

The Collector's Digest



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FEBRUARY, 1988
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THE EDITOR'S
CONTRIBUTION

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

FROM THE EDITOR'S CHAIR

OLD FRIEND IN A NEW SUIT: The January C.D. was a little late as I warned you it might be, but I felt sure you would say it was worth waiting for whilst it was being fitted with its new suit of Saville Row cut. And, my word! I was right. Opinions are flowing in and all say, without exception, that in appearance, it looks better than ever. As I said last month, I had the "wind up" when I knew I should have to look round for a new publisher. For a time I was haunted by the thought that January might draw towards its close without a C.D. Even as it was, letters were arriving making anxious enquiries. It is, therefore, all the more heartening when things have worked out so well, and now that this little crisis has passed over, I am encouraged to say that just as in the world of the theatre, "the show must go on", so as long as I am blessed with good health, "The C.D. will always get through".

* * * * *

ANOTHER SUCCESS. Life does seem to have been worth living lately, for just before the events recorded above, reports were coming in about the Annual and as they said almost without exception, "un-

doubtedly the best yet" - or words to that effect - I really had to believe we had scored again. One advantage about sending it out earlier was that some of the overseas readers got their copies by Christmas. They would reach the U.S.A. and Bill Gander told me he got his on Christmas Eve, which was just perfect. Harry Homer out in Spain, also got his.

Voting papers are coming in nicely. You'll see the present position elsewhere. It looks like being a close fight this time.

And now, after expressing such a top of the world feeling, 'tis a pity I must do a little admonishing. But I regret to say that despite my request for remittance of outstanding Annual subs. owing to the special circumstances this year, there are still quite a number to come in. Now you who may have forgotten, wouldn't like me to have to sell chunks of my cherished collection to enable me to do the right thing, would you? But it might be so, if Nuff said, I think.

* * * * *

THE SUN NEVER SETS. One of our members, George Fuller of Brighton, is at present doing his National Service and recently he wrote me from Tobruck and told me of an interesting incident on his second evening there. He walked into the N.A.A.F.I. and there, lo! and behold! among a number of papers, he found a couple of copies of the Magnet Nos. 1669 and 1670! A link with home if you like.

* * * * *

HERE'S A LAUGH. I am indebted to Jack Wood for an amusing cartoon from this month's "Happy Variety". Tousled-hair son is comfortably seated in an easy chair reading a copy of "Cosher Dick", and on the floor for company is "Crime Comics". Standing, is a meek looking Dad holding, kind of appealingly, a book entitled "Greyfriars" and with a picture of a spectacled plump faced youth. Sonny is saying scornfully, "Billy Bunter? Never heard of him - what's his racket?"

Alas! there's a certain amount of truth in the cartoonist's cynicism. His name, by the way, is Penfold. He should know, shouldn't he?

Yours sincerely

HERBERT LECKENBY

Stories I Remember

by HERBERT LECKENBY

No. 1. "MIDDIES OF THE 'FEARLESS'"

(Author:- David Goodwin)

* * *

Some of the stories which delighted us in our youth seem crude when read through spectacles of advancing age; others stand the test time. "Middies of the Fearless" certainly comes in the latter category for when I re-read it recently, I found it every bit as interesting as when I devoured it, instalment by instalment, when it first appeared in the "Boys' Friend" way back in 1909. As I have said before, David Goodwin could write with knowledge on all sorts of subjects and here we had the real tang of the sea in a yarn of the Navy as it was in the years just before the first world war; one to compare with W.H.G. Kingston when writing about the "wooden walls".

Despite the fact that "Middies of the Fearless" concerned peace-time days, it was packed with thrills from beginning to end. Goodwin yachtsman as he was, knew ever inch of the English coast and the story told vividly of adventures at Spithead, Sheerness, Chatham and northwards to Hull and Grimsby.

The hero was Ned Drake, son of a retired Naval officer and at the opening of the story, we find him posted as a midshipman to H.M.S. Fearless, "battleship of the Dreadnought type". In sending him to this particular ship, the Admiralty had made a grave mistake, for, just a little earlier, Ned's brother, Ralph, who had been a senior lieutenant on the Fearless, had been dismissed his ship and his Majesty's service under suspicion of having been concerned in the theft of a large sum of money from the Fearless strong-room.

Consequently, at first, Ned had a tough time, but having the blood of the Drake's in his veins, he soon settles down and becomes one of the most popular members of the gun-room. Another middy, Victor Darby, becomes his special chum.

A good deal of the plot concerns Adler & Co., an inter-

national firm of espionage agents, who buy impartially, secrets from, and sell to, any country willing to do business with them. Great Britain refused to have any truck with them; as a result, Adler & Co. created a lot of mischief. It was they who were behind the plot to get Ralph Drake disgraced. Ralph, on leaving the Navy, had taken up Secret Service work and he and Ned as the story progressed, were continually in and out of Adler & Co's clutches.

David Goodwin was fond of bringing boxing into his stories; he did in this one. Ned proved to be handy with his fists and accepts the challenge of an unpleasant specimen of a middy called Wexton. Wexton is beaten and takes it badly. He persuades a small-time pugilist, Bert Grundy, otherwise the Chatham Chicken, to impersonate a middy from a sister-ship and take on Ned. There's a little author's license here, for in real life the pugilist would have put his foot in it as soon as he opened his mouth. However, it was just as well he succeeded in deceiving the members of the gun-room for the time being, or one would have missed a very entertaining description of a right good scrap, which the young middy, of course, eventually won. The Chatham Chicken was unmasked by Victor Darby and after a chase round the ship, he, in a panic, jumped overboard and was saved from a watery grave by Ned Drake. Later, the Chicken, who wasn't really a bad sort, showed his gratitude by helping to save Ned on one of the occasions when he was in the hands of Adler & Co.

There were more exciting chapters laid off the coast near Hull and Grimsby, when Ned was made a prisoner on a fishing trawler by Long Dennis Clegg, a villainous member of the spy organisation. After a lot of rough handling, Ned deliberately set fire to the boat, but before he could get away, he was recaptured by the crew, who left the boat after fastening him to the mast and leaving him to his fate. His chum, Darby, came along to put in some hectic work and save Ned in the nick of time.

Here comes an amusing circumstance in connection with this part of the story. When Middies of the Fearless was reprinted in the "Boys' Friend Library", the publishers had the sense to give it two volumes instead of trying to squeeze a good yarn into one as they often did, thus ruining it. The second story was "Midshipman Drake, D.S.O." (No. 151, 1st Series). The cover picture portrayed the scene of the burning trawler with Ned roped to the mast. Despite all the rough-housing he had gone through, he looked as

dapper as if he had just come off parade, and was still wearing his cap! The culprit artist was T.W. Holmes, who should really have known better!!

