

STORY PAPER

COLLECTORS DIGEST

DECEMBER 1971

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OUR
25th BIRTHDAY
ISSUE

SPECIAL CHRISTMAS
DOUBLE NUMBER

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COLLECTORS' DIGEST

STORY PAPER COLLECTOR

Founded in 1941 by
W. H. GANDER

COLLECTORS' DIGEST

Founded in 1946 by
HERBERT LECKENBY

Vol. 25

No. 300

DECEMBER 1971

Price 25p



AND STRING LIGHTS FOR OUR
WINTER NIGHTS.

CHRISTMAS

WORDS

from



The Skipper

ANOTHER CHRISTMAS

Another Christmas! How they speed by, each one in its turn receding into the misty distance in a flurry of memories - each becoming a milestone down the corridors of time as we get older and our remembrances become sweeter. Thank God for Christmas.

It is my sincere wish that each and every one of my readers will enjoy the happiest of Christmases among their loved ones, and that the New Year will bring prosperity, joy, and contentment to all.

SILVER JUBILEE

Christmas is a time for humility, but it is impossible to repress a sense of pride that this month we are celebrating 25 years of Collectors' Digest. For an amateur magazine to reach its 25th birthday without ever missing an issue is something of an achievement, and it would be false modesty to suggest otherwise. It is a record which only a handful of professional publications can equal.

Collectors' Digest was born into another world - almost everything has changed since that misty November day, long ago, when the first copy of C.D. slipped through scores of letter-boxes. Down the tumbling years since 1946, television has become a god supreme for good or bad, the car has swept everything before it including some of the most beautiful countryside in the world, and standards have crashed. C.D. has remained largely unchanged in a changing world, and our readers have obviously liked it that way.

The first issues of C.D. cost 1s/1d. The one penny was for postage, and delivery took place the following morning after posting. 25 years later the postage is nearly 750% higher, and delivery is by no means as reliable. Such is progress in the later twentieth century. It makes you think.

On this, our Silver Jubilee, we warmly thank our untiring contributors, and our printers who work so hard to produce such splendid results, and, most of all, our band of readers whose loyalty and affection has made it all possible. Our Founder, Herbert Leckenby - bless the tender memories of that great-hearted man - is smiling happily this day.

Thank God for Story Paper Collectors' Digest, and for all it has stood for and for all it still stands for.

CHUCKLES AND THE FIREFLY

A contributor to the Silver Jubilee edition of Collectors' Digest Annual gives a fascinating history of the comic paper "Chuckles" and refers to the series about Courtfield Council School and an adjacent Greyfriars, a series credited to Frank Richards.

I am very doubtful whether Charles Hamilton had anything to do with the writing of this series. Had he written it, I think it would have been reprinted at some time or other.

I only possess a few copies of the paper containing these Dick Trumper stories, and the ones I have are certainly all substitute stories. They are, to my mind, reminiscent of the work of Hinton and Down, both of whom had a hand in the Rylcombe Grammar School series in the old Empire Library. Hamilton may have written the very early Courtfield tales - those who possess them can probably pass an opinion - in the same way that he gave a start to Cliff House in the School Friend. But I am doubtful.

One of my own favourite comic papers is the Firefly. Mr. Gifford, in his book on comics, refers to the Firefly as starting in 1915 and comments that it did not have the "right appeal" and so merged with the Butterfly after 111 weeks.

Actually the Firefly started in 1914, though it adopted the much-loved conventional style in 1915. I think it is unfair to assume that the paper had not the right appeal. After all, it lasted about three years, and the time when it merged with the Butterfly was one of great paper shortage. But for that, it might have gone on for many more years.

In fact, the Firefly is an interesting study. A paper of Magnet format, it went over to the conventional style of the period. Many years later, the trend was reversed. The conventional format gave way to the smaller format of Knockout. Mr. Gifford takes note of the later changes, but takes no note of the interesting fact that the smaller format was tried out, in the case of Firefly, all those years ago. Firefly, in fact, had previously been Fun & Fiction, and the readers of the latter were precipitated into Firefly without any warning. The change was clearly unpremeditated, and originally it was intended that both papers should run side by side.

JUST TO WIND UP - -

Our Let's Be Controversial article "And Summer is A-Coming In -- and Cricket" has been reprinted in the Journal of the Cricket Society, a book just published. In introducing the article, the editor of the Cricket Journal makes some pleasant references to our hobby and this magazine. He tells me that the article is causing plenty of interest in the world of cricketers who also remember the old papers.

A Merry, Merry Christmas, everyone.

THE EDITOR



DANNY'S CHRISTMAS DIARY



Christmas 1921

There was no snow, this Christmas, but the wind - it was just terrific. I had been in the town in the afternoon of Christmas Eve, and I got home for a late tea. I had just arrived in our road when my school cap blew off. I searched for it, but it had got pitch dark, and I couldn't find it.

When I got in, Mum was very cross about it. My cap was a new one and it cost 3/6, and she told me to go out and look for it again. She told me to put on my old cap this time, in case I should catch cold. Bless me, I hadn't been out a minute or two before my old cap blew off as well. I had taken Doug's torch with me, but even with the aid of that I couldn't find either of my caps. It made me quite nervous to go home. During my search, though I did not find my caps, I found something which I thought at first was a small coal-scuttle, but it wasn't. It was a postman's hat.

So I put that on my head, and went home. I told them: "I can't find my new cap, and I've lost the old one, too, but I've found this." It saved the situation. They all roared with laughing. Gran, who was with us for Christmas, had tears running down her cheeks from laughter, and my Auntie Gwen laughed enough to bust her stays. And Auntie Gwen doesn't normally laugh much.

After a late tea, I went out again, this time to the home of Mrs. Reeves, the postman's wife, with the postman's hat. It was her husband's hat. She said her husband would be glad to have it before he went out with the evening delivery.

The L.C.C. trams and the General Bus Company gave their travellers a welcome Christmas gift. Penny fares have been brought back on the trams and buses for people living around London. This doesn't affect our local trams, for we have always had penny fares for short distances.

For Christmas, Doug bought me the Holiday Annual, which is more marvellous than ever. The Greyfriars story in it was a bit odd, though very good indeed. Drake and Rodney, new boys at Greyfriars,

pretended that they were mugs at cricket, though really they were first-class players. But it is well over a year ago since Drake and Rodney left the Benbow to go to Greyfriars, and it must be a year since Drake left Greyfriars altogether to become Ferrers Locke's assistant.

Rookwood in the Boys' Friends has been very good. In "The Slackers' Match," Smythe & Co. have challenged Jimmy Silver & Co. to a football match. They intended to play a professional named Leech, whom they are passing off under the name of Jorrocks. However, at the last minute before the game begins, it comes out that the player is a pro, and the slackers have to play without him, and have a rough time.

Two stories, "Raby at the Races" and "A Loyal Pal," showed Raby at loggerheads with his friends. Raby becomes pally with Peele, and goes to the races with Peele and Townsend. Raby borrows 25/- in order to back the favourite - but the favourite lost, as favourites sometimes do. It was awkward for Raby, who played cards to try to win something to pay his debt. It is Jimmy who was the loyal pal. He was shocked, but he lent Raby the money to get out of debt, and Raby threw it at Townsend.

"The Rookwood Prize-Winner" was Tubby Muffin. In order to enter for a competition, run by Messrs. Twister & Co., Sharp St., Catcham, Tubby bought a football for 15/6 which he borrowed. He won the prize, but so many people won that Tubby only got 2d.

The Boys' Friend Christmas Number was enlarged, and cost 2d. The Rookwood story was "Christmas at Rookwood" in which, owing to a flu epidemic, Rookwood didn't break up, but stayed on at the school for Christmas, with Mr. Manders in charge. Putty Grace disguised himself as Dr. Shooter, and prescribed for Mr. Manders. Quite funny.

There is a series of tec tales in the Boys' Friend about Bulldog Holdfast, by Cecil Hayter.

Auntie Gwen bought Dad two new books for Christmas, as he is supposed to like novels. I suspect that Mum likes them better than he does. One was the new story by A. S. Hutchinson, called "If Winter Comes," and the other was a new story about the Forsyte family, entitled "To Let," by John Galsworthy.

The Gem went on with the New House barring-out against

Mr. Ratcliff. At the end of the month's first Gem "The New House Barring-Out," Mr. Ratcliff was swamped with water, and retired from the scene to nurse a cold. In the next story "Tom Merry's Conquest," Mr. Railton has taken charge, but the New House boys still refuse to give in. Then Tom Merry & Co. take a hand, and bring the New House to heel. So order is restored by the time the Head returns, and he, tactfully, forgets the whole affair.

I suppose barring-outs are a bit hackneyed, but this one was original in many ways, and I enjoyed it a lot.

"Trimble's Pal - the Prince" was good fun. Trimble pretends that he is friendly with Lord Westwood and the Prince of Rania, but nobody believes him. So Trimble persuades an actor, who is playing "Hamlet" at the Wayland Theatre Royal, to turn up at St. Jim's pretending to be the prince.

The Gem Christmas Number was good. It was a bit enlarged and had a coloured cover. I liked the story "Lord Eastwood's Xmas Party." A man named Dandy Carson has become Lord Eastwood's secretary under the name of a real secretary named Bloore. Lord Eastwood has left Bloore a lot of money in his will, so the fake Bloore is poisoning the earl to help him on his way. Wildrake recognizes the criminal, and foils his dastardly plot.

Final of the month, after Christmas, was "Tom Merry's Glee Party." A wicked landlord, Mr. Carrington, wears diamond rings and a gold watch across his stomach. (The rings are on his fingers, not across his stomach.) He is ejecting poor Mrs. Robinson and her baby and small daughter because she owes £20 in rent. So Tom Merry gets up some waits, and takes them round singing carols, and raises the money to pay Mrs. Robinson's rent.

In my Christmas stocking (actually, of course, it was a pillow-case) I found, among other things, a new Sexton Blake Library "The Secret of the Red Mountain." It stars Granite Grant and Mlle. Julie, and it is a really great story. I read it over Christmas. It was one of the things which brother Doug gave me.

All the shops were most beautifully decorated for Christmas - I think they all tried to outdo one another. I have never seen them looking so nice. The Salvation Army band played carols outside the

market all the week before Christmas, and it sounded lovely.

On Boxing Day afternoon we all went to the pictures and saw "Where the Rainbow Ends." This is the film version of the fairy play which goes on in London every year. This year the play is at the Holborn Empire. We all loved the picture, and, in the same programme, was Charlie Chaplin's 3-reeler "Sunnyside."

Other pictures we saw during December were Gladys Jennings in "Lamp in the Desert;" Jack Hobbs in "Inheritance;" and Fanny Ward in "Common Clay." There is also a new serial entitled "The Adventures of Detective-Inspector Haigh."

After Christmas it was very cold, with snow and ice. On New Year's Eve, Mum, Doug, and I went to the Clock Tower to watch the people dance round as the clock struck twelve. On the way home, as we walked arm-in-arm - Mum in the middle, Doug and I on either side of her - our feet all slipped from under us together on the icy snow. We all crashed full-length on our backs. We must have looked a sight. It all happened so suddenly that none of us was hurt.

In the Magnet there were the last two stories of the series in which Penfold trod the racketty road to ruin. These were "Penfold the Blade" and "Back to the Fold."

The Magnet had an enlarged Christmas Number with a coloured cover. The story "The Mystery of the Christmas Candles" was very good indeed, and it introduced Jack Drake, who is now Ferrers Locke's assistant. This was by the old writer, and was a very welcome change from the Magnet stuff in the last few months.

But the next one "Faithful to His Friend" was an itchy affair. Redwing finds an old friend of his, Jack Reynolds, who is now "only a crossing sweeper." He, too, is having trouble with a wicked landlord who wants his rent. The landlord this time is Mr. Stubbs. In order to raise the money, Redwing visits a bookmaker who takes bets on football matches. You have to give the result of the game, and the score. The bookmaker is Tony March - a well-dressed man, with refined features, honest eyes, and a gentlemanly bearing, that you might, from his appearance, have taken to be a doctor. He will only accept 10/- a bet on any match, he is so honourable. Redwing bets on the Southampton/Aston Villa match. Coker takes Redwing on his motor-

bike to the Dell at Southampton, to see the game. Redwing wins his bet, and is able to pay the wicked landlord. But somebody betrays Redwing to the Head, and he expels Redwing. However, Jack Reynolds explains it all to the Head, who takes a lenient view, though he is still cross, and he changes expulsion to a gating.

