Boot. 1076, Bunter Comes to Stay. 1077 (S) The Secret of the Schooner. 1078, The Jasper of Greyfriars. 1079, Be Careful Christopher. 1080, The Boy with a Past. 1081, Rallying Round Carboy. 1082, All Through Bunter. 1083 (S) Shunned by the Form. 1084, The Rebel of the Fifth. 1085, Who punched Prout? 1086, The Form-Master's Feud. 1087, The Phantom of the Cave. 1088, The Clue of the Coral Knife. 1089, Hunted Down. 1090, Under Bunter's Thumb. 1091 (S) Bunter Big-Game Hunter. 1092, From School to Hollywood. 1093, Bound for America. 1094, Harry Wherton & Co. in New York. 1095, Greyfriars Chums in Chicago. 1096, Held up by Bandits. 1097, Bunter's Amazing Adventure. 1098, Harry Wherton & Co. in Hollywood. 1099, Billy Bunter on the Films. 1100, The Hero of Hollywood.

Have 1920 "HOLIDAY ANNUAL" (one plate -- the frontispiece -- missing) to swap for any sixteen consecutive or any twenty-five non-consecutive complete GEMS with undefaced covers between and including Nos. 442 and 526. Box No. 6 (Canada)
C/c Editor, C.D.

OLD BOYS' BOOK CLUB

London Section.

Cherry Place, Wood Green. Sunday October 19th, 1952.

Inclement weather did not affect the attendance and our popular chairman once more ably took the chair. The usual formalities were soon dealt with and then Len thanked those present for the greetings telegram sent from Hove. It was stated how well the monthly news letter has been received and members that have not sent their particulars to Charlie Wright for the potted personalities are asked to do so. The rising costs of administration was the subject of a proposal by E. Reynolds and Charlie Wright, but on the amendment of Bob Blythe and R. Godsave it was decided to leave the matter over to the Annual General Meeting when the subject will be debated. Roger Jenkins, unable to be present owing to previous engagements including a visit to our esteemed president, Frank Richards, kindly furnished the main quiz. This was a school's quiz and Bob Whiter was the winner with Cliff Wallis and Len Peckman in the places. An Eight-question quiz on Cedar Creek was won by Len, with Charlie Wright and Bob Whiter in the second place. The ever popular eliminator quiz, key word Geal, was won by E. Reynolds, Bob Blythe was second and Len third. The question of the badge was held over to next month as replies from the other clubs are awaited. Official business being over a grand discussion on the rival merits of Edwy Searles Brooks and Frank Richards then took place. This proved to be very enjoyable and it went down well. November meeting at East Dulwich on Sunday 16th. Copies of "Tom Merry's Own" have now been sent out to all those who requested them.

UNCLE BENJAMIN.

Northern Section Meeting. October 11th, 1952.

J. Breeze Bentley in the chair warmly welcomed Herbert Sidebottom who had been unable to be present for some time owing to a severe illness.

Secretary Norman Smith announced that we had been able to book the room for the Christmas Party for Saturday, December 13th. It would be appreciated if those who hope to come would advise him as soon as possible to help catering arrangements. The fee 5/- as usual. It will be well worth it.

Treasurer-Librarian Gerry Allison said that for once it had been a quiet month. Nevertheless we are still solvent with a bank balance of £12.4.11.

Star turn of the evening was Stanley Knight, who brought along a most ingenious "Missing Letter" puzzle. What proved to be quite familiar names (20 of them) had to be formed letter by letter. Gerry won (he would) by several lengths. On one occasion, or was it two, he got the answer in the manner of Jack Train almost before Norman Hackforth has announced the object. It was a really entertaining half hour for even those who, like myself, were well in the rear, thoroughly enjoyed it.

After refreshments the Chairman read some extracts from a Magnet, "Billy Bunter, Lion-Tamer", creating roars of laughter the while. A jolly evening all round, declared the fifteen members present.

Next meeting, November 8th.

H. Leckenby,
Northern Section Correspondent.

Midland Section Meeting, 29th September, 1952.

No less than three new members were present, (Mr. P. A. Brown, Principal of Gravelly Hill College; Mr. W. W. Morgan of Sutton Coldfield; and Mr. A. L. Smith), as well as a goodly muster of stalwarts.