Space forbids details of numerous other thrills in this grand yarn. Needless to say, that in the end Ralph Drake's name was cleared and the Adler gang smashed.

David Goodwin had a happy knack of giving his characters names which seemed to fit. Some here might have been "lifted" from the Navy List. Thus, Admiral Frobisher, Captain Raglan, Sub. Lieutenant Hertford, Midshipman Keppel, Mayne and Acland - a small point, but one which somehow does make a difference.

That thought leads to something else. Years afterwards, the story was republished in the second series of the Boys' Friend Library. "Midshipman Drake, D.S.O." became "Chums of the Fighting Fleet". The story was almost exactly the same, but someone, certainly not David Goodwin, had been busy changing some of the names. The "Fearless" became the "Victorious"; instead of Ned Drake, we had Ned Hardy, and for some extraordinary reason, Darby's name was changed to Jinks, which didn't seem to fit at all. On the other hand, other characters were not changed at all, for Captain Raglan, Midshipman Keppel, Wexton, Bert Grundy, the Chatham Chicken appeared as in the original story. It was another example of the queer things the A.P. did at times and I'm blessed if I can see the motive. Where new readers were concerned, the original names would have done just as well, surely. If the idea was to try and deceive those who had read it in the old days, the sub-editor responsible for the revising should have had the sack for doing a neither one thing or the other job. Not so the artist who did the cover for the "Chums of the Fighting Fleet" B.F.L. however. It looked like Val Reading though; I am not quite sure if he was still active in 1933. Anyway, the picture showed the same scene on the burning trawler, to which I have just referred. But this time Ned Drake, beg pardon, Hardy, was drawn looking very dishevelled, with tie all untidy and, minus his cap.

Note: "Middies of the 'Fearless'" was republished in the B.F.L. 1st series as follows: No.149, Middies of the Fearless; No.151 Midshipman Drake, DSO. That would be early in 1911. When they appeared again in the 2nd series there would appear to have been a long interval between the two volumes for as far as I can make out, they were No.324 The Fighting Middy; and 386 "Chums of the Fighting Fleet, No.386 (June 1933). (H.L.)

Old Boys' Book Club

L O N D O N S E C T I O N

Our fifth anniversary Annual General Meeting was held at Hume House, East Dulwich on Sunday, January 18th under chairman Len's able guidance. The election of officers was a foregone conclusion as all the old faithfuls were re-elected including auditor Charlie Wright. Chairman Len reviewed the past year's happenings, mentioning all the good things we had experienced, the famous visitors we had had, and the promise of further progress in the future. I gave my report for the year and mentioned that new Bunter and Tom Merry books to the value of £52. 9. 6. have been supplied to members. The membership continues to be steady maintaining a good average. The treasurer's report was adopted, there being a balance in hand of £11. 1. 9½. of which auditor Charlie found correct. A discussion followed on finance and it was unanimously agreed to keep the present rate of subscriptions. A review of the expected new books to be published was given by the chairman and these will be supplied as hitherto to all those who request them.

Eleanor Packman, having joined the ranks of the "Oliver" tappers, typed out the general knowledge quiz which the three Packmans had devised for the first brain teaser of the year. Charlie Wright won hands down with myself second and brother Bob third. A team quiz then took place and some very intelligent questions were asked and in the main these were well answered. Seventeen members were present including "Red Magnet Robby" and there is no doubt that all had a very enjoyable time. The February meeting will be at Wood Green on the 15th.

UNCLE BENJAMIN.

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N O R T H E R N S E C T I O N

Meeting. 239 Hyde Park Road, Leeds, 3rd January, 1953.

Owing to the absence of J. Breeze Bentley (caused by meeting being a week earlier than original date), I took the chair and had the pleasure of welcoming once again Frank Case and Stanley.

Smith. Illness prevented several regulars from being present, including Bill Harrison, which meant he was missing for the first time. However, a dozen of us gathered round a cosy fire to listen to Harry Stables talk on the Frank Reade and Jack Wright stories in what was usually termed the Aldine Invention Library, or to give it the full name it was given at its start 60 years ago, the "Aldine Romance of Invention, Travel and Adventure Library". Veterans have pleasant memories of those extraordinary years concerning Steam Men, Steam Horses, Electric Horses, Electric Air Canoes and the rest.

Harry, as was mentioned on the occasion of an earlier talk has a happy knack of slipping in some delightfully droll humour. He also does a bit of research as was proved when he pointed out that in one story there was a lengthy bare-faced "lift" from Jules Verne's "Clipper of the Clouds". Harry was given a hearty round of applause.

Gerry Allison caused much amusement with his reading of a couple of chapters from a Magnet story.

Next meeting, February 14th, an interval of six weeks! Horace Turnham will be giving a talk on the old time comics.

HERBERT LECKENBY, Northern Section Correspondent.

* * * * *

MIDLAND SECTION

CHRISTMAS PARTY

December the 13th was our red letter day; being the date of our eagerly awaited party. So that it was a pity therefore, the combined effects of illness and atrocious weather kept away several enthusiasts. Those present however, had a very good time.

The attractive and comfortably furnished room was lavishly decorated with the liberal quantity of holly and mistletoe so generously provided by our Chairman.

The stage being thus set, popular George Smallwood capably guided our revels as Master of Ceremonies. Dancing, games, music, a competition, an amusing character sketch, (done by our M.C.), and an entertaining reading from a "Magnet", (done in character by Wilfred Davey), made the evening pass all too quickly.

In the meantime though, we had paused to refresh the inner man, (and woman!), and enjoyed firstly, delicious ices, and later an excellent buffet. There's no doubt but that the "Patron Saint of Food", our one and only Billy Bunter, would have entirely approved of an attractive lot of comestibles.

In addition to this splendid buffet, we had a scrumptious Christmas Cake mostly generously provided by our M.C.

During the evening our Chairman had sprung a surprise on us with a most masterly and enjoyable accordion recital; showing us a hitherto unexpected talent for this difficult instrument.

Towards the end of the evening, the signatures of all present were taken on a greeting to be sent to Mr. Fone at Stoke on Trent.

Before the singing of "Auld Lang Syne", group photographs were taken. The members seated in front held a very fine greetings poster done for us, quite voluntarily, by Miss Partridge.

Finally, our warmest thanks are gladly given to Albert Clack who so freely gave vital and yeoman service at the piano.

EDWARD DAVEY.

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MERSEYSIDE SECTION MEETING, 11th January, 1953.

There was another big muster (17) for this meeting, which opened promptly at 7.30. The chairman commenced by wishing all a happy new year; he then read a number of letters from Messrs. Timmins, Switzer, Begley and Pritchard regretting their inability to be present. Mr. Small was also unable to attend, but he made a very useful donation to the library in the form of a book; a gesture greatly appreciated. Don was able to inform us that we have enrolled yet another new member, Mr. W. Hunt; we are certainly making steady progress, and all our new friends are genuine enthusiasts. A further quota of new books has been bought during the past month, comprising "Magnets", "Gems" and a number of "Nelson Lees" from our Leeds friends.

