

# The COLLECTORS DIGEST

Vol. 11, No. 132.

DECEMBER 1957



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# —THE COLLECTORS' DIGEST—

Vol. 11 No. 132

Price 1s. 6d.

DECEMBER, 1957

Editor: HERBERT LECKENBY,  
12 Herbert Street,  
Hull Road, Yrk.

or

c/o YORK DUPLICATING SERVICES,  
12A The Shambles, York.

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## FROM THE EDITOR'S CHAIR

Wishing all the members of the  
Brotherhood of Happy Hours, at  
Home and Abroad, a very Good  
Christmas and a Prosperous New Year.

\* \* \*

A MEMORABLE YEAR: We are nearing the end of our eleventh year; once again it's been a year of progress. Several new members have joined our ranks: I've had the pleasure of meeting some of them and the only regret is they didn't join earlier. We have had four visitors from overseas, Brian Holt from Iceland, Bill Hubbard from Kenya, Leslie Rowley from Japan and Bernard Thorne from Canada. Impressive record that, you know.

Then it has been my good fortune to welcome many visitors to York. What thrills I've had when I've caught sight of some familiar figure at the station, or looked for clues from someone I've been meeting for the first time. May there be many, many more such occasions in the future. It's so good to report that we have lost no members by death this year. Last year, unfortunately, there were three.

There are stirring events to come, too. There's the fight for the Greyfriars Silver Jubilee Cup and the celebration of the birth of

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the Magnet itself. As I have said the February C.D. is to be a bumper number. In connection with this I am sure I can be pardoned if I slip in a business note. This month a large number of members renew their subs for a yearly or  $\frac{1}{2}$  yearly period. May I request that they add  $\frac{1}{6}$  to cover cost of this extra special one. I am sure those who are not Hamiltonians won't begrudge this, for it would not be practical to celebrate with an extra number.

And please get down to articles suitable for the occasion.

\* \* \* \*

THE ANNUAL: Down at the Duplicating Agency as I write, the pages are being run off and I am busy addressing the stack of envelopes. The cover this year is to be of golden hue. Since I last wrote I've received "The Prefects of St. Frank's" and "The Story of John Creasey" both by Jack Wood. You'll see a full list of contents on another page.

Now, at the time of writing there are about 30 regulars who have not actually ordered. However, when placing my order I took the risk of including them. It happens every year and, no doubt, they took it for granted I should do so. Anyway, to save me writing each one individually, I'll take it I shall be safe in sending one unless I hear to the contrary. I should, however, prefer to have a line saying, "Why, of course."

\* \* \* \*

A HELPING HAND: In last year's Annual, Bob Gray of Church Stretton, expressed a wish to obtain a copy of "Merry and Bright" of sometime in 1918 which contained a letter he had written to the editor. He had been trying to get hold of it for over 25 years. Well, I must confess I thought his chance was rather remote, as pre-war comics are somewhat scarce. However, one never knows in our little world. In a letter recently, Bob told me it had been sent to him by Maurice Kutner and it arrived exactly 39 years to the day from the one it was published. Was Bob pleased? I'll say he was. In his letter he exclaimed, "Who says collectors' don't help each other? I'll say they do."

He also expressed his gratitude to Bill Lofts who, though he could not supply a copy of the paper itself, had offered to give him a copy of the letter. I hazard a guess Bill had got hold of the file in the British Museum. That's a typical example of the Brotherhood at work, the kind of thing which immensely pleases

Yours sincerely,

HERBERT LECKENBY

LETTER BOXA NEW FAN-MAG FOR YOU

From: Arthur MacLean,  
P.B.P.  
11, Old Bond Street,  
London, W.1.

November 20th, 1957.

Dear Mr. Leckenby,

As you may have heard rumoured, I am beginning a new fan-magazine to be called 'THE BAKER STREET GAZETTE'. The first issue will be in January, 1958. It will be printed, have photographic illustration, and will be mailed to subscribers. It will sell at 1/6d a copy, and cover SEXTON BLAKE and SHERLOCK HOLMES, NELSON LEE and DIXON HAWKE, who I would call the 'Big Four' of detective fiction.

I would be very grateful for anything you might be able to do in the way of drawing your readers' attention to the new magazine, and would be pleased if you would reserve a one whole page advertisement for me in the January issue.

Yours sincerely,

ARTHUR MACLEAN

\*\*\*\*\*  
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S.A.E. 23 MOUNTJOY. BRIDFORD.

\* \* \* \* \*

# Blakiana.....

conducted by JOSEPHINE PACKMAN

27 Archdale Road, East Dulwich, London, S.E. 22

I have quite a lot to cram into my allotted space this month, which means my remarks must be brief.

Firstly, I would like to thank all those who have so kindly supplied material for Blakiana during the past twelve months. I do, of course, look forward to your continued loyal support throughout the coming year. It would also be pleasing to receive material from more contributors, and so ease the burden of the few.

And now, I will take this opportunity of wishing all my readers "A Merry Christmas" and "A Happy New Year."

JOSIE PACKMAN

\* \* \* \* \*

## MY TWELVE FAVOURITE UNION JACK (BLAKE) STORIES

As selected by Olive Wright

No. 1041	The Hawk of the Peak.....	G. H. Teed
" 1064	The Street of Many Lanterns.....	G. H. Teed
" 1098	The Wizard of Wurtz.....	A. Skene
" 1157	The Mystery of Mrs. Bardell's Xmas Pudding.....	G. Evans
" 1225	The Temple of Many Visions.....	G. H. Teed
" 1226	Doomed to the Dragon.....	G. H. Teed
" 1227	The House of the Wooden Lanterns.....	G. H. Teed
" 1365	The Mistletoe Milk Mystery.....	G. Evans
" 1366	The Masque of Time.....	G. Evans
" 1383	The Brute of Saigon.....	G. H. Teed
" 1497	The Blood Brothers of Han-Hu.....	G. H. Teed
" 1531	The Land of Lost Men.....	R. Hardinge

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## HOW'S YOUR MEMORY (No. 9)

By E. V. Copeman

## THE SPIRIT OF CHRISTMAS

What is happiness?

