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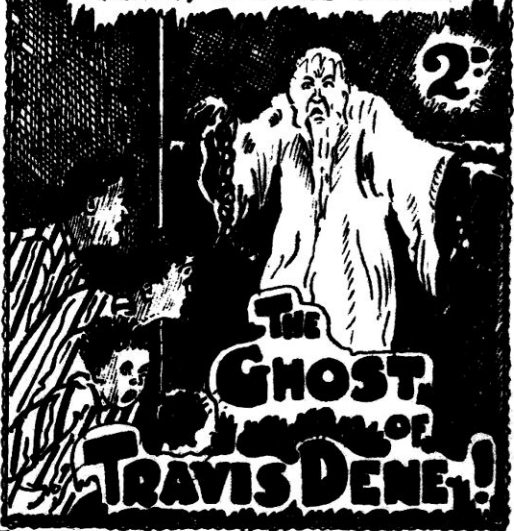
\* COLLECTORS \*

\* DIGEST DECEMBER 1968

BUMPER CHRISTMAS NUMBER 52 PAGES

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# STORY PAPER COLLECTORS' DIGEST

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STORY PAPER COLLECTOR

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W. H. GANDER

COLLECTORS' DIGEST

Founded in 1946 by

HERBERT LECKENBY

Vol. 22

No. 264

DECEMBER 1968

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## YOUR EDITOR'S CHRISTMAS CHAT.

### JUST CHRISTMAS

"I do feel sorry that I was set free  
 Master and Missy were so kind to me  
 And my heart is aching and a-breaking  
 Their faces for to see once more.  
 The piccaninnies sitting by the fireside bright,  
 Hanging up their stockings on a Christmas night,  
 For Santa Claus is coming in the morning  
 To the cabin on the Mississippi shore."

That is a song which I associate with one Christmas when I was a child - long, long ago I can't recall whether it was my mother, my father, or my sister who sang it, but I have never forgotten either the lyric or the haunting tune. Where it came from I have no idea. I have never heard it at any other time. I just associate it with one far-off Christmas.

Probably you, too, have some distant Christmas in your thoughts at this time of the year. Some Christmas, the memory of which is made permanent by some detail which became anchored in your mind for always. It may have been one of those extra-special Christmas Numbers of one of the old papers which makes a certain bygone Christmas

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glow permanently.

Times have changed since then, and not always for the better. But Christmas remains very much what it was, because Christmas is largely what we make it ourselves. I wish you and yours a bright and happy time this Yuletide, and may it be so pleasant and joyful that you will always remember it.

#### IS THIS RE-BIRTH REALLY NECESSARY?

Last month, one of our contributors gave us the information that Flashman, the bully of "Tom Brown's Schooldays," is to be re-born in a new novel next year. Our contributor wrote: "It all sounds fascinating and a great idea. It now only remains for some bright writer to launch another novel about the characters of Greyfriars School in their later adult lives. What possibilities there would be!"

So the idea fascinated one C.D. reader. I must confess that it sounds horrible to me. I like to think of the Greyfriars characters as they were, as their author depicted them. I have no wish at all to read about what happened to Harry Wharton & Co after they grew up, especially written by some modern novelist. Nowadays, authors and script-writers seem unable to leave anything alone, and if it is a person or a tradition especially beloved, then that is all the more reason for traducing it. You may not agree with me, but, personally, I should simply hate a last exit from Greyfriars.

#### ANNUAL TIME IS HERE

In the 22 years of C.D. Annual we have published many superb and memorable articles. All the same, I am confident that many of the articles in the 1968 Annual are the best we have ever offered. It is impossible to mention here even half the sterling attractions of our Year Book.

The teaching profession is very much in the limelight. Les Rowley, who was squeezed out of our last year's edition is featured in two superb articles. He writes on Henry Samuel Qualch, and, in a second item, he weaves a delightful fantasy around Masters' Common Room.

Roger Jenkins is at his brilliant best as he analyses Mr. Ratcliff of St. Jim's; Derek Smith writes on Sherlock Holmes, and Christopher Lowder spotlights Sexton Blake.

In addition, by courtesy of Bob Blythe, we publish the very first published work of E. S. Brooks.

It is not generally well known that Hurree Singh is the oldest of all the much loved Greyfriars characters. Long before the

Magnet was created and long before Harry Wharton went as a spoiled new boy to Greyfriars, Hurree Singh was a third-former and a member of a trio of pals at Netherby. This series of Netherby stories was never republished and they are rare today. We have picked out one of them, blown away the accumulated dust of over 60 years, and we are presenting it in this year's Annual.

Fifty years ago Danny kept a diary, and in C.D. we are privileged to present extracts from it each month. We have persuaded Danny now 50 years older, to write some views on Britain 1968. Persuading Danny to write for the Annual has needed the guile of the serpent and the wisdom of Job. The real task has been keeping him to the point. You won't agree with much that the older Danny writes in his article - but you may be interested. We have called the article "That Old-Fashioned Danny of Ours."

The Annual is packed from cover to cover with wonderful articles and pictures.

THE EDITOR

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WHAT A HOPE! DEPT. I am anxious to purchase a complete, bound run of THE MAGNET from approximately 1925 to 1933 inclusive. Who isn't, you may well ask! But it might well be that a collector is currently considering, for one reason or another, selling his collection - and this ad. may perhaps jog his memory. Anyway, if anyone is thinking of 'selling up' (and I'm also interested in bound volumes of other papers too), I'd be most grateful if he would enable me to make an offer. I'm prepared to pay a good price.

P.S. Don't forget your copy of my THE WHO'S WHO OF CHILDREN'S LITERATURE (Hugh Evelyn, 63/-)!

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# DANNY'S DIARY

December 1918:

Even now it's hard to realise that the war is over. Somehow there has been an odd feeling in the air, ever since we all went wild on November 11th.

There has been a General Election. Polling Day was December 14th. The result of the Poll was not announced until December 28th. The Coalition has won. Mr. Asquith and Mr. Macdonald have both lost their seats.

Just what has happened in the paper world, I can't think. There have been no Christmas Numbers of any of the papers I take regularly, but some of the other papers have done better. The Nelson Lee Library, for instance, had a real festive number, and a very good Christmas story. December saw the continuation of a series about Jack Mason and his uncle, Simon Grell. These tales were "The Arabs of El Safra," "The Secret of the Gold Locket," and "Jack Mason's Luck." The Christmas story, with a nice eerie atmosphere, was "The Mystery of Grey Towers." Grey Towers was the home of Sir Crawford Grey whose son Norman Grey, once known as Jack Grey, was at St. Frank's. This was a very long story.

There has been a strike in the Lancashire cotton mills.

Even the Boys' Friend, so strikingly good for so long, has been below standard. The first Rookwood tale was "Tubby Muffin - Musician." It was a silly affair in which Muffin tried to start a band, and went before the Head disguised as a beggar.

The next two Rookwood tales were fairly good. They were "The Mystery of Tommy Dodd" and "Pardoned by the Fourth." Jimmy Silver, Bulkeley, and others thought they saw Tommy Dodd at the Bird-in-Hand, and there was quite a bit of trouble for Dodd before they discovered he had a cousin who looked just like him.

The last of the month was "The Christmas Captives" and it is only notable because it has a Christmas flavour. But it doesn't read like the normal Rookwood story, and it is unsatisfactory. Jimmy Silver and his friends are on the way home when their train is snowed up. Getting off the train and walking, they come on the White House, where there seems to be a gorilla loose in the grounds. In the end they find themselves kidnapped in the White House.

Cedar Creek has been quite good. "The Rebel's Victory" saw Miss Meadows reinstated as Head of Cedar Creek. Then in "The Stunt of the Season" Mr. Peckover starts a private school, and Frank

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Richards & Co interfere with an advert which he puts in the Thompson Press. Mr. Peckover thinks Gunten is the culprit. Good fun.

"Rival Schools" and "Up Against It" told of the rivalry between the new school, Hillcrest, and Cedar Creek. At Hillcrest are Dicky Bird, Blumpy, Fisher, and Watson, and Gunten has left Cedar Creek and gone to Hillcrest. I hope there won't be too many of these rivalry stories, as they don't seem quite right in the Cedar Creek series.

