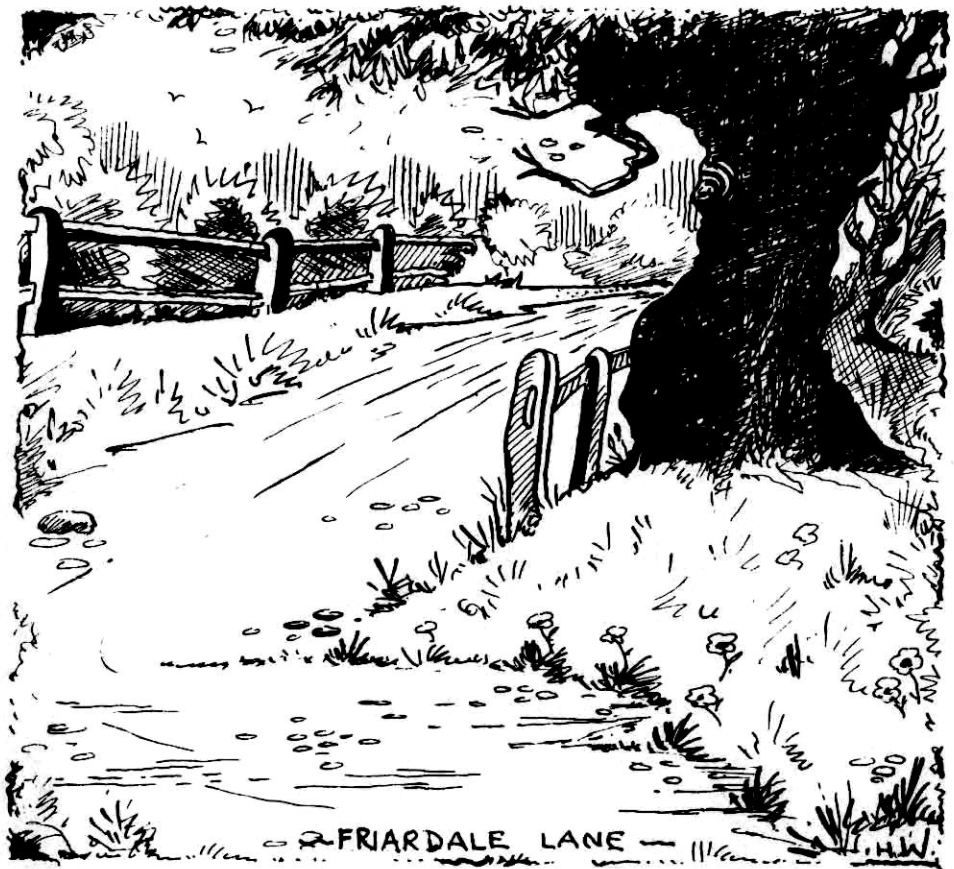


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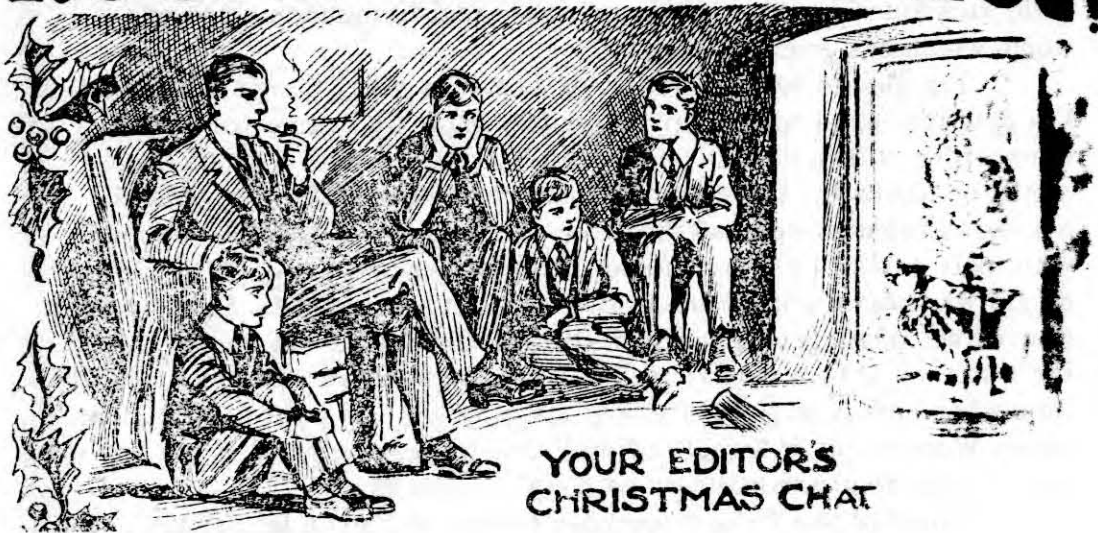
Vol. 26

No. 312

DECEMBER 1972

Price 15p

ROUND THE YULE-LOG!



YOUR EDITORS'
CHRISTMAS CHAT

HEIGH-HO, IT'S CHRISTMAS AGAIN

Christmas, of course, is a birthday. It's the birthday of Jesus, and the most wonderful of all birthdays. But, as in the case of our own birthdays, Christmas finds us all just one year older.

Birthdays and Christmas didn't matter when we were young. They just came to be celebrated and enjoyed. But as one followed another in swift succession, we found, to our surprise, that we were becoming mature. And yet another Christmas brings home to a few of us that not only are we mature - we're getting over-ripe.

But over-ripeness has its own compensation. Wonderful memories. The older we get, the longer our memories. Those of you who, like me, are getting long in the tooth, starting to bulge in the most inconvenient places, feeling a draught on top where the thatch used to be, and aching all over now and then, might think it would be rather pleasant to be young again in this marvellous new world of deodorants, decimals, and drugs. Not to mention motorways, supermarkets, X-films, and computers.

But I doubt it. For you and I have something which the poor little rich kids of today can never have - real living memories of a world which has gone for ever.

I'm glad to be over-ripe, for I have so many things to remember. I'm glad that I can remember the muffin-man, who came round once a week with a bell in his hand and a board, covered with a green baize cloth, on his head; I'm glad that I can remember May Day, when the horses were decorated and the streets were gay as they jingled along with their carts; I'm happy to recall the watering-carts, going around on glorious warm afternoons in summer, laying the dust; I like to think of winding, dusty lanes, in which the narrowness did not matter at all, for a car would be a rarity; it's lovely to remember the trams, and the time when one could go all the way for tuppence. I used to ride from Abbey Wood to Savoy Street, Strand - for tuppence - when if you lost one there would be another along in a couple of minutes.

I'm glad that I can remember the music hall in its heyday. I'm glad that I can remember an incomparable artiste like Gracie Fields in the full flow of her magnificent talents and in all her moods; and stars who could be heard all over the theatre without holding up a hand-microphone under their chins like a goitre as they do now. I'm glad that I can remember when popular songs had dreamy melodies. How sad, and how typical of our land today, that not one of those magnificent music halls, like Kingston Empire, Finsbury Park Empire, and

Stratford Empire - of which London once had dozens - has been preserved so that the men and women of the future could see what the music hall was all about. As in everything today, the value of the sites in solid cash came before preserving something worth while for posterity.

I'm glad that I can remember the papershops with their counters covered with heaps of current issues of the best periodicals in the world, on sale or return.

Perhaps most of all, I'm glad that I can remember real Christmases, when we made our own entertainment and we sang songs round the piano and we toasted ourselves before the coal and wood fire. For television has ruined the modern Christmas.

We are lucky if we are over-ripe and creaking at the joints, so be merry this Christmas. For memories are the spice of life - especially memories like ours.

I wish all my readers a happy time, come Christmas. With plenty of joyful reading, and, of course, cosy viewing. And may the New Year bring you all that you wish yourselves.

LET'S DINE AT THE BILLY BUNTER

Somewhere near Sydney in Australia there is a restaurant named the "Billy Bunter." Syd Smyth, one of our Australian enthusiasts, has sent me photographs of it. The sign reads "Billy Bunter's Take Away Food." Charles Hamilton's wonderful characters are becoming part and parcel of our language. More so than when their creator was living. Recently the Daily Telegraph crossword contained the clue "Compel Tom, the schoolboy, to look lively." The answer was "Make Merry."

THE BALLOT

All this month ballot papers have been raining into the Digest office by every post. To give our overseas readers the chance to vote for their favourites in the Digest the ballot will remain open until 31st December. Voting papers received here after that date will not be counted. Large numbers of readers have sent letters with their papers to say, in effect "We are voting - but we like C. D. as it is. Please don't alter anything."

That sort of thing is heart-warming. I can assure my readers

that I have no intention of making any drastic changes in C. D. as a result of the ballot. I have received well over two thousand letters from readers this year. One doesn't get a mail like that without knowing pretty well what our readers, in general, want.