The secretary then read the financial report; our funds are quite substantial and a reserve of £2. 5. 0. has been set aside for library purposes.

Then came the quiz, won this time by Frank Unwin, who now has the task of setting next month's posers. After refreshments, the Hamilton-Orwell debate was resumed; all hands waded in and some very interesting views were heard, resulting in a victory for the champions of Hamilton by eight points to two.

The meeting closed at 10 p.m. with the usual library business.

Next month's highlights. Frank Unwin's quiz; a debate "Then - and now", and a discussion on a proposed dinner-social to be held at a rendezvous in town within the near future.

F. CASE, Secretary.

(Nice work Merseyside! You're setting the pace are'nt you? - H.L.)

* * * * *

Ben and Bob Whiter wish to sincerely thank the many friends who sent kind messages of sympathy in their recent sad bereavement.

THE "ANNUAL" BALLOT

Present Position

There Were Other Schools	85
Levison at Greyfriars	81
The Amazing Career of Billy Bunter	58
Kings of Crime	54
Roamings of the Rio Kid	43
The St. Franks Saga	34
Stand and Deliver	33

AD'S

NUMBER ONES: Offers invited for first issues of 1/2d Gem, 1d Gem, Penny Popular (with Bunter plate), Greyfriars Herald (1919), Boys Realm (1902). Boys Realm (1919), Boys Leader (1903, with Funny Pips), Boys of the Empire (1900), Jack's Paper, Aldine Robin Hood, Newnes' Redskin Library, Dixon Hawke, Aldine Diamond, Newnes Black Bess (both series), Aldine Jack Sheppard, Aldine Claude Duval, Nelson Lee (1930), Thriller, Sport and Adventure, Sports for Boys, Boys Magazine, Rover, Adventure, Wizard, Boys Cinema, Pluck (1922), Rocket, Pals, Boys Mascot, Boys Favour-it, Eagle, Boys Cinema.

AND FOR HOLIDAY ANNUALS, 1921, 1923, 1924, 1925, 1926, 1927, 1928, 1930, 1931, 1932, 1936. Tom Hopperton, Courtlands, Fulford Road, Scarborough.

CHANGE OF ADDRESS: R.A. McGarva has moved from 220 Sissons Road, Leeds 10, to 15 WELLSTONE ROAD, BRAMLEY, LEEDS. Collects School-boy Annuals and is interested in G.A. Henty books or articles.

HAMILTONIANA

Compiled by HERBERT LECKENBY

* * *

Messrs. Cassell' announce two new Bunter Books for this year. "Billy Bunter's Brainwave" (June) and "Billy Bunter's First Case" (Oct), and I understand there's still hope of new Tom Merry books.

* * * * *

Here's something for Hamiltonians to swank about. Cyril Kersh writing in the "People" of January 25th about the amazing memory of Denis Brogan, famous member of "Transatlantic Quiz" and "Round Britain Quiz" teams, said -

"I am told that today he entertains his children - he has four, ranging in age from 16 to 10 - with Bunter stories he read as a boy! He recounts them incident by incident, and almost word for word."

How about the London Club inviting Mr. Brogan to a meeting for a contest with Bob Whiter? Strikes me t'would be worth listening to.

* * * * *

OLD-FASHIONED? NEVER!

by ERIC FAYNE

* * *

The literary critic of the "Daily Graphic", (now "Daily Sketch") referring to "Billy Bunter's Beanfeast", describes it as "one of Frank Richard's old-fashioned school stories, which will be devoured with enjoyment by boys and their fathers."

Book critics, - like film, radio, and television critics, - like to pass off as truisms statements which are really nothing but their own private opinions. These gentry are also gloriously facetious, and try desperately hard to be funny, though whether they ever succeed in being anything but complete bores is a question.

It is probably asking too much to expect the Graphic critic to explain on what grounds he describes the new Bunter book as an old-fashioned story. Does he expect us to enjoy a tale which is completely up-to-date? If so, I suggest that in the next Bunter book (a) most of the fellows are almost illiterate, (b) Harry Wharton and Co carry coshes while Skinner and Snoop each own sawn off shot-guns, (c) Fisher T. Fish is the most popular fellow in the school, as being in a position to supply the school with American comic papers, (d) Hurree Singh supplies all and sundry with Indian sex books, (e) Wingate announces his engagement to Clara Trevlyn, while Coker admits that he is secretly married to Mary, the housemaid, (f) there is a morning break in all classes for drinking milk, which Vernon-Smith insists upon having hot, (g) Corporal punishment is, of course, abolished except for very minor offences.

Personally, I think it is a moot point as to which school stories are really old-fashioned. I have always regarded "Tom Brown's Schooldays" as a hopelessly boring piece of tripe. I cannot imagine any modern boy reading it with enjoyment. Tom Brown was old-fashioned when Edward the Seventh was on the throne. "Eric", in my humble opinion, was a more interesting story, but its preaching style of writing makes it outmoded today.

But Wodehouse's famous school stories, written before the first world war, are as up-to-date today, so far as the school sequences go, as when they were written. The school sections of Talbot Baines Read's tales might have been written yesterday, except for the fact that his boys were expected to work in class.

Hylton Cleaver's short stories, under the title of "Harley First Fifteen", were written at least thirty years ago, but they are as convincing today as they were then.

Desmond Coke's "Bending of a Twig", written just after the first war, is still a perfectly natural story of modern school life.

To my way of thinking, Frank Richards' tales are ageless. Providing it is well-written, a school story is a school story. Hundreds of Mr. Richards' tales of forty years ago, to put the age in round figures, stand up well to the passing of time. In the Tom Merry stories now appearing in the "Sun", the Amalgamated Press have endeavoured to bring the tales up-to-date by making Tom say "He's trying to take the mickey out of me", while fellows are frequently made to ejaculate "Whizzo!".

Personally, I doubt very much whether either of those

expressions are in very constant use in Britain's great public schools of the St. Jim's type.

Frank, himself, has tried to bring his slang up-to-date by the use of "Smears" and "Smudges", which I think could well be dispensed with, while I found the continued use of the word "twerp" in one of his post-war stories very tedious indeed.

I suggest to him that most schools of good type have their own slang. Just before the war we found Greyfriars using "punny" for punishment room, "blacker" for black-out in those early days of the war, to mention only two. That sort of thing is far more convincing than "twerps" and "mickeys".

Frank Richards' style is ageless, simply because it is so completely his own. The "Stacey" series will still make fine reading after fifty years have gone by, simply because it was well-written, of sound plot, and the characterisation was perfect. Greyfriars and St. Jim's old-fashioned? Never! Never!