Somehow it has been an odd Christmas. Though we are all joyful at the end of the war, we don't seem to have got used to Peace yet. A certain amount of dried fruit came into the shops in time, so Mum was able to make her puddings and her mincemeat. It was on the dear side. But the shops did not make a very brave display this year.

We spent our Christmas at home. Gran is better since her illness, but they did not think it wise for her to travel to us in winter. We missed her a lot, but I hope we may be able to go to see her very soon.

On Boxing Night we saw a truly lovely film. It was Marguerite Clark in "The Seven Swans." It was the fairy tale, and so well done, and so suitable for Christmas. A day or two later we saw "Uncle Tom's Cabin" which was nice, but sad. Other films we saw in December were Olive Thomas in "Indiscreet Corinne," and a new spy serial "The Enemy Within;" William Farnum was in two. I liked him in "The Conqueror," but did not care much for him as Jean Valjean in "Les Miserables." W. S. Hart was very good in "The Silent Man," but I was not so keen on Enid Bennett in "Keys of the Righteous."

It has been a drab month in the Magnet. No Christmas story, and nothing much else either. The first tale was "Sacked," and this is (I hope) the last story of the series about the evil Sprin and his pious brother. Harry Wharton & Co haven't appeared much in this series, and there has been more about Highcliffe than Greyfriars.

The next story "The Wiles of Wibley" was a long yawn. It was a mixed up affair with Wibley impersonating a new boy named Samuel Benson. Yawns never come singly, and there was a sequel called "Sammy and Samuel." Goodness knows whom Frank Richards got to write these two for him.

The only pretty good tale of the month was "Bunter the Punter. This was amusing. Bunter had several schemes for raising money by being roty, and he finally lands in debt to Mr. Hawke. Clearly,

there's more to come.

It has been a drab month in the Gem, too. But the first tale was tip-top. This was "The Misdeeds of Mulvane Minor." Uncle O'Toole had decided to adopt Mickey, but Mickey didn't want to be adopted and leave St. Jim's. So Mickey decides to make Uncle fed-up with him. A real riot of fun.

But after this, oh, dear! "Caught Out By Kerr" was a sentimental affair starring Redfern and Kerr. A scandalous and anonymous magazine "The Hornet" insults all the chums, and particularly Redfern. Next week "The Chums of No. 5" starred Kerruish, Julian, Reilly, and Hammond - and tales starring the lesser lights never amount to much. This one doesn't amount to anything.

Last of the month was a syrupy, sentimental affair, all about Wilkins. It was entitled "Denounced as a Coward." Awful itchy. And, oh dear, no Christmas Number.

Well, that's the sad lot, except for the good news that the Penny Popular is to reappear on January 24th. Good work, Quick work.

On Boxing Day, President and Mrs. Wilson from the United States were guests of the King and Queen.

Early this month there was an inquest on Billie Carleton, an actress who died after the Victory Ball. The finding was that she died after taking too much cocaine.

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STRANGE CHRISTMAS (Editorial Comment)

As Danny makes clear this month, December 1918 was, up till that time, probably the worst of all months in the Companion Papers. There were no Christmas Numbers at all. In both the Gem and the Magnet there was only one genuine story for each. Even the much pampered Rookwood had to get by with two substitute tales. This was astonishing when one recalls that there had been less than half a dozen sub Rookwood tales since Rookwood began. Only Cedar Creek escaped unscathed.

Just why should the substitute writers have had to be so active in December 1918. We know that towards the end of the war, Charles Hamilton spent just one day in the army. That might have handicapped him a little, but it is not a very convincing explanation. He might have been ill. Colds and flu attack famous authors as well as ordinary mortals.

There is a more likely reason. The long series, to run in



both the Gem and the Magnet, when Billy and Wally Bunter changed places, was only just round the corner. In fact, the Magnet tale, "Bunter the Punter" (mentioned by Danny) was the start of it in the Magnet, though Danny was unaware of it at the time. Hamilton wrote most of the tales in the series which ran concurrently in both papers. There is not much doubt that he neglected the schools in December in order that the Magnet and the Gem might receive more than his normal attention in the early months of the New Year.

Almost certainly the one Christmas tale "The Christmas Captives" (and its sequel) came from a substitute writer. I cannot trace that these were ever reprinted.

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### AN OLD EDITORIAL

BROWSING through the Editor's Page in the old periodicals is often rewarding, in that it provides many interesting items. Sometimes I have found in these columns an announcement of a forthcoming serial, with the name of the author appended, yet when the story eventually appeared it was anonymous.

In either a Union Jack or a Detective Weekly of the nineteen-thirties - a copy which unfortunately I cannot now trace - was a letter from one R. Dolphin. One wonders if that letter was from a younger edition of the Rex Dolphin who has written some modern Blake stories.

On page 32 of U.J. No. 145, New Series, appears The Skipper's Weekly Chat. (This issue contains a story, "Sexton Blake in Chicago," by W. Murray Graydon, and is dated 21 7 1906) Under an announcement of the following week's yarn is printed this notice:

#### Back Numbers Wanted

I am asked by E. S. Brooks, of Windsor House, Langland Bay, Glam., to state that he will pay 2s. 6d. and exchange 120 clean copies of "Pluck" and the "Marvel" for Nos. 1 to 66, 71, 72, 75 and 76 of the UNION JACK, and Nos. 1 to 132 of "The Boys' Herald."

Will any reader who has these copies kindly send Mr. Brooks a postcard?

On reading this entry, printed a lifetime ago, one asks, was this the same E. S. Brooks who was to figure as a contributor to the U.J. a few years later?

S. GORDON SWAN

# BLAKIANA

CONDUCTED BY JOSEPHINE PACKMAN,  
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## The Sexton Blake Radio Serial

As I wrote in last month's Collector's Digest, I have had quite a number of letters from people who were delighted to be reminded of the happy days long ago, when they listened to this Sexton Blake serial on the pre-war Home and Light programmes. I am sure there must have been thousands of listeners who enjoyed hearing about their favourite detective, so I cannot think why this programme failed to develop into a regular weekly serial like the old Paul Temple stories and Inspector Hornleigh, although these are now defunct.

I have been sent a photostat copy of an article about Sexton Blake, written by a once famous writer of detective stories - Ernest Dudley - which appeared in the Radio Times. Unfortunately there is no date but it must have appeared in print about the end of 1938 or early 1939 when a programme called "Lucky Dip" was being broadcast. Does anyone remember it?

I should like to have published the whole of the above article in the Collector's Digest, but after writing to the Editor of the Radio Times for permission I was referred to Mr. Dudley himself, but nothing was forthcoming. However, I am sure all our Sexton Blake fans will understand when I say the article was indeed very good and also gave all the information about Blake and Tinker which we already know. The article finishes with these words:-

"I hope you have enjoyed this brief meeting with the great detective. If you would know him better and in action - well, the B.B.C. presents one of his most exciting casebooks this week and every week for the next three months, and every instalment chills and thrills."

Josie Packman

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## SOME THOUGHTS ON THE "SEXTON BLAKE ANNUAL"

After an absence from the bookstalls of, I suppose, over 20 years, Fleetway has at last brought out another Sexton Blake Annual. Having just finished tasting it, I find that it has a distinctly odd flavour.

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It will, as the Blakiana reviewer wrote in the October issue of "Collectors' Digest," appeal far more to the youngsters than to the older readers, but there should be enough for all, and it is certainly a "good buy" for its price, 6/6d.

"Sexton Blake - Detective," the long, early story, has almost certainly been reprinted in an abridged form (where, for instance, is the line referred to in Turner's "Boys Will Be Boys" - "Ninian Joyce, the sweetest maiden...etc.,?" But this is understandable, considering the great age of the piece and the antique language used. Even so, it seems not to have been modernised, as such, only cut down in length.