Last of the month was "Against the Law," in which a detective named Charlot is chasing Napoleon Dupont's cousin, Andre, who is suspected of robbery. And so ended a pretty bad year in the Magnet.

I love the Popular these days. They have an old story of Rookwood, an old one of Greyfriars, a serial, and Billy Bunter's Weekly. The Christmas Number, out only a day or two before Christmas, contained the story where Lattrey is a guest at Jimmy Silver's home, the Priory. The Greyfriars story, about Coker as School Captain, was not a Christmas tale. I think the old tales were a lot better than the new ones of Rookwood and Greyfriars which appear now.

On New Year's Eve we all went to London to see matinees. Doug took Mum to see "Sally" at the Winter Gardens; Dad took Auntie Gwen to see Josie Collins in "The Maid of the Mountains" at Daly's; and Gran took me to Olympia to see Bertram Mills' Circus. It was a simply lovely circus, and I loved everything except the lions. I didn't like those because they have to be cruel to wild animals to get them to do all the tricks.

And now for 1922.

 PRE-1932 MAGNETS URGENTLY REQUIRED. Please write stating numbers and price to:

P. J. MALLETT, 52 SUNNYMEDE DRIVE, BARKINGSIDE, ILFORD, ESSEX.

Phone Evenings 01-550 3988.

XX
 HEARTY SILVER JUBILEE CONGRATULATIONS TO C.D. and THANKS TO ERIC FAYNE. STILL WANTED: Hard Backtitles by Dorita Fairlie Bruce and School Friend Annuals 1933, 1934, 1939, 1940.

MARY CADOGAN, 46 OVERBURY AVENUE, BECKENHAM, KENT.

XX
WANTED: Good loose copies or volumes containing one or more of the following: GEMS 801, 817, 826, 828, 832. Boys' Friends from mid-1923 to April 1926, preferably long runs or in bound volumes. Good copies essential.

ERIC FAYNE, EXCELSIOR HOUSE, 113 CROOKHAM ROAD, CROOKHAM, HAMPSHIRE.

AN ENGLISH FISHY

by H. Truscott

Many of Richards' Greyfriars characters had earlier run-ins, and Fisher T. Fish, who arrived early in 1911 in MAGNET No. 150, is no exception. But there are one or two interestingly unusual things about Richards' earlier attempt at an American character in the Greyfriars saga, and the first is that this American was English. THE REFORMATION OF GREYFRIARS, in MAGNET No. 27, tells his brief story, a one issue appearance and disappearance. His name was Herbert P. Randall, and he was an old Greyfriars boy; but he had spent ten years in America, and returned pretty well Americanised, although not so thoroughly as the fully developed Fishy. Thoroughly enough, however, as Dr. Locke finds out. Randall rather sweeps things before him, and is outlining a brilliant scheme for modernising and improving the whole Greyfriars existing system before Dr. Locke has recovered his breath. At first, the good doctor can only respond feebly to Randall's breathless talk and even more breathless ideas, and politeness rather inhibits the Head; this is a disadvantage which does not inhibit Randall. The English-American has a scheme for doubling the present number of boys, given by the Head as 120, and when the Head objects that they haven't room for 240 boys, Herbert P. comes up with a scheme for putting up a new building. The Head is so flabbergasted by Randall's bumptiousness, which the latter calls having woken up, that he does not know how to cope with his guest. Randall takes the fact that the Head, who does not really take him seriously, has been so taken aback that he has not actually said "No!" for permission to go ahead, and he immediately gets to work ordering materials, hiring workmen, etc. He makes much of the fact that he has fifty-six hours and fifteen minutes to put in on this renovation of his old school before he must get back to London and resume his business. The next day work on the new building is going on apace, and Randall announces to the astonished Head that it will be completed by the evening.

And here Richards allows Dr. Locke to display quite a sense of humour. He tells Mr. Quelch that they can pay for the materials,

which are needed for Herr Rosenblaum's new academy, and that if the building is put up in a day it will probably fall as quickly, and can be carted away.

Randall also has other ideas, which enable Richards to have a good many goodnatured digs at the American way of life. One of them is baseball, which the old boy gets Wharton and his pals and other Removites playing. They are a sorry sight when Mr. Quelch sees them. Another concerns Randall's idea for increasing the number of pupils. He advises advertising, and rapidly draws up a rough draft for an advertisement:

WHAT YOU WANT

You want your boys educated! I want to educate them! Let us come to terms!

I have qualifications - to be enumerated - and I can give your boys just what they need. Send them to Greyfriars. I will send them back to you with the largest possible quantity of the best quality of education for the very reasonable fees charged.

Fees for single pupils so-and-so. Reduction for brothers. Special reduction for more than two of the same family. Parents introducing fresh customers will be granted a liberal discount!

All fees payable cash with order. We provide the best goods at the lowest prices, and there is no margin for credit!

Send for our prospectus. It will interest you. Mailed free to any part of the world on receipt of postcard!

"Dear me!" is all Dr. Locke can utter in response to this high-powered salesmanship - but he rigidly objects to pupils or their parents being called customers. But the Head, for all that the wind is at first taken out of his sails, is cuter than Herbert P. Randall thinks, and here again Dr. Locke's sense of humour comes to the fore:

"You think this would bring in a great influx of profit to the school?" asked Dr. Locke, with a slight twinkle in his eye.

"Dead certain!"

"And we should realise a large sum very quickly?"

"I guess so."

"More than sufficient to pay the cost of advertising?"

"Three times as much!"

"But that cost will be considerable?"

"Two or three hundred dollars to start with."

"But the return is certain?"

"Quite certain."

"Then if I were to suggest to you that you should finance the scheme, and pay for all the advertising ---"

"Eh?"

"And indemnify yourself from the extra profits that would result ---"

"What?"

"Of course, as business man you would jump at the idea?"

"Well, I guess not!" said Mr. Randall slowly. "You see, it's a mighty good investment for your money, but ---"

"But not for yours?"

"Ye-es, but ---"

"Dear me! It is nearly dinner-time!" said the Head, glancing at the clock. "You will dine with me, of course?"

"I guess so, doc. But it might be run without advertisements, you see. It would be just as efficacious to circularise the parents of the boys here, and ask them to pass the circular on to their friends. Rain circulars on 'em, and offer liberal commission for getting new customers ---"

The Head burst into a laugh.

Randall early has a conversation with Wingate, who is soon unusually outspoken. The English-American stands by the cricket pitch watching Wingate:

Herbert P. Randall nodded pleasantly.

"I guess that's a bit played out as a game," he remarked.

Wingate stared.

"What are you talking about?"

Mr. Randall jerked his cigarette towards the pitch.

"That!" he said tersely.

"Oh! And who may you happen to be?" asked Wingate, with a look which implied that he did not rate either Mr. Randall or his opinion at a very high value.

"Herbert P. Randall, of New York," said the young man, "formerly known as Randall secundus of the Remove at Greyfriars. I'm an old boy."

"Oh, you are, are you?" said Wingate.

"Yes. I've been to America and woke up."

"Have you?"

"Yes; I'm wide awake now. I can give you some points, I guess. That game is played out. I've got" - Mr. Randall drew a watch from his vest, and looked at it with a calculating eye - "I've got fifty-six hours fifteen minutes to spare before I have to get back to business in London, and in that time I will put you up to a few things."

Wingate seems to doubt this, and a moment or two later:

Wingate looked at him.

"You learned to wake up in America?" he asked.

"I guess so."

"Did you learn to shut up, too?"

"To - to what?" asked Mr. Randall, rather taken aback.

"To shut up," said Wingate grimly. "Because if you didn't learn it in America, you will very likely learn it at Greyfriars." And the captain turned abruptly away.

Herbert P. Randall smiled indulgently. He expected a rebuff or two in the course of waking up Greyfriars.

Mr. Randall fails, in spite of his efforts to wake up his old school. In fact, while he is standing with Dr. Locke, having realised

that he has failed, he suggests even a new idea as to what could be done with the new building. The idea is - egg-raising in large quantities. While he is expounding this to Dr. Locke, Wharton comes up, laughing so hard he can hardly speak, and at last manages to tell Randall that the new building has already fallen down. Randall and the Head go quickly to look at it:

Mr. Randall gazed at it in dismay.

"Quite American - eh?" said Dr. Locke, smiling.

Here is the close of this brilliant little story:

"Well, I guess I'm sorry I haven't been able to wake you up here," said Mr. Randall, when he shook hands with the doctor at parting. "I suppose you will go on in the same old humdrum way."

"I suppose so," assented the Head.

"Well, I'm sorry. But I suppose John Bull will never really wake up. That scheme of raising eggs in large quantities, now ---"

"The trap is ready!"

"And of circularising all your old customers ---"

"You will lose your train!"

"Oh, that's all right; I've allowed myself five seconds extra in case of accidents! Well, good-bye!"

And the hustler departed.

Among other peculiarities, Mr. Randall reduces words such as "permission" and "position" to "permish" and "posish," explaining to Wingate that life is too short to use the whole of a long word. Curiously, this is a habit, also, of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, who certainly does not do it for the same reason.

There is little doubt that Herbert P. Randall is a first glimpse of Fisher Tarleton Fish, but there is a curious circumstance attached even to this. As a side issue, from certain remarks made by Randall, Bob Cherry evolves a scheme for getting good tuck cheaper than at the tuck shop, which involves fellows contributing one-and-six per head. The curious thing is that in this one chapter, and nowhere else in this story, or in any other early story up to the arrival of Fisher T. Fish, there are references - three in number - to a boy called Fisher. I have examined all these early MAGNETS almost with a fine tooth comb, and these are the only mention this boy gets. He is one of a crowd of boys Bob approaches who turn him down, and Fisher says the scheme is no good. He makes a short remark a little later,



BLAKIANA



Conducted by JOSIE PACKMAN

SEXTON BLAKE in a Seasonable, Complete
CHRISTMAS Detective Story.



SERIALS IN THE UNION JACK

YEAR	TITLE	AUTHOR	ORIGINAL OR REPRINT
1903	The Chums of Ashbourne School	Allan Blair	Not known
1904	With the Colours	R. Wray	" "
1904	Captain of the Guard	H. St. John	" "
1905	The Streets of London	M. Hamilton	" "
1905	Ned Kelly	C. Hayter	Reprint BFL No. 44 1908.
1905	Trooper & Bushranger	C. Hayter	Reprint BFL No. 45 1908.
1906	The Pride of His School	C. Hayter	Not known
1906	Spy & Conspirator	N/K	" "
1906	The Black Assegai	S. Pound	" "
1907	The Hidden City	B. Kent	" "
1907	The Slapcrash Boys	E. H. Burrage	" "
1907	Ching Ching at School	"	" "
1908	Ching Ching Abroad	"	" "
1908	Battle & Breeze	H. St. John	" "
1908	For Home & Beauty	"	" "
1909	Sentenced for Life	A. Blair	? BFL 653
1909	Convict 99	N/K	Not known
1909	The School Against Him	H. St. John	BFL 219, 1913
1912	Charlie Gordon's Schooldays	H. St. John	N/K
1913	Dick of the Highways	D. Goodwin	BFL 256, 1914
1913	The Tragedy of the "Oklahoma"	C. Hayter	N/K
1913	Mike Langton's Vow	"	"
1914	Orders Under Seal	L. Carlton	BFL 1915, No. 291
1915	The Bogus Policeman	M. Darren	BFL 198, 1912
1915	The Diamond Dwarfs	H. St. John	N/K
1916	His Little Lordship	L. Carlton	"
1916	The Boy Who Wasn't Wanted	D. Goodwin	BFL 349, 1916
1916	The Seawaif	D. Goodwin	BFL 531, 1920
1917	The Aristocrat of the School	N/K	N/K
1917	In the Hands of the Headhunters	C. Hayter	BFL 433, 1918
1918	The Red Raiders	W. M. Graydon	BFL 451, 1919
1918	A Conspiracy at Sea	M. Scott	N/K
1918	The Headless Robin	"	"
1918	The Professor's Gold	"	"
1919	From School to Sea	C. Hamilton	"
1919	A Dead Man's Secret	M. Scott	"
1919	King of the Bush	"	"
1919	The Red Raider	A. S. Hardy	"
1919	The Cinema Athlete	W. Edwards	BFL 574, 1921
1920	The Four Shadows	N/K	N/K
1920	Curtis of the Fifth	E. S. Brooks	BFL 568, 1921
1920	The Fighting Scot	W. Edwards	BFL 556, 1921
1921	The Luck of the Cup	W. E. Groves	BFL 575, 1921
1921	In Peril at St. Elmers	R. W. Comrade	N/K
1921	The Worst House at St. Wolstans	E. S. Brooks	"
1922	The Vengeance of the Tong	G. H. Teed	BFL 669, 1923