THE ANNUAL

In mid-December, God willing, the 1972 Collectors' Digest Annual will be coming through your letter-boxes. The superb cover is drawn for us by our own talented artist Henry Webb. The book is packed with delicacies among which Roger Jenkins writes on "The Fifth Form in the Mailton Schools;" Bob Blythe introduces some of the struggles of E. S. Brooks in connection with the Gem and Magnet; Christopher Lowder takes a comprehensive survey of the Blakiana work of G. H. Teed; Len Wormull talks about an old favourite for boys; R. Hibbert waxes lyrical about the Rover; Bill Lofts tells how one St. Frank's tale came to be written; H. Truscott explains why he dislikes Johnny Bull; Mr. Buddle becomes Head for a day, and isn't sure that he likes it, in "Spirit of Slade."

And lot, lots more from a mighty team of writers.

A last reminder. Have you ordered your Annual yet? We cannot print many extra copies to allow for late orders.

And again, a really Jolly Christmas to you all.

THE EDITOR

* * * * *

WANTED: Good loose copies or volumes containing one or more of the following: GEMS 817, 826, 828, 832. BOYS' FRIENDS issues between Nos. 1182 and 1256 (inclusive). Good copies essential.

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XX

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DANNY'S DIARY

CHRISTMAS 1922

The Boys' Friend, which is 27 years old - I wonder what it was like in the beginning - has been tip-top all through December.

The short school stories by P. G. Wodehouse have continued, and I like them a lot. Two of them have been "Pillingshot's First Case" about St. Austin's, and "Scent per Scent" about Wrykyn.

The great series about Mornington has gone on. In "The Mornington Mystery," Morny kept turning up unexpectedly and then disappearing at Rookwood, and nobody could imagine how he did it. And all the time Jimmy Silver was being a good friend to Sandy Smacke, the red-headed new bootboy. In "The Elusive Outlaw," Jimmy decided that Smacke was acquainted with Mornington - and Peele, to their dismay, listened while Jimmy was talking to Smacke.

"The Invisible Schoolboy" was very amusing. The Head called in Inspector Sharpe to try to find out exactly where Mornington was - and Tubby Muffin thought the police had come about a pinched pie.

Final of an excellent series was "By Pluck and Luck," in which Sandy Smacke foiled two burglars who were robbing Rookwood, and Sandy got struck down. Blood was running from beneath Sandy's red hair, and Dr. Chisholm was surprised to find that Sandy's red hair came off. Readers cannot have been surprised that Sandy turned out to be Mornington in disguise, but all Rookwood was astounded. But it all turned out well, and the Head allowed Morny to become a Rookwood man once more.

Last of the month was the Christmas Number which was very late - only a day or two before Christmas Day. The Christmas tale was "The Phantom of the Priory." It was very short indeed, but a good, seasonable tale. Mr. Silver's Rembrandt, worth £2,000, has been stolen, in spite of the fact that Mr. Silver has a new secretary named Mr. Spencer. The Fistical Four go to spend Christmas at the Priory, with Mornington as their guest. Lovell insists in spending the night in the haunted room, and the tale ends with Lovell shouting "Help, help, help." Nice eerie yarn, but not much of it.

The Popular's Christmas Number, also out just before Christmas, was not very Christmassy, apart from a few sprigs of holly on the pages. The Cedar Creek tale was about Frank Richards & Co. producing Julius Caesar. One wouldn't expect the headmistress of a backwoods school to say "Bless my soul!" - but Miss Meadows said it. The Greyfriars tale was about Esmond, the funk. The Rookwood tale was one of the Masters on Strike series. As for St. Jim's, well, a new tale, I think, by somebody or other, about one of those endless football tussles for somebody's cup. Awful bilge. Plus Billy Bunter's Weekly.

Last month, all the Companion Papers were enlarged, and their prices went up, but all the extra space and more is filled with advertisements.

The Gem has been excellent, though there was one tale not by the real Martin Clifford, and a fake story is something of a rarity these days. A good pair started the month. "Trimble in Trade" told of Trimble buying up stuff to sell cheaply. He sold Gussy a pocket-knife. A similar knife was used to damage Mr. Lathom's very special Virgil - "a magnificent volume bound in calf, and it contained not only the Aeneid, but the Georgics and the Eclogues, with notes in Latin by the learned gentleman who had spent thirty years in the classic shades of Oxford preparing that edition, and had lost his hair and most of his eyesight on the task. And that bald, blinking, and deeply-learned gentleman had presented that valued volume to Mr. Lathom, with his own learned and indecipherable signature in it." They blamed Gussy for damaging the volume - and he was sentenced to a flogging.

But, in the sequel, "Cousin Ethel to the Rescue," Ethel visited St. Jim's, and inspired Kerr to track down the real vandal - Mellish.

Then came the fake tale "The Fags' Rebellion," a weary one about the Third against Mr. Selby.

In the Christmas Number came the start of another new series, heralded by a really mighty fine tale "For Friendship's Sake." Mr. Ratcliff, who hoards gold, smashes Manners' camera. And Tom Merry is suspected of stealing fifty of Ratty's golden sovereigns. Tom is sentenced to expulsion, but in "A Christmas Barring-Out," the entire junior school supports him, and the Head finds himself locked out of the School House. A barring-out doesn't seem quite the thing for Christmas,

but these two yarns which launch the series are absolutely tip-top.

Early in the month there was a bad gas escape in Bethnal Green. There was an explosion, and three people were killed.

One of the greatest pictures I have ever seen was on at a local cinema this month. It was Lillian and Dorothy Gish in "Orphans of the Storm," a story of the French Revolution. Also in the film are Joseph Schildkraut and Sheldon Lewis, and it is directed by D. W. Griffith. Another time we saw Norma Talmadge in "The Eternal Flame." Betty Balfour was good fun in "Mord Em'ly," and Theda Bara was fearfully dramatic in "Carmen." In the afternoon of Boxing Day we all went to the cinema and saw "A Message from Mars," which was exciting and seemed seasonable, and with it there was the newest Charlie Chaplin film "Pay Day."

The shops have been beautifully decorated this Christmas, and packed with good things. They look better than they have ever done since the war ended.

I had some very nice presents, but what I really liked the best was the latest Holiday Annual which my brother Doug gave me. It is a beautiful book, with lovely pictures, and it cost him six bob. It has Who's Who of the three schools, and some very good short stories. The long Greyfriars tale was called "A Shadow Over Greyfriars." It told of a cricket week at Greyfriars which was spoiled by Bunter hiding things belonging to various people so that they thought they were stolen. Jack Drake came back to Greyfriars to solve the problem and lift the shadow.

The long Rookwood story was "The Mystery of the Priory," an old story from the Boys' Friend, about Private John Silver. It appeared during the war, and it was the first appearance of Cousin Phyllis. Doug recognised "Captain of St. Jim's," the long St. Jim's tale, as being composed of several of the old blue-covered Gems of long ago. Tom Merry becomes school captain. It was illustrated by E. E. Briscoe, who also drew the front cover of this Holiday Annual. A grand book.

The Magnet's Congo series came to an end with "On the Ivory Trail" in which Bunter lost his kingship of the cannibals, and Captain Corkran and the Greyfriars chums found their hidden treasure of buried elephant tusks. In "The Black Man at Greyfriars," the Greyfriars chums went back to school - and Pickle Jar, the black Krooman, followed

them. He didn't want to be separated from "Maas" Harry. A good tale.

"The Call from the Air" was a funny old tale. Peter Todd is given £50 as a birthday present, so he buys a wireless set. Strange messages are received on the set, so the juniors go out in a body to rescue the unknown caller. The Christmas Number of the Magnet was very good. It contained "The Ghost of Mauleverer Towers." The chums go home for Christmas with Mauly, and they meet Brian Mauleverer who was once a scamp, but has turned over a new leaf. When a piece of armour falls from the lot that had been worn by Sir Fulke Mauleverer it is said that a death will occur in the family. A good yarn which finished in the one week with the reformed Brian being chucked out. Also in this issue was "The Terror of the Grange," a story of Ferrers Locke and Jack Drake which I found a nice morsel beside the fire while Mum made the mince pies. By Owen Conquest.

Last of the month was "Ponsonby's Revenge," the second one this month not by the real Frank Richards. Hazeldene is very weak and Ponsonby is fearfully wicked in thinking out "a terrible scheme."

As he always does just after Christmas, Dad took us up to a matinee in London. This year we saw a revue at the Empire in Leicester Square. It was called "Pot Luck" and the stars in it were Cicely Courtneidge and Jack Hulbert. Cicely is a very funny girl and I laughed a lot.