"The Perfect Crime" is, I think, a paraphrase of Rex Hardinge's "The Man I Killed," which appeared in the "Detective Weekly" issue for July 8th 1933, No. 20 in that paper's run. I say "I think" because Hardinge often used to rewrite his own stories and get them published years later, so "The Perfect Crime" could be a paraphrase of a later or earlier version. I should imagine that "Tinker's Challenge" comes from the same era - late "Union Jack"/early "Detective Weekly" - written possibly by someone like Mark Osborne, whilst the factual articles were probably written especially for this 1969 Annual.

Apart from the long Harry Blyth tale, the picture-strip stories seem to be the most interesting subject for analysis.

There are five in all, and each features a famous Blake adversary of the past. "Sexton Blake's Honour At Stake" - George Marsden Plummer; "Material Evidence" - Zenith the Albino; "Decoy For Diamonds" - Leon Kestrel; "Fun At The Fair" - Waldo the Wonder-Man; and "Terror of the Tong" - The Scorpion.

But there are curious discrepancies - seemingly, change for change's sake - in all. Where, for instance, is Plummer's beard; why is Waldo portrayed as an Italian playboy; why does Zenith look almost exactly like Bram Stoker's original conception of Count Dracula (save that Dracula's moustaches drooped); whatever happened to Oyani; and, worst of all, who in Sam Hill is "Inspector 'Taff' Evans?"

As for the latter, of course, we all know who he really is - Chief Detective Inspector George "Bulldog" Coutts, in disguise! But why on earth do we have this ridiculous change of name? It reminds one, inevitably, of the emasculation of Leslie Charteris's splendid Inspector Teal character in the T.V. series about the Saint.

Incidentally, the Harry Blyth yarn "Sexton Blake - Detective," is not, of course, Blake's "very first recorded adventure." As far as we know, "The Missing Millionaire" was the first Blake story, and this was published in the No. 6 issue of the  $\frac{1}{2}$ d "Marvel" in 1893. "Sexton Blake - Detective" was the first Blake story to be printed in the "Union Jack," though I think the date should be the 2nd of May, 1894.

I should imagine that the picture-strips themselves have been adapted from old "Union Jack" stories, though I could be wrong. As it is, there are some nice pictorial touches in all - Blake snapping home a beautifully offhand bull's-eye in "Fun At The Fair;" the splendid battle at the end of "Terror of the Tong;" the 2LO/BBC newsreader reading the "News" in evening dress in "Decoy For Diamonds;" and, possibly to sum the whole Annual up, Blake's whimsical, rather long-suffering expression in the last frame of "Sexton Blake's Honour At Stake," when someone yells "...He's the best detective of 'em all!"

This sort of thing makes up, at least to a certain extent, for the liberties that have been taken in other directions. Though, all in all, as I said at the beginning of this piece, this Annual is well worth the price. In fact, the book should be a sell-out - if it weren't for the fact that the old-timers will probably scorn it for its modern strips, and the modernists for its many allusions to the past.

No wonder the poor chap looks long-sufferingly at the reader in the last frame of "Sexton Blake's Honour At Stake." He has good reason to.

"Anon."

Dear Mrs. Packman,

I was greatly interested in your item of the Sexton Blake broadcast. It arouses many happy memories for me. Unfortunately I don't actually recall the broadcast itself, but it was about this period that we first had a radio set. It may seem strange today to write this in the period of colour T.V. but in 1930 onwards it was the days of the depression. In a poor family of four children, we had a crystal set with wires all over the kitchen, and only two headphones. So one can imagine the position of only two of us ever being able to listen to the B.B.C. at the same time.

When our Radio set came, it was marvellous to see all the stations, and hear our favourite programmes. Jack Warner, Carrol

Gibbons and Syd Walker the rag and bone man. With the aid of Mr. W. O. G. Lofts a contributor of your section I have been able to glean quite a lot about the Sexton Blake programmes, and here is the data as follows:

This was the very first broadcast featuring SEXTON BLAKE if one believes the Radio Times. "The world's most popular detective makes his bow in the "Lucky Dip" programme on Thursday, the first time on Radio. Ernest Dudley the famous writer of ARMCHAIR DETECTIVE fame and the Dr. Morelle Novels wrote a great deal on the history of the famous Baker Street sleuth. Unfortunately he seems to have fallen into the same error as others in naming the UNION JACK as the first time Blake appeared in print.

Exactly six feet in height, of spare, athletic build, Sexton Blake's most dominant feature is his eyes. Grey, level, and piercing, set deep in his lean, somewhat ascetic face, they are indicative of an acute intelligence, while a humorous glint therein reveals his human kindness. He originally planned to be a doctor, but after taking his degrees, the fascination of anti-criminal science gripped him, and he turned his attention to what might be termed the laboratory side of detection. Blake was one of the first in this country to study crime-psychology scientifically. He is a specialist in criminology, and his brilliant chemical research has furthered our knowledge of such diverse matters as fire-arms and fingerprints, poisons, bloodstains, hairs, and tyre-tracks. On such subjects his monographs have considerably enriched criminological literature. Added to these high intellectual attributes is his unique gift of reaching a correct deduction of the facts by a process of logical reasoning and expert observation of apparently unimportant details. One must not also forget his great personal courage, together with his strength and skill, which have been proved in many a tight corner.

Early in his career as a private criminal investigator Blake met his assistant Tinker, a sharp-witted Cockney newsboy. Impressed by the boy's sparrow-like alertness and more than average intelligence, Blake took him in hand and trained him to be his assistant. As a result Tinker today is a youth of singular astuteness and keen ability, aiding his chief in actual detective work, and handling the routine business of correspondence and classifying and recording crime data. This latter is a formidable task reaching many volumes of the Baker Street Index.

You will find no brass plate bearing Sexton Blake's name outside the house in Baker Street (this is the other end of the famous

street where Sherlock Holmes lived, now the Abbey Road building society) where he and Tinker live. Inside the visitor ascends the stairs (where bullet marks scar the wall) to reach the consulting room on the first floor overlooking the street. Here Blake receives his clients. On the same floor, opposite is a small laboratory. It is completely equipped for its criminological purpose, with every necessary modern appliance and instrument from a comparison microscope for ballistic work to X-ray apparatus and ultra-violet light. Here the great detective, apart from any specific work he may have to do, delights to spend an hour or two inquiring into some problem of forensic chemistry or physics.

Pedro is Blake's inimitable bloodhound a wonderful man tracker. Affectionately cherishing his master and Tinker, he has several times saved their lives. If ever a dog deserves the description of 'human' it is Pedro.

This is really a brilliant essay about Sexton Blake, and it's rather astonishing that Ernest Dudley (real name Vivian Ernest Coltman-Allen) never penned any stories, as he could have been quite a good one. The Serial "Enter Sexton Blake" was only part of a sort of mixed programme, as the title suggests "Lucky Dip," when it ran for about 20 minutes. George Curzon played the part of Sexton Blake and probably no man fitted the part better than he, as he fitted his description exactly. Brian Lawrence played the part of Tinker. It is worth mentioning that the plot for the story which ran for 12 weeks was written after a synopsis by Berkeley Gray. The many people who missed this programme in the afternoon could hear a repeat at 7-30 in the evening, peak time listening, so one could safely say that Sexton Blake must have had an audience of millions, and probably larger than the present radio series, which has terrific opposition with T.V. these days.

"Nostalgia"

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# NELSON      LEE      COLUMN

## BRIEF INTERLUDE

by William Lister

Mr. Studd gazed out of the window. Already it was dusk and hardly four o'clock in the evening. It had been bitterly cold all day and now the sky was steel grey.

"Snow," he muttered to himself, "that's what's brewing - snow."

He drew the curtains - settled in his chair and resumed his reading:

"How oft my truant footsteps stray,  
Down wistful lanes of yesterday,  
To search lost gardens in the rain,  
For flowers that cannot bloom again."

He put the paper down.

Mr. Studd had been thinking of his yesterdays - Christmas was approaching - and it would be so different this time. There had been the Christmas he had met Jessie, his wife. Together they shared in the bringing up of their children and many a Merry Christmas they had enjoyed together. When the children had reached maturity and established homes of their own, there had still been Jessie and her widowed mother, Anne, to share each returning Christmas.