During the month since our last meeting, events had been moving swiftly behind the scenes, and so there was a considerable amount of news for members. Accordingly therefore, after welcoming our new members and dealing with the minutes, the following were reported upon:-

1. Change of Club Headquarters. The "block" booking at the ~~Townsend Club expires with our November meeting un-~~ fortunately, but it is very pleasing to record that active enquiries by our Chairmen have resulted in our securing very satisfactory accommodation at the Chamber of Commerce, New Street, from January, and for the Christmas Party, at the Y.M.C.A., Dale End.
2. Club Badges. These will be available fairly soon to members, at 2/6d each. A brooch type for ladies, and a lapel type for gentlemen.

This unusual and impressive mass of formal business having been dealt with, Mr. Brown then gave us his promised

talk. He referred in particular to correspondence and interviews with national and local newspapers, comparing the rich flood of juvenile literature of yesteryear, with the miserable and uninspiring trickle of today.

Letters from Mr. Leckenby were also quoted, giving further interesting information on the old writers.

A most interesting talk which showed clearly the vast and fertile field of our hobby and the horizons it opens up for exploration and research. Our warmest thanks and applause were given to Mr. Brown on the conclusion of his talk.

An old member, Albert Clack, then gave us another treat with a reading from a 1922 "Penny Popular", dealing with our immortal Removites and the arrival of a new boy, (Lee), who although a decent and normal lad, nevertheless had been sent to Greyfriars for a nefarious purpose. Bunter, of course, is never stony, and would never dream of hiding under the railway carriage seat in order to bilk the company; so naturally did not hear the conversation between Lee and his rascally guardian, and so knew nothing of the new boy's secret. Or, (horrid thought!), is it just barely possible that he did?

EDWARD DAVEY,
Hon. Sec.

Merseyside Branch. 12th October, 1952.

This, the annual, meeting opened at 7 p.m. to a record attendance, and the chairman began by extending a hearty welcome to a number of new members. He was most pleased that their enrolment coincided with the Section's first anniversary, and he was sure they would derive as much pleasure in the future as the older members had in the past. He regretted that some new members were unable, for personal reasons, to be present; they had, however, forwarded their entrance fees and subs, and he hoped we should have the pleasure of their company in the near future. He then read a letter from George Simpson, tendering his resignation, a step he had been obliged to take owing to other commitments, all were most sorry to lose the company of such a valuable and well-liked member; but it is nice to know he will still retain his connection with the club as a postal member.

The election of officers was then put to the vote; they were re-elected en bloc, and the chairman thanked members

for the confidence shown; he felt sure the officers would do their best in the future as in the past.

The secretary having read the minutes, etc., refreshments were taken, and then we got to work on Jack Morgan's quiz; this was a very excellent puzzle which soon had most of us attempting the double task of chewing the ends of our pencils and trying to look intelligent. The winner was Bill Horton, with Mrs. Webster a close second; this was the first time either had finished at the top, and was a fitting reward for their perseverance.

The company then broke into groups indulging in chats on the hobby, etc. and the meeting ended at 10 p.m. with the library business, which reached a new "high". Bill Horton was kept very busy dealing with the demands on our stock of books.

Next meeting (open discussion night) 9th November at 7 p.m.

Members present: the usual "regulars", and Mr. J. Jones, Mr. P. J. Laffey, Mr. Chillingworth, and Sir Frederick H. M. Bowman.

WANTED: Holiday Stories (Not foreign travel) in S.O.L., Magnet and Gem (especially below 1000). Good price or attractive exchanges offered. J. Walsh, 345 Stanley Road, Kirkdale, Liverpool 20.

FOR SALE: Young England, 1904, volume 24, 10/- C.D. Annual 1951, 5/-; 11 C.D.'s from last November, 9d. each. "Billy Bunter Butts In", 3/6. Miss E. Magoveny, 65 Benthams Street, Belfast, N. Ireland.

WANTED: "Bob Cherry's Barring Out!" Your own price paid. "Robby", 13 Raphael Road, Hove, 3.

WANTED: Holiday Annuals. State year, condition and price to Roger Jenkins, 3 Town Hall Road, Havent, Herts.