(EDITORIAL COMMENT: Though Danny did not know it then, he had reached in the Gem the end of a year the like of which he would not see again for a long time. There were only four substitute stories in the Gem in the whole of 1922.)

* * * * *

WANTED TO BUY: Chatter Box Annuals G.C. 1909, 1911, 1912. Champion Nos. 1 to 9, 79, 80, 81, 89, 91 to 104. G.H.A. 1920. For s.a.e. Champion Nos. 28 to 32, 35, 39, 43, 44, 49, 50, 53 no cover, 55 to 58, 60, 61, 62, 68, 70, 72 to 78. 35p each.

H. W. VERNON, 5 GILLMAN ST., CHELTENHAM, VIC., AUSTRALIA.

XXX
SEASONABLE GREETINGS AND BEST WISHES - BEN WHITER.

XXX

WANTED: St. Frank's Monster Library, Nos. 1, 2, 3, 5, 8, 13, 16, 18. £2 each for good copies.

J. BERRY, 367 ST. ALBANS ROAD WEST, HATFIELD, HERTS.



BROOKS - THE TELLER OF TALES

by Gemini

There's no doubt in my mind that Edwy Searles Brooks was the most ingenious school story writer for boys' magazines during the '20's. I don't think that he ever planned this and was quite probably overwhelmed by the demand for his own creations (particularly when one recalls his early attempts for establishment as portrayed in the interesting correspondence published through Bob Blythe in "Digest") but nevertheless his superb gift for story telling coupled with enthusiastic editorial acceptance was never more superbly demonstrated than in the pages of "Nelson Lee" during the years of the '20's.

The work put out in this magazine over this period shows how he dominated the genre for flair, imagination and sheer plot ingenuity, coupled with his inborn ability to gain and hold compulsive readership support. When he really began to diversify and looked for new fields to conquer, then and only then, I believe, did St. Frank's start to look a different place.

Great story tellers are remembered for their tales and the people who were in those tales, not necessarily for a regularity of professionally balanced, well seasoned and tested diet, which was often the content of many magazines for young people over the same period.

From the St. Frank's Remove and their chief cohorts, Lee, Nipper, Dorrimore and Umlosi, finely drawn characters by Brooks spring out in the memory from his tales of that era. Who, once having read about them, can forget the introduction of the infamous Colonel Clinton; the waggish Josh Cuttle; the smoothly sinister Comte de

Plessigny; the original spendthrift Singleton; the happy and unalloyed Little; Glenthorne and his Phipps (haunted by shades of Wooster and Jeeves, perhaps); that tremendously thorough-going rascal, Ralph Leslie Fullwood; such intriguing character essays like Doctor Karnak, William K. Smith and the atmosphere of the Petticoat School; the incomparable Ezra Quirke (who was, I think, mistakenly reintroduced in both the First and Second New Series); William Napoleon Browne (I agree with the reader of "Digest" who commented on a resemblance to Wodehouse's Psmith); such happy inspirations as the ex-naval trio of Boom, Juggs and Ridd; the old showman, Sylvanus Noggs; the happy bargee, Captain Joshua Pepper - really, the list of outstanding characterisation from the pages of "Nelson Lee" is endless, for many of his people stood out and "lived" in their times.

And I haven't even mentioned most of Lee's famous criminal protagonists who got so inextricably and (I think) too successfully mixed up with St. Franks' affairs.

Then the plots! The various Remove revolts, told with such gusto, and in so much planned detail of strategy; the arrival of the Serpent and his machinations; the excellent double series about Jack Grey; the tremendous Starke and his expulsion; the White Giants of El Dorado, surprisingly not hackneyed despite the popularity of this type of tale in boys' papers at the time; nobody but Brooks, so far as I know, ever thought of Petticoat Rule; stories with topical backgrounds, like the Goodwin and Levi series; the perennial visits to the South Series (always with interesting variations); the Communist School; Montana; Jerry Dodd - and I'm still only halfway through the Old Series.

To come in the First New Series were such great series as the China and India stories; the Great Flood; the Honour system; Northestria; the Congo Slaves; the Fresh Air fiends - and many more.

And there was always the annual Brooks' speciality - the Christmas series, with the most credible and eerie spooks!

Brooks, indeed, wrote so many great tales and fine series in St. Franks' history that I find it puzzling that these works today are not more in demand. Perhaps they are now not known sufficiently. And certainly their reprint values seem much below that of the consistent Greyfriars.

But, doffing my hat in the direction of Billy Bunter et al, I believe that with proper exposure of good series selection and critical distribution, the sheer tale telling readability of Brooks would obtain growing returns.

In fact, I believe that a section of blase modern youth, as well as middle-aged afficianados, might well "go" for some of Brooks' St. Franks' work today, if somebody selected wisely and risked a few of those outstanding school action series on the market in cheap, paper-back reprint.

- POINTS OF VIEW -

JAMES W. COOK (Auckland): Every now and again an old-time reader of the NELSON LEE LIBRARY decides it is high time to hold a postmortem on the demise of that excellent boys' weekly and weird and wonderful are the findings.

In the current October issue we have an analyst who wishes to remain anonymous under the pen-name GEMINI. In our little magazine I am sure there is no need for anonymity to write about the Nelson Lee. After all, GEMINI did say a few kind words about St. Frank's and he - or she - seems to be familiar with the saga.

But I cannot for the life of me understand why one has to theorise at this late stage. If GEMINI has read Brooks so much, surely he is aware that Edwy was no longer writing what he liked to write but writing to editorial policy. This was around 1930 when he wasn't interested in what he wrote for the N.L.L.

It may well be that Brooks was becoming a rival to Chas. Hamilton in the field of school story writing and constituted a threat to that gentleman. It is well-known that Hamilton was a big fish in the small pond at Fleetway House.

Was there any rivalry between the two authors? I don't think so - I don't think there was any personal friction between Hamilton and Brooks. But Edwy did say to me on one occasion during an interview that, apropos the reason why the NELSON LEE LIBRARY finished publication in 1933, was that 'you can't have two kings on one throne.'

There is no doubt that something other than all the theories put forward by wellwishers and opponents of Edwy Brooks for the discontinuance of the publishing of the NELSON LEE might be found in that remark I have quoted of Mr. Brooks.

The ball is now in anybody's court. (Carbon copy to Mr. R. Blythe.)

LEN WORMULL (Romford): Since my remarks are never intended to be other than a personal viewpoint, I must disallow John Tomlinson's inference that 'some writers seem to take the view that their opinions should be held by all sensible people and another point of view is not permissible.' But I grant that he has a point.

How very true, I thought, on reading Jim Cook's defensive tribute to E. S. Brooks. Passionately sincere, indestructible, knowledgeable, reliable - and yet, so woefully one-dimensional. The voice of opposition calls forth the lash of a Montaigne quotation. Here is another from the same author ... 'There never were in the world two opinions alike, no more than two hairs or two grains; the most universal quality is diversity.'

Like Quirke's *La Grande Illusion*, it mystified, stunned. Scepticism came with the illogical weaknesses. 'Brooks overpowers others' achievements.' Ten million Frenchmen must then be wrong. 'Where else can one find an abundance of good reading?' Ssssssh! - we all know where. The ability to read a St. Frank's story over and over

again proves only an insatiable appetite for St. Frank's. The chosen idol was also an imitator of 'another school story writer.' Constructive criticism invited, while breathing destruction down the necks of Hamiltonians. The mind is a wonderful storehouse of memories, but it needs jogging. Hence Do You Remember? - a popular pastime even outside the hobby, as witness radio and television. To recall unaided an author's repertoire shows either a phenomenal memory or a limited range. Let's Be Controversial is of course alien to Lee policy, something abhorrent. To suggest that it stems from an author's failings is both fatuous and ludicrous. Kill controversy and our paper is dead.

By all means have an occasional rarity in our columns, from all sections. And since the chips are down, why not a programme reshuffle in the Lee household itself? Give it strength through real appraisal. Be controversial. Give and take a little. Treat banter as banter and not belligerence. Try changing to a two-way system. And then watch a resurgence of interest.

Collectors' Digest is under attack, its role challenged. I am reminded of hobby correspondent, John Gunn, who once told me that he had reached the stage where he liked reading about the old papers in preference to reading them. I rather fancy he is not alone in this thinking. Surely this is what C.D. is all about? To paraphrase another writer, 'I can find no fault with this paper.'

LES ROWLEY (Kilburn): I do wish that Jim Cook would stick to his "Letters from St. Frank's." I found them entertaining and enjoyable. His latest article on Edwy Searles Brooks (in the November 'Digest') was neither. It is difficult to see the objective behind writing it at all for the end result is that it does a dis-service to our Lee followers and to Brooks himself.