YEAR	TITLE	AUTHOR	ORIGINAL OR REPRINT
1922	Tinker's Boyhood	N/K	N/K
1923	Treasure Island	R. L. Stevenson	
1923	The Wire Devils	F. L. Packard	
1924	The Atom Smasher	L. H. Robins	
1924	Slave Island	G. Chester	BFL 519, 1936
1924	The Mystery of the Marshes	H. W. Twyman	BFL 52, 1926
1925	Captain Blood	R. Rabatini	
1926	A Son of the Plains	A. Paterson	
1926	From Prisoner to President	S. Blake	BFL 272, 1931
1926	The Three Just Men	E. Wallace	
1927	The Striking Shadow	H. Scott Hedley	BFL 258, 1930
1927	The Fox of Pennyfields	L. Jackson	
1927	The Black Abbot of Cheng Tu	G. H. Teed	Original
1927	Dead Man's Rock	A. Quiller-Couch	
1928	The Devil's Mantle	F. L. Packard	
1928	Hercules Esq.	G. Evans	
1928	The Isle of Strife	Stacey Blake	
1929	Scissors Cut Paper	G. Fairlie	
1929	The Seven Sleepers	Francis Beeding	
1930	The Adventures of Ralph Rashleigh	N/K	
1930	The Crooked Billet	D. M. Dell	
1931	Chains of Fate	P. Lewis	
1931	The Blue Envelope Mystery	F. L. Packard	
1931	Death on the Air	H. Landon	
1932	The Lives Between	P. Lewis	
1932	Five Dead Men	A. Skene	
1932	The Gyrrh Chalice Mystery	M. Allingham	
1932	The Next Move	R. Murray, G. H. Teed, A. Skene & G. Evans	

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THE AMAZING AFFAIR OF BLAKE'S BROTHER

by Chris Lowder

To every great and successful (and long-running) fictional detective there comes a time when his security and reputation are threatened by something far more menacing than a knife-wielding crook or a gun-toting gangster. This is when the human element creeps into his normally austere private life - and there is nothing more menacing than the human element, believe me.

All sorts of unpleasant things have happened to Sexton Blake in this respect. Usually an ascetic, Blake has discovered, to his cost,

that a frosty exterior can be eminently desirable to a member of the opposite sex, who cannot understand his comparative lack of emotion and wants nothing better than to get behind that cold facade and discover what exactly makes him tick.

But attracted females are not the only peril in the game. There's another menace which, if anything, is even more hazardous. I refer to the family element. Mother, father, sister, brother ... a formidable quartet under any circumstances - but if one of them goes over to the opposition, so to say, the complications that ensue can be tremendous.

It is a widely known fact - even to those only peripherally interested in Sexton Blake lore - that Blake had a brother who was, not to put too fine a point on it, a villain.

His name, you will recall, was Henry. He was over ten years older than Blake, had slightly stooping shoulders and was well-built, though slight-looking. His smile was like Blake's, as was his curious habit of half-veiling his eyes when speaking.

You will also recall the manner of his fall from grace, so to speak. Their father (his and Blake's) was a harsh if just man, and Henry, being rather wild as a boy, yearned to break away and see the world. At the age of 15 he was accused by his father of stealing money from him. This happened to be untrue, but Henry left home - soon to fall among thieves, and become, after many years, a gambler, coiner, swindler and forger. It was, you will remember, when he was in England posing under the name of Prince Larinski, and involved in a vast scheme to flood the country with forged notes and coin, that he finally met up again with his now-famous detective brother and ...

What's that? You don't remember? You say you've never heard of this Henry? I'm not surprised. Neither had I until recently.

The brother you do recall, of course, is Nigel - concocted editorially and expanded into story-form by Lewis Jackson, especially for the first issue of the Detective Weekly (February 25th, 1933).

So who is this Henry, and how did he get into the act?

In the same way that Nigel was brought in, of course. The Boys' Friend 3d Library (a truly magnificent conception, by the by) was begun in 1906 as a vehicle for the talents of S. Clarke Hook, specialising

in 80,000 word yarns of Jack, Sam and Pete. Hook couldn't keep to his schedules, and the editor decided on a reprint policy, beginning with one of the very best Nelson Lee stories of all time, Maxwell Scott's "Birds of Prey." Then someone figured that since Sexton Blake was now going over big in the Union Jack, maybe the BFL ought to feature a Blake novel. Trouble was, there wasn't much reprint material available (the policy was - as it is now, as it ever shall be, probably - that stories must not be reprinted until about 5 years had elapsed). So, it had to be a new story - and this is why, incidentally, a third of the 1st Series BFL Blake novels are originals.

The old Amalgamated Press usually liked to start things off with a bang, and what more explosive a theme could they exploit than Blake, the Great Detective, honoured by kings and politicians, up against his own brother, who was definitely on the side of villainy and disorder.

Norman Goddard wrote the story, "Sexton Blake's Honour," and it was printed as No. 10 of the BFL (the first original novel in the series, apart from Hook's opuses). It is relatively early Goddard (he was 25 at the time, and had only been writing Blake stories regularly for a year or so), but still a good tale for all that, and, allowing for certain archaisms, thoroughly readable.

At the time, I should imagine it was a knockout. It had all the right ingredients - excitement, danger, sentiment, drama (emotional as well as actual). As in the Lewis Jackson series of some 30 years later, the spotlight is directed solely on Blake and the conflict inside him between law and order and his sense of loyalty to his own flesh and blood. It works out into a great, if slightly old-fashioned, yarn.

There is something that is remarkably modern about the book, however, that reflects well on Goddard as a human being. This is his somewhat compassionate attitude towards criminals in general (an attitude that runs, intermittently, through most of the tales I've read by him). Goddard had a certain amount of reforming zeal in his make-up that spilled over into the stories he wrote. I'll quote just one example (and there are many): "...he (Blake) felt confident that he could find his brother - then own to failure. He felt that the end

would justify the means. A man saved for a better life was a finer thing than a man clapped into a prison for years..." An interesting philosophy, not acceptable in many quarters even today.

All this, of course, doesn't explain away the fact that Blake now has two brothers!

Of course, with a fictional character such as Blake this sort of problem is bound to crop up. And it's the sort of problem that cannot be rationalised. With Holmes, it's simple - he was born in 18-something, had a career in detecting crime that stretched over a certain reasonable period, and died, around the age of 90, in 19-something (I forget the dates, and in any case critics disagree on them).

With Blake, we are faced with a vast assortment of insurmountable problems, not the least of which is the fact that he started his career in the late 1880's or early 1890's, and thus it is blatantly impossible that he should be practising in the 1920's, and sheer madness to suppose that he would still be tracking down criminals, and with such verve! in the 1970's.

Another thing - so many chroniclers endowed him with their own personal characteristics, and, needless to say, these varied to a startling degree. Goddard for instance made a big thing of Blake's eyes - the detective was always half-closing them, either in an endeavour to outstare a suspect (an odd way of going about it, I would have thought), or to aid his thought processes. It must have seemed to those talking to him that the poor chap needed glasses. Teed's Blake was curt, Skene's was cynical and flippant by turns, E. W. Alais's was positively Pickwickian.

And then there is the actual age difficulty. In the beginning, Blake was about 35, give or take a few years either way. From the 1920's onwards, he was slightly older, around the 40 mark ... though one Golden Age writer put him at 45 - knocking on a bit, I'd have thought!

On the other hand, one can be too rational. Far better to thrust such difficulties to the back of one's mind, and forget about them. It makes for greater enjoyment - which is really what reading Sexton Blake stories is all about.

THE SATURDAY HEROES

AN AFFECTIONATE LOOK AT THE COWBOY STARS OF YESTERYEAR

by Larry Morley

On October 12th, 1940, cowboy star Tom Mix crashed his white convertible at 80 m.p.h. As he braked the car when going into a skid, a heavy leather suitcase broke loose and crashed on to his skull; the car overturned pinning his body underneath; the King of the Cowboys was dead. It would appear that Mix was something of an extrovert, for about his person was \$15,000 in travellers' cheques, several thousand in hard cash; as well as a great deal of valuable jewellery, he was wearing the familiar ten-gallon hat, white riding boots, and a diamond-studded belt.

In 1941 Universal Pictures made a 15-part serial "Riders of Death Valley" as a tribute to the memory of Tom, starring his old friend and former double Buck Jones, together with Dick Foran, Noah Beery, and a large supporting cast.

There can be no doubt that Tom Mix was the cowboy Superstar of the 1920's, holding the unique position of earning a reputed \$10,000 per week, 52 weeks per year; even in the early 1930's when his star value was diminishing he was earning \$1,500 a week.

In 1928 Fox declined to renew his contract, and Mix somewhat huffily took his equestrian talents to South America. He returned to Hollywood in 1930, but his days of real glory were over.

In his absence other cowboy stars had found their places in movie-goers' affections; people like Buck Jones, Ken Maynard, Tim McCoy, Tom Tyler, and half a dozen or so more; it must be understood however that, while Mix starred in First Feature Films, the others made "B" or Second Features. These were the Saturday Heroes of mine, and I daresay thousands of others who are now in their late thirties or early forties.

Leading the field was Buck Jones, who made hundreds of westerns for nearly every film company; his career started in 1919, and he worked in movies until his tragic death in a hotel fire in 1942.

"Col." Tim McCoy was another great favourite. He had been an

official in a Government Department; worked on a ranch; and among the Arapahoe Indian tribe; he was also a Lt.-Col. in the Reserve Corps; and a Brigadier-General in the Wyoming militia before entering films. With this experience he was a "natural" for cowboy parts.

McCoy starred in perhaps the finest western serial of all time, "The Indians are Coming" (Universal 1930), but it wasn't until 1937 that it reached our local cinema in Derbyshire.

Many of the movies were made by "Poverty Row" companies, i.e. "Monogram," "Ambassador," "Tiffany," etc. I don't know how they would stand up to today's viewing, but in those days we weren't critical and thought they were wonderful.

The plots of these films were very much the same; there were only about half a dozen basic stories with slight variations; dialogue was at a minimum, but there was action and movement, and that's what we wanted - and got.

Here are a list of titles; they speak for themselves: "Mystery Ranch" (Tom Tyler), "Trailing Trouble" (Ken Maynard), "Vanishing Frontier" (Johnny Mack Brown), "The Sundown Rider" (Buck Jones).

Every Saturday morning we would tramp to our local picture-house, pennies clutched in sweaty hands, and lose ourselves in a dream world where right and justice were dished out by the good guys in the white hats (the villains always wore black ones for some reason).

Ken Maynard was a great favourite also, although a little over-weight; he was known locally as the cowboy Billy Bunter. I used to wonder how his poor horse Tarzan managed to carry him about all day.

Johnny Mack Brown was the best looking cowboy, which I suppose was natural, because at one time, in the late 1920's, he had been leading man to such stars as Garbo, Joan Crawford and Constance Bennett. In the middle 1930's he had been relegated to playing in "B" westerns - with great success.

It must be assumed that these films were made primarily for a juvenile market to be shown at children's matinées, but some of the smaller cinemas put them on as supporting films at their evening shows.

Such a house as this was one of our locals the "Regent Cinema,"

a converted church; so when the scent lady came round with her disinfectant spray the cry would go up "LET US SPRAY!" This proved to be amusing for a while, but after about 500 times the joke began to wear thin; so did the patience of the scent lady because the nearest person to her to utter this gem of wit got about half a pint of spray round his head (no doubt when he got home his wife would swear blind he had been with another woman).

The "Regent" showed "B" westerns week after week, mostly starring cowboy star Reb Russell (who made around 12 pictures 1934-1936) and William Boyd.

The policy of showing these films led to people making remarks like "keep away from the first four rows of seats or you'll get covered with trail dust," and it was the only picture-house in England that supplied a hitching-rail and spittoons for customers. Nevertheless I remember the old "Regent" with great affection.

In 1935 Gene Autry took it upon himself to sing as well as shoot, much to the delight of the public and of his studio, Republic; other producers wanting to cash-in on this new venture rushed frantically around looking for stars of their own, and a new breed was born - "The Singing Cowboy."

In no time at all we had Roy Rogers, Eddie Dean, Bob Baker, Sons of the Pioneers and Dick Foran. Hard-pressed producers persuaded established favourites to exercise the old vocal tubes. I remember Ken Maynard and Tom Tyler having a go, and quite frankly the results were - well the whirring sound you heard was Caruso turning in his grave.