WANTED URGENTLY FOR LIBRARY. O.B.B.C. Northern Section.
Magnets 1204-1223, 1226-1267, 1269-1284, 1307, 1310.
Gems. 1293, 1300, 1314, 1457, 1459-1464, 1467-1469, 1494,
1497-1500, 1506, 1529, 1535, 1536, 1542, 1552, 1556.
Best Prices Paid. G. Allison, 7 Summerfield Gardens,
Bramley, Leeds.

THE NELSON LEE COLUMN

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

It gives me great pleasure this month to introduce Neil Gourlay - of Whitley Bay, who although a newcomer to our ranks, certainly knows his stuff when it comes to the Nelson Lee. His first article (and I hope it's the first of many) describes one of his favourite series.

THE ST. FRANK'S SCHOOL TRAIN SERIES

Nelson Lee - 1st New Series, Nos. 160-170.

A Review by N. C. Gourlay

For many newcomers to the second half of the Nelson Lee's existence and for those like myself who have only read of Nipper & Co. in the S.C.L. reprints, I can recommend the School Train series, Nos. 160-170 1st N.S. of the Nelson Lee. It is true that this particular series shows signs of the "stunts" era which commenced halfway through the first New Series and eventually ruined the paper. Nevertheless, although not one of the best St. Frank's series, the School Train stories do display the leading characters in interesting situations which, written in a quiet easy style, make one realise the attraction they had for boys of the long ago. Handforth, William Napoleon Browne and Archie Glenthorne are the stars.

The first story, "The St. Frank's School Train", tells of the selection by competitive examination of a small number of St. Frank's boys to go touring around Britain on a train presented to the school by Lord Dorrimere. In this story Henty thrusts himself into the limelight by falling out of the train just as it leaves Belton siding. Church and McClure, of course, run out to help him with the result that all three are stranded in their pyjamas. The following chapters with the three boys in their night clothes speeding across England in Handforth's Austin Seven to catch the train at Colechester, give Handforth a chance to display all his masterful qualities. Handforth & Co. are again to the fore in later numbers of the series. Especially must be mentioned "The School Train in Scotland" in which, by a piece of clever detective work (in his own opinion) Edward

Oswald discovers McClure's long lost grandfather. Also the Liverpool story, "The Kidnapped Schoolboys" which involves Handforth & Co. in trouble amid Liverpool's dockland is to be recommended for some realistic background description. Handforth as Detective, puts himself and his chums into a perilous situation in "Mystery of the Cave". Hunting for a missing schoolboy the chums of Study D get caught in an eerless rowboat on a mudbank off the Welsh coast. Some vivid Brooksiem description of an approaching storm and the incoming tide follows.

Archie Glenthorne is prominent in most of St. Frank's yarns, but in "Archie's Lancashire Lass" he has a story of his own. Falling in love with a mill girl on holiday he makes us sympathise with him by the chivalrous way he ignores the schemes of Nipper & Co. to jape him out of his infatuation.

For me the best stories in the series were those which revealed the uncanny powers of William Napoleon Browne to talk anybody into doing everything. Browne - the Napoleon is self bestowed - displays his unusual talent in "St. Franks in the Midlands". In this story he befriends a spurned inventor and promises to convince an uncle who is a famous steel manufacturer of the man's worth. The leader of St. Franks Fifth Form survives many rebuffs before, in his own ingenious manner, he talks his uncle into accepting his protegee's invention. W. N. Browne is a more interesting character than Waldo or Norman Conquest in that he achieves his ends not by "he-man" heroics or dare-devil deeds, but more subtly by use of his brain and delightful oratory.

"Napoleon" Browne talks his way into the forefront of "The St. Frank's Touring School" when he publicises the exploits of Marjorie Temple (one of the Moor View girls) when she is competing in a swimming contest in Newcastle-on-Tyne.

One of the more humorous stories of the series is No. 168 1st New Series, "The Rival Sportsmen". Here the boys of the school train jape a party of visiting Americans into thinking all English schoolboys are monocled dudes. Handforth, dressed up in a top hat with a "window pane" in his eye, is a riot. The novelty of this particular story lies in the only serious treatment of a baseball match I have read in an English school story. The Remove chums play the visiting American boys at baseball - and win.