(This pungent Fayne opinion has been in hand
some time - H.L.)

* * * * *

REVIVING THE MAGNET

(The following is a copy (slightly abbreviated) of a letter the active Merseyside branch of the O.B.B.C. are proposing sending to the Amalgamated Press - H.L.)

Dear Sirs,

"Daddy, why can't we get regular long stories of Billy Bunter and Tom Merry now? "

How many fathers up and down the country have been asked that question by the youngsters to whom they have loaned their treasured copies of "The Magnet" and "Gem" ? To that, however "the Daddies" can find no adequate answer. Nor can we, the members of the above Club, on behalf of whom this letter is written.

The sentiment by which we are unashamedly inspired does not, however, make us unmindful of the commercial and economic issues involved.

We realise, that, to issue a regular school-story paper the publishers must be convinced that the demand is there. Is it?

Our experience, of which the commencement of this letter are typical, proves that it is; and disproves the theory hold in

some quarters that the nature of the healthy-minded British school-boy of this so-called "jet age" has so changed as to lessen his appreciation of the clean, wholesome literature that delighted a previous generation in papers like "The Magnet" and "The Gem".

True, the periodical "literature" he reads - or scans - today (inferior, rubbishy and in poor taste as much of it is) might seem to bear out that contention to some degree. But, equally true, he has no choice in the matter.

It is to give him that choice that we now appeal. We realise, of course, that the matter of potential demand may not be the only lion in the path.

We are aware, for instance, that Mr. Charles Hamilton - in whom, as the author of the stories for which we appeal, our sole interest lies - is a man of advanced years. We also know, that the time may not be far distant when Fate decrees that he lay down his pen for the last time. The publishers will know, by some sorry experiments of yesteryear that no substitute writer would deceive the reader or claim his allegiance for very long afterwards.

But no dislocation need ensue, for the solution is ready made, and one, moreover, that has been successfully adopted by the publishers themselves on previous occasion; notably in the case of "The Gem" and Schoolboys' Own Library. We refer, of course, to the re-publication of Mr. Hamilton's previous stories which would thereby extend the new paper's lease of life by, say, a score of years. A number of course, would require slight re-editing or re-writing (the latter, preferably by Mr. Hamilton himself.)

As regards the success of this course, we could quote the invariable tributes paid to Charles Hamilton's stories both by the Old Boy who has renewed acquaintance with them after a lapse of many years, and by the young boy who has read one for the very first time - that their vitality and freshness utterly belie the date on the cover; that they are as timeless as the old but ever-new festivities of Christmastide. Furthermore, several of the cloth bound issues selling at 7/6d. have had to be reprinted several times, and even the modern generation is conversant with Billy Bunter, Greyfriars and St. Jim's.

Yours faithfully,

D. B. WEBSTER, Chairman.
For and on behalf of
THE OLD BOYS' BOOK CLUB.

1930? DO YOU AGREE?

by Raymond Jones, Cowes, Isle of Wight.

* * *

I wonder if a debate has ever been held in our select circle to discover the most popular year of all Frank Richards' tales of Greyfriars, as produced in the "Magnet"? It is generally held, I believe, that the late 1920's and early 1930's saw the master's finest work come off the reel, but has the case ever been argued? I can imagine a heated argument if so. At any rate, I am going to "stick my neck out" as they say, and claim that in 1930 we have the most enjoyable "Magnet" stories ever.

Probably many "old regulars" will jump down my throat and say that 1932, with its fine character studies in the "Lancaster" and "Harry Wharton's Downfall" series takes the prize, but I maintain that for sheer lighthearted, humorous writing 1930 cannot be beaten. I'm afraid I must ask you to overlook the lamentable spasm of "subs" stories, but apart from them I stake my claim and stick to it!

Take the "Courtfield Cracksman" series, for instance, which starts the year (following, I may say, surely one of the best Christmas tales ever). This series seems not to have attained the popularity I have always thought it deserves. Its style is free and easy, the humour unbounded, and the plot though hackneyed, is treated boldly and clearly. For sheer Bunterism this series cannot be beaten -- yes, and I am including the much vaunted "Bunter Court" tales. Remember the "Back to Greyfriars" chapter which commences the winter term? A gem, a real gem, chaps! And remember Bunter in full and frantic flight when he believes Richard Steel, fancied to be the Courtfield Cracksman, is on his track with a gun hidden under his coat-tails? And that last, uproarious issue "Billy Bunter's Come-back", when poor old Billy is hounded from pillar to post in his endeavours to get back into the school? And speaking of "poor old Billy", I shall always treasure the last illustration in the issue "Goodbye Bunter", which shows Bunter sitting on his trunk waiting for the train which is to take him home after his temporary "expulsion". There, in that drawing, I think you have very nearly everything that made Billy Bunter great.

Later came a short series -- again, seldom done justice: the Barney McCann series featuring our old hatchet-faced friend Fisher T. Fish. For as long as Henry Samuel Quelch remains in my

memory I shall always see him catching Barney McCann in the back of the neck with a large, heavy poker at midnight.

Pop of the Circus was well up to average, but for me the highlight of the summer came in a single issue "Bunter the Inksplasher", one of Bunter's several expeditions with a circus. Poor old Quelchy again! Ink in his chivvy this time! What that man had to put up with! And, from the same story, what price Rollo's description of Bunter's nose: "Like a little dumpling chucked at your face and sticking where it happened to fall."

The "Brander" rebellion can rarely have been equalled for sheer pace and action. As a boy this was my dream rebellion; it was all a rebellion ought to be. I cheered Bob Cherry and the Bounder when they sacked Van Tromp's study; I hooted Brander out of the dorm when he broke his promise to the rebels; I roared with immoderate laughter at Major Cherry and Sir Hilton Popper as they squared up to each other, gobbling with fury like excited turkey-cocks.

The China holiday series was perhaps the best holiday series ever. It was honestly a geographical education in itself to a kid. The dramatic moments were sustained as well as anything Richards ever did, and Bunter, of course, was in his element, though I seem to remember some objection on his part when his ears were to be cut off. Also (whisper it) I have always had a sneaking regard for Ferrers Locke. Down with Sexton Blake!

Now, have you ever read a more delicious piece of Greyfriars characterisation than that of Paul Pontifex Prout when his eye was blacked in those memorably couple of tales in the autumn of 1930? This was Prout at his best -- and also Coker at his best, too, though as a rule I'm not a tremendous Coker fan. Prout before his study mirror, surveying with horror his darkening optic will always be a source of joy to me. Poor old Prout! How we do laugh over the misfortunes of others!