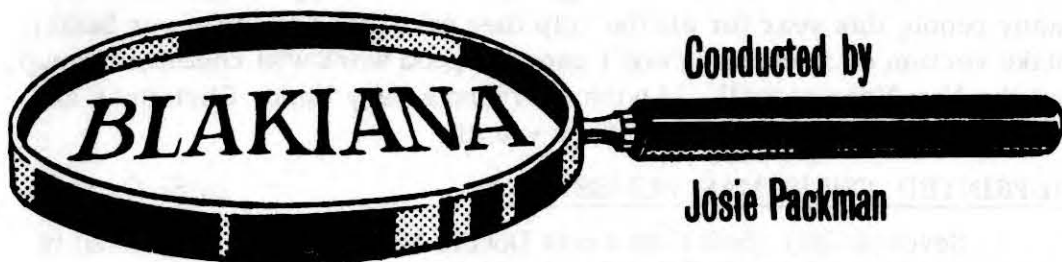
Brooks did not achieve the greatness Mr. Cook so extravagantly claims for him. Neither of our favourite authors of School Stories were giants of literature in their lifetimes and neither of them have become so posthumously. They wrote their stories and according to our choice we read what they wrote. Some of us chose Hamilton some chose Brooks. Both gave their measure of happiness to the chosen and both are remembered and re-read with affection. It is as simple as that. The sole reason that Hamilton takes up more space than Brooks in the Digest is that the Lee followers are less industrious less appreciative and (judging by the article in question) less imaginative. The idea of the hobby is to unite and it is to the credit of the devotees of Lee that they have been largely responsible for the success of such a union. But I find nothing in the dictatorial tone of Mr. Cook's article - nor in the age-old allegations of carping criticisms - that helps anyone.

"Cast off the Do You Remembers and the Let's Be Controversials for they have served their purpose if only to fill the gaps," urges Mr. Cook. Fill what gaps, Mr. Cook? Those that could have been filled by Lee contributors if only there had been the supply - if only there had been the demand?

W. T. THURBON (Cambridge): I feel that Jim Cook is too vehement in his claims for E. S. Brooks. I would say that Frank Richards had the edge over Brooks because he set the fashion for a type of school story which still has devotees today. He has added a character to English folk lore in Billy Bunter, and I don't think Brooks has done anything to equal this. I think St. Paul's advice about moderation is a thing we all need to take to heart when we write about our pet subjects and authors.

PETER HANGER (Northampton): Jim Cook seems to have gone overboard for St. Frank's. Tell him he can have my Howard Baker "Barring-Out at St. Frank's" for five bob (post free).

* * * * *



Conducted by

Josie Packman

Once again
 Christmas is here!
 Yes, just the same
 old words but always
 said or written with
 heartfelt joy
 especially if we can
 remember what
 Christmas really
 means, and the joy
 of reading our



THINK what you could do with that £500 we are offering this week for Football Forecasts!



A COMPLETE Story of MYSTERY and DETECTIVE ADVENTURE, featuring
SEXTON BLAKE, "The OWL," and Professor KEW
 Also in This Number — 8-Page DETECTIVE MAGAZINE SUPPLEMENT

favourite Christmas stories once again. I have to say many thanks to so many people this year for all the help they have given to make our Sexton Blake section so interesting and I hope the good work will continue throughout the New Year as well. I wish everyone a very Happy Christmas and a Prosperous New Year. God Bless you all.

REPRINTED CHRISTMAS NUMBERS

by S. G. Swan

Several Union Jack Christmas Double Numbers were reprinted in the Boys' Friend Library and the Sexton Blake Library. The most famous of these was W. Murray Graydon's "Five Years After," which was first published in the Union Jack as the Christmas Double No. for 1906. When it was revived in 1919 the following editorial note preceded the story:

This is probably the most popular Christmas novel that has ever been written. It was published originally in 1906, and later it was dramatised, and played in theatres all over England. I am republishing it this Christmas, as I am sure 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.

In Union Jacks of the early nineteen-hundreds you can find advertisements for the play, "Sexton Blake, Detective," which was based upon this story. In one issue a synopsis of the scenes is given, in another a list of the characters, which seemed to include one person who did not appear in the story - Philadelphia Kate.

The secondary hero, Roger Blackburn, who was wrongly accused of the murder of Squire Lovell, was destined to appear in many later tales of Sexton Blake. The Baker Street detective was often an honoured guest at Cossington Hall, in Somerset, and the gracious hostess was Marjorie Blackburn, the late Squire Lovell's daughter.

Many years ago, in 1924, in the Sexton Blake Library I read another Christmas tale by W. Murray Graydon, which was called "Next-o'-Kin." Some years ago I re-read this and not long afterwards acquired a copy of the Union Jack Christmas Double Number for 1909, the story in which was called "Sexton Blake's Christmas Case," (No. 321). It was then I discovered that the two stories were identical. In this instance there was no editorial note to inform the reader that the

story was a reprint of an old Union Jack published fifteen years previously.

Another Christmas Double Number that was reprinted - in this case in the Boys' Friend Library - was "The Ghost of Rupert Forbes," which first appeared in the Union Jack in 1908. This was by Michael Storm and some years later was republished in the Boys' Friend Library under the same title.

This story may have puzzled some readers who hadn't read it in the Union Jack but did happen to have read "The Mervyn Mystery," an earlier B. F. L. title in which Rupert Forbes was teamed up with the notorious George Marsden Plummer. For in that yarn Rupert Forbes died, so that the title "The Ghost of Rupert Forbes," seems an oddly appropriate one. The truth is that it was a previous story to "The Mervyn Mystery" and took place prior to the death of Rupert Forbes.

Five Years After - U. J. No. 165, reprinted in Sexton Blake Library (First Series) No. 105.

Sexton Blake's Christmas Case - U. J. No. 321, reprinted in Sexton Blake Library (First Series) No. 359, under the title of Next-o'-Kin.

The Ghost of Rupert Forbes - U. J. No. 269, reprinted in the Boys' Friend Library (First Series) 248.

THROUGH THE PAGES OF THE PAST ON
A CHRISTMAS AFTERNOON

by William Lister

Christmas! Once again that magic word is in the air, the season of mirth and merriment, mince pies and mistletoe and many other equally good things.

Thus the opening of our Editor's Chat for Christmas 1926, U. J. 1208, 11 December. A delightful U. J. tale, The Adventure of the Two Devils. I say delightful because it reveals that Tinker's heart could be touched by the wiles of a woman, or rather a girl - Nirvana. Now Tinker had a real crush on Nirvana. Allow me to draw aside the curtain on this tender romance: "They stood thus for a few moments and then suddenly Tinker's arms went round her. She did not resist, her little form swayed in close to him, lips a little open, her warm flushed face came up as his head bent down to hers." (Mind you this

state of affairs had been going on for the previous year.) Proof - you can have it, in U. J. No. 1159, Nirvana's Secret, 26 December, 1925. A seasonable cover indeed. A midnight blue background, with large snowflakes scurrying across. Under the overhanging brick archway stand the figures of Nirvana and Tinker. A broken gas-lamp and a badly bent bollard (suggesting a 1925 type vandalism) complete the scene. A certain amount of sweet nothings are uttered by our lovers during the course of the story.

By the way both Josie Packman and Gerry Allison have informed me that considering all the years the Union Jack and Sexton Blake Library were published there are remarkably few Christmas tales and this is so. Strangely enough in some cases the U. J. sported two Christmas tales a year and 1925 is one such occasion. U. J. No. 1157, 12 December, 1925, saw the publishing of "The Mystery of Mrs. Bardell's Christmas Pudding," by Gwyn Evans. A cover picture of Plum Pudding, Duck, Mincemeat and sprays of holly meets your eye and creates a thirst for the contents. What makes a Christmas tale? Why, the descriptive passages, so here we go.

"The drab houses of Rice Street looked almost beautiful. Their yellow-bricked ugliness was softened by the powdery snow and from the once grey roofs icicles glistened with a myriad facets." "Christmas Day in Baker Street. Outside across the many roofs that gleamed white in the pale rays of a December sun, there floated the joyous carillon of Christmas bells."

I have chosen yet one more from the many exciting descriptive Yule-tide passages in this story. "From neighbouring churches the Christmas chimes began to ring a merry clangour of sound that pealed the joyous message of Yule through the scurry of the snow-filled night. Chelsea Old Church, with its mantle of snow and lighted windows, looked like some idyllic Christmas card." Since the first Christmas there have been millions of loves of Yuletide but now and again there have been those who hated Christmas. Scrooge comes to mind and another such - Jabez Bruff puts in an appearance in "The Crime of the Christmas Tree." Poor fellow he is not so fortunate as Scrooge. A nasty piece of work, he meets his end almost on the eve of Christmas when a large pointed icicle falls from a tall fir-tree and pierces his neck.