Life, to many people, is one long hysterical vain search for happiness. You will see them, faded wrecks of beautiful girls, pale nervous young men; they have searched for a happiness supposed to be found through indulgence in their own petty whims and fancies.

But is there any greater pleasure than the thrill to be felt when one sees the gratitude in the eyes of another for some gift or help? In the eyes of the poor man for the gift of money that will mean a crust of bread to his starving children. In the eyes of the sick person, alone in his bedroom or ward, when he looks up to see that he has at least one friend who can sacrifice some little time to cheer him in his loneliness.

In our busy work-a-day lives we forget the pleasure of giving, and are apt rather to seek the easier modes of relaxation after our daily toil....but at Christmas, perhaps, one does think more of the pleasure of helping others.

As we sit before our cosy fires listening to the wind howling outside and blowing the snow about, everyone of us has thought: "Ah! If I were a millionaire, what pleasure I could give now! I would wander from street to street leaving behind me a path of gratitude." The very thought of it giving us exquisite pleasure.

We call it the Spirit of Christmas.

#### WHO WROTE THE ABOVE MESSAGE?

The message I have quotes above appeared in the pages of the SEXTON BLAKE LIBRARY. I wonder how many readers can recall and identify it?

As the final contribution to the "How's Your Memory" series for 1957, we will for once refrain from withholding the answer.

It was written by the Editor of the S.B.L. and appeared on the first page of Special Christmas Issue No. 105 (First Series) issued December, 1919.

In that same issue appeared a "powerful long Christmas Novel of Sexton Blake, Tinker and Pedro" called FIVE YEARS AFTER. Even in 1919 this story was a reprint, though I am not aware where it appeared previously.

In his introduction, the Editor stated: "This is probably the most popular Christmas Novel that has ever been written. It was published originally in 1908, and later it was dramatised and played in theatres all over England. In response to many and repeated requests, I am publishing it this Christmas, as I feel sure that even those readers who have read it before will revel in it, for it is a real

Christmas story. The spirit of Christmas envelopes every page."  
 (Note: This story was written by W. Murray Graydon. J.P.)

\* \* \* \* \*

ANSWER TO TEASER No. 8 (October 1957 C.D.)

I am wondering if any of you named Anthony Skene as the writer. Skene always featured Inspector Coutts and he is no longer writing Sexton Blake stories. And the inclusion of the little Japanese.....

Well, it wasn't Anthony Skene.

No, the author was WALTER EDWARDS and the story from which the six quotations were made was THE NEWSPAPER-SELLER'S SECRET which appeared in S.B.L. 2nd Series, No. 627 in June, 1938.

As for the extracts, No. 1 was scattered over page 2, No. 2 was on page 14, and Nos. 3 and 6 were from the endings to chapters 17, 18 and 19.

Quite a good yarn. The "clues" for identification were mainly in the characters - also the elimination of the modern authors during the course of the article.

The writer has a feeling that Walter Edwards would be acceptable to the present S.B.L. Editor, but alas, Mr. Edwards - like so many of the "old brigade" - is no longer with us. And that is our loss.

\* \* \* \* \*

ON TOUR WITH SEXTON BLAKE

By Walter Webb

This is a case of Sexton Blake in the famous city of Vienna following the disastrous events of the first world war when death and despair clouded the beautiful city and starvation caused the death of numberless victims. Blake's case-book divulges only rare instances of his activities in Vienna, and our tour of the once known "Queen City" of Central Europe deals with the most important of his assignments there.

Introducing those famous characters, Granite Grant, of the British Secret Service and Mademoiselle Julie, of the French Secret Service, affectionately remembered by many old-timers; the story was published in March 1923 (no. 278 First Series) under the title of

(No. 3) THE CASE OF THE CABARET GIRL Author - Pierre Quiroule

Stories of the hunt for buried treasure have been the novelists delight for many years; in fact, so avidly has he seized upon this so



fascinating theme as a means of entertaining his reader that he has well-nigh done the subject to death; yet that fascination still prevails today, albeit much dimmed by reason of the radical changes that have occurred in the standard and variety of our entertainment. This is the story, partly fact, of the Hapsburg treasure - of the attempt of the revolutionists, in November 1918, to gain possession of it and of how Sexton Blake came to have a hand in the unearthing of it. Back then, to Vienna, to those thankful days following the cessation of hostilities between the Allies and Germany.

Count Otto Stralsund was a member of King Carl's entourage and on very intimate terms with the emperor. When Carl, having failed to win either the confidence or respect of his people, was forced to flee with his suite from the Palace of Schonbrunn to the more friendly embrace of Switzerland and her subjects, he took with him the famous Hapsburg Jewels hidden in trunks. It was only when they were on the train that it was discovered that one of the trunks was missing. Count Otto was instructed to return to the palace and get it. He was accompanied by his daughter, Dalma, and a servant, a man named Hans Dietrich. But revolution had broken out in Vienna, and they were unable to fulfil their mission. The Count and his servant carried the trunk away to bury it, after which Dietrich stabbed and killed the Count, possessed himself of the paper on which details of the hiding-place of the treasure was given, and made good his escape. And, as the assassin ran, so Dalma waited in the palace for the return of the father she would never see alive again.