Christmas at Cavendale Abbey, whilst not up to the standard of a Christmas at Wharton Lodge, nevertheless had all the ingredients of a true Hamilton Christmas (who was this man Dickens anyway?). We had a ghost and an assassin, Ferrers Locke, a stately earl, bags of snow, whistling wind and midnight adventures. All perfectly illustrated, complete with short story and Editor's chat, for 2d. Who could want more? Blimey, I'm paying 2/6d. a time for 'em now!

No, me bhoys, 1930 was the broth of a year! I defy anyone to go one better and produce a year which gave more solid enjoyment than that contained in these tales outlined above. I throw the gauntlet down -- the contest is open to all! And that includes my old Southampton friend Edmund Walter Cox. Him and his 1932! Take up your pens, draw close the ink -- I'm waiting to have thirty-two years thrown at me!

* * * * *

MAGNET TITLES (Cont'd).

"S" denotes Substitute. No.1131 The Schoolboy Detective. No.1132 Skinner's Shady Scheme. No.1133 Blackmail. No.1134 Fool's Luck. No.1135 Coward's Courage. No.1136 Six in the Soup. No.1137 Bunter The Bandit. No.1135 Coker's Cracksman. No.1139 Quelohy's Christmas Present. No.1140 Billy Bunter's Christmas. No.1141 Bunter Comes to Stay. No.1142 The Artful Dodger. No.1143 The Form-Master's Favourite. No.1144 Wanted by the Police.

VERY SOON . . .

THE

"Magazine Collector"

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NELSON LEE COLUMN

All communications to ROBERT BLYTHE
46, CARLETON RD., HOLLOWAY, LONDON, N.7.

This month we have another chatty article from Len Allen of Sheffield, and I'm sure that his last paragraph will arouse quite a lot of interest.

LEEFLECTIONS - AGAIN

by Leonard M. Allen

Congratulations to Bob Blythe on the completion of his four year task - a complete list of the Nelson Lee Library titles covering the four series. I am sure that many collectors have found it invaluable. Gratifying too is the number of new Leeites recently enlisted to the ranks to whom, perhaps, a little advice from old stager Allen may be useful.

We all have strong affection and memory of a particular story or series first read years ago and I am sure that others share this with me of the first Brookes' St. Frank's yarns which commenced in No. 112 of the old series. Now these copies are exceedingly difficult to obtain today but I can recommend the reprints in the N.L. 3rd New series. These are in fairly plentiful supply and reasonably priced. The Editor quite openly announced that the stories had been published before consequently they vary little from the originals. The illustrations are superior and more numerous, in addition two interesting serials are offered - "The Peril from the East" by Stanton Hope is especially entertaining as it is futuristic and forecasts a war with the yellow races in 1943. Following this series, Nos. 1 to 8, came another reprint also differing little from the original, the Hunter the Hun stories (Nos. 148 to 157 in the old series). This covered the first barring-out at St. Frank's and generally agreed to be one of the best of this type. These number 9 to 18 in the 3rd Series and, in addition, an original serial by E.S.B. appeared in Nos. 11 to 17. This concerned the adventures of Lord Dorrimore and Umlosi, unassisted by Lee or the scholars in a typical Brookes Lost World in the Pacific. Neither of these two series were republished in the Monster Library but the remainder of the 3rd New series cannot be recommended being a strange mixture of stories apparently taken at random.

Few of the long-run A.P. boys' papers were not graced at some time or another with a story by Charles Hamilton. The N.L. Library was no exception. One story is all that I can trace but I am sure that Hamiltonians will be interested to learn that it appeared in No. 338, (Nov. 26th/21), and the price of the paper was raised from 1½d. to 2d. that very week. A football yarn, "The Corinthian", possibly a re-print, did not include any familiar characters.

We all associate E.S.B. with St. Frank's, Sexton Blake the Blue Crusaders and imaginative stories but during the new series of the Boys' Realm quite a different style of yarn from his pen appeared. This serial, "The Stuff to Give 'Em", ran from No. 45 (May 26/28) to No. 55 (Aug 4/28) and had a strong human interest. The hero, Clive Tracey, a young animal doctor whose father has been ruined by the local squire, is in love with his rival's daughter. Horses are doped, suspicion cast on the hero and everything depends on him winning the horse race in the final instalment. This sounds more like Nat Gould than E.S.B. but the familiar touch is there - Clive invents a medicine which rejuvenates animals and need I say how useful this proves. Conveniently the Jockey Club refrain from asking awkward questions.

The N.L.L. was never very generous with readers' competitions, the magnificent prizes make strange reading today. A Painting Competition was offered in the 2nd new series, the first prize was announced as having been won by a Manchester reader - the sum of one shilling a week for a year, the second won by a Great Yarmouth reader - sixpence a week for a similar period. Fifty other prizes were also distributed but discreetly undescribed.

Most readers will have a vivid recollection of the cover illustration of an old number although the story is forgotten. I have two, one is the cover of a Boys Friend 4d. Library - "In Trackless Space" by E.S.B. under pen-name, Robert W. Comrade, a copy of which I obtained some short time ago and agreed with my impression. The other is of a Nelson Lee and without any previous mention to Bob Blythe I would like him to check for me. The scene depicted was the outside of a large shop, bank or theatre with running figures disappearing on the right, on the pavement in the foreground was painted a large purple circle. How about it, Bob, was there such a cover in the old series?

Good news for the E.S.B. supporters - Norman Conquest to

appear in the cinema screen. The successor to Waldo, the Wonder Man, has for a long time been a best seller in the Collins Mystery Novel series. The part of Conquest is to be played by Hollywood actor, Tom Conway, who recently arrived in this country. He has all the histrionic and physical requirements for the role, being over 6' in height and for years played a similar role in American pictures as The Falcon. Recently he has been featured as Sherlock Holmes on the radio, with another English born actor, Nigel Bruce, as Doctor Watson. Some years ago, his film-star brother, George Sanders, took the role of the Leslie Charteris character, The Saint, in a film. Readers will recall those stories appearing in "The Thriller" as did the early Conquest yarns.

* * * * *

Len's news concerning The Conquest film interested me so much that I got in touch with Brooks and as a result I can now give the following additional information. The film is to be made by Premier Film Productions at Denham. Apart from Tom Conway, other parts are to be played by Eva Bartock and Joy Shelton, the latter taking the part of Pixie, Conquest's wife. The story is based on Brook's novel "Daredevil Conquest" and will be called "Park Plaza 605". Apparently it is intended as a first feature film so we should all have a chance of seeing it. Speaking personally I'd far rather see a film about the St. Frank's characters - but as that's obviously out of the question this is a very good second best. Here's hoping the film is a success and that as a result Brook's will move up into the top bracket of thriller writers. The place left vacant by Edgar Wallace has never really been filled, so there's a good chance for E.S.B. if it comes off.

Incidentally, before we go on, the cover you remember Len has me beaten. It certainly doesn't occur in the first 150 numbers of the Old Series. Can anyone else recollect this cover?