The icicle having melted there was some mystery as to how he died. Blake finds the answer. "Sexton Blake pointed to the lower branches of the fir-tree. The foliage was powdered with frozen snow and from the underside of several branches hung dozens of icicles some six inches in length. Each sharp silver of ice glittered in the moonlight. That was the way Jabez Bruff - hater of Christmas met his death.

"The Crime of the Christmas Tree," U. J. No. 1313, 15 December, 1928, sports a splendid cover picture. Members of the "League of Robin Hood" in the persons of Robin Hood and Friar Tuck are seen looking up at the offending fire-tree. Sexton Blake is kneeling at the foot of the tree examining the corpse of Jabez Bruff. Quote: "Beneath the Christmas Tree lay the body of Jabez Bruff. The dark stain that dyed the virgin whiteness of the snow glistened red in the moonlight." At this point I digress. The author realized that his readers may consider the cause of death by an icicle a bit far-fetched. He makes his position sure by causing Blake to quote two real-life cases. "About 15 years ago (i. e. prior to 1928) there was a case in Alaska and another in North Wales in 1908 during a blizzard.

* * * * *

W A N T E D : Monsters, S.O.L's, Adventures, Champions, Rovers, Hotspur, Wizards, Dandys, Beans, Magics, Skippers, Annuals.- Dandy, Beano, Jester, Greyfriar's Holiday Annuals, all old Boys' Books bought, collections, etc.

JAMES GALL, 49 ANDERSON AVENUE, ABERDEEN, SCOTLAND, AB2 2LR.

XX

FOR SALE: Complete run of Magnets, from 1084 to 1683. 600 consecutive issues, excellent condition, £450. I regret that I cannot accept exchanges, or any figure below this sum. Also complete run of Gems from 1325 to 1663. Excellent condition. The Gems are all beautifully bound, in maroon, except the Silverstone Series, £170.

W. SETFORD, 155 BURTON RD., DERBY.

XX

THE MAIN INGREDIENTS FOR

A HAPPY CHRISTMAS ARE

TURKEY, CHRISTMAS PUD, MINCE PIES, LAUGHTER, LOVE
AND COLLECTORS' DIGEST ANNUAL

(Have you ordered your Annual?)

No. 105 - Magnets 1244-6 - Mauleverer Towers Series

It was at Christmas time that the Magnet really came into its own, with the inevitable (but statistically most unlikely) fall of snow at the end of term. The juniors would construct their slides in the quad, and the customary accidents would follow. Troubles would beset Bunter in his persistent and relentless fishing for invitations, and when they all adjourned to the holiday venue a seasonable spectral mystery would present itself. St. Jim's and Rookwood were just not in the same class when it came to Christmas series, and the Magnet in its last eleven Christmases set a pattern that readers came to know and love.

The Mauleverer Towers series of 1931 had many endearing features. The novelty began when Bunter, despairing of being invited to the Towers, hid himself in Mauleverer's trunk; unluckily it was so heavy that it was dropped, and the surprising contents were revealed when it burst open at the bottom of the steps, just before it was to be loaded on to the car. After a few days at home, Bunter ordered a taxi to Wharton Lodge, hoping to stick Wharton for the fare, but Wharton and Pinky had already gone on to Mauleverer Towers, and accordingly Bunter ordered the taxi to drive across country towards Winchester, jingling an English penny against a French penny in his pocket as he gave his instructions. As the taxi proceeded up the driveway of Mauleverer Towers, Bunter jumped out in order to bilk the driver, and, missing his way in the snow, he fell down an open well, which afforded a secret entrance to the Towers. Thus the scene was set in a novel fashion for an entertaining Christmas series that was never less than very readable all the way through.

It is interesting to consider why the Mauleverer Towers series, like so many other Christmas series in the Magnet, was so eminently satisfying to the reader, and the answer to this elusive attractiveness must surely lie in the character of Bunter himself. To his school-fellows he must have been the most unwelcome companion imaginable, the Death's Head at every feast, but to the reader he was an indispensable part of Christmas jollifications in the Magnet. There has always been a sneaking sympathy for the underdog, and Bunter's triumphant

escapades at Christmas are in direct descent from the custom of an earlier Elizabethan age, when an underserving servant was installed as Lord of Misrule for one day, with the privilege of giving orders to everyone in the household, including the master and mistress. Bunter was Lord of Misrule every Christmas in the Magnet, and by helping to save Mauleverer from the kidnapper he was in the happy position of being persona grata with everyone at Mauleverer Towers. It would have been a churlish reader indeed who did not rejoice with him in his triumph and who failed to put down these yuletide Magnets with a sigh of deep satisfaction all those years ago.

* * * * *

REVIEWS

THE REBEL OF ST. JIM'S

Martin Clifford
(Howard Baker: £2.75)

The main dish in this excellent meal is the 4-story Victor Cleeve series which brightened the lives of Gem readers way back in 1928. In fact, Charles Hamilton wrote nothing else for the Gem in that year so that, at the time, the series tended to shine even more brilliantly than it would have done. But even by itself, it still stands out as one of the finest school yarns ever written, with its background of the summer term and cricket. Characterisation is superb, as one would expect, for the famous writer was at the height of his powers.

As a contrast to this powerful story of summer, and as a curtsey to the Christmas season, the opening stories in the volume are a couple which helped to make the Christmas of 1925 memorable. Some of the plot is played out at Holly Lodge, Monty Lowther's home, and the pair of tales provide a sound little thriller. One big advantage is that the St. Jim's stories in 1925 and 1928 were considerably longer than they had been in the earlier twenties. Both the thriller and the Cleeve series have star parts for the Terrible Three and especially for Tom Merry, and if you think this fact casts a rosy glow over the book for me - how right you are!

Out now in time for Christmas are four of Wodehouse's school books, published by Souvenir Press at £1.50 each. "The Pothunters" was the first book P.G. ever wrote. Others now re-issued are "The White Feather," "Tales of St. Austin's" and "A Prefect's Uncle."

LET'S BE CONTROVERSIALNo. 176. JOE FRAYNE

The Gem's Christmas Double Number in the year 1910 was like all the early Gem Christmas Numbers in one respect. It appeared very early. In November, to be exact.

It would seem evident that Charles Hamilton was not alerted that this special number was to appear, for the St. Jim's tale in that issue was not double length, nor had it any festive atmosphere. It was a normal tale for a normal Gem, and it was entitled "Levison, the Schoolboy Detective." The double number was made up with various other complete stories.

Strangely enough, "Levison, the Schoolboy Detective" was never reprinted, which was a pity, for it was a good yarn of its type. Levison was a new boy, and had been at St. Jim's only a few weeks.

In the reprints of the nineteen-thirties, the return of Levison to the St. Jim's scene was very badly and very inexplicably mishandled. In the blue Gem, Levison had arrived just in time to clear up the sombre little matter of the death of Lumley-Lumley, but, in the reprint period, these tales were held over, and a big jump ahead was made to a period when Levison was well established at St. Jim's. Levison appeared in these tales, but he was called Snipe. After a year or so, a return was made, and Levison arrived as a new boy, to save Lumley-Lumley. After this, Snipe, of course, disappeared, and Levison became his old self. But it was far too late. Too many of the old masterpieces had been used with Levison as Snipe. A golden age of the Gem was almost wasted in the reprints.

And, though Levison was eventually introduced as a new boy, the early "Levison, the Schoolboy Detective" was never revived. There could have been no reason for its omission. It was just overlooked. I reckon that I was as much to blame as anyone. In the thirties I contacted Mr. Down a great many times concerning omitted stories, and he used them almost at once. But I, too, overlooked "Levison, the Schoolboy Detective."

Though, in 1910, there was no Christmas St. Jim's story in the official Christmas Double Number, there was a Christmas story that

year, some six weeks later. This was "Tom Merry's Resolve," one of the yarns in the 7-story series about Tom Merry adrift in the wicked city of London. Tom Merry, found in the slums of London by his chums, went to spend Christmas with them at Eastwood House. This story contained one of those curious, stodgy, and inconsequential pieces of padding of which Charles Hamilton was occasionally guilty. For no reason at all, a by-election was taking place at Easthorpe, where Eastwood Lodge was situated, and Skimpole was in the town to give support to the socialist candidate.

In the thirties, this story was re-named, very weakly, "Gussy, the Ghost." The election sequence was scrubbed out (quite reasonably), and somebody (quite ineptly) inserted a different episode.

What a pity that Mr. Down did not ask Charles Hamilton to accept payment for re-writing the story! It would have been fascinating. After all, such re-writing was done by Hamilton in the early years of the Gem; why not in 1934? How shortsighted they all were!