From a window high up in the Burgtheater, Granite Grant, with Mademoiselle Julie close to his side, watched as Vienna seethed in revolt. Secret Service agents, they were enjoying the triumph for which each had striven - that of the victory of their country against German and Austrian aggression. The revolutionist mobs filled the Ballplatz - the Whitehall of Vienna - and spread across the Volksgarten merging over into the Burg-Ring. When it became obvious to Grant that the mob intended to raid the palace of the emperor, he made a hurried rendezvous with Julie, and ran down the wide staircase of the great building in the wake of the revolutionists. Darting across the road and making a detour of the Hofburg, he came out into the Opern-Ring. Following his progress, we see him gain the Schadek Gasse and from there to the Mariahilfer Strasse, a great shopping highway of Vienna and one of its longest thoroughfares. Reaching Schonbrunn and the green lawns of the Vorpark ahead of the mob intent on lifting the treasure of the Hapsburg Monarchy, the value of which

was beyond the purchase of money, Granite Grant gained the courtyard of the palace as the revolutionists surged up the Schwender Gasse. Pressed against one of the upper windows he saw the face of a girl remarkably like that of Julie. Actually, it was that of Dalma, anxiously awaiting her father, not knowing that he had just been assassinated by Dietrich. Grant dashed up the famous "Blue Steps" of Schonbrunn Palace, but after a hurried search including an inspection of the Million Room and the Gobelin Room, he failed to find the girl and vacated the building as the mob surged the Vorpark and stormed the palace.

Dalma, having quitted the palace also, was found wandering in the streets of Vienna by a Herr Gartner, a professor of dancing, and became known as Helena Gartner. In gratitude to his generosity towards her she danced at night cabarets to augment his reduced income. Both she and her brother swore to be revenged upon Dietrich for his treachery.

When Richard Conway, a well-known London impresario, saw Dalma dancing at one of the cabarets, he approached her with a view to obtaining her consent to dance at the Nuts and Wine Cabaret in Piccadilly - a new club he was shortly opening in London. Seeing a ring on Conway's finger which she recognised as having once belonged to her father, she was intrigued to discover that he had bought it from an Italian named Andrea Morello, who taught French and German at a translation bureau in Sergeant's Inn, just off Fleet Street. A refusal of Conway's proposal was quickly changed to a compliance, and so it came about that Dalma became a popular entertainer at the Nuts and Wine Cabaret when its doors were thrown open in invitation to the public. At Dalma's request Conway unhesitatingly gave her brother Heinrich, a post as waiter in the club. Not knowing Morello she decided to keep watch in the hope that Dietrich might put in an appearance. A window in Mitre Court attracted her attention; it occurred to her that she could keep watch on the window of the Elite Translation Bureau without risk of observation could she gain access to it. It belonged to an artist named Basil Wilbrow, and acting on the spur of the moment, she asked him to paint her portrait. As Wilbrow worked so Dalma kept observation on the window opposite. Her patience was rewarded when she saw Dietrich suddenly appear at the window.

In England under the assumed name of Robert Jansen, Dietrich wanted to elicit Morello's assistance in unearthing the treasure, and in order to inspire the Italian to join forces with him, showed him

the Carloqitz Pendant, one of the jewels of the Hapsburg regalia. In his greed Morello endeavoured to gain possession of the priceless jewel; a quarrel ensued and Morello was killed. Dalma, appearing on the scene of the crime and about to enact vengeance on Dietrich, was attacked by the murderer with a heavy paper-weight, and in self defence she was forced to shoot him.

When, distraught, she destroyed the painting Wilbrow had almost finished, it brought Sexton Blake on the scene, for the artist, much incensed by the act of vandalism, sought the criminologist's advice. A seemingly trivial case, there were many interesting little points about the affair that Blake was prompted to investigate. Not the least interesting bit of information was that Madame Lefevre - as Wilbrow's client had introduced herself - was amazingly like Mademoiselle Julie in appearance; and Blake had a very wholesome admiration for the lovely and courageous French girl!

When Heinrich heard from his sister of the double killing at the Elite Translation Bureau his first thought was to obtain the pendant and paper giving details of the exact spot where the treasure was buried. He was interrupted by Blake, but flinging a tablecloth over the detective's head and tripping him up at the same moment, Heinrich escaped, but lost the precious paper in his hurried exit from the building, to be found by Blake a little later. The full significance of the apparently meaningless writing on the paper was made plain to the detective when he met the danseuse and heard how her father had been murdered by the treacherous Hans Dietrich. The police, lacking any conclusive evidence that a third party had been present at the double murder at Sergeant's Inn, had formed the theory that the men had killed each other, and Blake advised Dalma to forget the part she had played in the affair.

The clue he possessed to the treasure then claimed Blake's whole attention, and when he met Julie unexpectedly at the Nuts and Wine Cabaret they exchanged confidences, although Julie naively allowed Blake to do most of the talking and forbore in return to reveal anything which might have been advantageous to the detective in his investigations. To her secret delight, Blake even revealed the fact that he had the paper giving the hiding place of the treasure trunk, and went so far as to give her almost the precise details written on it. Almost, because knowing his Julie and her air of assumed artlessness, Blake knew she would lose no time in telling Grant of her triumph, after which the pair would lose little time in possessing themselves of the treasure. But having given her one or

two false directions, Blake relaxed in the knowledge that neither she nor Grant could beat him to the spot where the trunk lay hidden. Therefore, as the friendly rivals converged upon Vienna in the final stages of the hunt the cards were all in Blake's favour.

As he and Tinker reached Salzburg, Granite Grant was en route to Constantinople (now Istanbul). Day followed day as the engine snorted its way across the little Balkan States. Across the scorching Thracian plain; past the sea of Marmora, shimmering like a plateau of off pale bluish-green, through a breach in the crumbling mediaeval walls of Byzantium into Constantinople.

On reaching the Embassy, Grant found a wire from Julie awaiting him, bidding him join her in Vienna. Having discovered Blake's directions inaccurate, Julie had, nevertheless, managed to hit on the trail of a man whose ambitions ran parallel to their own. She had followed him to the Hietzinger Friedhof Churchyard and saw him searching about amongst the tombstones. When, eventually, Grant was brought face to face with the stranger, he recognised him as a young Austrian he had met during the war. His name was Von Bruer, and his quest for the treasure was solely in the interests of Dalma and Heinrich.

But when Grant and Julie did unearth the trunk all they found inside was a heap of stones and dirt, plus a card bearing Sexton Blake's compliments! Questioned in London later by his two indignant friends, Blake denied knowledge of the whereabouts of the treasure, apart from confessing that he had been with Von Bruer when the latter dug it up, but had not waited for it to be opened. Not for the first time had Blake been in a position when ignorance was by far the better policy to follow. The destination of the Hapsburg jewels was a matter of which he preferred to know nothing about.