Three weeks to go to the festive season found Mr. Studd alone. The cruel hand of death had early that year claimed Anne and only last week he had looked on his dear wife's face for the last time.

Mr. Studd was not old - not unless you call 57 old. He gazed thoughtfully at the glowing fire and yawned.

. . .

"George, go down to the newsagent and get the "Yorkshire Evening News" for Dad before he comes home."

George took the money from his mother and made his way to the shop. The moon had just emerged from a bank of black cloud and the street was flooded with light. With a thin covering of snow, everything shone in its silvery radiance.

He entered the newsagent's, cheered by the warmth and the glow of light piercing its window. After purchasing his paper, he glanced at the counter laden with books and magazines, all sporting festive covers. The glowing features of Father Christmas could be

seen. Plum puddings and falling snow, laced with holly and mistletoe.

There was one paper, a small one. It caught George's eye. The "Nelson Lee" library containing Xmas fare by Edwy Searles Brooks, 2d. George dived in his pocket for the required twopence. He had read this paper before and had grown fond of Nipper and Handforth and a host of fictional friends that appeared week by week. He took the paper in his hands and looked excitedly at the cover. It was at this moment a darkness overcame the lad. He seemed to sink deeper and deeper into a well of emptiness.

Mr. Studd stirred uneasily. The fire was burning low. He gazed around the room and collected his scattered thoughts. A glance at the clock revealed that he had dozed for nearly two hours. He must have been dreaming of the past - his past - and himself a spectator looking as if at actors on a stage.

He stirred the fire with the poker and turned again to the verses he had been reading.

"The songs are sung, the stories told,  
The triumphs o'er, the dreams grown old,  
There is no path, nor any way,  
That leads us back to yesterday."

He rose and looked through the window - the shaft of light revealed his surmise had been correct. The back garden was already white and snowflakes were whirling down, carried by a strong wind giving every promise of a heavy fall.

George Studd drew the curtains, turned to his bookcase, chose several magazines and returned to his chair.

As if to fulfil his dream he took up a small magazine. Across the top in large red letters "Nelson Lee" and "A Yuletide of Mystery," revealed the title of the story dated 1919.

If you had glanced through the pile of papers at his side you would have discovered several "Collector's Digest" Annuals for the past few years, also a complete Xmas series of "St. Frank's School Tales." And you would agree with old George Studd that perhaps the closing lines of the poem:

"There is no path, nor any way,  
That leads us back to yesterday"

were not quite true in his case nor indeed of the experience of the other members of the "Old Boy's Book Club."



BOB BLYTHE WRITES:

In connection with the E.S.B. correspondence in the October issue a mistake occurred at the bottom of page 18. The paper "The Penny Pictorial" is mentioned both in E.S.B.'s letter and in my comments. It should have, of course, read "The Penny Magazine" as this and the "Nuggett Library" were the only two papers to be dealt with on this occasion.

MORE CONQUESTby D. Smith

Norman Wright's article about Norman Conquest made very pleasant reading. I don't think there was any real deterioration in the quality of the series in its later days, though I thought the Saga struck a rather flat patch in 1943/5 when Conquest was existing in an unreal world, neither pre- nor post-war. Since all the tales were rewrites of various Sexton Blake adventures, Norman often seemed out of character, too. But "Mr. Ball of Fire" in 1946 was a bright and breezy adventure in the old style, and saw Joy Everard established (at last!) in her rightful place as Mrs. Norman Conquest. The ghost of Rupert Waldo was still hovering over the stories until 1949, but by 1950 the series had got its second wind. Thereafter we were regaled with smoothly written tales rather along the lines of the Transatlantic husband-and-wife detective teams - and I, for one, had no complaints.

But, of course, the "Golden Years" of Norman Conquest belong to the old THRILLER days. I have always had a special affection for the original tales, which culminated in Norman's fantastic one-man invasion of Nazi Germany. I have always believed that E.S. Brooks reached his peak as a writer as "Berkeley Gray" - for sheer driving narrative force, plus a cheerily outrageous imagination and a delicious "tongue'in'cheek" sense of humour, he was absolutely unbeatable!

His books contained every ingredient that made the James Bond films such an enormous success except for the now obligatory amatory adventures. There were, of course, plenty of gorgeous girls and deadly damsels - notably Primrose Trevor, alias Miss Dynamite - but the unbreakable thread of the stories was the mutual devotion of Norman and Joy. That was only right and proper, since Young Pixie was the most delightful heroine in fiction.

I had thought that the Saga was finally concluded with "Curtains for Conquest?" but it seems I was wrong. I have already

written to Bob Blythe about a puzzling review I found in the current (September) issue of the London Mystery magazine. The book is "Conquest Calls the Tune," published by Robert Hale in July. The review reads (in part): "A new hero emerges in the young and detection world - that of a young and rather pleasant young man called Norman Conquest, complete with pretty little wife ... I look forward to his next adventure..."

Obviously the reviewer has never heard of the Collins series, for which he is more to be pitied than blamed, but I am mystified by the belated appearance of the novel, with its implied promise of more to come from this new publisher. I hope our Nelson Lee experts will be able to throw some light on the mystery!

THE ENVIRONS OF ST. FRANK'S

by R. J. Godsave

As we all know the club has been exceptionally fortunate in having possession of papers and MSS relating to E. S. Brooks early works. Of these papers, one which was of extreme interest to me was a torn out page from an ordinary note book showing a rough drawing of Bellton Wood and surrounds in pencil.

It has always been a source of regret that I did not think to ask Mr. Brooks, when he attended the club Christmas meeting at Dulwich a couple of years ago, whether the surrounding countryside of St. Frank's was taken from an actual place. For no particular reason I have the idea that the quiet village of Bellton was actually an Essex village, bearing in mind that Brooks lived quite a while in Essex.

In the very early St. Frank's Lees Bannington Moor with its derelict windmill and disused quarry workings were brought frequently into the stories with great effect. No. 134 o.s. was entitled "Mystery of the Moor Quarry" was one of the series in which Cecil DeValerie was introduced. The old quarry workings were connected with St. Frank's by a tunnel which led from the moor to a vault beneath the monastery ruins. It was in these workings that the Remove had their punishment chamber during their fight against the bullies league which composed of fifth and sixth form bullies. The old ruins featured in the Hunter the Hun series. Led by Bennett - as Nipper was known - the remove barricaded themselves in the old ruins with a barrier of bundles of faggots which were set on fire by Mr. Hunter forcing the remove to withdraw into the old quarry workings. A secret chamber which Nipper & Co. had found a few weeks earlier enabled the Remove to vanish from sight.

much to the mystification of Mr. Hunter and Starke & Co., the latter having entered the workings from Bannington Moor. The derelict windmill was featured on the cover of No. 114 "The Boy from California" which was the second St. Frank's story to be published. Another fine drawing of the windmill adorned the cover of No. 275 entitled "The Study of Mystery" which was in my opinion a very fine drawing. The mill was frequently used by Brooks in many of his stories.

A place of interest which was used quite a lot in the early Lees was a large house known as the "Mount." This stood on the edge of the moor quite near St. Frank's. It was here that Sir Montie Tregellis-West and Handforth stayed as guests of Mr. & Mrs. Ridgeway when both had been expelled from St. Frank's owing to the activities of Reginald Pitt during the term when he first arrived at St. Frank's. The "Mount" also featured in a short series in which Nelson Lee was engaged in a tussle with the Circle of Terror. In this case the "Mount" overlooked a cottage on the moor from which the Circle were operating. Their efforts to scare Mr. Ridgeway to leave the house makes this series an extremely interesting one. Such titles as "The Moor House Mystery" and the "Cottage on the Moor" were of this series. The Arrival of the Duke of Somerton as Browne ran side by side with the Circle of Terror activities making extremely interesting reading.

I would say that apart from Bellton Wood, the river Stowe featured largely in many series and single Nelson Lee. Hunter the Hun series gave excellent reading of activities on the river; The Remove having occupied Willards Folly on Willard's Island naturally brought the River Stowe to the forefront. The chase of Nipper & Co. in a rowing boat, with an unconscious Nelson Lee, by Hunter in a motor boat was one incident. As Mr. Hunter had his school duties to perform in the day-time it was necessary for him to carry out his anti-British work at night, and his visits to the underground printing works on another island had to be made at night.