The Tom Merry - Adrift series has never received much notice from hobby students as the years have fled, but I have always had affection for it. It was, I think, only reprinted once - in the Gem of the thirties - and on that occasion it was not helped by being drastically and very unskilfully pruned.

In many ways, the series was Dickensian. We might read it, this Christmas of 1972, and greatly enjoy it as a period piece. We might well think to ourselves: "It couldn't happen now, of course, but it was feasible enough 60 years ago."

In my view, it was really incredible in 1910. I cannot think that Miss Fawcett's financial difficulties could have resulted in a youth of Tom Merry's qualities and background, finding himself among criminals and layabouts in the slums of London.

There is one remarkable aspect of Tom Merry adrift. He met and was assisted by the then famous characters, Jack, Sam and Pete, with their dog, Rory. Hamilton gave a delightful pen-picture of the three adventurers. The introduction of these famous characters into the Tom Merry story was a truly great inspiration on the part of someone, and it seems likely that that someone was Hamilton himself.

In 1910, of course, Jack, Sam and Pete were at the height of their

popularity, though it is not likely, perhaps, that their followers were also readers of the Gem. But everybody knew of Jack, Sam and Pete.

In the reprint of 1934, Jack, Sam and Pete had their names changed to Jim, Buck and Rastus, though the dog remained Rory. It seemed a pity that this change was made. Of course, the fame of the much-loved adventurers was long past by 1934, but surely most boys still knew their names. Jim, Buck and Rastus had been characters in a series in the later Boys' Friend, and, possibly, elsewhere. I have always assumed that the Jim, Buck and Rastus tales were reprints of early Jack, Sam and Pete yarns, with the names changed, but I do not know this for certain. Experts on Pete lore, like Mr. W. T. Thurbon of Cambridge, would probably be qualified to judge, but Mr. Thurbon may never have come into contact with the Jim, Buck and Rastus stories.

In the slums we first met Joe Frayne, son of the criminal, Bill Frayne. Joe befriended Tom Merry, in the kind of atmosphere which Dickens or Talbot Baines Reed portrayed so well. When Tom Merry came into his own again, he remembered Joe, and was the means of bringing him to St. Jim's as a pupil.

It was cosy. It was pleasant reading. I, at least, loved it - and still love it. But it was quite unbelievable that Joe Frayne, waif of the slums of London, son of a convict, and almost illiterate, could ever have been accepted into a school like St. Jim's.

As soon as he opened his mouth, Joe would have betrayed his upbringing. The intonation would matter, and Joe would never lose it. It wasn't really what he said but how he said it that mattered. An author can tell us of the cockney whine or of the slurred consonants. He cannot reproduce the intonation, which would be much more effective. Martin Clifford made Joe say, in a later story: "Some of 'em, sir. Master Mellish, and Gore, and Crooke, and Levison 'ave been werry hard on me, sir. They don't like a slum chap in the school. But I wouldn't 'arm their papers, sir. I only jest come in, sir."

An actor can convey illiteracy and lack of training by putting on an intonation (it is often over-done), but the author can only show it by indicating dropped aspirates and mispronunciations.

In the same chapter, Martin Clifford made Kildare say, before a crowd of boys: "Am I to understand, Noble, that you are one of the

fellows who have persecuted Frayne because he came from a poor place to this school, and is paid for by Tom Merry's uncle?"

Surely Kildare, in public, would be unlikely to refer to Joe's fees and to who paid them!

Bill Frayne tried to rob St. Jim's. In a dramatic effort to do some good for himself, when he was captured, he announced that he was not Joe's father. He said: "Joe's thirteen years old, I reckon. He might be anything from twelve to fourteen. Sixteen years ago I was sent to prison, and I stayed there seven years at a stretch. You can prove it by looking out the records. I couldn't be Joe's father --."

Looking back on it now, one wonders whether the door was being opened for Joe to turn out to be somebody's "missing heir," as such characters as 'Erbert, Flip, Skip, Erroll and plenty more did, later on. If so, nothing came of it.

Joe starred in several more worthwhile tales, and, of course, recognised Talbot as coming from the underworld. For a time the heroes of the third were Wally, Jameson, Curly Gibson and Joe Frayne. But with the arrival of Reggie Manners and Frank Levison, the picture of the St. Jim's "third" changed. Joe Frayne dropped out of the lime-light. For me, it was not a change for the better. He was hardly credible as a St. Jim's schoolboy. But I was always fond of Joe.

* * * * *

WANTED TO BUY: Union Jack 1266, 1267, 1297, 1298, 1299, 1301, 1305, 1396, 1397, 1399, 1410, 1432, 1478, 1487, 1495. Also Holiday Annual 1920's and just nine issues of The Champion.

H. W. VERNON, 5 GILLMAN ST., CHELTENHAM, VICTORIA 3192, AUSTRALIA.

XX

C O M P L E T E S E T of Penny Popular, 1912 - 1913, in mint condition. Will only accept the best offer in Magnets I require, or cash offers.

BILL WATSON, "OLYMPUS," SANDFORD MILL RD., SPRINGFIELD, CHELMSFORD, ESSEX.

XX

WANTED: Film Fun (1930-33), Bullseye, Surprise (early Nos.), Magnets 1175/6/7, 1180/1, 1228, 1236, 1246. Boys' Mag., Buy/Exchange Magnet, Bullseye, N. Lee (O.S.) others.

SUTTON, 41 SWALECLIFF AVE., MANCHESTER, M23 9DN.

XX

MAGNETS WANTED: 1123-1137; 1157-1174; 1189-1208; 1223-1245; particularly 1309, 1330. Good prices paid. Magnets, Marvels, Plucks, True Blues, Libraries, etc., for disposal.

J. de FREITAS, 29 GILARTH ST., HIGHETT, VICTORIA, AUSTRALIA 3190.

REVIEWS

BUNTER THE VENTRILOQUIST
and other stories

Frank Richards
Howard Baker Press: £2.75

For my money, this is one of the most delightful of all the reprint volumes. A gorgeous treat of single stories from the golden age of the Magnet: 1930, 1931 and 1933. At least, among the single stories there is a joyful twinset - a delicious trifle concerning Mr. Prout, a black eye, and Coker. It is hard to say which is the best of the eight stories contained in this book, but Bunter, attempting to pass off the tenth ode of the second book of Horace as his own work takes a lot of beating.

Whether it is wise to include so many single stories in one volume is a question which is of only passing interest. One of these would have been infinitely more fitting as make-weight in a recent volume than one story from a long series, as was used.

But that, of course, is a way of life. A publisher's way of life. Let us put off such considerations for another day, and, in the meantime, be happy with this superb volume.

Leonard Shields is the main artist. What a pity that the artists, in these books don't get the credit they deserve.

TEST YOUR N.Q. Denis Gifford
(New English Library, 30p)

N.Q. means Nostalgia Quotient. This is just the little book for a short railway journey, or for that odd twenty minutes before tea-time on Christmas afternoon. Denis Norden, who writes a delicious introduction to the book, says: "If you are of a generation that thinks Tom Mix is some kind of do-it-yourself cake mixture - sorry, mate. There's nothing here for you. Go out and get some fresh air."

Which means that it is intended for the "not-so-youngsters" or



the "getting oldies." It is packed with questions - and, if you want to cheat, all the answers are given at the back - covering things with which we were familiar in the years before the war. It's a wallow in nostalgia. Which means, surely, that it's just the Mix for us.

COMPANY OF BANDITS

Jack Trevor Story
(Howard Baker: £1.50)

This is a reprint - in book form - of one of the stories in the Sexton Blake Library of 1965. It is of a gigantic robbery, planned by a company of sixteen people. Though it is not the traditional type of Sexton Blake story, it is one in which Blake and Tinker work together, and it should be acceptable to those who were not too keen on the new set-up in the Sexton Blake circle.

Jack Trevor Story is noted for a whimsical humour all his own, occasionally outrageous in a way but never offensive. Such humour is well in evidence in this one. Rather fascinating, too, is Mr. Story's brand of social comment. The tale ends with a sigh - a glimpse of the old Baker Street sitting-room, with Pedro on the mat, and Mrs. Bardell in the offing. Well worth having on your shelves in this more permanent form.

THE NINTH SEXTON BLAKE OMNIBUS

(Howard Baker: £1.75)

The Sexton Blake Library was fading into the sunset when the two stories, included in this omnibus volume, appeared. The year was 1966. For some time there had been criticism from certain quarters that the new Sexton Blake stories relied over-much on realism. Over six years have passed since that time. It will be interesting to see what a new generation thinks of them.

"I, THE HANGMAN," by W. A. Ballinger has a novel plot. The Jack Ketch Society sets out to deal with people who, though guilty, had been acquitted by the courts. "THE MUCKRAKERS," by W. McNeilly gets Blake and his organisation following a trail which has been fogged by time. Blake solves a forty-year-old murder mystery.