You will remember my including in the column a letter from Bill Champion of Reading - well he has been persuaded to write an article, and I'm sure you'll all agree with me when I express the hope that there will be more forthcoming from his pen in the near future.

* * * * *

WILLIAM THE CONQUEROR

An Appreciation

by

William Champion

In all the school stories published within the pages of the "Gem", "Magnet", "Nelson Lee", etc., the accent was chiefly on youth; in other words, the plots were woven round the members of the middle-school ---- the fags and seniors merely being brought in to "make up weight", as it were.

However, in my modest opinion, there was one character from the upper-school who had no parallel ---- not even in the classic "Fifth-form of St. Dominics" ---- and that character was William Napoleon Browne, of the Fifth-form of St. Franks. Incidentally, WAS it ever made quite clear that the "Napoleon" was inserted by the fifth-former himself, or was he christened that way by his fond parents?

Although he was a comparative newcomer to the school, his geniality, wit, wisdom, perfect sang-froid, and free-and-easy habit of mixing with the "lower types of humanity", soon earned him a special niche in my esteem, as it must have done countless others. Furthermore, his loquacity, which would have made any American President go green with envy, was a constant source of amusement to me.

Who will ever forget his introduction in "Fooling The School" (Nelson Lee No. 513, 4-4-25). In this exceedingly humorous yarn we find Browne, due as a pupil at St. Franks in the coming summer term, on his way to that famous seat of learning in order to give the school the "once-over". On the train, he makes the acquaintance and incurs the displeasure of a certain benighted Prince Augustine of Zeko-Vania, who has also chosen that day to visit St. Franks ---- a somewhat doubtful honour he has already conferred, or inflicted, upon several other unfortunate schools. With typical Browne technique, our hero informs the prince of the "ferocious types of assorted firebrans" who inhabit St. Franks, completely dissuades him from his project, and masquerades as the prince himself on his arrival at the school.

The account of how Dr. Stafford conducted the pseudo-prince round the various form-rooms made entertaining reading, such as his entry into the third-form room; "For you, Mr. Suncliffe," said Browne, casting a benevolent eye on Willy Handforth & Co, "there must be thrills in platoons. The homely

tin-tack as you sit upon your chair, the whistle of a paper-pellet as it wings its sticky way past your auricular appendage, the sylvan note of the homely mouth-organ as it is tuned behind the friendly desk-lid. Such thrills as these must be of daily occurrence. Am I right, sir?"

Browne evaded censure for his daring deception by luckily discovering that the Head's life-hobby was archaeology. Our hero, who also knew a Ming Dynasty vase when he saw one, talked his way right into the Head's heart; and when, eventually, he cordially extended an invitation to Dr. Stafford to visit his home during the Easter holidays in order to meet his father, Sir Mortimer Browne, another famous archaeologist ---- well ----!

The following week's story was "Archie's Easter Picnic!", and here, again, Browne was well to the fore. Early in the yarn he had occasion to visit Captain Bertram Glenthorne's chambers in Jermyn St. and his opening words proved he had not changed over-week:

"Why, dash it, you're Browne!" ejaculated Archie, opening the door.

"The result of loitering in the sun," admitted W.N. apologetically. "I trust the weather-beaten appearance is not too pronounced? No? I breathe again!"

Yes, Browne certainly had something. He had not been long at St. Franks before he had replaced Chambers as Captain of the fifth; and later, when Fenton was worried by the great lack of cricketing ability among the seniors, we find William Napoleon wheedling the Captain of the School into playing Nipper and one or two more juniors in the First-team ---- with excellent results.

Our hero again came out strong in the summer vacation series of that year. Who doesn't remember his coolness when, with most of Lord Dorrimore's holiday party, he was held captive aboard the Wanderer, anchored in the lagoon of Paradise Island, whilst Nipper & Co. were camping-out on the island, as yet free from Jonathan Prescott's clutches.

Browne was finding his enforced stay on the yacht rather irksome. He confided as much to his friend, Stevens, of the fifth; and, soon after, noticing Nipper, Handforth, and a few more juniors approaching in canoes, he calmly decided to join them. Followed by a quaking Stevens he approached the gangway, and found a villainous-looking half-breed guard barring his progress. This

guard pushed a revolver towards the lanky fifth-former'

"Better stand back!" he grunted'

"These little annoyances are only to be expected, Brother Horace," said Browne gently. "It is a pity that we should be forced to suffer them; but no matter. Come!"

'Stevens was about to say something, but he gulped. Browne was smiling as urbanely as ever, and he didn't seem to appreciate the fact that the guard's revolver was menacing him. He lifted up the barrel, gazed down the bore, and carelessly turned it aside.'

"Very interesting, but crude!" he remarked coolly'.

The upshot was, that Browne and Stevens did join forces with the juniors; and I can recollect feeling as relieved as Nelson Lee and Dorrie must have felt, as they were paddled out of gunshot.

I think 1925 saw Browne at his very best ---- he went from strength to strength. When the mystic Ezra Quirke was getting into his stride, it was W.N. who applied the half-Nelson in no uncertain way, and did more, perhaps, than the inimitable Nipper in bringing sanity back to the school.

And, to finish this short eulogy of Mr. Justice Browne's favourite son, who will ever forget "The Ghosts of Dorrimore Castle" and "The New-Year Revellers"? Who will ever forget the masterly way in which W.N., plus Willy Handforth, abducted Miss Muriel Halliday from under her aunt's nose, and whisked her from London to the lesser-known wilds of Derbyshire and Dorrimore Castle, there to meet her old love, a certain distant relative of Dorries named Henry Bruce, who had long mourned her as dead.

I always claimed that reading that series was the most delightfully-cheering way in which to terminate the Old-Year and enter the New. Here's to William the Conqueror!

WILLIAM F. CHAMPION.

FOR SALE and/or EXCHANGE: Magnets, 1938 to 1939. Gems from 1936, including Christmas numbers. Nelson Lees, 1919 onwards, including Xmas numbers. Holiday Annuals 1928 to 1931. A few S.O.L's. The last 50 issues of Startler 1931-32. S.B. Annual, Tom Merry's Own. REQUIRE THE FOLLOWING: Magnets, Gems, Nelson Lees, Monster Libraries, S.O.L's. Any reasonable exchanges welcomed. S.A.E. for details G.J. HIGHTON, 14 GREYHOUND ROAD, WILLESDEN, LONDON, N.W.10.