With the river naturally Willard's island was mentioned and the St. Frank's Cadet Corp had their first camp on this island. This was a first class story in which the treasure of old Willard was found by the cadets. Apart from the Annual Boat Race between the College House and the Ancient House which Brooks wrote of in the Reggie Pitt series the river in its frozen state was made good use of. One of Brooks' single stories "The Demon Within Him" describes how DeValerie dreamt of his girl cousin being drowned

after a fall through the ice and his remorse for his previous behaviour to his uncle and cousin. It was from the towpath that Fullwood, whilst captain of the Remove, had thrown himself after being swindled by a bookmaker at the local races. Having betted with the Remove Sports Fund money and won £80 the bookmaker denied the bet and there was nothing Fullwood could do about it. He was rescued by Archie Glenthorne who generously replaced the lost money on condition that Fullwood resigned captaincy. The title of this Nelson Lee was "Fullwood's Folly."

The River House School which was to become an important part of the St. Frank's saga was introduced on No. 143 o.s. "The Sign of the Purple Circle." The close proximity of the school to St. Frank's naturally caused the meeting of scholars of both schools to be unavoidable. Whilst Nipper & Co. were friendly with Hal Brewster & Co, the same could not be said of the "Honourables." The mere fact that they were entitled to prefix their names with "Honourable" caused them to look down on those who were not entitled to use this prefix.

Bellton Wood in itself must bring to mind of all Leeites those series in which it dominated. I should think that the Mr. Heath, Handforth's brother-in-law series and that of Yung Ching were perhaps the series in which Bellton Wood was in the forefront. In the Heath series No. 259 o.s. "The Riddle of Bellton Wood" describes how Mr. Heath meets the Comte de Plessigny - a wealthy and charming man - and incidentally find a large diamond under a tree which unknown to Mr. Heath had been stolen. How the Comte tries to fasten the theft on Mr. Heath makes delightful reading.

In the Yung Chin series the titles of No. 364 o.s. was "The Horror of Bellton Wood." Here the Chinese enemies of Yung Chin live in the treetops of Bellton Wood in their efforts to kidnap the Chinese Junior. This series led to a chase of the Chinese ship in which the kidnapped Yung Chin was being taken to China, by Lord Dorrimore's yacht. Having rescued Yung Chin Lord Dorrimore and the St. Frank's party resumed their holiday trip. A severe storm caused the yacht to be flung on to the rocks of a south sea island thus marooning the St. Frank's party. As is well known, Brook's holiday series are guaranteed to be thrilling and extremely interesting.

As the Nelson progressed, the pattern of the surrounding countryside took shape, and apart from some slight discrepancies the pattern as a whole was extremely accurate.

The use of the background which Brooks has built up was

AT CHRISTMAS we think of old friends. And very few of our friends can have been with us as long as Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. He was created 62 years ago in a long-hidden story which has never been reprinted as the years have swept by. Now, 62 years later, C.D. invites you to meet Arthur Augustus D'Arcy - New Boy.

## THE SWELL OF ST JIM'S

James Monteith, the Head prefect of the New House, came into his room. His chum Sleath, the treasurer of the school clubs, followed him in, and closed the door. Monteith looked in some surprise at the gas, which was turned low.

"Hallo! Somebody's lighted my gas!" he said, turning it up. "My fag, I suppose. Unusually thoughtful of Figgins. Sit down and make yourself comfy, Sleath. I've got some new smokes in that drawer."

"No chance of any beastly master poking his nose in, I suppose?"

"No, not to-night." Monteith opened the drawer and drew out a packet of cigarettes. "Here you are, Sleath - help yourself."

Sleath selected a cigarette, and took up the matchbox. He put the cigarette between his lips, and struck a match. And then his hand stopped half-way.

"What's that?"

"What's what?"

"Thought I heard something."

"You're as nervous as an old woman when you're going to have a smoke!" said Monteith scornfully.

"Well, it would be no joke to be spotted," said Sleath uneasily. "It would be worse for you than for me, because you're a prefect; and you'd get the sack quick enough if you were found smoking."

"Well, I'm not going to be found. Give me a match."

Sleath struck another vesta, and then blew it out, and started to his feet.

"I tell you I heard something then!"

"So did I!" said the prefect uneasily, looking around. "Like somebody breathing. Can there be a fag hidden in the room watching us?"

"By Moses, if there is we'll skin him alive!"

The smokes were hurriedly put out of sight. The two Sixth Formers began to search the

room. Monteith jerked away the big screen, and gasped in astonishment at what he saw. There, folded neatly upon a chair, were the clothes of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. There, peacefully slumbering in the bed, was Arthur Augustus himself.

Monteith could scarcely believe his eyes.

"Do you see him?" he gasped.

"Rather!" said Sleath, grinning. "My word! I've heard of some cheeky things, but for a junior to go to sleep in a prefect's bed - well, my word!"

"Who is it?" muttered Monteith. "It's not one of the juniors of our house."

"Surely a School House kid would never dare ---"

"It is a School House kid!" interrupted Monteith. "Yes; I know him now. It's a new boy that came to-day - a soft sort of silly goat. He cheeked Kildare in the gym, but I never thought he'd have nerve enough for this!"

"I say, somebody must have put him up to it - fooled him, perhaps."

"Perhaps. I'm going to give him a lesson, all the same. Hand me that cane. Now jerk the bedclothes off."

Sleath did as directed. The bedclothes came off with a jerk, and D'Arcy, suddenly startled out of his slumber, sat up, shivering and blinking. He had taken Monteith's night-shirt, finding it on the bed, and his own night-garments being he knew not where. He blinked at the two seniors.

"How dare you!" he exclaimed angrily. "How dare you disturb me? Go away at once!"

"Yes, I can see myself doing that!" said Monteith. "Take that, you cheeky young scoundrel, and that, and ---"

He began to lay the cane about the new boy. The cuts stung the unprotected skin terribly, and the boy roared with pain. He remembered Mellish's advice, and caught up

a pillow and hurled it at the prefect.

Monteith had expected nothing of the sort, and the missile caught him in the face and sent him flying backwards. He went reeling against the table. The table wasn't built to stand that kind of usage; it went over with a crash, hurling books and papers and inkpot far and wide.

Sleath made a spring at D'Arcy. The new boy's blood was up. He let Sleath have the bolster with all his force, and the senior was bowled over like a ninepin, falling on top of Monteith.

"Get out of my woom, both of you!" cried D'Arcy indignantly. "I shall complain to the dootah of this!"

Monteith jumped up. He was hurt; his dignity was hurt, and his legs were hurt. He rushed at the boy on the bed and began to thrash him with the cane in the most brutal manner.

D'Arcy yelled and wriggled. He skipped out of bed, catching two or three stingers on his bare legs as he did so, and dodged round the room, yelling like a Red Indian.

Monteith, blind with rage, chased him, cutting at him savagely.

Round the over-set table they went, D'Arcy yelling with pain as the cane made active play on his back and legs. Desperate with the pain, he seized a chair and hurled it at the prefect. Again Monteith was bowled over, and D'Arcy made a dash for the door. Sleath interposed and caught him, and dragged him back, yelling. He tore himself free again as he saw Monteith making for him, and bolted for the door.

At that moment the door opened, and Mr. Ratcliff, the housemaster, strode in. The yelling of the unfortunate junior had reached all through the New House, and the master had come on a voyage of discovery. His face as he entered showed that he was angry. But his reception made him angrier still, for D'Arcy, bolting blindly, rushed right into the master of the New House, and sent him staggering back into the passage.

Then Arthur Augustus would gladly have bolted down the corridor, but Mr. Ratcliff's grip closed upon him, and he was dragged, kicking, into the study.

"What is the meaning of this?" shouted the housemaster. "How dare you make such a disturbance here? How comes this junior here, Monteith? He is not a New House boy!"

"I found him asleep in my bed!" howled Monteith. "When I fetched him out he buzzed a pillow at me! He's a School House kid. He's done it for cheek!"