E. S. Brook's description of the match is very interesting and at the time it was written may have caused several readers of the Nelson Lee to try and play the famous American game in their back-yards. The cover of this issue is unique. The great Handforth is depicted in a baseball batsman's outfit poised to hit the ball as it comes from the pitcher's hand.

The last story in the School Train Series, "Bank Holiday In Brighton", dealt with an old Punch and Judy Showman who had plans of a lost gold mine in Arizona. It also re-introduced Lord Dorrimore and laid the scene for the following holiday series, "The Arizona Gold Quest."

As a whole the series is a pretty good sample of Brook's works in the 1st New Series period and - can it be whispered - can even be compered - without detriment - to quite a few series out of the Magnet or the Gem.

I've never published a letter in this column before, but this one I received from Bill Champion of Reading (another newcomer, by the way) is so good that I've persuaded him to let me use it in the "Column".

After the first opening remarks, he goes on to say:-

I don't know in which year you commenced reading the Nelson Lee; but I first became a regular reader in 1919, at the time when Dr. Stafford, accused of laxity when that horrible Greek boy, Alexis, set fire to the Colloge House, was sacked, to be succeeded by a Mr. Howard Martin - a bully and crook of the old school! Although I was but nine years of age at the time, I was already a confirmed reader of the "Gem" Library, and can remember with crystal-clearness how I became possessed of that initial Nelson Lee. It was the celebrated fifth of November, and the bonfire was already blazing away merrily at the bottom of the garden. Happily clutching close to me my box of "Brocks Best Assorted" I made for the bonfire and set the box down carefully on a nearby garden-seat. Then, like the proverbial "bolt from the blue", it happened! - a nasty little spark shot out of the fire, and, propelled by an equally nasty gust of wind, dived right into that box. Believe me, for the space of perhaps one minute we were treated to one of the best displays it has ever been my lot to witness - but, was I heart-broken! For over an hour my parents did their very best to

console me, but with little success; and then my elder sister had a brainwave; she rushed round to a nearby news-agents and purchased a Nelson Lee. Armed with this, she hurried back and, wonder of wonders, within five minutes I was so deeply immersed in this new school-book that I had almost forgotten the tragedy of the fireworks. Which only goes to prove the wisdom of the old adage: "it's an ill wind". Since that eventful evening, besides becoming a regular reader of the N.L., I read all the "Monster" Libraries, purchased quite a number of pre-1919 issues, and decided, quite early, that next to the "Gem", the N.L. was my favourite paper.

There are some series that I shall never tire of reading over and over again: the one about the White Giants, in 1919, when the heroes of St. Franks, plus, of course, "Dorrie" and Umlosi, journeyed up the Amazon and into the lesser-known wilds of the Matto-Grosso in search of one Colonel Kerrigan, the intrepid explorer-father of young Stanley, of the Third; the Ezra Quirke epic (very gripping, this!); the enthralling story of Tommy Watson when a pupil at Moat-Hollow School in the doubtful care of the ungodly Grimesby Creepe (what a Dickensian name!); and others too numerous to mention.

How, in the autumns of bygone years, I used to be filled with a thrilling sense of anticipation as the boys, safely back from the summer vacation spent in some remote corner of the globe, would, almost on the first day of the new term, be flung headlong into some nerve-tingling mystery.

Even to this day, directly the evenings begin to shorten, and my nostrils are assailed by the acrid but not displeasing ^{scents} of allotment bonfires, how vividly does that familiar and beloved scene spring before my eyes — the dark, massive pile of the old school lying still but eerie under a fitful October moon, so real that I can hear the rustle of falling leaves as the cold, blustery wind denudes the tall elm-trees clustered round the school wall — can hear the distant hoot of the inevitable owl from the not too distant dense bulk of Bellton Wood — and then the short hairs at the base of my neck begin to bristle as I catch sight of those dim and sinister figures, flitting ghostlike round by the old monastery ruins.

Gosh! the very thought of it send little shivers racing up and down my spine — but there is no possible doubt whatever that we used to get our money's worth in those days.

Well, that's the lot for this month, so I'll say Cheerio!

By the way, did you read my appeal last month? O.K. I just wondered!