All of these "B" westerns were made in black and white, or monochrome. But in 1937 Republic produced a movie called "The Bold Caballero" in Magnacolor, starring Bob Livingstone; this was a kind of Mark of Zorro western, I remember going to see it with a great deal of excitement, but was very disappointed. The colour was terrible.

Ray Livingstone is best remembered as one of the "Three Mesquiteers" an excellent series made by Republic in the late 1930's. The other two were Ray (Crash) Corringan and Max Terhune the only ventiloquial cowboy in the business; he had a dummy called Elmer

This story, written nearly 70 years ago, is one of the earliest examples of Charles Hamilton's work still in existence. It was written in 1903 for the Christmas edition of Tom Browne's Comic Annual. One wonders what the author would have said if somebody, that Christmas long ago near the turn of the century, had suggested to him that one day he would be accepted by most people as the greatest writer of school stories in the world.



A Christmas Comedy



by Charles Hamilton

(Author of "The Blue Box Mystery," "The Man Without a Name," "Sent to Coventry," "The Mysterious Miss Carlyon," "By the King's command," etc., etc.)

I

"BUT, Enid -"

Cyril Rallsford was standing at the window looking out over the snow-covered park, with its array of gaunt, leafless trees. His face wore a slightly worried look. For Helston House was full of the excitement of amateur theatricals, and Rallsford was stage manager, and he did not find the post a sinecure. He was in a brown study when the words suddenly fell upon his ears.

He looked round. The door which led into the library was open, and the voice came from the apartment beyond.

"But, Enid, listen to me."

"No, Arthur, I won't listen. You are only going to say something unpleasant. Just because Captain Creyke -"

"Oh, you knew what I was going to speak about, then."

"Of course I knew. Don't you look as glum as - as a gargoyle, whenever he is near me? It is positively painful to rehearse with you looking like that."

"It isn't exactly pleasant for me to look on and see that - and see Captain Creyke making love to you."

"Now, don't talk nonsense, Arthur. You know that it's all only acting."

"I know that it isn't - on his part, at least."

"I wonder you don't say, on my part too."

"What that ass Rallsford wanted to choose such a piece for I can't imagine." Rallsford smiled grimly. He wondered whether he had better make his presence known. It was evident that the speakers did not know that anyone was within sound of their voices.

"That is absurd, Arthur. I think 'A Christmas Comedy' quite the best thing that could have been chosen."

"Because there's a love scene in it for you and the captain?"

"Don't be rude, Arthur. You will have to make love to Lady Helston, and I am not jealous."

"Then you won't give it up?"

"Give what up?"

"The part!"

"The ideal! I wonder what Mr. Rallsford would say!"

"Hang Rallsford! That silly ass has caused all the bother."

"Nonsense! I'm sorry you should be so unreasonable, Arthur; but of course it's impossible for me to change my part now. It would upset everything. Lady Helston would never forgive me. Now I must run away and change my dress or I shall be late for rehearsal."

There was a rustle of skirts; then a muttered something, and then a young man came through the open doorway from the library, into the room where Rallsford stood, a grin on his face.

The annoyed look on Arthur Tunstall's features gave way to a blank expression as he saw Railsford.

"Hallo," he said feebly.

"Sorry I heard, Tunstall. But, you see, I couldn't help it. Your own fault; you know this room is my sanctum sanctorum. But sit down and try one of these cigars and tell me your troubles. Perhaps I can help you; although, like Dogberry, I must remember that I am an -"

"Excuse me, Railsford, I really didn't mean -"

"No, of course you didn't," Railsford assented cheerfully. "But what's the bother about?"

"It's that confounded Captain Creyke. You must have noticed how he - well, how he makes love to Enid. Pleasant for me, her fiancé, isn't it?" growled Arthur. "I can see his little game. He knows I am jealous, and he thinks that I shall provoke Enid into breaing the engagement. And then he thinks he will have a chance. It's all because of Enid's money. It is her fortune he is after."

Railsford was silent. He was quite aware that what Arthur said was probably true. He had before suspected that the captain, taking advantage of the opportunities afforded him by the rehearsals, was setting himself deliberately to make mischief between the lovers. And as Enid was a high-spirited girl, wilful and disdainful of control, and Arthur was too deeply in love to be very patient, it looked as if the captain's manoeuvres might be crowned with success.

"The fellow's a howling cad," continued Arthur, wrathfully. "Everybody knows that he's a needy fortune-hunter. Nobody likes him, but the women. And what they can see in him beats me."

"He isn't bad-looking," suggested Railsford.

Arthur sniffed.

"I don't see what's to be done," said Railsford, in a very thoughtful way. "It's too late to alter the cast now. Besides, Captain Creyke is the only one who can take the part of Colonel Rake. One can't deny that his acting is good. Suppose you try and possess your soul in patience till after Christmas week? The theatricals will be over then."

Arthur shook his head gloomily.

"It's no good, Railsford. I couldn't stand it. It isn't only the rehearsals I mind. There's other things - nothing a fellow can take hold of - but -"

Railsford nodded sympathetically.

"What are you thinking of doing then, Arthur?"

"Making some excuse to Lady Helston, and -"

"Not going?" exclaimed Railsford in alarm.

"Yes."

"Hang it, man, that won't do. Are you forgetting that you take Sir Charles in the comedy? You took the part with your eyes open, and you can't leave us in the lurch now."

"Well, you'll have to find some way of muzzling that beast Creyke, then," said Arthur, desperately. "It would make a charming tableau, wouldn't it, if I were to knock him down in the middle of a rehearsal?"

Railsford looked horrified.

"Arthur!"

"Well, it may come to that if I stay here."

And Arthur, thrusting his hands deep into his pockets, stalked away with a gloomy brow.

Railsford looked the picture of dismay.

"Scott!" he ejaculated. "And this is the result of all my labours! What a frightful bore these theatricals are. What did I let them make me stage-manager for? I think I'll resign."

"No, you mustn't do that, Mr. Railsford."

Railsford looked up to see Lady Helston, his hostess, standing in the doorway. Lady Helston was twenty-five, a beauty, brimming with vivacity. Her husband, Sir Richard, was a diplomat of distinction, and his official duties absorbed a great deal of his time - a state of affairs which the lady submitted to with a very good grace. At the present moment Sir Richard Helston was detained in Paris by some affair of importance, and he had written that he could not arrive at Helston House before Christmas Eve. On Christmas Eve the performance of 'A Christmas Comedy' was to take place,

if all went well; but Railsford was beginning to doubt whether all would go well.

"No, we couldn't possibly spare you, Mr. Railsford," her ladyship went on, "I know yours is a thankless task. But can I help you?"

"Perhaps you can," said Railsford, thoughtfully. "I know that I can rely upon your discretion, Lady Helston."

And he gave a concise sketch of the difficulty.

"You see, we mustn't offend the captain, at least until after Christmas Eve. The comedy would be a frost without Creyke, it's no use trying to disguise the fact. On the other hand I'm doubtful about what Arthur may do. Besides, I'm really concerned about him and Enid. The captain's game is clear enough. Don't you think so?"

Lady Helston nodded.

"They say that woman's wit will often find a way out of a difficulty when men's duller faculties are at fault," Railsford remarked. "See what you can do with the problem, Lady Helston."

The lady was evidently thinking very deeply. There was a little pucker, indicative of deep reflection, between her arched eyebrows.

Presently her brow cleared; she looked at Railsford, her face breaking into a dimpling smile, her eyes alight with a merry sparkle.

"You have a plan," he exclaimed.

"I think so."

"Please tell me."

Her vivacious ladyship rapidly explained. Railsford listened, first with a smile, then a broad grin, and then an amused laugh.

"Will you have nerve enough?"

"Nerve enough," said her ladyship, superbly, "I've nerve enough for anything."

"By Jove! I believe you have."

"You think it is a good plan?"

"Oh, yes, the fellow's conceited enough for anything."

"But you must help me."

"With all my heart."

And after Lady Helston had left him, Railsford remained thinking over the situation, and several time he broke out

into a prolonged chuckle.

II

RAILSFORD paused in the shadow of a huge mass of South American palms. From the ballroom the strains of a waltz came dreamily through the green coolness of the conservatory. But Railsford was listening to the subdued voices on the other side of the towering palms.

"But - your attentions to Enid - to Miss Grayle -"

"Nothing, merely nothing, my dear Lady Helston - the idleness of the moment -"

"They made me very unhappy -"

"Ah, if I had but known! From the first time I saw you I was attracted to you, but I never dared to hope -"

"I have done wrong to betray my secret. Yet, how could I keep it longer. But, Captain Creyke, I know that I can rely upon you."

"Can you doubt it?"

"And the time of happiness is so short -"

"Why so, dear Lady Helston - Celia?" said the captain, in a tender voice.

"Because upon Christmas Eve Sir Richard returns," said Lady Helston, in a stifled voice, "and then -"

"You look forward with repugnance to his coming?"

"Can you ask?"

"Why should you await it?" said Captain Creyke, in low, passionate tones, "Why should you persist in this false idea of duty towards one for whom you do not care - for whom you cannot care."

"Ah, Captain Creyke, do not tempt me."

"Dearest Celia, I would not urge you if I were not sure that I could make you happy."

"Happy!" said the lady, with a long sigh.

"I would crush down the wild longings of my own heart, dearest Celia. But is not your happiness, as well as mine, at stake?"

"Alas!"

"Then let us consult only our own hearts, and despise the carping of a heartless world. Let us -"

"Do not urge me further, Captain Creyke," said the lady, in an agitated voice, "I - I know not what to say. I must think - I must have time to think. Let us return to the dancers."

The speakers moved away. Railsford smiled a broad smile. He seemed amused by what he had heard.

Half an hour later he encountered Arthur Tunstall, who was looking decidedly more cheerful than of late.

"Railsford, old man, come and have a drink."

"You are looking cheerful, Arthur."

"Am I? I can't make it out."

"Can't make what out?"

"About Captain Creyke and Enid. He seems to have changed his tactics all of a sudden. He's asked her for only one dance, and all his little graces seem to be frozen up. Enid denies that she ever thought of flirting with the captain, but I can see that she's perfectly wild at the change, though she tries hard to conceal it. I can't understand it."

"Perhaps Creyke has seen the error of his ways."

"Um - perhaps," said Arthur, doubtfully.

"You haven't lost any time," said Railsford, when he danced with Lady Helston.

She looked up at him demurely.

"So you've noticed?"

"I was in the conservatory an hour ago."

"Oh! You approve?"

"Decidedly."

"I am afraid poor Enid is sadly puzzled."

"I sha'n't waste any sympathy upon Miss Grayle. She shouldn't flirt. Should she?"

"Oh no. I never do."

Railsford smiled.

"The captain is an eager wooer, isn't he?"

"Yes. He is desperately in love with my thirty thousand pounds. Enid's ten thousand has no chance."

"Ha, ha! Do you think you will be able to keep him in hand till after the theatricals?"

"I think so - I will try."

"You mustn't fail. Above all, the comedy must be a success."

"But after that -"

"Oh, after that we shall know how to deal with our gallant captain."

In his room that night Captain Creyke indulged in some pleasant reflections.

"Thirty thousand pounds!" he said to himself; "it's a cert, too; no doubt about it; thirty thousand of her very own. Creyke, my boy, you're in luck."

III

DURING the following days, matters went very smoothly at Helston House. The captain's attentions to Miss Grayle no longer caused frowns to cloud Arthur Tunstall's brow, or significant smiles to be exchanged by the other guests. Arthur was sensible enough not to give Enid any hint of his satisfaction, and Miss Grayle herself appeared elaborately unconscious of any change.

Enid thought it just a little injudicious of dear Lady Helston to flirt so very openly with Captain Creyke, and she confided this opinion to two or three intimate friends, who fully agreed with her.

But her ladyship appeared to be quite unaware that eyes and tongues had begun to busy themselves with her actions. She walked or drove or skated with Captain Creyke, with an air of blissful unconsciousness.

Christmas was close at hand now. But as the time of Sir Richard's return drew near, Captain Creyke became more urgent, and all Lady Helston's skill was needed to fence with him.

"Why wait - why wait, Celia?" he urged. "How painful to both of us to meet Sir Richard, when -"

"But -"

"Why do you hesitate?"

"The comedy."

"The comedy?"

"Yes. What would become of it without you - without me?" said Lady Helston, with an air of innocent seriousness.

"But - Celia - can you think of such a trifle at such a moment?"

"A trifle, Captain Creyke!"

"Well, in comparison with -"

"After all the trouble that everybody has taken - how could I spoil it? What horribly bad form."

"Well, but think of ourselves."