"What do you mean by being out of your house, boy?"

"I was told this was my room!" sobbed D'Arcy, beginning to realise how matters stood; and, in his pain and terror, he even forgot to lisp. "I was told to sleep here, and that this was my bed-room."

"You are a new boy?"

"Yes."

"Yes, what?"

"Yes, sir!" faltered D'Arcy.

"That is better. You must be an extremely simple youth to be deceived so easily."

"It's all lies, sir!" said Monteith savagely. "It was just cheek. Those School House kids are always getting up to some jape like this!"

"Pardon me, Monteith, I am inclined to believe the boy. The matter shall be inquired into. You say you were told to come here, boy. Who told you?"

D'Arcy was about to blurt out the name, when he remembered Jack Blake's caution. He mumbled something indistinctly.

"Answer me!"

"I -- I'd pwefer not to say, if you please."

Mr. Ratcliff shook him angrily.

"Answer me immediately!"

D'Arcy was silent. He could be obstinate when he liked.

"I do not quite understand this boy!" said Mr. Ratcliff, breathing hard. "The matter shall be cleared up. Get your clothes on, and come with me to the School House."

D'Arcy obeyed. He dressed himself, and followed Mr. Ratcliff from the study. Straight across to the School House marched the housemaster. When he entered, a good many boys looked curiously at him and the wet-eyed Arthur Augustus.

It was near bed-time for the Fourth Form, and Blake was wondering what had become of D'Arcy. Great was his surprise to see him marched into the School House, with Mr. Ratcliff's hand on his collar.

"My hat! What has the silly ass been getting up to now?" he muttered.

"Looks as if he had been trespassing in the New House," remarked Percy Mellish.

"Just like the silly ass, too!"

Mr. Ratcliff marched the junior up to Mr. Kidd's study, knocked, and entered. The master of the School House looked at him in some surprise. There had been friction between the two housemasters more than once.

Mr. Kidd was inclined to look upon the rivalry between the houses, with a good-tempered eye, recognising that it was not without its advantages to the school when not carried too far. But Mr. Ratcliff took an exaggerated view of it, and was always heavily down upon the contending juniors.

"I have brought this boy to you!" said Mr. Ratcliff, with great dignity. "He had the astounding impudence to go to bed in Monteith's room, and to assault the prefect when he was disturbed. He declares that he was the victim of a practical joke, and with characteristic impudence refuses to give the name of the person who deceived him. He is not under my jurisdiction, Mr. Kidd, and so I leave him in your hands."

"You may trust me to do all that is necessary," replied Mr. Kidd coldly. "If you choose to stay, you can be a witness to the punishment of the individual concerned. I have not the slightest doubt that this foolish boy has been the victim of a practical joke."

"I will leave the matter entirely in your hands," said Mr. Ratcliff, with chilly dignity. "Good-evening!"

And the master of the New House returned to his own quarters. Mr. Kidd turned a stern look upon D'Arcy. He was deeply annoyed at Mr. Ratcliff having an excuse to complain of the discipline of his house.

"Why did you go to Monteith's room, D'Arcy?"

"I was told it was my bed-room, sir."

"By a School House boy?"

"Yes, sir."

"Do you know his name?"

"Yes."

"What is it?"

D'Arcy was silent.

"Did you hear me, D'Arcy?" said Mr. Kidd, raising his voice a little.

"Yes, sir."

"Then why do you not answer me?"

"I would pwefer not to do so, sir. Do you considah that it would be honourable and gentlemanly in me to betray the -- aw -- chappie?"

Mr. Kidd drew a deep breath.

"If you cannot give me the name of the boy, D'Arcy, I shall have to conclude that you have not spoken truthfully."

"Ic doubt a gentleman's word is not the act of a gentleman!" replied D'Arcy. "You have no right to hint a doubt of my vewacity!"

"D'Arcy, I am sure you do not mean to be impertinent, or I should cane you severely. You heard me tell Mr. Ratcliff that the culprit should be punished. It is necessary for you to give me his name. I can respect honourable scruples but there must be a limit. I command you to give the name!"

"I wegwet vewy much, sir, that I cannot meet your wishes," said D'Arcy, with a bow. "It would not be gentlemanly. It would not be cwicket, sir."

"D'Arcy, I really do not know how to deal with you! I must think over this matter. Come into my study in the morning after prayers."

"With gweat pleasuah, sir!"

And D'Arcy walked out. He left the housemaster wearing a worried look. Mr. Kidd had had to deal with all sorts and conditions of boys in his time, but Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was a little too much for him.

(There will be a further instalment of this 62-year old story Next Month)

Do You Remember?

By Roger M. Jenkins

No. 73 - Magnets 1556-9 - Reynham Castle Series

There is a general opinion among collectors that when the Magnet donned its salmon-coloured cover it was definitely past its prime. Like all generalisations, this is only partly true, and certainly the Reynham Castle series of 1937 retains a special place in the affections of Magnet readers. It was in its way the last of the really memorable Christmas series.

It began when Sir Peter Lanchester was on his way to Greyfriars to seek advice from his old friend, Mr. Quelch. Sir Peter's ward, the young Lord Reynham, had long been the intended victim of kid-nappers, and to safeguard this delicate boy Sir Peter had placed him at school under an assumed name, and no one at the castle in Sussex had seen him for more than four years. Sir Peter needed a boy of sixteen to masquerade as Lord Reynham, in order to draw the kidnapers into the open. It need hardly be stated that Bunter, by a mixture of accident and trickery, succeeded in winning the honour.

One cannot help having a sneaking feeling of sympathy for the under-dog who suddenly has a stroke of fortune, and descriptions of Bunter as a pig in clover are always eminently readable. The Reynham Castle series is an echo of the Bunter Court situation, and it bears an even stronger resemblance to the 1934 Bunter the billionaire series, in that the luxury had to be paid for in terms of worry and anxiety. Considered as a Christmas series, the nearest analogue is probably the Cavandale Abbey series, where another member of the household was the secret enemy. But though it resembles many other Magnet series, it nevertheless bears its own individual stamp. Charles Hamilton was too great an artist ever to repeat a situation in exact detail.

The reader at Christmas expected a seasonable snowfall and an air of festivity, combined with an underlying mystery or menace which made the happy moments even more delightful. If a ghost could also put in an appearance, the recipe for happiness was complete. The Reynham Castle series provided all these ingredients, and indeed the chapter in which the wraith was first seen is a noteworthy example of tense and vivid description with hardly any conversation at all.

The series came to a fine climax in the last number, and for once the cover-to-cover Magnet story does not seem to be a word too long. It is pleasant to recall highlights from among the Magnet's fading years, and the picture of flunkys waiting upon my Lord Bunter is more than enough to warm any old Magnet reader's heart at the festive season.

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#### LET'S BE CONTROVERSIAL

#### No. 130. THE LAST OF THE WAR YEARS

Fifty years ago the Great War had just ended. The end seems to have taken everybody unawares. It is interesting to look back on the year 1918 and see what effect it had upon the Hamilton papers. It is a year which perplexes the student of Hamiltonia. The



key to the mystery lies, without doubt, mainly in the acute shortage of staff in the editorial departments of the Amalgamated Press, and, of course, the shortage of authors.

Pentelow found himself in charge of the Companion Papers, with precious little overlooking or guidance from the top. The publishers did not bother so long as the papers could be kept going at all in such difficult times. So Pentelow probably had greater powers than any editor had before him or was ever likely to have again. One can hardly blame Pentelow for making hay while the sun shone, and I think that there can be little question that a mild little racket went on for a time.

If we know the period thoroughly, we can only decide for ourselves whether Charles Hamilton was a victim of the racket or whether he was part and parcel of it and, with the editor, making hay.

I have used the term "racket," and I haven't much doubt that there was a racket. But the word "racket" suggests something of doubtful morality, and there is another side to the matter. It must have been enormously hard to keep the papers going at all in the conditions existing then, and it should be possible to come to the conclusion, however grudgingly, that the editor and the author did a grand job in actually keeping the four schools on the market. For my part, I cannot now see how this could have been brought about at all, had not Hamilton and Pentelow worked together as, in my view they very obviously did.