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

This month the whole of Blakiana is devoted to an article by Rex Dolphin. It is so good that it was thought it would be a great mistake to split it, and I will take the opportunity of mentioning here that one of Rex's clever cross-words devoted entirely to Sexton Blake, will appear in the Annual.

Cheerio. H. M. B.

SEXTON BLAKE — AS THEY SAW HIM.

By Rex Dolphin

Has the average Sexton Blake fan ever asked himself just what it is that prompts him to say, "X is my favourite author"?

The classic analysis of fiction will show that it must be one of the following things: plot, characterisation, backgrounds, style (which covers such diverse things as dialogue, humour, atmosphere), the author's own attitude to life, an indefinable something, or a combination of some or all of these elements. Or, in detective stories only, the mechanics of the crime.

Well, let's not get too analytical — that way one loses the spirit of fiction, the purpose of which is to

transport the reader unconsciously to other realms. My reason for bringing up the subject is that I feel my own selection of favourite authors is based mainly on what sort of a man each of them makes Blake out to be. (There are, of course, no bad Blake authors — as it was once said about beer — but some are better than others.)

On this basis Anthony Skene stands head and shoulders above the rest, though Teed runs him a good second. His Blake is a real man, the type of man a detective of the superior, educated type would be in real life. Not for Skene the man who can be shocked or surprised by commonplace happenings or even by the very unusual.

For why should Blake be surprised? Hasn't he lived through enough cases and seen enough of all kinds of life, and isn't his job the unravelling of mysteries, the discovering of things calculated to shock or surprise the man-in-the-street? The drugged drink, the body that falls out of the cupboard, the assumed friend who suddenly points a gun at you, the man who drops dead from a silent missile while he is talking to you — these things would shock if they happened to us. But while we know that Blake is fully human, these things have happened to him so many times that he is hardened to them, and whatever he feels about them, he shows no sign of shock or surprise. In fact, to state a paradox, he goes about looking for the unexpected!

Maybe the early authors had some excuse for falling into this common error — after all, they lived in an age when melodrama, theatricality and over-writing were the fashion. Having survived that age, Blake has no reason to be other than tough — and tough in the manner of the soldier, who can be tender as well.

Again, Skene's Blake is not loquacious. Loquacity is a bad trait in the man Blake is supposed to be, although we can forgive any detective his little splash of elucidation at the end of the yarn. This, in any case, is merely a writer's device for clearing up the loose ends by using dialogue (or monologue) which looks brighter than plain unquoted text.

So Skene's Blake is silent, a grim man at times, when the situation warrants it. But not devoid of humour and humanity when the tension eases.

Naturally, he is a hard-worker, self-confident in any situation, keenly observant and sharp to deduce facts and situations. He is fearless in fight, a master of all kinds

of fighting, but with it a hater of violence. He dislikes all humbug and snobbery, and is friendly with all kinds of people, including tramps!

Skene is one of the few authors who have given us a really graphic description of the detective's personal appearance. Let's now see Blake through Skene's eyes:

"— a broad, tweed-suited man ... stepped quickly into the room and allowed his genial but penetrating glance to move from man to man. From the first moment the personality of their visitor impressed them all. (And these were Cabinet Ministers — R.D.) Rather short, crisp, iron-grey hair; the brow of a scientist; grey-blue eyes as piercing as a sword-blade; a keen, aquiline nose, with sensitive nostrils; the mouth of a judge, and the square jaw of a brawler — such was the head of Sexton Blake."

In another instance, the author says Blake is two men, "a thinker, fighter, man of action — and in addition, a half-sleepy, peace-loving, goodhumoured Englishman."

This theme — the perfect synthesis of the man of action and the dreamer — occurs again and again in Skene's work, and to a lesser extent in that of other authors.

Now G.H. Teed gives us one side of Blake only — the soldier and traveller. I have always read Teed for his backgrounds, but not till I started re-reading him recently did I realise how smoothly he makes Blake become a part of the setting. Blake is a chameleon, a natural habitant of whatever country is portrayed. This becomes a little far-fetched when we are expected to believe that Blake, definite European type that he is, can pass for a Chinese coolie or a Mexican peon — but well, to help the story along, we are pleased to believe just that.