"Ah, don't ask me to spoil the theatricals - that would be too bad."

"Well, then, suppose we get the beastly thing - I mean the comedy, over - then -"

"That would be different."

"Perhaps, too, we should find it easier to fly undiscovered on Christmas Eve," the captain said thoughtfully. "Everybody will be talking about the theatricals, and how easy it would be for you to slip off under pretence of changing your dress, and join me in the grounds. It is only ten minutes' walk to the station."

Lady Helston's eyes gleamed for a moment. Then she smiled.

"How easy," she murmured.

"It is agreed, then?" Lady Helston did not speak, and, taking silence for consent, the captain continued, "And now for the rendezvous."

A twinkle of fun darted into the lady's eyes.

"The plank bridge over the stream in the grounds," she suggested.

"That is a distance from the house,"

"All the better."

"Be it so, then."

"You will wait there for me. I will wear a dark cloak with a hood - you will know me."

"How happy you have made me."

"But the comedy - you will do your best?"

"Your wish is my law."

"I do so want it to be a success."

Verily, the captain said to himself, the ways of women are strange. She seemed to think more about the comedy than about the terribly serious step which was to follow. But the captain was a wise man, or thought himself one, and he had long given up trying to solve the mystery called woman.

When Lady Helston demurely told Railsford about the rendezvous for Christmas Eve, he looked grave. But when she proceeded to explain her views, his

face relaxed into a grin.

"What do you think of the idea, Mr. Railsford?"

"Excellent."

"He ought to have some punishment for his insolence."

"Yes - I should like to give him a horsewhipping - but that would be a scene. Leave it to me."

The rehearsals went on excellently. Arthur Tunstall, so far from wishing to introduce the startling tableau he had spoken of to Railsford, had begun to think that the captain wasn't such a bad fellow after all.

And so came Christmas Eve, and Sir Richard Helston, and the long-looked-for performance of 'A Christmas Comedy.'

IV

EVERYBODY agreed that 'A Christmas Comedy' was a success. Everyone who participated in the acting played his or her part well, and Railsford's management was perfection. Captain Creyke especially was a success in the part of Colonel Rake. And Arthur, with his mind freed from anxiety, was excellent; and Enid, determined to show Captain Creyke that she did not care, was dazzling.

There was general satisfaction. And in the buzz of talk after the theatricals, Captain Creyke strolled away to smoke a cigar on the terrace.

Railsford saw him go, and smiled. Lady Helston was with Sir Richard, apparently thinking of nothing in the world but making his home-coming happy, as was natural after his long absence.

Captain Creyke did not finish his cigar. As soon as he was satisfied that he was unobserved, he went into the grounds.

It was a clear, cold December night. The ground, powdered with snow, glimmered in the steely starlight. Captain Creyke soon found himself at the rendezvous.

The little streamlet, winding amongst the leafless trees, was frozen over, but the ice was thin and treacherous. Captain Creyke halted by the rustic plank bridge, and lighted another cigar. No sign of Lady Helston yet. He smoked and

waited.

Presently a sound made him cease his pacing, and glance across the stream. A figure enveloped in a long dark cloak and a hood appeared under the frosty trees upon the opposite bank. He saw a hand raised to beckon him.

Captain Creyke was a little puzzled. Lady Helston must have gone round by the iron bridge, two hundred yards away to reach that side of the stream. Why she had done so was a mystery.

However, there she was, and he had only to cross the plank bridge to join her. He stepped upon the plank. It lay level upon the surface of the ice. He waved his hand and advanced.

Crack!

The ice cracked and gaped, the plank, parting in the middle, plunged into the stream. Before the captain could realise his danger, he was up to his armpits in icy water, gasping and sputtering.

He scrambled ashore, drenched, half frozen, wholly enraged. For he knew that the plank must have been sawn through the middle, so that his weight had fallen upon the thin sheet of ice; that was the only explanation of the catastrophe.

What did it mean? He stared round in search of Lady Helston. But the cloaked figure had vanished. But, as the unfortunate lover stood wondering, furious, and shivering, the sound of a laugh came mockingly from the trees.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Captain Creyke ground his teeth.

The gallant captain was confined to his room by a severe cold all Christmas Day, and he had the pleasure of listening to the sounds of merry-making in the intervals of coughing and sneezing. And as soon as his cold was better he made his excuses to Sir Richard and Lady Helston and took his leave.

"So sorry you must go," gushed Lady Helston, as she gave him the extreme tips of two slim fingers. "Still, I am glad you were able to stay for the theatricals. I hope you will carry away a pleasant recollection of our little Christmas comedy."

But it is to be feared that the captain's recollections were far from pleasant ones - though, to this day, the whole affair remains a good deal of a mystery to him.

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XX

WANTED: Good loose copies or volumes containing one or more of the following: GEMS
 801, 817, 826, 828, 832. Boys' Friends from mid-1923 to April 1926, preferably long
 runs or in bound volumes. Good copies essential.

ERIC FAYNE, EXCELSIOR HOUSE, 113 CROOKHAM ROAD, CROOKHAM, HAMPSHIRE.



NELSON LEE COLUMN



ANNIVERSARIES IN THE CAREER OF EDWY SEARLES BROOKS

by Robert Blythe

With this 25th anniversary number, it seemed to me to be appropriate to review the various 25th anniversaries of Edwy Searles Brooks' career - and if that isn't too clear I hope it will be before I've finished.

First though, let me add my own congratulations to our worthy editor, without whose tireless efforts on our behalf, this little magazine would have, in all probability, died with Herbert Leckenby. As it is, it survives to be one of the most professional of any amateur magazine. So here's to Eric and the C.D., long may they be with us.

And now to E. S. Brooks. As we know, Edwy was born in 1889 and so this makes 1914 his first 25th anniversary. What had he achieved by his 25th year? Well, we have, from the evidence supplied by his letters, a pretty clear picture that his life, until this point, had certainly not been too easy as far as making a living as a writer was concerned. It is obvious that there were many times during these precarious years when he must have wondered where his next meal was coming from, and it must have required much tenacity of purpose to persevere in his chosen profession. By 1914 he had not achieved security - that was to come, but it can be said that he had gained a reputation among A.P. editors as a reliable writer who could always be depended upon to turn in an exciting and readable story, no matter what the setting. He had not reached this point without many vicissitudes. In the past now were all the miscellaneous writings from the "Magazine Programme" through such unusual papers as "Home Circle" and "Cycling" to the "Magnet" and "Gem." In the not-too-distant future was the "Nelson Lee," but that was in the following year.

His next 25th anniversary may be said to have arrived in 1932. This was 25 years after the publication of his first story "Mr. Dorian's Missing £2,000" in "Yes or No" in 1907. His first successes were few and far between, but by sheer tenaciousness he won through, gradually

receiving more and more commissions, until in 1917 he was given the heavy responsibility of providing a story each week for the "Nelson Lee Library." There is no need to elaborate on this period of his career, his St. Frank's stories are read and loved by an ever-increasing circle, many of whom express a pleasant surprise at the quality and entertainment contained in them. Suffice it to say that so successful was he in this, that he was at one time, the most highly paid writer on the A.P. staff. Moreover, never once in all these years had he failed to provide a story every week. Surely a record of which to be proud! However, by 1932, all this was in the past and he had entered a period involving many hardships which must have been more difficult to bear than when he was first struggling to obtain recognition.

The reason for the decline of the "Nelson Lee Library" has been dealt with many times in the past and there is no point in going over all of it again. But it did mean that if he was to maintain his standard of living he had to find other markets - but quick! And so, in 1932, we find his first efforts appearing in the "Boys' Magazine."

The years prior to 1940, our next anniversary, were the lean years. Yet, in a way, they were a preparation for the last, and probably the most successful, part of his long career.

Edwy's first story in the N.L. appeared in 1915. This was "Twenty Fathoms Deep" in No. 26, and so the 25th anniversary of this event, in 1940, shows the entire Nelson Lee and St. Frank's saga seven years in the past, although reprints of St. Frank's were in the S.O.L. Stories by him were appearing in the most unlikely papers - "Comic Cuts" among them, and the last of his stories in the "Detective Weekly" and the "Thriller" had appeared. It can be said that 1940 marked his final separation from the A.P. He was to carry on writing school and adventure yarns for Swan Publishing Co. from the following year until 1947 but his interest had switched to his old love - detective stories.

And so to the last of E.S.B.'s 25th anniversaries in this short account of his career.

Edwy's last St. Frank's story in the Nelson Lee Library was written in 1933 (in No. 22, 3rd N.S. as a matter of fact) just three weeks before the Nelson Lee Library came to an end. 1958 is the 25th

anniversary of this regrettable event. And what was our author doing? Well, sitting pretty I should say! During 1958 he had had four novels published, two under the pseudonym Berkeley Gray and two under the name of Victor Gunn. Behind him were 66 full-length novels. Most of these were translated and published on the continent in various languages (they were particularly popular in Scandinavia and Germany), as well as in all parts of the Commonwealth. The royalties coming in from this lot must have been very gratifying, to say the least. Another very satisfactory aspect was that, instead of turning out a 25,000 to 30,000 word story every week for years, four novels a year was all that was needed to maintain a reasonable standard of living, together with plenty of time left to enjoy life.

And so we leave our author in the evening of his life, after many years of hard work, in this affluent position. However, profitable as these novels were, and as readable as they are, it is for his school stories that he will always be remembered with gratitude.

Let us be thankful that such a man as Edwy Searles Brooks, and others like him, lived, to give us so much pleasure, and that we can find cause to celebrate these anniversaries, 25th or otherwise.

* * *

CHRISTMAS! and the NELSON LEE ARTISTS

by William Lister

For many years during the course of my reading I have made a point of noticing the passage on which the artist has based the cover or jacket picture. In some rare cases I have been disappointed in that nothing resembling the picture can be found in the story, or sometimes the artist has not truly depicted the passage he has taken. For the most part, however, one finds the chosen paragraph truly illustrated.

It is this habit I have of nosing around that has led to this article. I decided (after the editor had reminded us it was time to be thinking about Christmas) to have a look at some of the "Nelson Lee" Christmas number covers, and to check them with the story.

I have before me ten seasonable copies of the "Nelson Lee"

from 1918 to 1929.

The 1918 copy entices the buyer with an exciting Christmas scene encircled in a large holly and mistletoe wreath. Bogged down in several feet of snow and flakes still flurrying down are several St. Frank's boys gazing towards the outline of a castle-like building, but let the author describe it: "Built of grey stone, solid and substantial, it had stood the blasts of winter for hundreds of years. Towers jutted out at different points and gables abounded. On a dull, drab day the old building looked almost sinister, perhaps - gloomy and forbidding." The title? "The Mystery of Grey Towers."

The 1923 copy truly catches the spirit of Christmas - a heavily laden sleigh driven by Santa Claus, containing toys, food and a huge Christmas tree, is pulled by five or six of what appears to be bears and a golliwog, but a closer look reveals some of the St. Frank's boys in suitable disguise.

"The Schoolboy Santa Claus" a very human tale this. Those of my readers who remember the hard days of 1923 to 1933 or so, will understand what a splendid sight this would be to the poor children who would have had no Christmas but for the St. Frank's boys, and their seasonable turnout.

Did you know that though the boys of St. Frank's encountered many Christmas ghosts over the years, St. Frank's school had its very own ghost?

As a prologue to "The Ghost of St. Frank's" the editor tells us -

"As every old-time reader is aware, St. Frank's is built on the site of an old monastery whose historical association with the past lends colour to the rumours that on certain dark nights, when the wind is howling over the moors, certain spectral figures are said to wander along the silent corridors of the ancient building; whether this is true or only the result of local gossip, there is no denying that things of an uncanny nature did happen at St. Frank's."

The artist chose the following piece for an illustration "for a strange and terrifying thing appeared, and slowly, with a strange uncanny motion it commenced to float down the stairs. The thing itself was horrifying - a figure that might have been a ghostly monk. There were no legs, the ghost trailed to nothingness. A ghastly

terrifying countenance with glowing eyes and fang-like teeth."

May I add that the ghost of St. Bartholomew was first sighted on December 17th, 1575, the present sighting being in 1923.

Space forbids me to enlarge on the rest - 1926 "The Spectre of Handforth Towers" its coloured cover revealing the Spectre bending over an unconscious figure, "The Phantom of Modern House" and the artist treats us to the view of a ghostly monk descending the staircase to the horror of some Modern House boys.