\*\*\*\*\*  
WANTED: Magnets 400/600, 1000/1300. Gems 1/900, 1250/1450 preferably bound. Your price of exchanges. Write airmail. CHARLES VAN RENEN, BOX 50, UITENHAGE, SOUTH AFRICA.

WANTED: Magnets, Gems, all years but preferably pre 1925. Holiday Annals, S.O.Ls (Greyfriars stories). Any condition considered but price must be reasonable.

H. GORDON, 113 NEWINGTON GREEN ROAD, LONDON N.1.

\* \* \* \* \*

# HAMILTONIANA

compiled by Herbert Leckenby

Frank Richards tells me that there will be a short Bunter story in the Christmas number of "Time and Tide,"

\* \* \*

Who would expect to find a flash of Hamiltonia in a war-time convoy to Russia? Magnetites will find nostalgic pleasure amid the shot and shell of the February Sexton Blake Library entitled "The Sea Tigers" by Peter Saxon. Remember.....Peter Saxon is an old Magnetite from way back.

\* \* \*

## NOW SOME ARTICLES WITH SOME CHRISTMAS MEMORIES

Do You Remember?

By Roger M. Jenkins

No. 27 - Boys' Friends 1175-1180 - The Texas Lick Series

Quite a number of American characters appeared at Charles Hamilton's schools from time to time, and very few of them were in any way a credit to the United States. Certainly one of the most striking was Texas Lick whom the Fistical Four had encountered during their long Canadian visit in 1923.

Texas Lick was rather like Fisher T Fish in his supreme contempt for the backward country in which he was obliged to obtain his education, but apart from that there was little resemblance between the two characters. The Rookwood schoolboy was the ebullient, adventurous son of a millionaire, yet this made him no more attractive than Fish because with all his enterprise there was a note of cynicism and hardness that made him quite repulsive. Tubby Muffin was quite sorry for having fatuously offered to take him in hand and civilise him.

Jimmy Silver in his good-natured way asked his chums if they could stand the American junior over the Christmas holidays to save him from having to remain on at Rookwood on his own, but the answer to his enquiry was an emphatic negative. These preliminaries, however, turned out to be quite superfluous, for Texas Lick invited himself,

and all five of them were eventually installed at Jimmy Silver's home, where there was in due course yet another Ghost of the Priory.

The author never intended that Texas Lick should be likeable, but he did not grudge him the attributes of courageousness and and resourcefulness. He successfully roped in a mad bull at Rookwood (a feat which earned him a pardon for having lassoed Mr. Dalton just beforehand), he refused to be intimidated when Lovell masqueraded as the ghost of the Priory, and he was also instrumental in saving Mr. Silver from being cheated of a thousand pounds.

Mr. Silver was an art collector, but, like many people in those hard times, he was feeling the pinch and had decided to sell a Tintoretto to a dealer for that amount. Texas Lick opined that whilst Mr. Silver was a wise man, the purchaser must have been a mug to pay so much for such a daub. His impudence was, however, forgiven when, by a neat piece of tracking in the snow, he discovered that the man who had called to collect the painting was an imposter. This Christmas story constituted the most pleasant number in the series.

Back at School again in 1924 the series began to deteriorate. Texas Lick encountered a cardsharp on the train (the ubiquitous Captain Punter), and turned the tables on him, only to find that no-one had any admiration for his cunning. He became more and more unpopular until eventually the crash came; in an odd sort of a tale he induced the Fistical Four to accompany him to Brighton on a spree, without leave. The result was a flogging apiece - except for Texas Lick, who decided to leave Rookwood precipitately, and the old school knew him no more.

The Texas Lick series was in more senses than one a hangover from the long Canadian series. The decision had almost been made to leave the Fistical Four in Canada permanently, and their eventual return to Rookwood perhaps found the author a little out of touch, like the juniors who had been absent for so long. But this was not the end of the Rookwood stories in the Boys' Friend, and there were still some good things in store for readers when Texas Lick finally departed from the Rookwood scene.

\* \* \* \* \*

LET'S BE CONTROVERSIAL

(In this series, Eric Fayne touches on certain matters of interest to students of the Hamilton papers. He gives his own views superficially. If you will write to him, expressing your opinions on the topics he

discusses, he will summarise readers' views in a future issue of the C.D.)

#### No. 9. WHICH WERE THE BEST CHRISTMAS NUMBERS?

Could a good Xmas tale be staged at the schools, or was it preferable to feature a party held elsewhere? Which were the worst Christmas numbers?

In my opinion, the Gem's best Christmas numbers came between the blue covers; the Magnet's, very many years later. The Gem's Christmas stories played out at St. Jim's were (a) Binks playing ghost. (b) Mr. Selby's guest playing ghost. (c) "Nobody's Study". (d) "The Shadow of the Past" - an Outram Story. (e) The Christmas barring-out. Of these A, B and C were very fine stories, made outstanding by a seasonable eerie quality; in fact "Nobody's Study" is a great favourite of mine. The Outram yarn had its moments, but it lacked something that the others possessed, and of course, it appeared in 1917, a not particularly sparkling time for the Gem. The barring-out tales were good of their type, but a barring-out at Christmas seemed badly timed.

My favourite of all the Gem's Christmas issues contained "The Mystery of the Painted Room", which means I preferred the Xmas tales to be staged away from the schools. In my view, the Gem never again presented a Christmas story to equal "Painted Room" which appeared in 1913. True, many later festive seasons were spent at Eastwood House - a memorable one occurring during the Tom Merry-Cardew feud - but they were spoiled for me by being staged on the mammoth scale of a Hollywood musical, introducing characters from here, there and everywhere in Hamiltonia. Of course, far too many Gem Xmas stories were written by substitute writers.

The oddest Gem Xmas number I recall was in 1910, when a double number contained "Levison, the Schoolboy Detective", a shortish, quite unseasonable St. Jim's yarn. A real Christmas story actually appeared later the same year.