And now let us look at that very curious year, 1918. Not the least curious item was that there were no Christmas Numbers of any of the Companion Papers that December.

Hamilton's best work in 1918 went into the Boys' Friend. He wrote all but two of the Rookwood stories that year, and every one of the Cedar Creek tales. He wrote two-thirds of the Greyfriars tales in the Magnet, and just half of the St. Jim's tales in the Gem.

It was due to Hamilton's allegiance to the Boys' Friend that so many Magnet and Gem tales had to come from the stand-in writers.

Some of the most famous Rookwood stories of all time appeared in 1918. There was the "Blind Mornington" series and the resultant barring-out over Lattrey. This lot, despite some rather blatant melodrama and theatrical contrivance, still make a fine school story even fifty years on. Hamilton never really surpassed, of its type, the long caravanning series of that summer. In the autumn a truly novel set of tales showed Rookwood under canvas as a result of the

bomb on the school buildings. And he wound up the year with the kidnapping series, perhaps the most famous Rookwood series of all, and always regarded as something of a classic of its genre.

In the Magnet it was Redwing's year. Introduced as the New Year came in, he starred in several beautifully written series which will always be memorable. There was little else of any consequence during the year, but one recalls the little gem about Hoskins and Hobson which gave promise of things to come.

In the Gem there was nothing outstanding. Hamilton's fifty per cent of the material was competent, but sometimes dull and hackneyed. The Gem tales were very much of the pot-boiler class. It would obviously be absurd to suggest that a nail was driven in the Gem's coffin in 1918, but it is equally obvious that the Gem was put into the background, and it never regained the lead and the glamour which it had once known.

Just why did Hamilton concentrate so markedly on the Boys' Friend stories, and neglect Greyfriars and St. Jim's. Clearly it was intentionally done. It could be that, for some reason, Pentelow was anxious to make a success of that paper, but such an argument does not hold water. It could be that the sly old editor, for some fell purpose of his own, sidetracked Hamilton's work into Rookwood and Cedar Creek. That, too, does not make sense. I am quite sure that Hamilton wrote what he wanted to write and that he drove himself to the limit.

Rookwood fans might like to suggest that Hamilton had an especial love for Rookwood, so he concentrated on that school, and threw in Cedar Creek for good value. I wouldn't believe that for a minute. I have said before that I feel certain that sentiment never had the slightest part to play in deciding what he wrote.

Clearly, less harm would have been done had the substitute writers taken over a great deal more of Rookwood. In any case, the Rookwood stories were always too short for characterisation to be a major consideration. Again, Rookwood was only one item among several in the Boys' Friend programme. Yet the author concentrated on Rookwood and Cedar Creek, and neglected the more important schools of St. Jim's and Greyfriars.

It is a cynical view, possibly, but I think the only reason can have been that the writer found it much more profitable financially to write two short stories each week plus one long story (with an additional short time that could be devoted to a few thousand words towards another long one), rather than to write two long tales (St. Jim's and Greyfriars) regularly.

St. Jim's was sacrificed at the altar of Rookwood and Cedar Creek in 1918, as, later on, it was to be sacrificed at the stake of the Rio Kid.

1918 was also the year of the Greyfriars and St. Jim's Galleries. The Greyfriars series ran too long; the St. Jim's series was cut short in its prime. Pentelow is credited with the writing of both, though there was a considerable difference in style. The Greyfriars articles were more factual; the St. Jim's articles much more abstract and rhetorical. Each was worth while in its own way, but, for some reason, the Greyfriars series made the greater impression at the time.

NELSON LEE COLUMN - The Environs of St. Frank's (cont'd from p.20) .. somewhat missing in the New Series. The emphasis was on the activities of persons rather than a mixture of both which was so evident in the old. In a sense it must have appeared to Brooks that he was writing from scratch again in the New Series, as I cannot believe that he would willingly scrap all the topographical build-up which we had used so cleverly in the old series.

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REVIEWS  
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BY THE PRICKING OF MY THUMBS

Agatha Christie  
(Collins 21/-)

This is probably easily the best Christie since "Cat Among the Pigeons" of about eight years ago. The great novelty about it is that it re-introduces Tommy and Tuppence Beresford, who last starred in a story as long ago as 1942. For the genuine Christie fan it is a joy indeed, but for anyone at all it is an ingenious thriller, told in fascinating style by the Queen of detective story writers.

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G. C. Ramsey  
(Collins 21/-)

\*AGATHA CHRISTIE MISTRESS OF MYSTERY\*

This book is a remarkable appreciation of the greatest detective story writer of our time. It is all the more remarkable in being compiled by an American, or, at least, a teacher in an American University.

It lists and analyses every single story ever written by Agatha Christie, with particular attention being given to the sagas of Hercule Poirot and Miss Marple. The cross references are absolutely fascinating.

It is a 'must' for the Christie fan. It is quite breathtaking that anyone should undertake such a work on a writer as prolific as Christie. Maybe someone with a lifetime to spare will do the same one day for Charles Hamilton.

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SALE: Collectors Digest 1 - 72 (includes 3A but not 5, 6, 9). First sensible offer  
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# THE POSTMAN CALLED (Interesting items from the Editor's letter-bag)

**WALTER WEBB (BIRMINGHAM):** I am very disappointed over the continual breaks in publication of the **SEXTON BLAKE LIBRARY**. Original stories of Blake having been getting gradually less each year and 1968 promises to be the least productive of all, except, of course, 1964, when there were no issues at all.

**H. P. CLARK (NUNEATON):** Although it is more than 40 years since I read my first Magnet I can still clearly remember the utter delight that my introduction to Greyfriars gave me. I can also recall the title of that story, published, I think, in 1921. It was called "Loder's Long Trail."

It was the custom of my late father to bring home a small gift for me each weekend when he returned from business, and he certainly could not have realised what a world of happiness he was opening up for me when he came home with a copy of the Magnet - the first I had ever seen. I would very much like to know the number and date of that issue and, if possible, obtain a souvenir copy.

**J. CONROY (LIVERPOOL):** I was enthralled with Bob Blythe's article "Early Struggles" in the Lee column of the October C.D. He must surely have put in a lot of time and trouble and research to have dug out all the correspondence between E.S.B. and the various editors. As letter follows letter you can sense the gradual despair of Mr. Brooks as his terms become lower. It is amazing that the St. Frank's stories ever saw the light of day after early treatment like this. I think it speaks worlds for the character of E.S.B. and other early writers that they withstood this heartbreaking rejection of their work and were still able to come up smiling in the end. Congratulations to Bob Blythe on a fine article.

Whilst on the subject of the Lee one of my favourite series was the tour of Australia and New Zealand when the Test matches were on. I think this series was published about 1928. What are the series numbers please?

**O. WADHAM (NEW ZEALAND):** I have never seen any mention in COLLECTOR'S DIGEST of the fact that THE BOYS' FRIEND had a companion paper for girls called THE GIRLS' BEST FRIEND. In a copy of THE BOYS' FRIEND dated May 1st, 1899 the paper for girls is advertised, and readers are urged to buy it and read "the most startling story ever written called 'Under A Ban.'" I wonder just how long THE GIRLS' BEST FRIEND lasted - does any reader have more details of the publication?

**WANTED:** Early Film Funs, Boys Cinemas 1927-32, also American Detective and Screen Mags, same period. Chums 1933 for sale or swap for above.

THOMPSON, 53, WALLASEY PARK, BELFAST, BT14 6PN

**LOST** - and much missed by its sorrowing owner. Volume containing early Penny Populars (1911) Nos. 1 - 12. Newly bound in dark brown with lettering on spine in gold. Very substantial reward for any finder who will send it home.

ERIC FAYNE, EXCELSIOR HOUSE, GROVE RD., SURBITON.

A bit hard up? Perhaps I can relieve you of some of your "unwanted" (?) items, for cash of course. Details please to:- NORMAN SHAW, 84, BELVEDERE RD., LONDON, S.E.19. Many OBBs. available. State wants.