Come with me, if you will, into a huge baronial hall, enjoy the warmth of the large open Yule-log fire. Admire the ancient suit of armour, the rich carpet, the profuse Yule-tide decorations. But just a moment! take hold of your nerves; the huge oak table has commenced to rise and is slowly turning over. The artist has made a seasonable job of this 1928 "Mystery of Rathmere Castle."

We have come to 1929 "The Ghost of Travers Dene" and if you saw this cover on your book-stall and were not tempted to buy it - you must be a hard nut to crack.

It could be none other than Marley's Ghost glaring at you from the cover of this "Nelson Lee," and the four boys gazing at this figure are pictured with their hair standing on end. There is no doubt that the writer's hair would also be stood on end, if he had any.

* * *

DID EDWY SEARLES BROOKS
HAVE A DOUBLE AT ST. FRANK'S?

by James W. Cook

Edwy Searles Brooks once told me his favourite character was Handforth. But which of his St. Frank's characters did he identify himself? Assuming that among the 150 boys that were named in the St. Frank's stories, at least, one may have reflected Edwy's own personality. Was it Archie Glenthorne? I ask, because Edwy's birthday was the same as Archie's, November 11th. But the faithful St. Frank's admirer doesn't readily associate Archie Glenthorne with Edwy Searles Brooks!

Was it really Handforth? Old Handy may have been Edwy's favourite character but then again, Brooks may have meant Handy as

the easiest character to portray which made the leader of Study D the author's favourite.

I am so well steeped in St. Frank's history that I should be able to choose one junior or senior and say, that is Edwy's own personality. Only Edwy could have told us though and it is too late now.

But to those who knew Mr. Brooks personally perhaps we can examine the full cast of St. Frank's and make an educated guess.

We can easily eliminate quite a few to begin with. The rotters for instance. I would never believe our favourite author was something like Gore-Pearce or Bernard Forrest; or even like Kenmore, Grayson or Guy Sinclair.

Our estimation of Edwy's distinctive character would surely rise above that of those cads.

Alright, let's explore the inmates of St. Frank's a little more closely. I know Edwy had a soft spot for Biggleswade. We first met this happy-go-lucky Sixth form prefect in No. 524. Probably Brooks wished to perpetuate the name Biggleswade from his association with that Bedfordshire town. Edwy used to buy his favourite cigarettes, Tortoiseshell, from a tobacconist there who was a reader of the Nelson Lee Library. But back to the senior Biggleswade. Old Biggy was too easy going to have exemplified Brooks. No, I don't think Biggleswade will do. Those readers who got to know Edwy from the author's replies in the N.L.L. will know at once he wasn't that easy going! What about Reggie Pitt? Nipper and William Napoleon Browne? What have they in common with Brooks? Perhaps Nipper would head the list of possibles. But Nipper was not Edwy's own creation. Horace Stevens of the 5th Ancient House? No, I don't think Edwy had any desire to be an actor.

Cecil DeValerie has occupied my mind for a few moments; but Val was never reliable. Edwy certainly was.

How about the masters? Could Brooks have been another Dr. Stafford? The Remove's James Crowell was never fully developed as a character and can be forgotten. Nelson Lee? But again, Lee was not Edwy's creator.

Lord Dorrimore and Umlosi, Mr. Goole of the East House and

Mr. Pycraft, East House are also out of the running. Barry Stokes and Mr. Pagett, West House masters, unlikely.

Edgar Fenton, the Captain of St. Frank's is one character I would love to identify myself with, but not Edwy. Brooks, I would say, wasn't fashioned to occupy such a tedious position as School Captain. Too forgiving our author of the St. Frank's tales was.

Well, that doesn't leave many in the field now. I think we can ignore the great list of outsiders who crept in the stories now and again. Some like Mr. Fielding, the Caistowe motor-boat owner, Farmer Holt, The Rev. Goodchild, all "resident" characters; then on to the parents of the juniors and seniors. Indeed, it is getting very difficult now to find Edwy's counterpart, but we will keep on trying. For I feel certain there is one character of Brooks' creations at St. Frank's that he built around his own personality. It would be churlish to rule out the domestics for they often featured in situations and events in the St. Frank's saga, and they all had their various outlines of characterisation. Phipps may have stepped right out of Barrie's Admirable Crichton but he never put foot into St. Frank's. Try and picture old Edwy looking after the needs of Archie!

I must remember Fullwood. Ralph Leslie, the one-time leader of smoky Study A, and virtual dictator of the Ancient House prior to the arrival of Nipper. In fact, Fullwood seems to have controlled the whole Lower School at one time.

While I wouldn't associate Fullwood in his early role with Brooks, yet Fullwood reformed is making me think seriously. It is surprising how Edwy changed Fullwood so contrarily. Was Brooks in his early life a chip off the block that was Fullwood? And as Brooks moulded Ralph Leslie into a clean living and upright junior did Edwy himself recall his own reformation? For Fullwood's complete change of character never really went down well with the old, faithful readers. It wasn't that the changeover was moderate in its forming, for Fullwood wasn't really accepted at once and it took some time before the decent chaps began to admit the former rotter into their circle. I think Handforth was about the last junior to believe Fullwood's change of heart.

Yet I hardly dare to support a theory that our beloved author

was at one time something of the old Fullwood. No, I won't.

But I think it inevitable that an author writing continuously about a set of characters week after week for a number of years did unconsciously portray his own self through a created character as Brooks must have done. Unless several of the St. Frank's cast each had a little of Edwy.

After much consideration and deep thought I think I would settle for Willy Handforth. I believe Edwy, in his younger days, was very much like Willy, cool, calm and cheeky!

DEATH OF CREATOR OF SCHOOL FRIEND

News has just reached me of the tragic death in a road accident of Reginald T. Eves on September 23rd, and his wife Beatrice.

Reg. Eves started at Amalgamated Press in 1907/8 as an office boy in the Gem and Magnet offices, and saw the quick popularity of these papers. In 1916 he became editor of the Boys Friend. In 1919 he saw the possibilities of a girls' school story paper and created the SCHOOL FRIEND, and under his editorship the paper became a great success. Later he brought out Schoolgirls Weekly, Schoolgirls Own, Schoolgirl, and Girls' Crystal. He also took over from Addington Symonds the Champion/Triumph/Pluck group. In post-war years he turned to pictorial boys' adventure papers - with Lion and Tiger - both very big sellers. He wrote a few substitute St. Jim's and Rookwood tales - plus stories of Redcliffe in the Boys Friend where he introduced Greyfriars and St. Jim's. These were under the 'Herbert Britton' pen-name. Eventually he was made a director of the firm and retired in 1959 to Bexhill, Sussex.

W. O. G. LOFTS

SEASONABLE GREETINGS to all correspondents and friends.

UNCLE BENJAMIN

36 NEWCOURT HOUSE, POTT STREET, LONDON, E20 EG.

READERS WRITE AND SAY:



Happy Birthday, S.P.C.D.



DAVID HOBBS: Birthday Greetings, and Many Happy Returns, to a true and valued friend, STORY PAPER COLLECTORS' DIGEST. Congratulations, too, and best wishes to our esteemed editor and all contributors. Not forgetting our indebtedness to the all-too-many departed friends, who nurtured the magazine during its formative years.

MARY CADOGAN:

Bunter, Wharton, Marjorie
And other friends come back to me
Every month with our C.D.

Each issue is a happy sight
Renewing joys of youth so bright -
LONG LIVE C.D. TO BRING DELIGHT!

LES ROWLEY: That the "Collectors' Digest" should reach its twenty-fifth year and its three-hundredth issue are remarkable achievements for a non-professional publication. But then the Digest has that something that professional enterprises lack. I won't even begin to try and define what that "something" is but I would like to add my small voice to the paean of thanks that will be sung by the choir of subscribers to that beloved magazine.

Thank you for the many articles that you have personally contributed throughout the years. Articles that are always interesting, invigorating and sustaining. Thank you for your editorial guidance without which the Digest would not have become what it is and what it means to all of us. Thank you, too, for the encouragement that you have given to the contributors whose articles give us so much delight. Thank you for anything else that I have left unsaid.

W. O. G. LOFTS: What a magnificent performance to reach 25 years of publishing, and never an issue missed - despite illness, postal strikes,

and other factors. A very happy anniversary to the C.D. on its 25th birthday, and my thanks for the great pleasure and enjoyment it has given me through the years.

G. A. LONGMAN: I would like to take this chance to let you know how much I look forward to the C.D. each month, and the C.D. Annual every year. Many thanks to you and the few whose efforts keep the rest of us so happy. I only wish I had the specialized knowledge to submit an article or two myself, but I must content myself with enjoying the results of efforts of those more competent than I. Best wishes to you and your faithful contributors.

OFFERS WANTED for all the post-war Tom Merry and Billy Bunter Annuals, 14 in number, all as new.

BLOWERS, 25 CHURCHFIELD ROAD, ROTHWELL, Nr. LEEDS.

XX

Highest prices paid for Collections and surplus items or exchanges.

Hamiltonia at present includes some Red Magnets, 2 Bound Magnets complete 1918, many more Bound Magnets and Gems from 1934 just arrived, Popular, Greyfriars Heralds, G.H.A's from 1923, S.O.L's, plenty of loose copies of the Magnet and Gem, except 800-1200 period.

Very large stocks of other items as previously advertised. Would appreciate lists of latest "Wants."

THIS MONTH'S SPECIALS:

11 Bound Volumes of the Boys' Friend from No. 715, mint (Rookwood and Cedar Creek from first one published). Also loose copies.

2 Vols. Bound U. Jack, 1921, 22, 2 Bound Triumph 1930's, 1 Bound Modern Boy, 4 Bound True Blue, 2 Bound Thrillers 1929-32, 18 Bound Vols. Big Budget 1898-1908.

Here's wishing you all that you can wish yourself this Christmastide!

NORMAN SHAW

84 BELVEDERE ROAD, LONDON, SE19 2HZ.

01-771-9857

LOOK BACK IN EUPHORIA

A nostalgic review of the C.D. by Roger M. Jenkins

The Collectors' Digest began in November 1946 for a rather unusual reason: Bill Gander who had started the Story Paper Collector in Canada in 1941 had fallen ill. His little hand-printed magazine, sent quarterly to a circle of enthusiasts, had stopped publication, and Herbert Leckenby proposed reviving it in England. Bill Gander was unwilling to part with the title, and so Herbert Leckenby and Maurice Bond launched the new magazine under the title of The Collectors' Digest. For many years there was competition: Joe Parks's printed Collector's Miscellany (Fifth Series) ran from October 1945 to October 1950; Bill Gander recovered, and continued the Story Paper Collector until July 1966; Tom Hopperton brought out the Old Boys' Book Collector for three issues in 1952 in order to publish his own provocative backlog of articles; while Wheeler Dryden issued his quaint Collecting Juvenile Literature which emitted a querulous note all of its own. Dismal prophets of gloom were eager to forecast the speedy demise of the new magazine; in particular it was agreed that monthly publication was an absolute impossibility - the material would just not be available.

The early numbers of the C.D. were published by Mr. Wood's agency which later closed down, and judging by the unprepossessing appearance of some of them one can easily guess why. The first issue contained a review of the Monster Library by Tom Armitage, my review of the Schoolboys' Own Library, and a list of Sexton Blake titles from Herbert. The liveliest item, however, was an attack on Hamiltoniana by "Pat" (in reality Herbert himself). It was so successful that Herbert asked me to launch an attack on St. Frank's for No. 3, which proved equally successful from Herbert's point of view, though I later thought that I too should have sheltered behind a pseudonym.

A new and dramatic development occurred with a special issue, No. 3A, devoted entirely to the activities of various swindlers who were pretending to have long runs of the old papers for sale. Quite the most colourful and imaginative was Roger Anthony Carstairs (or Merrivale)

who explained that he kept them in a large oak chest, rather a remarkable achievement for someone who moved about all over the country. He managed to keep one step ahead of the police, but Pearson of Leicester was jailed.

Blakiana had had its own section under Maurice Bond from No. 1, and the Nelson Lee Column began in No. 13, under the aegis of Bob Blythe. Hamiltoniana (the Cinderella section) had to wait until No. 31 before Herbert himself began the section.

No. 16 reported the first meeting of the London Club, with its suggestion of a black list of dishonest people; it was also proposed that controlled prices should be fixed for all the old papers. These suggestions caused a great deal of discussion. The first meeting of the Novocastrian Club in Leeds was reported in No. 41 as a stop press item. The Midlands Club followed suit in No. 53, and finally Merseyside appeared in No. 59.