The Magnet had so many spanking Christmas series that it is difficult to decide on the best. In early days there were a few staged at the school, but they were slight, episodic affairs, with the exception of "Drummed Out of Greyfriars" which was unseasonable and a poor choice for Christmas. None of the early Magnet Christmases reached the quality of "Nobody's Study", and are hardly worth considering.

But in later years we could always rely on a masterpiece at

Christmas in the Magnet. I liked to spend my Christmas at Wharton Lodge, and I place first the series with Bunter hiding away in the attic - followed closely by Bunter in the well at Mauleverer Towers, and Cavendish Abbey a close third.

I did not like Yuletide at sea, and possibly because it starred minor characters, was not very keen on Yuletide in the Highlands.

For sheer simple charm, I think that "Tom Merry's Christmas" the Gem's first Christmas number, takes a lot of beating.

It's just my point of view. What's yours?

\* \* \* \*

### CONTROVERSIAL ECHOES

No. 7. Can any criticism be levelled at the reformation of Vernon-Smith and Levison?

HARRY BROSTER writes:- "That Vernon-Smith was the counterpart of Lunley-Lunley is matter of personal opinion. That their early misdeeds were on a par as far as actual villainy was concerned, yes, but that is as far as it goes. Vernon-Smith's reformation was farcical. He lapsed too often into his former bad habit for any reformation. On the whole, he could not be called a pleasant character. As Eric Fayne says, his tricks reminded us too much of a vicious adult, not a boy of nearly sixteen.

But that is where his charm lay. Frank Richards depicted him as an unreliable type - when he was good, he was very good, but when he was bad - well, he was an intriguing character. But the fault was, he was wicked beyond his years.

There Levison scored. His faults were legion, but they were the bad traits of an unpleasant boy of fifteen. We can say his reformation was complete. It had to be with such a character as his brother Frank to make it feasible. But he was still an interesting character when he was "good" remember, because he maintained that great trait, his shrewdness and keen mind. Charles Hamilton has invested all his best character with that keenness and wisdom beyond their years. Bring to mind, Kerr, Roylance, yes and Lunley-Lunley, Cardew too (he was Vernon-Smith over again, of course). Then, the Bounder and Mauly from Greyfriars; Jimmy Silver, and that other "reformed" character, the Caterpillar of Highcliffe.

No, the reformation of Vernon-Smith never happened - his appeal lay in the fact that he was apt to break out any time. Levison's had to be complete, otherwise no Frank Levison and no need for Cardew. We



lost Levison, the cad, but we gained the Levison brothers, both great characters and both great assets to their school, and we had for good measure, Cardew, perhaps in some ways better than the Bounder and certainly more likeable.

ROGER JENKINS writes:- "I would agree with you in saying that the early Vernon-Smith was the counterpart of Lumley-Lumley, not Levison, but if my memory serves me right Vernon-Smith really did reform in the early days of the first World War; the trouble was that Mr. Quelch never believed in the genuineness of this reform. In No. 418 of the Magnet an expelled boy re-appeared and struck up an acquaintance with the Bounder, whose reputation suffered as a result.

Another similar story was "The Bounder's Guest" in No. 453 in which Mornington of Rockwood, who was also dubious about the reformation, called at Greyfriars in a thousand-guinea car to take Smithy out on a spree. The reformation actually did end in the famous series in Nos. 487-490 in which the Bounder tired of being unjustly suspected, and really did relapse: this was far better than incredible series in which he tried to get all his enemies expelled in the days of the red Magnet, though it may have been too subtle to appeal to most readers. Anyway, having started as black and having turned white the Bounder ended up an attractive shade of grey, to the satisfaction of all readers.

I can never really make up my mind about Levison. There were so many fine stories in the Blue Gem which revolved around his plotting that I cannot regret his early villiany. Yet would the Cardew-Levison-Clive axis have been half so good without the reformed Levison, who could never reproach Cardew without being reminded of his own unsavoury past? Think of all the good stories that came about as a result of Levison's reformation - particularly when he was being searched by Mr. Railton and threw in the fire an incriminating document of Cardew's - and I feel sure that most readers would never have wished Levison's career to have been anything but what it was.

ERIC FAYNE says:- "There can be little doubt that our two contributors to this argument have summed up what is the view of the average reader. We are unanimous over the Bounder. Levison - well as I have said before, I always have a tinge of regret over his reform, and was never particularly keen on brother Frank. All the same, I agree with Roger, and would probably not have willed things to be different from what they were.

Mrs. Vera Nicholls has pointed out that it was Jemima Carstairs

and not Paula Creel who wore a monocle, and I am indebted to Mrs. Nicholls for the loan of four Schoolgirl's Owns, which show that Jemima was at Morcove before she went to Cliff House. I was very surprised to learn this, for it would seem obvious that the Morcove and Cliff House tales of the period came from the same writer.

\* \* \* \* \*

THE LATEST TOM MERRY BOOKS

Reviewed by Eric Fayne

"TROUBLE FOR TOM MERRY" (Spring Books 2/6) Frank Richards

This is one of the very finest stories that the star author has written since the war. It contains good character work, humour and drama. A highlight is a cricket match between St. Jim's and Greyfriars, on the occasion of which Billy Bunter visits the Sussex school and is the cause of much of the trouble for Tom. Wonderful value for money, this unusually fine story concentrates its plot on the leading characters, and it is a grand feast of reading for Tom Merry fans of all ages.

"THROUGH THICK AND THIN" (Spring Books 2/6) Frank Richards

This is a story of Talbot's past, and admirers of the Toff should be in their element. Though the basic theme is familiar, the plot develops on fairly novel lines. It is sketched on a smaller canvas than the Toff stories of years ago, and, in my view, is all the better for being so, in that the characterisation is far more intimate and the plot more closely knit.

In passing, I was told in the book department of a great store that the demand for Tom Merry books is enormous. Certainly, I saw a large pile of them one day, and the following day every copy had been sold.