Presumably by intention the centre of the volume contains a number of letters which apparently appeared in the old S. B. L. letter-bag pages. They seem slightly incongruous, especially as the address

of Collectors' Digest is given as one which we left nearly two years ago.

On the attractive dust-jacket, Agatha Christie is saying how delighted she is to see Sexton Blake still going strong. She seems to have been saying it for a very long time indeed.

DICKENS DICTIONARY OF LONDON 1879 (Howard Baker: £2.25)

This would make an excellent Christmas gift for someone, but we warn you that you may buy it for someone and end up by keeping it for yourself. It is a real gem. Following in the wake of reprints of such things as old Magnets, old newspapers, and old timetables, this is a kind of Enquire Within Upon Everything (about Victorian London). You can browse and browse to your heart's content over its mass of nostalgic information, ranging from Music Halls to Fallen Women - and then start again from the beginning to enjoy it all over again. Lovely binding, and with a slip case. Highly recommended to all but weeny-boppers. Even the ads at the back are a sigh of delight.

* * * * *

SALE: 290 Nelson Lee's between May 1926, to December 1931, 5/6 each. 12 copies or more 4/6 each. Postage extra. Wanted Boys' Comic Library (Aldine).

LITVAK, 58 STANWELL RD., ASHFORD, MIDD.

XX

SALE: Magnets 1374-1382 (£7); 1599 - 1608 (£4); 1615 - 1625 (£4); 1631 - 1642 (£4); 1643 - 1650 (£4). Wanted: Comics.

38 ST. THOMAS RD., PRESTON.

XX

WANTED: Micky Mouse Holiday Specials 1936 - 1937 and 1938. £5 each offered. Also wanted, certain issues of Micky Mouse Weekly 1950 and 1951.

R. HAYDEN, c/o 41 HIGHFIELD RD., LIVERPOOL 13.

XX

WANTED: Gems.

1/2d 8, 11, 18, 42 - 1d Series 74.

510, 658, 700, 701, 720, 721, 722, 744, 745, 749, 750, 751, 753, 755, 764, 776, 781, 797, 799, 801, 804, 807, 808, 812, 822, 831, 839, 841, 846, 867, 970, 976, 1069.

Your price paid. Write -

W. O. G. LOFTS, 56 SHERINGHAM HOUSE, LISSON ST., LONDON, N.W.1.

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FOR SALE AND WANTED: Magnets, Gems, Nelson Lee's, Sexton Blake's and Bunter Books.

S.a.e. for list -

F. BOTTOMLEY, 48 DOWNHILLS PARK ROAD, LONDON, N.17.

The Postman Called

(Interesting items from the
Editor's letter-bag)

S. A. HAILSTONE (London): With reference to the letter in the November C. D. from John Tomlinson, I must agree with his remarks. After all "fair play's a jewel." I must admit my preference had always been for Hamilton but correspondence and articles in C. D. led me to believe I must obtain more first hand experience for myself to form a firmer opinion. I am at the moment making my way, with Bob Blythe's help so willingly given, through the E. S. B. Library. I still prefer Hamilton but am continually acquiring a greater regard and liking for E. S. B. as I read his stories side by side with those of Hamilton.

It may well be that I will always prefer Hamilton but at least I am putting myself into a position where I must regard E. S. B. as a fine creative writer with much to be said in his favour.

Comparison certainly is valid but I cannot believe that there is anything to be gained by trying to uplift one author by disparaging another. Certainly criticism should be constructive, not destructive.

JAMES W. COOK (Auckland): With reference to T. Hopkinson's letter in "The Postman Called," which describes his agony of mind reading the Nelson Lee reprinting of Feud/Death of Church; he's having me on surely! I defy any member of the hobby not to like these two series if they would only read them and not "plough through them" with Chas. Hamilton in mind.

Why are these Hamilton addicts so presumptive that no other author could write as well as C. H?

And was it a coincidence that you followed on Hopkinson's letter from John Tomlinson's who had something to say in favour of the Nelson Lee Library?

PETER HANGER (Northampton): Once again I am saddened by your unscholarly habit of stating an opinion as a fact. If I were to adopt the same standard I would say that the Cigarette Case series is the best of the Christmas series. I content myself by saying that it has always given me very great pleasure. It is just the right length, it begins and

ends at Greyfriars, and, as you acknowledge, it has its full quota of festive atmosphere. It is difficult for me to understand your objection to it.

H. MACHIN (Preston): The Cigarette Case series is the dullest Christmas series I have ever had the misfortune to try to read. "Glyn's Hair-Raising Investion," I have never been able to plough my way through.

Beaumont was expelled for the part he played in Mornington's plot against Silver, falsely accused of stealing a fiver supposed to belong to Beaumont.

DESMOND O'LEARY (Loughborough): Thank you for all the interest and pleasure you have given me with the Digest. As someone who was brought up on the Thompson papers and to whom Bunter was a character in Knockout, the quality and extent of the Hamilton saga were a revelation. The erudition displayed on Blake, Lee and Hamilton is amazing and when combined with some asperity reminds me irresistibly of some of the disputes between scholars in the learned journals. But I must say that this asperity only appears occasionally in C.D. , and usually the articles and letters show a real spirit of shared enthusiasm. Once again, my grateful thanks for all your hard work.

E. DARCY (Maidstone, Australia): Let me express my gratitude for the pleasure and enjoyment I have had from our monthly treat. My favourites in the hobby still remain Champion and Triumph and R. Home-Gall, but I have found myself being drawn to Sexton Blake. After reading the Howard Baker Union Jack facsimiles I understand why Blake has an army of fans. Thank you for the friends I have gained through the Digest, and congratulations on your fine editorial work.

NORMAN WRIGHT (Watford): I was interested in the "Let's Be Controversial" article this month, re the use of old illustrations. It may interest you to know that at least one "Magnet" was illustrated with old "Boys' Herald" illustrations. The "Magnet" in question is number 246, dated 26 October, 1912. All of the Greyfriars illustrations are taken from a Sidney Drew school story titled "Val Partington of Barrowby," in the "Boys' Herald," number 404, dated 15 April, 1911.

I wonder how many other "Magnets" used secondhand

illustrations?

(EDITORIAL COMMENT: This is extremely interesting. I do not recall ever coming on this item of information before.)

BILL LOFTS (London): I was completely fascinated by Controversial No. 175, as it proves once again, that everything is not known in our hobby, and in Hamiltonia at that! At the moment I don't know the authorship of the stories, as I must confess like our editor, that I always assumed them as reprints - but I certainly will attempt to find out in the near future.

The Penny Popular in 1917 was, I think, run by R. T. Eves - who wrote some stories by 'Herbert Briton' which introduced Greyfriars and other schools in another paper. Some collectors indeed (but certainly not all) thought that this was Charles Hamilton in the early days of our hobby. As our editor says, it is quite possible that some early short stories of another school may have been used with the characters and school changed.

WILL SHARPE (Box Hill, Australia): I continue to rejoice in the virility and substance of C.D. It is an amazing success that after so many issues, and such a long run, it continues to be so healthy, interesting and entertaining.

Laurie Sutton (Orpington): Re the "Golden Domes" cinema - John Bush was in error in stating that it was "in Camberwell New Road, almost opposite the bus garage" - there was a cinema there, but the name escapes me - I'm sure it also had an unusual name.

The "Golden Domes" was, as you say, in Denmark Hill, but what made me earlier think you might have been mistaken was that it was by a coincidence, right opposite the Camberwell Palace.

Actually, I lived less than 200 yards from these theatres, from 1947 to 1953 - this was the period when Frankie Howerd was making his name in "Variety Band Box." I always remember seeing that great film "Of Mice and Men" (Len Chaney, junior, Burgess Meredith) at the "Golden Domes."

* * * * *

News of the Clubs

CAMBRIDGE

The meeting on 12th November was attended by President Bill Lofts. Chairman Danny Posner gave a talk on Victorian juvenile papers, with examples from his superb collection of these. He drew attention to the fine art work in many of the papers, and pointed out how editors sought to involve their readers by correspondence columns. He drew attention also to the Jack Harkaway series, and pointed out how some papers contained much violence, sadism, and sex. He was of the opinion that the influence of Harmsworth in the latter part of the 19th century, and in the 20th century, was for good.

"Aunt Judy's Magazine" roused much interest, and Danny spoke highly of the "Tim Pippin" series by Roland Quiz. Secretary Bill Thurbon recalled that the reprints of these stories had been among his favourites as a small boy before the 1914 war.

Members enjoyed playing an ingenious picture quiz game on the Hamilton school characters generously sent to the club by Roger Jenkins.