No. 26 contained fascinating letters from Hamilton and Brooks, the former revelling in the resuscitation of old characters, and the latter explaining why he had turned his back on the past. Equally fascinating were Eric Fayne's competitions. The first, in No. 47, concerned the popularity of various types of stories: the readers voted for barring-out stories as their most popular theme. Later competitions were run to pick the best series in the Magnet by a system of voting in six heats. The Grand Finale was announced in No. 63: they were, in order, Wharton the Rebel, Lancaster, Wharton Lodge, China, Bunter Court, South Seas, Popper Island, and Polpelly. The Sexton Blake section had a competition in No. 74 to write a short story.

Revelations from the inside always make interesting reading. An intriguing account written by a sub-editor of the Companion Papers appeared in No. 68. Bob Blythe's map of St. Frank's appeared in the same number, and it is a pity its publication was not delayed, because in 1953 the C.D. was transferred to York Duplicating Services, a vast improvement. The smudgy typing disappeared and cover pictures began to show respectable detail. Another notable change was the beginning of Maurice Bond's departure from the hobby in No. 76, and Josie Packman took over Blakiana the following month, which means

she has been in charge for the record period of eighteen years. Another change occurred in No. 84, when Jack Wood took over the Nelson Lee Column which he renamed Gossip About St. Frank's for a time. Coronation year was certainly full of innovation. 1954 was more tranquil, but the practice of printing on coloured paper was a strain on the eyesight at times.

The first double number of the C.D. was No. 100 which contained a long reminiscence from Herbert and a secret inset from the four clubs in the middle of the magazine, paying tribute to Herbert. Eleven months later there was another mystery: but this time it was a practical joker who had no sinister motives. Herbert Leckenby was receiving letters on beautifully printed notepaper purporting to emanate from Mr. Quelch and other Greyfriars characters.

Eric Fayne's Let's Be Controversial began in No. 124 as a tentative experiment, and has continued ever since, with no abatement of interest. One of its most famous topics was in No. 133 when it considered Harry Broster's attack on the Hamilton critics, accusing them of worshipping uncritically at the shrine of Hamilton and idolising him, and after the Magnet Silver Jubilee issue in No. 134 the echoes of this controversy were still reverberating.

A novel supplement appeared in No. 147 - a series of photographs of collectors in Canada and the U.S.A. As the Golden Hours Club in Sydney had been formed a few months earlier, the world-wide interest in the hobby was becoming evident. No. 150 was another double number, and contained some entries from the English Clubs competing for Les Rowley's Greyfriars Cup.

One of the most momentous events was reported in No. 155, the death of Herbert Leckenby. The issue had been partly edited by him and was taken over by his nominated successor, Eric Fayne. Herbert could not have made a wiser choice as subsequent issues were to prove. The most noticeable feature of the new regime was the large number of photographic illustrations from the old papers that enlivened the magazine. Eric and Les also instituted a voting contest for popular characters, the top ten being announced in No. 175 as Wharton, Bunter, Vernon-Smith, Cherry, Sexton Blake, D'Arcy, Merry, Mr. Quelch, Nelson Lee and Handforth, in that order.

The death of Charles Hamilton produced a special inset in No. 181 and a memorial number the following month, devoted entirely to personal tributes. Danny's Diary, that evergreen item, first appeared in No. 185, recounting the issues and events of fifty years ago. Nearly ten years have elapsed since then, but Danny is like the characters he reads about - he never grows old! No. 187 saw another innovation - the printing of stories in double columns using small type. This was a Mr. Buddle story, but all kinds were to follow in the future. The next double number was of course No. 200, and the compliment paid to Herbert was extended to Eric on this occasion - a surprise inset from the four clubs in his honour.

St. Frank's had its share of glory in No. 222 which celebrated the fiftieth anniversary of the Nelson Lee Library. Equally notable but not a matter for rejoicing was the death of Edwy Searles Brooks which was announced in No. 230, and on this sad note we can end our rather random review of the C.D.

What is the secret of its astonishing success? How has it managed to outlive all of its competitors? Gerry Allison once told me that it was its regular monthly appearance which sustained interest, and there may be much in this: quarterly periodicals can never conduct successful controversies and report topical events. I think that sincerity has much to do with it: those who met Herbert Leckenby were always surprised by his embarrassed shyness and lack of personal vanity, and he had a most unbusinesslike attitude (the C.D. editorials were full of appeals to pay subscriptions that were in arrears), but no one could ever fail to respond to the genuine warmth of feeling that all his writing displayed. Eric Fayne has continued the tradition but in a more intellectual fashion, just as sincere but more forthcoming in his expression of personal viewpoints. Perhaps another factor is the C.D.'s exclusive interest in old boys' books: it has never made the mistake of trying to cast its net too widely and dealing with unconnected items like cigarette cards or postage stamps. But above all, it is the personality of its editors that has carried it through so triumphantly. I for one look forward with pleasure to the next double number in the four hundredth issue.

LET'S BE CONTROVERSIALNo. 165. LONG AGO CHRISTMAS.

Long ago indeed! Fifty years ago, in fact. The Christmas of 1921. The Christmas which Danny lived, and which we bring back in the extract, this month, from his famous diary.

In the old papers there was snow. There always was at Christmas, and we would not have had it otherwise. In real life, as Danny tells us, it was an extremely windy Christmas, but there was no snow.

Story-wise, it was not really memorable, except that the stories of Greyfriars, St. Jim's, and Rookwood all came from the pen of Charles Hamilton that Christmas. Nevertheless, as well as giving us Hamilton for Christmas, the publishers did make some effort, for the first time since 1917, to ensure a Happy Christmas for readers. The editor announced "Greatly Enlarged Christmas Numbers" for the Magnet, Gem, and Boys' Friend, but omitted to announce in advance that those particular issues would cost 2d instead of the usual 1½d. The papers were certainly enlarged - the Gem and Magnet by one double sheet each which provided four extra pages. Those four extra pages were largely occupied with increased advertising. Perhaps the Boys' Friend readers were the luckiest. The Friend also had an extra sheet, but the Friend sheets were always double the size of those used in the Gem and Magnet. However, the Gem and Magnet also had coloured covers, while the Friend did not.

It was extraordinary that Briscoe drew the coloured cover for the Gem, and Macdonald did the interior pictures, while Macdonald did the coloured cover for the Magnet while Chapman was responsible for the inside pictures. Quite a topsy-turvy Christmas.

A look at the stories. The Rookwood story was longer than the normal Rookwood tale of the period. At Rookwood they had one of those Christmases which I always regarded as rather unsatisfactory. I liked a conventional Christmas, with ghosts and sliding panels or a little intimate party.

That year you had to suspend belief at Rookwood. Owing to an outbreak of influenza in the school, there was no break-up. The boys stayed on at Rookwood, with Mr. Manders in charge while the other masters went on holiday. It is hard to believe that any Headmaster would abolish the Christmas vacation for such a reason. For smallpox or something similar, perhaps - but not for influenza. Schools broke up about a week or more ahead of Christmas, and even the most infectious of influenza sufferers would have stood a good chance of being better before the holiday.

It was the kind of silly theme in which the substitute writers gloried. Only a month or two earlier, one of the subs had tried out the same thing in term-time at St. Jim's. The boys of St. Jim's, in small groups, were scattered in various schools all over London and the suburbs. Tom Merry and a few of his friends arrived at a school in Edmonton at the close of the story, which was almost certainly the first one of a series. Evidently the editor recognized what rubbish it was, for, if further tales were written to extend that amazing situation, they were not published.

The Rookwood story, of course, was in a different class, incredible though it was. Hamilton's writing papered over the cracks in the plot, and there was plenty of good fun in the tale, which continued, in subsequent weeks, into a barring-out.

The Magnet story sounded more like a tale in a detective series, and, perhaps, that is exactly what it was. "The Mystery of the Christmas Candles" was a nice enough little seasonable tale without being anything very outstanding. Inky starts his Christmas vacation a week early, and goes to his uncle, the Jam, in the latter's London house. The Famous Five are to join him for Christmas. At Greyfriars the chums each receive by post the gift of a Christmas candle from Inky. Jack Drake, now a boy detective, comes into the second part of the tale, in chase of a sinister Hindu. At the finish, diamonds are found in the candles - surprise gifts for Inky's pals.

I have long felt it probable that this story comprised two stories originally written by Charles Hamilton for the Greyfriars Herald. There is a natural close for a story at the end of the eighth chapter, and the last part stars Drake who was very much a character

of the Greyfriars Herald. The author himself told me that some of his stories, written for the Herald, were transferred to the Magnet and to the Holiday Annual.

Only a very few genuine stories appeared in the Magnet in 1921. I think it likely that all of them were left over from the Greyfriars Herald. The caravan series in the summer might be an exception, but I would not bank on it.

The reasons for this very unsatisfactory year for Hamiltonia as a whole can only be a matter for conjecture. It is almost inexplicable, both in connection with the author and with the publishers.

Hamilton wrote almost every Rookwood story in 1921 in the Boys' Friend, but they were very short and mostly run-of-the-mill tales. It was rare indeed for a scene from a Rookwood story to feature in a cover picture during this time when Rookwood was clearly running down.

The Gem fared the best of the Hamilton papers. Though few of the St. Jim's tales at this time were very inspired - I exclude "The St. Jim's Swimmers" which was novel with excellent character-etching - Hamilton was writing most of the stories in the paper from the summer onwards. The delights of the Gem's Indian Summer were not far away by the time Christmas 1921 was celebrated.

The Christmas story in the Gem was "Lord Eastwood's Christmas Party." I have always had a fondness for this one, on account of its reminiscence. The Painted Room, probably not referred to since its original appearance in the old classic of 1913, was brought into the limelight again, and the old events were recalled. But the story, though it read pleasantly enough, was not really good. There were loose ends, and the plot was not believable for a reader of intelligence.

Lord Eastwood, the host of the party which includes Cardew and Wildrake among its St. Jim's guests, is in failing health. Cardew regards the earl's new secretary, Bloore, as a bad hat, and Wildrake has a feeling that he has met the man before. It is Wildrake who finds out that Bloore is poisoning his master, the motive being that the earl has remembered Bloore in his will. Bloore, in fact, is not Bloore at all. He is a Canadian criminal who stole the papers of the real man.

This was a tale which, if it were really to create interest and tension, needed to be told in a short series. One short story, such as the Gem was presenting at that time, gave insufficient scope for the author to develop a plot of this sort very successfully. And there was the sneaking feeling that Lord Eastwood's bequest to a temporary man who had only been on his staff a short time - a bequest of sufficient size to make the man attempt murder - was unlikely.

Nevertheless, though the three Christmas stories were far from being out of the top drawer of Hamiltonia, the Hamiltonians of 50 years ago must have been happy. He's not what he was, but, at least, he's back, they may well have thought. Perhaps they didn't think - and were just delighted.

An unusual factor was that all these Christmas Numbers were late. The Boys' Friend and the Gem each appeared only just before Christmas, and the Magnet a week earlier.

The next Gem story, "Tom Merry's Glee Party," a substitute effort, told of Tom Merry trying to raise money by taking a party of waits round singing carols. By the time it appeared, the New Year was on top of readers. Why the tale did not appear before the Christmas Number is one of those little puzzles with which the Fleetway House often presented us.

Both the Bloore story and that of the Christmas Candles were reprinted, many years later, in the Holiday Annual.

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CORRECTION: In the Let's Be Controversial article No. 163 we printed the following: "Mr. Jenkins is being dogmatic when he says that the Ravenspur Grange series was out of place in the Magnet, as I am when I say that the Old Bus series was far superior to the Water Lily series, and as Mr. Truscott is when he states that the post-war D'Arcy's Disappearance is as good as any pre-war single-issue Gem in the hey-day of that magazine."

In fact, Mr. Truscott's comment referred to "Skimpole's Snapshot" and not "D'Arcy's Disappearance." The title of the story did not really matter so far as our columnist's argument went, but Mr. Truscott is entitled to being quoted correctly, and we apologize to him for the error. Both stories were in the post-war Goldhawk series of St. Jim's tales.

MAGNETS WANTED. Please send details to J. de FREITAS, 29 GILARTH STREET, HIGHETT,
VICTORIA, AUSTRALIA 3190.

In this series, Eric Fayne remembers some of the cinemas and theatres he knew long ago in the days of his mis-spent youth.

HERE, THERE, AND EVERYWHERE

Probably lovely Drury Lane is the most famous theatre in the world. It was there that I saw the play which, even now, I recall warmly - Noel Coward's "Cavalcade." Mary Clare played the leading feminine role, and Frank Lawton was the son. No doubt plenty of other famous stars also figured in Drury Lane's "Cavalcade."

It was later made as a film, which, at that time, I did not think nearly so good as the stage play. Diana Wynward played the Mary Clare role.