"THE DISAPPEARANCE OF TOM MERRY" (Spring Books 2/6) Frank Richards

This excellent story of kidnapping is packed with thrills, chills and laughs. Tom Merry is the pivot of the story, which is very satisfying, Kerr is shown as the canny Scot, while Miss Priscilla Fawcett makes a welcome re-appearance. Inspector Skeat seems unusually dim-witted, but that is a minor detail. Grand reading which should please everybody.

"Jack of the Circus" from the same publishers, same price, is also on sale.

\* \* \*

Here's an amusing article to chuckle over by the Christmas fireside.

THE DIRTY OLD TRAMPS OF GREYFRIARS

By Edward Davey

Let me hasten to explain at once that I am not referring to any of the actual inmates of the dear old school. Heaven forbid! I refer of course, to the tramps and ruffians who figure in many of the stories and for whom, I for one, have quite a soft spot in my heart; adding as they do so much life, colour and interest to the tales.

Very many of these individuals have figured in these stories since their inception in 1908; perhaps scores, Frank Richards was a genius for finding appropriate names for his characters and the tramps are no exception. "Smudge" Purkiss, Alf Hopkins, Bill Huggins, Jimmy Guggs, Ike the Weasel, Peter the Pincher, Fighting Fred and many others.

They are birds of passage; figuring only in a particular story or series. The "Bookies" - Joey Banks and Bill Lodgey, are perhaps of a slightly higher social status, and in any case, are not birds of passage, being, so to speak, on the "permanent staff" of the stories.

It is interesting to reflect that the tramps and ruffians are really relics of a bygone social era. In Victorian and Edwardian days men could and did marry on 18/9 a week, and our tramps aforesaid, could and did "scrounge" a feckless livelihood. Needless to say conditions have since changed enormously. It would be impossible to live on anything like this nowadays and during the war ration and identity cards were required. Thus the inglorious race of tramps has very largely died out. The modern equivalent would probably be the even less desirable types of the "spiv", the racecourse tough, and a more "Smart Alec" type of individual. In other words a more sophisticated type of workshy.

But however this may be, the tramp and the ruffian certainly played a staunch part, and anyone conversant with the stories will recall numerous episodes in which these gentry figured.

Thus, for example, in the "Muccolini's Circus" series (1936) the rascally Italian circus proprietor who was a Fascist spy and whose secret was discovered by Bunter, would gladly have given a years takings to be able to "fire" Bunter from the circus. He hires one Jimmy Guggs to "beat up" the fat Owl, but needless to say two

attempts both fail owing to the timely arrival of the Famous Five. As one character remarks ruefully, "they are 'andy at 'andling a covey."

Tramps often figure in episodes of robbery or attempted robbery with violence or threats of violence, as for example, in the "Water Lily" series when one Alf Hopkins makes Bunter cook him a breakfast and then loots the camp; the Famous Five having gone for a swim. How Alfred subsequently gets his just deserts at the hands of the Famous Five, is cleverly told later in the story.

Sometimes tramps play quite a prominent part in the plot of a story; as for example in the "Tuck Shop Rebellion" series (Magnet Nos. 1510 - 1515) and that very funny single story, "Coker the Kidnapper." (Magnet 1516).

In "Coker the Kidnapper" the Champion Chump of Greyfriars has the fatheaded notion of having Wingate held a prisoner in Friardale Wood by three tramps; on the principle that if he won't play Coker in the team, neither shall Wingate be allowed to play.

Bunter conveniently overhears something, and needless to say the plot misfires; Wingate is rescued by the Famous Five and the tramps lurk in ambush to rob Coker. What the Fifth Form Fathead lacks in brains he possesses abundantly in brawn and pluck, and a stirring fight against hopeless odds is graphically recorded.

"It was a terrific fight. One or other of the tramps was down nearly all the time under Coker's mighty jolts. But he always had at least two at a time to contend with, and not only his wealth, but the damage he was doing, urged them on."

Coker totters back to Greyfriars a complete wreck with two black eyes and innumerable bruises. By general consent it is considered that he has collected his own punishment, and Wingate good naturedly refrains from reporting him for what would have been at least a Head's flogging.

But for the master of the school to enlist the aid of tramps for the purpose of maintaining discipline was a real tour de force by Frank Richards.

This occurred in the "Tuckshop Rebellion" series when the Head and Mr. Quelch were both away ill as the result of an accident caused by, (of course) Bunter's foolishness. Mr. Hacker was appointed Headmaster temporarily, but being weak and vain as well as fully deserving his nickname of the "Acid Drop", indulged in outrageous petty tyranny which caused the Remove to revolt.

Eventually, led by Mauly, they barred out in the Tuckshop with the hearty good wishes of the School. Even the Prefects were goaded

into revolt in the end and refused to take any further action against the rebels.

Various methods having failed to effect a surrender Hacker, although bitterly determined, was at his wits end, and a chance encounter with a tramp who tried to rob him on a lonely road across Courtfield Common in the dusk of a February evening, gave him an idea.

The tramp threatening to "bash" him with a cudgel if he did not hand over a "quid" merely brought the Acid Drop, bitterly exasperated feelings to boiling point. Crash came his walking stick on to Bill Juggins battered bowler. "ow! bust my buttons", howled the tramp, who after a few more juicy swipes gives Hacker best.

As related however, the Acid Drop has had an idea and arranges for Juggins to bring along five or six more of his own kidney to deal with the recalcitrant Remove, at a remuneration of a quid apiece.

"Easy money" think the workshys; but is it? Rib tickling scenes follow, and needless and happily to say, the tramps are out-generalled and routed by the Removites. At first Hacker refuses to pay up when the tramps fail, but being minus the support of the rest of the school is made to under dire threats. The tramps are soon hustled away then; never has Greyfriars seen such an unseavory crew or witnessed such unseemingly scenes.

This particular series is a very striking example of how what is really a "young" story; with much knockabout comedy stuff reminiscent of Charlie Chaplin; and sometimes even rather silly, as for example when the rebels capture Hacker and make him do the washing up; is nevertheless superbly told with the author's usual scholarly English, and excellent literary craftsmanship.