This Blake is never in the dressing-gown, in fact rarely even in Baker Street. The pipe is discarded in favour of the cigarette, sometimes the cigar. This Blake is tough, a soldier, can stand any amount of exposure and battle. He is a first-class shot, a good rough-houser, a knife-fighter if necessary, a stealthy commendo-like creeper-upper, rarely surprised.

Mentally he is soldier-like rather than brilliantly intellectual. He has long bouts of turning over the situation in his mind and planning action. He talks to the point, and usually without humour. Physically, except when in battle, he is unobtrusive, pleasant, lean-jawed, and with

penetrating but pleasant eyes. He is gentle with women, and Teed would almost have us believe he is a Great Lover. He has a fatherly love for Tinker, and is fond of animals. This would almost seem to be another side of the Teed Blake, but no, it fits in quite well with the Soldier character.

Other writers, while still giving us a lively story, show us a less physically energetic Blake. Robert Murrey's Blake is generally a quietish man, a keen observer, not over-given to rough-house stuff, a sympathetic man, a keen fighter for justice. Not much attention is paid to his physical appearance. We get the pipe and the cigar often, and sometimes the dressing-gown.

Murrey, whom I admire for the wide sweep of his plots, is sometimes, like his father Murray Graydon, guilty of making Blake capable of being surprised rather too easily. This is probably done, as with other authors, unconsciously. After all, surprises keep the story moving. The reader must feel surprised, yes. The detective, no. Or at least he mustn't show it. Murrey himself is aware of this, for on one occasion he makes Blake say: "My profession is one which causes me to be surprised at nothing."

Yet the stories are full of phrases such as: "a look of surprise and annoyance flickered across his lean countenance" ... "he gave a slight gasp of astonishment" ... even on one occasion "he was paralysed with amazement".

Gwyn Evans's Blake wears his emotions almost on his sleeve. In fact, the brilliance and charm of Evans's work is equalled only by the laziness of his pen. The clichés come thick and fast, enabling you to read the story at high speed, though perhaps with irritation. Blake is portrayed almost like a melodramatic actor in early films, and he has a most extraordinarily mobile face. He scans people through narrowed eyelids; his firmly-chiselled lips tighten or twitch or set grimly; or purse thoughtfully, or even curl; his jaw sets grimly, he frowns, his shrewd grey eyes become grave, he smiles sympathetically, he gives a soft whistle of amazement, he shrugs his shoulders.

What never fails to amuse me in the Evans stories is the first shot of Blake, wherein he is depicted as vegetating in the Baker Street chambers, bored at the lack of action. "Not a ripple had disturbed the placid surface of the underworld for weeks" — a rather questionable statement considering that Blake was at that time usually clearing up at least two

sensational cases per week, many of which took him out of Europe, let alone London. Hardly time for boredom, even in a lesser man than Blake, whose calibre and tastes and intellect surely put him above boredom. (Contrast Skene's handling of the same theme — he shows Blake deliberately relaxing between cases, in order to conserve or re-create his powers.)

However, this is just the author's way of setting the stage and introducing his star characters. Blake in his tattered old dressing-gown, filling the first pipe of the day, Pedro in the hearth, Tinker yawning over the Index — all these are swept away when the client or Visitor arrives and the action starts, and Blake dons his outdoor clothes and gets out.

There is an echo of Holmes in the Evens Blake, not only in his appearance but also in his occasional cryptic pronouncements like, "I would draw your attention to the matter of the parsley in the butter-dish." He is inclined to be rather irritatingly cryptic throughout the story, and to enjoy in a quiet way the surprises he is able to spring at the end. These moments are, by the way, generally the only occasions when the great detective is other than modest.

Gwyn Evens gives us one of the quieter Blakes, who is only very seldom roused to violent action. Edwy Scerles Brooks, too. In fact Brooks's Blake is almost colourless. He is rather an ordinary man, like a modestly successful businessman. He says, "My reputation is more legendary than real." Yet he is quietly observant, quietly dangerous. He is level-headed, thoughtful, friendly, a gentleman in every way. Sometimes Tinker's boisterousness and habit of jumping to conclusions irritates him, and he is curt with the lad. But later he recovers his customary good nature.

Another rather ordinary Blake is given by Coutts Brisbane; a human, rather than superhuman detective. He is friendly, a lively speaker, and has no great mannerisms, either of speech or action. He is an observant man and a man of action. And, "as with most men of action, the stern exterior concealed a soft heart for women and children, and they always seemed to divine this instinctively."