BLAKEANA

Edited by H. M. BOND
10 ERW WEN, RHIWBINA, CARDIFF

THE ROUND TABLE - FEBRUARY, 1953

Anthony Baker of Barnet, Herts, has written agreeing with the views expressed in our January issue re the modern Blake stories. He thinks they are not too bad when one views them in keeping with today's events. The age of Master Criminals has gone. He doesn't think that boys of today, himself included, would like them back. When one realises that the S. B. L. is the only British detective magazine for boys on the market, and compares them with the American trash that is crowding the bookstalls, we should be very glad that Sexton Blake is what he is. It was good to see Derek Ford's excellent review of 1952 in the January number. But if Sexton Blake is to live very much longer something must be done, his status amongst boys of today is absolutely nothing. Anthony would say that 90% of the people who read the S.B.L. today are adults. In his form at school he is the only one out of 28 reading it, only about two others even having heard of it. Three or four vaguely remember Blake as an adventure strip cartoon in "Knockout", which, after all is only a comic paper for the younger reader. The commencement of a story of Blake in "Knockout" is a step forward on the picture strip (however, but not much, for they are of no sizeable length and in any case do not catch the eye of boys over the age of 10 or 11. He goes on to say that he thinks the present circulation of the Library must be pretty small. His newsagent only has orders from four or five other people. Our young Blake fan suggests giving Blake a boost by placing stories about him in the "Champion", a boys paper much more widely read. He thinks this, plus a good amount of advertising in other A.P. papers might set the Man from Baker Street on his feet again and make him once again THE fictional detective.

Now these revelations make one sit up and think. Fancy only two boys in a class being sufficiently interested in Blake. Of course in this jet-age we must give way a little to the inter-

planetary type of hero like the already famous Dan Dare, but nevertheless there is still room for the adventures of an earthbound hero. We surely do not have to send Blake to the far off planets in order to re-introduce him to the public. Before saying any more on this subject I would like to refer you to the excellent new article by Graham Davies which appears in this issue of the C.D. He gives a good reason why Blake is not so popular nowadays, but the angle is NOT juvenile. I shall have more to say about this next month. I shall welcome all correspondence on the current subject, so please get pen to paper.

Cheerio for now,

H. MAURICE BOND.

* * * * *

A BLAKIAN DILEMMA

by

Graham Davies

In recent months there has been quite a lot of discussion about whether the Sexton Blake Library, and indeed Blake himself, hold the same foremost place in the regard and affection of present day youthful readers as they did, say, during the 1930s and 1940s. I do not believe, myself, that there is any danger of Blake really falling off the map, but it does seem to be the case that other characters in juvenile fiction have come forward to offer a strong challenge to the Baker Street detective - notably Biggles, Kit Carson, etc. With regard to adult readers of the S.B.L., as it is presented at the moment, well, I think that to them Blake is the same dear old friend that he was in their youth - or they wouldn't still follow his cases!

But whether or not present day youth prefers pure adventure stories to detective stories is not really so important as the allied question of whether the Sexton Blake Library should be re-created anew as purely adult reading - to occupy a place on the bookstalls among purely adult magazines. As we all know, Blake stories were originally meant for juvenile readers only; and then, as the years went by, and almost certainly as a result of the fine qualities of Blake's own character and the ever-improving writing

of the A.P. team of authors, Blake stories began to be announced as 'For readers of all ages'. This was quite true - they were for readers of all ages, with good plots, good characterisation, good dialogue, and good narrative. But they were still, even so, bound to the ranks of juvenile literature. An attempt was made, in 1933, with the introduction of the Detective Weekly, to make Blake stories non-juvenile, but although a good start was made with Lewis Jackson's polished aid, it was not long before they had to return once again to the category of 'For readers of all ages.'

What is it that prevents Blake from being a 100% adult's detective? Why is it that he is still to be found among the ranks of the Juveniles? It is not because of any defect in his own character. It is true that, at one time, Blake was inclined to indulge in rather exaggerated feats of rough-housing, and of physical endurance without food and sleep, etc., but even these tendencies have largely disappeared in these days of Tyrer, Parsons, King, Frazer, etc. Blake is more a man of brain power than brawn power at present. And, as is well known, he quite frequently has to come into contact with the seamy side of life, and this he accomplishes without any trace of prudery - which should weigh heavily in his favour with most adult readers.

No, the reason why Blake stories are tied to the juvenile shelves is, I am afraid, because of our old friend, the dearly beloved Tinker. It is Tinker, and Tinker alone, who keeps Blake among the pages of the Knockout Comic. That is to say, Tinker as he is, and always has been depicted - Blake's youthful assistant.

What is Tinker's age supposed to be? Blake, we are pretty well agreed, is round about thirty-nine - eternally. But Tinker - well he might be anything from seventeen to twenty-three. Not a few authors in the past, notably J.G. Brandon in the 1930s, used to make Tinker little more than a boy - about fifteen years of age. If that! Looking through some of my old Union Jacks, I frequently find him drawn (though not by Eric Parker) as a boy of little more than fifteen or sixteen. I do not think I am wrong in my idea that, whilst there is nothing about Blake's character to prevent him from being endeared to any adult reader, there is definitely something too youthful about Tinker's to have quite the same effect. I am not saying that it is Tinker's character that is at fault (there is no one who likes his cheerful, intrepid, and intelligent

qualities more than I do), but only that, if Blake is to take a front place among the Paul Temples, Poirots, etc., then something must be done to Tinker.

The obvious answer is simply to transform him from being Blake's youthful assistant into being Blake's younger partner in detection - with a share in the business! He could be aged twenty-five, with a more certain background than he has at present. He could be, say, the son of a professional man of some kind, now deceased, who left him a modest little sum to start him on a career; and he could have a definite girl friend, who could play a regular part in Blake's cases!

Should something like this be done, Tinker would immediately become a more sympathetic character to adult readers. No longer would he call Blake 'guv'nor' but - ah, now what could he call Blake? Sexton? Never in a thousand readers' years. Tony? (As Lewis Jackson resorted to way back in 1933). No, Tony would not be the right name for Blake, at least not in my humble opinion. Here, then, we come up against the Blakian dilemma. If Tinker is to be made an adult's character, he can no longer be the youth whom Blake employs. If he is made an adult character in the way I have tentatively suggested, then, as Blake's younger partner and friend, he will have to drop the 'guv'nor' and replace it with - what?

The only solution I can think of would be for Tinker to call Blake - well, just 'Blake'! But that again does not seem satisfactory. Perhaps some one else can think of a way out of this difficulty. Unless of course, the S.B.L. should remain what it has been for so many years - a magazine 'For readers of all ages'!

(Note. These were crowded out last month. - H.L.)

THE DECEMBER SEXTON BLAKE LIBRARIES

- No.277: "The Mystery of the Mason's Arms", by Anthony Parsons.
 No.278: "The Man with a Number", by Stephen Blakesley.

Gerry Allison writes:- May I first thank all those who have written about my reviews of the recent issues. I am pleased to hear how much they are appreciated. Regarding their appearance each month, the position is this. Firstly my spare time is very limited owing to the Northern Section O.B.B.C. Library, and second-

ly, there are certain authors whose work I simply cannot read!