However, enough has been said at any rate, to show how even minor characters like our dirty unwashed friends were woven into the warp and woof of Greyfriars.

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# OLD BOYS BOOK CLUB

## LONDON SECTION

A very good attendance assembled at the flat of Roger Jenkins and David Harrison on the occasion of the November meeting. On show was 'The Greyfriars Cup' which our Les Rowley had presented for the competition between the four clubs. Also on show for members who had ordered them were copies of "Boys will be Boys", the three new Tom Merry books, "Billy Bunter's Own Annual" and "Jack of the Circus".

A very fine talk on Paul Pontifex Prout was given by Roger Jenkins and this was thoroughly enjoyed, great was the applause at its conclusion. Then it was the turn of the other host, David Harrison, who got busy with the film projector. First film was in colour and was one of Roger's efforts. Shots of London and Havant were seen but the middle of the film was the highlight as it showed some of Roger's collection of "Magnets" - "Gems" and S.O.Ls". Second feature was a film of "Tom Brown's Schooldays." This was greatly enjoyed by all present, the grand performance of Dr. Arnold in the film was superb. Three teams were arranged, Greyfriars, St. Jim's and St. Frank's for future quizzes. The Christmas meeting will take place on Sunday, 15th December at 706 Lordship Lane, Wood Green, London N.22. Herbert Leckenby hopes to be present at this meeting and to bring down a good supply of the "Collectors' Digest Annual."

UNCLE BENJAMIN

\* \* \*

## NORTHERN SECTION MEETING - 9th NOVEMBER, 1957

Once again there was quite a lot to discuss, but under Chairman Stanley Smith's able guidance all items were got through and were dealt with speedily and to everyone's satisfaction.

First came the matter of the Christmas Party date 14th December. It was unanimously decided to follow on the lines of last year starting about 4.30 with tea at the Club Room instead of a meal in town. Then came plans for the Greyfriars Jubilee Cup. It was plainly evident we shan't be short of copy. Followed more about the arrangements for the Leeds Public Library Exhibition next February.

J. Breeze Bentley then took over to give his always looked forward to annual talk. This year his subject was "The Fourth Form at Rockwood" the school which hitherto has not had its fair share of

publicity. Breeze's talk did a good deal to make up for the neglect and was greatly enjoyed. It will appear in next year's Annual.

There was just time for a novel quiz. A five weeks wait for the Party unfortunately, anyway let's have a bumper attendance.

HERBERT LECKENBY

Northern Section Correspondent.

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MIDLAND SECTION MEETING - 28th OCTOBER, 1957

As expected there were interesting repercussions to our Treasurer's provocative talk of last month and the good attendance at this meeting enjoyed a lengthy debate lead off by Ray Bennett.

As is the normal case in such occasions, we could have gone on all night, the subject ranged from one thing to another but soon Jack Ingram (back in the Chair) had to call a halt for we had the all-important Greyfriars Jubilee Cup Competition to discuss. One good item for this was read to the assembled company by Madge Corbett and so well received was it that other material of a like nature were promised by members. So far so good, it will not be a matter of what to put in as what to leave out.

The night ended, after a good library session, with Ted Davey reading to us some of the Clubs early activities. These were from the C.D. of course, and brought back happy memories to the foundation members present, and much interest to the others.

The date for the December meeting was confirmed as Monday, 16th and will be held in the Club lounge. November 25th will of course be George Chatham's film show.

HARRY BROSTER

Secretary.

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MERSEYSIDE SECTION - SUNDAY, 10th NOVEMBER

There was an excellent attendance at the sixth Annual Meeting of the Merseyside Branch O.B.B.C. The Chairman in a short speech reviewed the Club's activities over the past year and touched upon some of the things we hoped to do in the year to come. Both the financial and the Library states were reported to be in good condition. The re-election of officers then took place. Satisfaction was expressed for the present holders and they were re-elected en bloc. Some

considerable discussion then took place on the "Greyfriars Herald" competition, and some new ideas and suggestions were duly noted. Following tea the arrangements for the Xmas meeting and party were agreed upon. This will be on Sunday, 8th December at 4 p.m. with the business side first, followed by tea and then two or three hours of the Xmas party spirit. All members are earnestly requested to attend and make everything go with a swing. The evening concluded with an entirely new and novel quiz by Don Webster. In this the names of popular school characters had to be built up letter by letter. This quiz was clearly won by Frank Unwin. One change of address - Mr. P. J. Laffey is now at 102 Antonio Street, Liverpool 20.

Next meeting as advised, Sunday, 8th December, 4 p.m. sharp.

NORMAN PRAGNELL

Secretary, Merseyside Branch O.B.B.C.

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DECEMBER 1957The Last Days of Berlin (No. 395)Peter Saxon

Amid the bomb-blasted ruins of the dying city that was once Berlin, a lone girl flees despairingly before the advancing hordes of Zhukov's victorious armies. She is Gisela Meyer, trusted agent of Adolf Hitler. In her possession a secret which could reshape the destiny of the entire world. No less than the plans and documents for the construction of the V3, a long-range rocket with an atomic warhead. With this weapon, capable of inflicting immense destruction in her possession it would be possible, even at the eleventh hour, for Germany to turn certain defeat into crushing victory. Her mission to deliver the plans to Grand Admiral Doenitz, named by the Fuehrer as his successor. Hounded by the Russian Secret Police by order of Ivan Zeroff to first relieve her of the vital plans and then to dispose of her, Gisela finds an ally in Sexton Blake. Working on behalf of H.M. Government. Blake's assignment is to gain possession of the plans for Britain at all costs.

This is a tough, brutal novel, and because of its authenticity has several revolting incidents. It is these things because it is war, and war is each and every one of them. In the writing of this story Peter Saxon surpasses anything he has previously written and supplies the complete answer to those who insist that the best Blake stories were written many moons ago. An outstanding and memorable novel.