"A well-groomed athletic-looking man with clean-cut features and of distinguished presence"... so Pierre Quiroulet describes him. As with Gwyn Evens, we have here a Blake of mobile features, which do not always mask his feelings.

"His face lit up with pleasure" ... "His anxious eyes narrowed thoughtfully".

As with Teed, this Blake is at home in any country. As with Skene, Brooks, Brisbane, he is kind and sympathetic. He sometimes shows surprise; he sometimes, rather lamentably, falls into rather obvious traps.

Donald Stuart, much as I admire the ingenuity of some of his stories, can only seem to produce a rather colourless conventional-detective-Blake, who is less a personality than a vehicle for the mechanics of the crime.

Chester gives us a peculiarly Gilbertian Blake, a jerky, volatile man who is full of action yet can throw away a line of snappy deduction that would not disgrace Holmes. Subservient generally to the plot, this Blake yet emerges as a flesh and blood character. My "surprise theory" is well-known to Chester, as witness:

"You surprise me," he commented, though, in point of fact, he had long since lived past the stage when anything astonished him."

This Blake is a repository of a vast amount of odd knowledge, a picker-up of unconsidered trifles. (And quite understandably.) He knows Russian, among many other languages; he dabbles in the supernatural; knows astrology. Yet he says: "I am merely a cold-blooded criminologist."

Curiously enough, Chester is the only author to tell us that Blake is a trained medical man who can write M.R.C.S and L.R.C.P. after his name. It would appear, then, that the many medical men who feature in other authors' stories are largely superfluous!

Physically, he is athletic, spends little time indoors or in dressing-gown. He is sharp in his movements and brisk and abrupt in his speech, but in temperament quite good-humoured. He is keenly observant, and very sensitive to atmosphere.

Cecil Hayter gives us the Blake who was probably most calculated to appeal to the schoolboy of the era. Blake is schoolboyish himself, and slangy in his speech, of which there is plenty. He is a soldier, a world-traveller, who dashes about but doesn't spend much time in deduction. Like the Teed Blake, he is a good bushman and fighter. He is lean, sinewy, as finely-built as a greyhound. Hayter doesn't spare the blood, and in one story at least, Blake tortures a man with a red-hot iron.

The Baker Street chambers are like a schoolboy's study. After Mrs. Bardell had tidied up, "The room looked so unnaturally tidy that both Blake and Tinker felt mildly uncomfortable, and had to hunt for things in their proper places when they wanted to find them. For instance, Blake's favourite cigarette-holder was in its case on the mantelpiece, instead of being, as usual, wedged between the leaves of the book he happened to have been reading last; and Tinker, unable to find his loose change, which he generally kept in a flower-pot in the window, was hunting wildly for it, quite oblivious of a neat-looking purse on the writing-table."

Well, there is Sexton Blake, as they saw him — an interesting mixture of a man who emerges as an unforgettable character. And there are some of the authors, as I see them. And as we don't all see the same things, and none of us have read all the stories by all the authors, the whole subject is bound to be steeped in controversy.

LETTER BOX

Frank Richards Replies to Readers

Dear Herbert Leckenby,

Oct. 11th, 1952.

Many thanks for the C.D. I like Miss Stevens' talk on H.W., though our fair friend does seem a little hard on T.M. and J.S.

I fear that Mr. Goodhead has been a little off the mark in his article, as the verses he describes were often contributed by other hands. I wrote a good many verses which appeared chiefly, I think, in the Gem or the Greyfriars Herald: some may have been in the Holiday Annual: but the versified odds and ends were generally manufactured "in the menagerie". The "Barcroft" verses in Tom Merry's Own are, of course, my work, like the Barcroft bellad that appeared in "Poetry London". I note that in his letter Mr. Pound refers to his happy suggestion of publishing a volume of "Barcroft Bellads", which I should be very happy to do, but for the sad circumstance that no publisher believes that verses would sell: which is a sine qua non in the publishing world. One of these days, perhaps

With kindest regards,

Always yours sincerely,

FRANK RICHARDS.

(Contd. p.333)

LATE NEWS. Cassell's new Bunter Book out on November 20th.