# NEWS OF THE CLUBS

## MIDLAND

### Meeting held 29th October 1968:

There were eleven members present including Mr. E. Dodd of Kingstanding and also Gerald Price after a long interval.

It was an excellent meeting, full of lively discussion of the hobby and two first-rate talks were given by Ian Bennett and Mrs. Hamilton Wright, niece of the great Charles Hamilton, for the second meeting in succession.

Ian Bennett, whose special interest is the Captain Justice stories about which he had given a fine talk at a previous meeting, this time widened his scope and proposed the question "What is the secret of the perennial interest in the Old Boys' Books that we loved so well?" Ian's answer was that these books had gripped our imagination in the formative years and there had grown up a sense of loyalty to them and the ideals that they represent. Ian doubted very much whether any modern juvenile literature could have the same effect. George Chatham had his tape recorder going and Ian's talk will be heard again in the future.

After the coffee break Mrs. Hamilton Wright gave us another interesting talk on her famous uncle. This time she devoted herself to the post-war Bunter books. She said that after 1940 when the Magnet finished Charles Hamilton could not write about Greyfriars for some time as the copyright belonged to the Amalgamated Press. Towards the end of the war the great man was writing again in small paper backs on such schools as Sparshott, Topham, Carcroft and Headland House School for girls. The public, however, wanted Bunter again so a compromise arrangement allowed new stories to be written in hard cover books well above the old Magnet price. A new character Jack of All Trades was created, according to Mrs. Hamilton Wright a sentimental picture of himself.

We found Mrs. Hamilton Wright's talk most interesting and also the specimens of Charles Hamilton's post-war work which she displayed.

There were some very interesting books on the display table this month including a huge tome, a bound volume of Tit Bits for 1926 brought by Bill Morgan. Some "Plucks" in mint condition brought by Ivan Webster raised a few eyebrows and our usual features: Anniversary Number and Collector's item. These were Magnet No. 1602 Tricky Tracy and 30-years old being published on Oct. 29th,

1938, and Schoolboys' Own Library, Rival Guys of Rookwood published on 2nd Nov. 1939, the last Rookwood S.O.L. to be issued.

J. F. Bellfield, Correspondent.

NORTHERN

Meeting held Saturday, 9th November, 1968

Though the weather was wintry outside, the Clubroom was cheerful and cosy when the Chairman, Geoffrey Wilde opened the meeting with a gathering of thirteen members there. The formal business was quickly disposed of as we had a full programme. Gerry Allison's post bag included letters from Derek Vaughn, Charles Williams, and Alfred Hanson. Also Gerry had a newspaper cutting for the scrap book. A "Yorkshire Post" third leader headed "Too Many Bunters." A comment on the many obese children, but which started with a reference to Greyfriars!

Final details for the Christmas Party next month (starting at 4.30 p.m. for tea at 5 p.m.) were made covering games, food, prizes, and the hiring of a film projector and projectionists for the sound films (obtained with the kind help of London's President, John Wernham).

We had no less than three entries for the Short Story Comp. this evening. Jack Allison read his first. Jack had written an elegant ballade, (first explaining to us the form that a ballade must take regarding rhymes and the recurring last line to its three verses and envoy). This was set in the Greyfriars scene through autumn, winter, spring, and summer and was entitled "The Ballade of the Incongruous Telephone Box." The next entry, "The Jewel of Amen-Shan" was by Alfred Hanson and was an interesting mixture of East and West with an exciting dream sequence after the hero had suffered an accident. Gerry Allison read this for us.

Time for refreshments, which Myra Allison (at home with sinusitis) had none the less made as usual, and sent along.

We then heard Jack Wood's story called "King Victor's Peril," and being Jack, that ardent upholder of the Nelson Lee saga through thick and thin, the story was set in that well-known scene of school, detection, adventure and fantasy. All the favourite Lee characters appeared in positively Brookesian manner, and even Sexton Blake, to bring the story to an end. All three efforts contained the specified words and phrases, and as the evening had flown (two items being held over) we had to say farewell until the Party on .. Saturday, 14th Dec. 1968 (meet at 4.30 M.L. Allison please.) Hon. Sec.

LONDON

A new rendezvous for the November meeting was Bob and Laura Blythe's Colindale residence and 21 members found their way easily enough thanks to Bob's very good directions. Two fine pictures, quite appropriate for this Nelson Lee gathering, had been brought along for the occasion by Bob Acraman. Strangely enough, he had his reward, as his talk in the "What is your Opinion?" competition was adjudged first. Second, third and fourth were Winifred Morss, Don Webster and Maurice King. Suitable prizes were awarded to the four participants. Previously to this contest there was a long discussion re programme arrangements and this was settled very amicably.

Bill Lofts gave one of his very fine talks, this one about the controversial subject, "The Substitute Writers." This was greatly enjoyed by all present.

Ben Whiter obliged with a Sexton Blake quiz and it was Josie of Blakiana who won. Dead heat for second place were Len Packman and Brian Doyle. From 1952 Len Packman read extracts from Newsletter number 7. Afterwards there was a long discussion re the 21st anniversary meeting of the club scheduled for next February. Messrs. Hubbard and Doyle agreed to make enquiries for a suitable meeting place.

Good reports by both the librarians, Roger Jenkins and Bob Blythe and it was stated that there was a possibility of a Nelson Lee Library catalogue on the same lines as the forthcoming Hamiltonian one. The tea break, which had been lengthened in time so as to suit the many get togethers, was a great success, a good feed and many good conversations.

The next meeting, the Christmas one, is to be held at Hume House, Lordship Lane, East Dulwich, on Sunday, December 15th. John Wernham, the worthy president of the club, will be present, plus of course, copies of the new Hamiltonian Library catalogue. Kindly let Len and Josie know if intending to be present.

Uncle Benjamin

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A TRIBUTE TO LEONARD SHIELDS

By John Trovell

In his diary for October 1918, Danny enthuses over the new artist in the Boys Friend. Mr. Kelly's article "The Importance of C. H. Chapman" in the October Digest deplores the change of artist in the Magnet. Charles Hamilton, and at least one good friend and

member of our circle, thought the Magnet stories of sufficient merit to appeal without any form of illustration. Such is the diversity of opinion on the subject of artists.

Mr. Kelly, having been introduced to the Magnet when C.H. Chapman was responsible for the illustrations, resented the change that affected his image of Greyfriars

In contrast, my own introduction to the Magnet in 1927, when Leonard Shields was so skilfully bringing to life the adventures of Harry Wharton & Co., left me with a similar feeling of frustration when Mr Chapman took over during holiday periods. However good the story, the enjoyment was marred to some extent by the change of illustration.

The opinion of those of us who resented change in a make believe world that for us had become reality, in no way reflects on the ability of the artists concerned, each of whom rendered sterling service to the saga of Greyfriars.

Bearing in mind that Charles Hamilton was turning out some of his finest stories during the recognised Golden Age of the Magnet, when Shields was so ably illustrating, the work of the artist must be considered an important factor in making this the most successful period experienced by the paper.

This success would suggest that the Editor did know his young readers and the policy to adopt to appeal to them, and how many of those readers were introduced to the Magnet by the attractive Shields' covers must remain an intriguing question.

Mr. Chapman himself recognised the skill of Shields and classed him as one of the finest line artists of his generation, a generous tribute indeed. The two worked in harmony and remained close friends until Shields' death in 1945.

Leonard Shields had the ability to adapt his illustrating to the mood of the story. You sensed the light-hearted vein in the smiling faces of those ordinary boys (praise be that they were ordinary) and in the more dramatic story the tenseness of a situation was equally well conveyed. His impression of distance, height, and background detail were always worthy of close study.

It was with his depicting of the Greyfriars masters that Shields delighted. The venerable and kindly Dr. Locke, a portly Prout so like a galleon in full sail, Hacker cooing acid, and Quelch so grim and eagle-eyed that his very portrayal demanded respect, were all so convincingly conveyed to add further realism to Hamilton's fine stories.

Mr. Kelly states that Shields could not be expected to kill off people and replace them. Chapman's characters were never killed. Leonard Shields presented them, for our pleasure, in a form that added to our appreciation of the wonderful world of Greyfriars.