Rating..... Excellent

\* \* \*

Walk in Fear (No. 396)W. Howard Baker

One has to delve well into the past in order to seek the last occasion when a Christmas story of Sexton Blake was published. To the year 1934 in fact, 23 years ago. Now in the old tradition, we have Blake again solving a series of crimes in the seasonal atmosphere of a white Christmas. This time it is at a country house on the Thames near Marlow, To be exact, very near the house that the late Edgar Wallace owned and in which he used to live.

An author submits to an agent a novel which will obviously prove a best seller. It is accepted with alacrity by a publisher. The Daily Post want to print it as a serial prior to publication. But the author - MacDonald Hall - disappears. An advertising campaign run by

the Post brings startling results, for no fewer than five people lay claim to be the missing author!

From this point - to use a melodramatic term - death drops in. The claimants begin to die mysteriously. Whose the hand that strikes them down? Who and where is the real MacDonald Hall? These are the baffling queries Blake sets himself to solve.

The hand that described with such powerful intensity the humiliation of Berlin is much more relaxed here as befits the festive season, and the resultant fare is a light and agreeable mixture of mystery suspense and humour. A most satisfying and entertaining wind-up to the 1957 programme.

WALTER WEBB.

Rating.....Very good

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## NELSON LEE COLUMN

by JACK WOOD

Nostaw, 328 Stockton Lane, York.

Phone: 25795

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As we come towards another season of good cheer, may I first take this opportunity of wishing everyone, especially the increasing band of staunch Leeites, a Merry Christmas and a Happy and Prosperous New Year, with many more to come.

Christmas, without exception, has always been a particularly happy time for readers of the adventures of Nelson Lee, Nipper and the boys of St. Frank's, not forgetting, of course, the young ladies of Moor View. Year after year, Edwy Searles Brooks came up with a sparkingly fresh story in which the familiar ingredients of snow, mystery, adventure and reasonable enjoyment were skilfully blended for our pleasure. It was in these yarns, as well as in the summer holiday series, that Brooks's ability to mix boys and girls without mawkish sentiment was so well demonstrated. One of the best Christmas stories in this vein was, I think, was that in which the younger Handforths took their boy and girl chums to the Norfolk home of their Uncle Gregory. There was, of course, plenty of snow, and more than a little mystery, but to me the story is memorable for the description of Handy's endeavours to live up to his boast that he will spot his girl chum, Irene Manners, at the masked ball and kiss her under the mistletoe.

His reward is to be her dancing partnership for the rest of the evening, but the path of recognition is not to be so smooth. Doris Berkeley, the tomboy of the Moor View contingent, promptly enlists the aid of a prospective Pirate Chief, namely, Willy Handforth, who has already been seen by Edward Oswald in his striking costume. Irene had intended going to the ball as an Irish Colleen, and with a delicious piece of "planting" Handy gets to know. When the colleen enters the ballroom with the other girls, Handy, dressed as an impressive Porthos indentifies the colleen as Irene by her "exquisite poise", "those graceful ankles", "that wonderful, graceful walk." As she strolls over to the bench under the mistletoe he dashed over, trips over his sword which shoots between his shin and his calf. He sprawls with a terrific crash, slithering on the shiny floor for about two yards, but sword in one direction, his hat in another, and his spurs rattling noisily, much to the hilarious approval of the rest of the party! Underterred he carries on and pulls the colleen under the mistletoe where "he delivered a full kiss - a beauty". The girls howl with laughter, and so does everyone else, but the colleen slaps Handy's face - hard - and runs off. A cackling Pirate Chief stands by, but the infuriated and dismayed Handy, grabs him, carries him out of the ballroom and hurls him into a snowdrift outside the window. The mask slips and Handy realises that the Pirate Chief is Irene, while the colleen must have been Willy. "Disinfecting" his lips with snow to erase the taste of the kiss, Handy goes back to a yelling audience in the ballroom, where later he spots the Pirate Chief, who runs into the conservatory. Handy follows to seek forgiveness amid the shaded lights and the cosy loneliness. "Ted, how could you?" asks the Pirate Chief softly as Ted seeks forgiveness. "Silly, there's nothing to forgive," and the Pirate produces a sprig of mistletoe. He grabs her and kisses her on the lips. "Help, water" retorts the Pirate Chief - Willy!

Yes, there has been another "switch" between the girls and the irrepressible Willy! But Handy gets his own back, for during the explanations by Irene she walks under the mistletoe and Handy takes her in his arms and gives her two kisses for good measure! He gets his due reward of a permanent dance partner for the evening, if course, and the other boys and girls pair off as usual to enjoy the festivities.

Only Willy is disgruntled, or at least as one of my favourite authors, P. G. Wodehouse, might put it, far from gruntled. After all, he has been kissed twice, and he feels that only some disinfectant will remove the flavour!

That series was the preliminary to the first, and better,

Northestrian series in which the boys and girls and many of their elders too, found a hidden country in the Arctic wastes.

That, however, is another story, and for now I'll leave you with the memory of Nipper and Co. around the festive board, hoping that you too will have an enjoyable Christmas with lots of good things to eat and drink, happy memories to recall, and lots of good reading in the Annual, and other publications from the pens of our favourite authors.

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EXCHANGE - RARE HAMILTONIA Boys Friend Libraries - all the Hamilton stories except 2; Chuckles, No. 1 to 37 containing Frank Richards stories. Populars No. 1 onwards. Boys Friend Weeklies containing Rookwood yarns. Schoolboys' Own Library over 100 containing Greyfriars - Rookwood - St. Jim's etc. early rare series and later. Complete run of 1921 Boys Herald, also Greyfriars Herald containing Bonbow yarns. Magnets and Gems - good years e.g. 1932 Gems etc. Red covered Magnets inc. 1st and 2nd Christmas Nos. in mint condition. Number wanted in excellent condition for binding, are:

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LATE NEWS: Just as we go to press news comes to hand (via Bill Gander) of the death of Wheeler Dryden of Hollywood, well known to many of our readers.

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