My comments on many of the books could be restricted to a single adjective. Or if I used the Baedeker 'star' rating, nothing less than minus the entire galaxy would adequately express my opinion.

However, whenever there are any numbers which I can really recommend, or which contain points of interest, I shall be very willing to let the Editor have my report upon them.

Just one more thing before I come to the December titles. Last month I pleaded for the number of THE HOUSE in Baker Street. Well, James W. Cook has given me the number, together with chapter and verse! Before I pass this along to you I must do a little research work. I hope to be able to write a short paper in time for next month's "Digest", on the subject: 'The Home of Sexton Blake'.

No.277. S.B.L. They say that the first two acts of a play are easy to write, but it is Act three which shows the merit or otherwise of an author. It is there when the earlier action has to be logically explained, and any mystery made clear.

This maxim is only too frequently exemplified in the S.B.L. and "The Mystery of the Mason's Arms" is a fair specimen. The book has a good beginning, considerable humour, and convincing development. But as the denouement approaches the author loses his grip. For instance, an unknown man has been murdered in the Underground. He has followed Lady Emily Westomholme, (Blake's new girl-friend!) from the above named pub. She is taken to the mortuary and shewn the body, but declares that he is a perfect stranger. Later on however, they discuss the question as who it was that had trailed Lady Emily. The author has apparently forgotten that he had stated that it was an unknown person, for one very well-known character is eliminated because 'he isn't tall enough'. This, and similar careless mistakes quite spoil my enjoyment.

And how do you like this for a picture of the calm and cool Sexton Blake: "He (Blake) had found a small oak pew, and in a frenzy of destruction was swinging the thing round his head, and literally bashing angels and effigies to pieces. His hair was all over his face; his eyes wild with a species of madness. Sweat was pouring down his face and falling off his chin, and, every time he struck he yelled curses".

Pretty, isn't it? But of course he was saving Lady Emily from being buried alive. Alas for Yvonne Cartier and Roxane Harfield!

No.278. Stephen Blakesley has given us quite a readable story about an ex-convict trying to go straight, but whose past catches up with him and gives him trouble.

The villain, Delling, was quite a good character of the Master Criminal type. He had a tame monster of the Caliban brand as a servant. Now, why, instead of killing these two off at the end, why did he not allow them to get away? He would then have had them ready for a later story, and may have been able to build Delling up into another Kew or Zenith. After all, every crime is not solved or punished in real life.

* * * * *

SEXTON BLAKE COMPETITION No. 1.

This month I have pleasure in introducing a new series of competitions for readers of Blakiana. We are starting the ball rolling with a short story competition and the prize will be One Guinea for the best story submitted. It is pointed out that much co-operation will be needed to make this first contest the success I hope it will be. Here are the full details:-

1. Stories submitted must be about Sexton Blake but not necessarily actual detective yarns. For instance a short story dealing with an episode between Blake and his housekeeper is quite permissible.
2. Stories must be written or typed on ONE SIDE of a foolscap sheet.
3. Name and address of the author must be written or typed on the reverse side of manuscript sheet.
4. All entries MUST be received at the headquarters of Blakiana by the 28th February, 1953. No entry received after this date will be accepted for the competition, although any stories received after this date may be printed eventually in the C.D. if permission be given by the author.
5. The prize of 21/- will be awarded to the story which is considered to be the best by popular vote. Readers will be asked to vote when the stories appear in the APRIL and MAY

numbers of the C.D.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE COMPETITIONS WILL BE WELCOME.

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Letter Box

FRANK RICHARDS' MONTHLY LETTER

January 15th, 1953.

Dear Herbert Leckenby,

Many thanks for your letter and the C.D. W.W. Jardine's parody of my verses in the Auto is really charming. And our friend Roger is as interesting as usual, and as usual hath a pretty wit. But I am sure he knows well enough why the author left dry-as-dust details out in the cold. He does see the "practical reasons" for putting a severe limit on the number of 'houses': and the same limit has to be applied in other directions. "Economy of detail" should always be an author's watchword, in my opinion at least. Why burden the reader's memory with items which it is quite unnecessary for him to remember? A reader has told me that he could "see" that big beech tree at the corner of the footpath in Friar-dale Lane. I don't think he would have seen it more clearly, or indeed as clearly, if the author had stated that it was precisely seventy-three-feet-six-inches high, the trunk four feet in diameter, and that it was planted in the reign of George the Third by a man named Jones. I have always found that the reader's own imagination will fill in uncessential details. Thanks to Roger all the same for a very readable article.

George Bromley's discovery certainly made me jump. I knew there were often extensive borrowings in such cases: but a whole chapter must be a record. Who couldn't be an author on such easy lines?

With kindest regards, Always yours sincerely,
FRANK RICHARDS.

HOW GEORGE BROMLEY FOUND IT

Wigston Magna,
Leics.

Dear Mr. Leckenby,

I was not only surprised, but really thrilled to hear of the interest shown in the article on the duplicate chapters.

I never contemplated that it would have anything more than a passing "Well fancy that". I'm pleased that it was not Frank Richards who was caught cribbing!

To explain finding it is hard, but I had read with interest

an article in the "Digest" about the travel adventures of The Famous Five and sitting and pondering on same I was moved to protest that the Travel Series are not so interesting as the School series. The protest is herewith attached. I sorted through my modest collection and read the "Gem" travel story, weeks later I received a few Magnets from Bill Martin and ignoring pleas of fires to attend and pots to wash I started to read. Most uncanny. Everyone knows the feeling, when in a strange place, of knowing all about it, here I felt I knew every word that was coming. I estimate that six weeks had elapsed since reading the "Gem" but I immediately remembered the story and a quick check proved me right. The real co-incident is that I have only about a hundred Magnets and Gems and yet I have these particular two.

I like the new "Digest" very much, I wish it were a daily.
With best wishes,

Yours sincerely,
G. BROMLEY.

* * * * *

THE PEN-NAMES OF E.S. BROOKS.

RON BURROW

That student of Nelson Lee lore referring to the 'Pseudonyms' article in the Annual, points out that E.S. Brooks also wrote as S.B. Halstead, E. Sinclair Halstead and C. Hedingham Gosfield. He adds the interesting information that E.S.B. was living at Halstead in Essex at the time and that Hedingham and Gosfield at nearby villages.

That amazing fellow, Geoffrey Hockley of Christchurch, New Zealand, has done it again. You will remember that remarkable "write-up" in the New Zealand Listener he was responsible for some time ago. Well now "The Press" of Christchurch has interviewed him and an account of considerable length appears in what Geoff calls "its conservative columns". It is described as "Written Specially for The Press" by R.G.M." R.G.M. evidently spent quite a lot of time delving into Geoff's fine collection.

* * * * *

Thanks for the compliments!

K. Gore-Browne, Proprietor