The next meeting will be on 3rd December, a week earlier than usual, and will take the form of an informal Christmas party. It is hoped to show a film of the club's visit to Dick Turpin's birthplace. Meetings are normally held at 3 Long Road, Cambridge, and visitors from other clubs are welcomed.

The club sends Christmas greetings to Eric Fayne and the Digest and to the members of other clubs.

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NORTHERN

Meeting on Saturday, 11th November

On a dark, wild, wet and very 'Novemberish' evening, Jack Allison gave his talk on 'Reading between the Lines.' He began by quoting from the 'Peanuts' strip in the day's Daily Mail:

Miss Sweetstory answered my letter!

"'Dear Friend, thank you for writing . . . sincerely, Helen Sweetstory.'"

She wants me to visit her. .

"This is a PRINTED letter!'"

Miss Sweetstory has invited me to her home, and wants me to write the story of her life!

"THIS IS A PRINTED LETTER!'"

Some people just can't read between the lines!

It may be argued that both Peanuts and Snoopy were reading between the lines, the former more accurately than the latter!

Jack took us through the highways and byways of the Greyfriars saga, reading between the lines with keen logic.

An example of his penetrating study is to be found in the Lancaster series where Wharton is tied up by Ponsonby (Magnet 1215). It was Wednesday, we are told, 'a glorious afternoon at the end of May.' The story (of the same day) ends by telling us that 'the bright May dawn was creeping in at the high windows of the dormitory before Wharton slept at last.'

But the next Magnet begins the story of the following day with the Famous Five strolling under the elms 'in the bright June sunshine.'

Of course, if Magnet 1215 dealt with the last day of May, then Magnet 1216 would be dealing with 1 June. However, the events of Magnet 1215 took place on a Wednesday, which logic demands would be 31 May and followed (obviously) by Thursday, 1 June. But a glance at a calendar for that year shows that it couldn't have been 1931 (when the series was published). In fact, it couldn't have been before 1933! Frank Richards was ahead of his time!

Oh, yes, there is no doubt a simple explanation. It requires only a stroke of the editorial pen to change 'May' into 'June' in Magnet 1216 to keep the story 'up to date!'

Jack created an absorbing diversion from the usual type of (to use the theologians' term) 'Formgeschichte!'

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MAGNETS FOR SALE. Write to - FELDMAN, 4 BALLANTRAE HOUSE, LYNDALE, LONDON, N.W.2.

LONDON

Despite the inclement weather, the attendance at the Twickenham home of Sam and Mrs. Thurbon, was one of the best of the year. The thespian qualities of the host, Sam Thurbon, were in evidence when he read a passage from a MAGNET of 1939, and took off the parts of Quelch, Prout and Aunt Judy, part of the series "Coker Expelled." It was extremely funny and backed up with a Holiday Annual Quiz, the gathering was away to a good start. Roger Jenkins was the winner of the quiz.

Josie Packman gave an account of her stall at a recent Paymaster General exhibition, taking along 33 items of Sexton Blake lore, and this was the success of the show.

Winifred Morss read a chapter from that famous GEM story, "The Mystery of the Painted Room." Don Webster read Frank Unwin's Greyfriars Cup entry: - "Hat Trick," and Bob Blythe conducted a Team Game which resulted in Josie Packman's side defeating Don Webster's, the score 77 points to 39.

The Rembrandt Luncheon party to celebrate the Silver Jubilee of the London Club was discussed and the menus, etc., chosen. The cost including wines was fixed at £3.

The Yuletide meeting will be held at Friardale, 2 North Drive, Ruislip. Phone outside Ruislip 31025 and the London number 713-1025. The date, Sunday, 10th December. Kindly inform if attending.

UNCLE BENJAMIN

SYDNEY, AUSTRALIA

When members gathered at Cahill's Restaurant on 1st November (a slightly smaller number than usual) the main topic of chat was the facsimile Union Jack volume. The general view was that it was nice to see Sexton Blake at last in the series, and it is to be hoped that the publishers will soon return to this media.

There was a lengthy debate concerning the actual stories in the book. Some plumped for complete series while others agreed a representative assortment of stories would introduce Blake's many-sided personality more effectively to people outside the hobby circle. Some would have preferred an assortment from an earlier time so that originals rather than rehashed stories could have been featured. But a good show, Howard Baker.

Arrangements were finalised for the Christmas Party to be held on 15th December. Members will be the guests of Mr. and Mrs. Ron Brockman, at the Graduates Club, Faveaux Street, Sydney.

B. PATE (Hon. Secretary)

THE MYSTERY OF F. ST. MARS(and Fenton Ash) SOLVED

by W. O. G. Lofts

The author F. St. Mars has always interested me a great deal. Not only did he contribute delightful nature stories in the Companion papers, illustrated by that master of animal drawings Warwick Reynolds, but there has also been a great element of mystery about the writer. Indeed, in the early days of the hobby, either the late Walter Webb or Herbert Leckenby asserted that the writer was actually a woman. The 'F' standing for Florence. This statement was however completely discredited when I met Mr. C. M. Down, editor of the Companion Papers, who stated ...

"It is news to me that F. St. Mars is a woman, as I knew the author, and the F. to my knowledge stood for Frank. I first saw his work in the RED MAGAZINE and was so impressed by it, that I commissioned him to write for our papers. I remember him as a very pleasant, youngish-looking man, with a good conversation, and we often had tea in my office."

Later it was discovered that in an artist's drawing of a group of contributors in the CAPTAIN, F. St. Mars was included, which showed again quite clearly that he was a youngish looking man.

However, there has always been some slight mystery about the author. He was quite famous in having 12 books published and also contributing to the more famous magazines such as STRAND, LONDON, etc. Biographical details about him were never mentioned.

When I was recently engaged on research surrounding the author 'Fenton Ash,' famous for his science fiction type of tales in boys papers - 'The Radium Seekers,' 'A Trip to Mars,' etc., I came across the real identity of F. St. Mars. His real name was FRANK HOWARD ATKINS, and he was the son of FRANCIS HENRY ATKINS otherwise 'Fenton Ash.' Possibly because of the confusion with his father's same initials he adopted the St. Mars pen-name, after his father's famous story of the planet Mars. The detective work involved in tying them together is too lengthy to go into here but simply ... Some stories paid to F. Atkins appeared as by F. St. Mars. Both F. Atkins and St. Mars were born in 1882. Both lived at the same address

at Havant, Portsmouth. Both died on the same day, 2nd September, 1921. No new stories by F. St. Mars appeared after F. Atkins death. All ones after were reprints, of earlier tales.

'Fenton Ash' the father, died at Clapham, aged 80, in 1927 - leaving a Sexton Blake Library story unfinished and unpublished entitled 'The Mining Mystery.'

In fairness to Walter and Herbert they did state that F. St. Mars was related to F. Atkins - and curiously there was a daughter and second wife involved named Florence. Like his illustrator, Warwick Reynolds, who died early in life in 1926, aged 46, F. St. Mars was only 38 years old when he passed on. Far too soon for such a gifted and interesting writer, whose work is still remembered and collected today, by enthusiasts of nature work.

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THOSE CHRISTMAS ANNUALS

by N. M. Kadish

It is always intriguing to turn out the drawers and cup-boards of one's house from time to time. Recently I cleared out some cup-boards in my studio and was pleasantly surprised to come across a folding pamphlet, advertising the forthcoming annuals for 1928.

Once again I could sense that warm glow of anticipation, looking over the well-remembered styles of the various covers. This year was the 'Tiger-Tim' period of my interest, with my then favourite paper taking pride of place on the outside of this folding pamphlet in the form of Tiger-Tim's Annual. I remembered how I used to cut out this little facsimile, and stick it onto some cardboard to represent a miniature book - a childish delight but an intense one.

Other Annuals such as the 'Rainbow,' 'Chicks Own,' 'Bruin Boys,' 'Picture Show,' 'Playbox,' 'Chums,' 'Scoolgirls' Own,' and my present favourite Holiday Annual, are here all represented. I can still recall and sense the delight to my young, fresh-eye of the scintillating primary colours on the brand new 'Rainbow Weekly' as I pulled it out of the letter box. They really gave me a feeling of euphoria.

I wonder how many of these pamphlets are at present in collectors' hands?

Another interesting side-line to the hobby is the collection of dust covers to these annuals. I don't suppose there are many of these transparent protective covers left now. I have only two in my possession, one from the 1928 'Tiger Tim's' Annual and the other from the 1937 'Holiday Annual,' with the old magic prices of 6/- and 5/- still printed there on.

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M A G N E T: Vol. 11, Jan. 6th/ Dec. 29th, 1917. 52 parts. Also GREYFRIARS HERALD. No's 1 - 52 New Series. Nov. 1, 1919/Oct. 23, 1920. All in original covers. Offers.

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