It has always been the practice of the renters to give pre-release showings of outstanding films during the summer season at seaside resorts. I saw "Cavalcade" at the Tivoli, a pleasant little cinema at Clacton. Another film I saw pre-released at the Tivoli was "All Quiet on the Western Front," though it was probably a year or so earlier. Jessie Matthews in Priestley's "The Good Companions" was pre-released at another smallish Clacton cinema, the Kinema Grand.

During the season, another cinema operated in Clacton, rather out of the town, and facing the sea. This was known as the Palace. I went there once to see another Jessie Matthews feature "Evergreen." This also had a role for a famous British star, Betty Balfour. I notice that Danny, in his 1921 diary, is just recording the start of Betty Balfour's career. By the time of "Evergreen," the early thirties, she was at the end of it. I wonder what became of Betty Balfour.

"Cavalcade" was selected as the opening production on pre-release, by Union Cinemas at their new Super Cinema at Gravesend. Anna Neagle attended in person to open the theatre.

For a couple of years or so, Union Cinemas presented remarkably lavish cine-variety shows at Gravesend Super. In addition to two big films there would be Billy Cotton and His Band, Olly Aston and His Band, Troise and His Mandoliers, and big music-hall names of the day. Then Union Cinemas acquired the other three cinemas in the town, and lavish shows were no longer necessary.

Union Cinemas, in fact, seemed to make a habit of collecting cinemas indiscriminately to add to their mighty chain. One was the huge and lavish Regal at Kingston-on-Thames which sent out organ interludes to the nation on radio. Kingston was proud of its Regal, and when Union Cinemas, incredibly, re-named it the Union, it caused quite a stir. It may be added that the name didn't last long, for Union Cinemas came a cropper. The Union returned to its more popular name of Regal, and today, with real modern originality, is called the A.B.C. It is still a magnificent theatre.

Union Cinemas, in acquiring cinemas, seem to have bought up plenty of unprofitable places as well as the other sort. The result was that they went on the rocks, and the circuit was taken over by A.B.C. I have always felt that it was not in the interests of cinemagoers when one firm obtained the running of all the cinemas in a town. I have already mentioned how, in Gravesend, after Union Cinemas got control of all the cinemas, the lavish shows enjoyed by Super patrons were at an end.

Union Cinemas (and their successors) always played the most popular releases at the theatre with the largest capacity. The second most popular release went to the house with the second-largest capacity, and so on. This meant that the smaller cinemas always got the least popular releases or the re-issues and became merely overflow houses for the larger ones. It was not a happy arrangement for those picturegoers who had a "favourite" cinema which was not, of necessity, the one with the largest capacity.

Other towns to my knowledge in which Union Cinemas got a monopoly by buying up all the cinemas were Luton and Oxford. No doubt there were other towns similarly placed.

Finally, a return to "Cavalcade." Long after the war I was in Walton-on-Naze. the front there was a cinema named The King which only operated during the season.

I found it was playing "Cavalcade," at least 20 years after the film was originally released. I went to see it, and, with the memory of the stage play now dim, enjoyed it immensely.

REVIEWS

DISCOVERING COMICS

Denis Gifford

(Shire Publications, Tring. 30p)

This is a little book which all enthusiasts will wish to have among their treasures. A history of the comic paper in Britain from mid-Victorian days till the present time, the book also has a look at the American comic and the effect it may have had on our own publications in the same line. There is prolific information about the artists, and the work, though giving plenty of statistics, succeeds in being entertaining throughout and never descends to stuffiness. The plentiful illustrations form a history all their own.

It is inevitable, with a work of this type, that some of us will disagree with the author in minor details. He mentions that in France there is a learned society of students of comic paper lore, and that America has an Academy of similar students. He goes on to say that "Curiously, only Great Britain, where the comic paper was born, takes its comics for what they superficially seem - ephemera to be discarded as soon as read. There have always been collectors of comics, of course, but their motive is nostalgia - a recapturing of a long-lost childhood."

Well, Collectors' Digest and its Annual are very, very British, and they have been looking at comic papers, off and on, and reproducing pictures from them for 25 years now. Nor do I believe that all collectors of comic papers are seeking their long-lost childhood, any more than I think that all collectors of beer bottle labels are seeking past hangovers.

I fancy, too, that plenty of our readers will think Mr. Gifford off-course when he writes that "Sexton Blake and Billy Bunter are today better remembered for their strip appearances (in Knockout) than for all their longer literary careers."

Apart from these little warts (as we see them), "Discovering



The Christmas Postman Called



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

JOHN BURSLEM (Wickford): A thought: your articles on the old cinemas - I appeared on stage at the Troc' "Elephant & Castle" in 1933 with Teddy Joyce and his Band as a boy tap dancer.

J. E. MILLER (Brighton): A special 'thank you' for your really first-class pieces on old cinemas and theatres - very definite contributions to a byway of social history and to what would now be called pop culture.

I look forward, as a 'Blakian,' to the new series of reproductions of Union Jack covers (more than one per issue?).

HAROLD TRUSCOTT (Huddersfield): As to the Blue Crusaders, Fatty Fowkes was indeed their goalkeeper. Towards the end of "Corcoran of the Blue Crusaders" Brooks writes: "Fatty Fowkes was huge. He weighed sixteen stone, and Handforth, at least, was dubious as he regarded him. He could not understand how this cumbersome fellow could be a good goalie. Yet the fame of Will Fowkes was great. It was a recognised fact that he was the best keeper in the Second Division. Many, indeed, held the view that Fatty Fowkes was the finest goalie in professional football."

BILL LOFTS (London): I am puzzled why Mr. Truscott should accuse me of being dogmatic and dictatorial, simply because I agreed with Roger Jenkins on a point of view. Surely I am entitled to this, the same as anyone else? Many, many times I have disagreed with Roger, but at the same time had the good sense to accept that he is fully entitled to his views. All I wrote in the June C.D. was "I couldn't agree more with Roger Jenkins on his piece about the post-war Bunter Books. As an old reader of the Magnet, they left me cold, and in my opinion the Master had lost his touch." I was stating an opinion, and not a fact. If Mr. Truscott really means the way I write, I can only say that this style is entirely my own. I have never claimed to be a writer, but a fact finder, and a research detective.

Once again expressing an opinion, and not a fact, I would

suggest that Mr. Truscott is like the pot calling the kettle black. It is he who is being dogmatic, and dictatorial. He should accept the fact that people are fully entitled to their opinions, and to stick by them, however much others may disagree.

W. WRIGHT (Gravesend): After reading "Gone to the Pictures," by 'Hilda Lewis' my enthusiasm for the really good old days of the cinema has been redoubled. Should not have given this excellent book a second look if you had not sung its praises in an earlier C.D., but just by chance I unearthed this splendid item from a number of others at a local second-hand shop - a very good buy for a 1/-!!

J. TOMLINSON (Burton-on-Trent): While there seemed an overdramatisation in the serial "The Only Way," one got carried away by the development of the plot, as always in Charles Hamilton's tales. I myself had never read this (nor have I read "A Very Gallant Gentleman") and know only what I have read in the "Digest" about the characters Rupert Valence and his sister Violet, and Arthur Courtney. Even if the tale is a little over-sentimental, however, boys do not get the like these days, but reams of picture strips.

ROSS STORY (Wimbledon): A most extraordinary thing happened this morning, and I had to tell you.

I was reading the first pages of C.D. and out of it - and out of the past - leapt the title of a story I have been trying for many years to find again, on second-hand bookstalls, libraries, etc., in Worthing, Eastbourne, and the Charing Cross Road. I read it in my (very) early youth - perhaps the only "girls" story I ever did read - and it made a tremendous impression on me. The details are hazy now, but I remember it was about a little girl named Rosalie, whose mother, before she died, told her to journey through the country to find her aunt. The little girl had many adventures, and the part I remember best was where she rescued a little black kitten from the house of a cruel woman (the mother had been deliberately poisoned - I wept!) and this little black kitten accompanied her through all her adventures. I remember, too, the circus, and how she finally found her aunt (and there was a saucer of milk for the kitten!).

That story was called 'A PEEP BEHIND THE SCENES.' I cannot remember the author - shame on me! - but thank you for letting me know that it really was written; after so many years of searching I began to think I must have dreamed it - or even written it myself!

(Author was Mrs. O. F. Walton — Ed.)

STAN KNIGHT (Cheltenham): What a wonderful landmark this year brings with its Silver Jubilee number. I have known C.D. for over half of its lifetime, most of which we have been privileged in having you at its helm.

Alas, with the passing of the years, some have fallen by the way whose names we remember with gratefulness. Maybe they will be rejoicing with us that C.D. continues to flourish.

It was a pleasure to see the cover on this month's C.D. by Geoff Harrison. He seems to have improved greatly.

HARRY DOWLER (Stockport): I always thought that Roger Jenkins was the great authority, but, according to his article on Boys' Friend 3d Library "King Cricket," his knowledge of Hamilton, particularly the pre-Gem and Magnet era, is sadly lacking. How astonished Herbert Leckenby would have been to read such an article!

No need to do the Sherlock Holmes stuff to find original date of "King Cricket." It appeared in 1906 in Boys' Realm, commencing in No. 254 and ran for about 25 instalments. Was a very long story, and the B.F. 3d Library would only be about $\frac{1}{3}$ of original story.

Other serials by Hamilton in Boys' Realm were "Football Fortune" in 1905 (reprinted B.F. 3d Library No. 36), "Arthur Redfern's Vow" and "Redfern Minor" 1909. Hamilton wrote a large number of complete stories for Boys' Realm, and I myself have vol. Boys' Realm containing about 12 complete stories. He also wrote several for Boys' Friend in period 1904-8 or so. Also wrote series of short school stories of Cliveden in Boys' Herald, reprinted I believe in Dreadnought. In my opinion his knowledge of football was nil, and his cricket knowledge doubtful. J. N. Pentelow, was an expert on cricket and his stories had the authentic touch. A. S. Hardy was an expert on nearly all sports, but the majority of these old boys' writers had little or no knowledge of the sports they wrote about. (Editorial Comment overleaf)

EDITORIAL COMMENT: Mr. Jenkins was commenting on the BFL reprint which was greatly abridged. Not so long ago, in our Let's Be Controversial series, we published "King Cricket in a Golden Summer." This article, which is to be reprinted in the JOURNAL of the Cricket Society next year, took a more detailed look at the story. A little earlier we had on our cover a stunning picture of "King Cricket" on the cover of the Boys' Realm. But even Mr. Dowler is a little off-course. The story featured in the Boys' Realm in 1907 - not 1906 as stated by Mr. Dowler.

IN DEFENCE OF DR. BIRCHEMALL

"The Skipper" seems to dislike parodies in general on the grounds that they are usually a cheap means of raising a laugh.

This is probably true and I can share his dislike of many of them. But does it not depend on the kind of parody and the kind of laugh which it is intended to raise? A good-humoured skit is one thing. Malicious ridicule is another.

As a boy "Magnet" reader I thought the St. Sam's absurdities were usually too stupid to laugh at but this was because I had not grasped the point. When I realized, re-reading them as an adult, that they were poking fun at Greyfriars, I found them highly amusing. But this did not in any way lessen my admiration for the stories at which the humour was directed.

I remember the pre-war film "Mutiny on the Bounty" as one of the finest films I ever saw. Shortly afterwards my favourite comedian, the late Will Hay, starred in "Windbag the Sailor." This was tilting at "Mutiny on the Bounty" throughout and was delightfully funny.

I can still laugh when I think of the scene where Will Hay, being cast off on a raft with Moore Marriott and Graham Moffatt, addressed the crew with the same words as Charles Laughton, in his role as Captain Bligh, had addressed the Bounty mutineers.

Surely it would be rather harsh to regard this kind of humour as "guying and ridiculing." And I think the same applies to Greyfriars and St. Sam's.

If I am wrong Shakespeare must have been guying and ridiculing his own "Romeo and Juliet" by his comic Pyramus and Thisbe episode in "A Midsummer Night's Dream."

PHILIP TIERNEY



NEWS OF THE CLUBS



MIDLAND

Meeting held October 26th, 1971.

Despite the small attendance the meeting was lively and entertaining. The fare provided was varied and included two readings, one by Win Brown and the other by Jack Bellfield. Both featured Billy Bunter at his funniest. The tape recording by George Chatham brought back nostalgic memories of Jack Payne and his orchestra with excellent commentary by George, and Tom Porter entertained us with two games "Take a Letter" and "Located around Greyfriars."

The Collectors' Item and Anniversary Number were provided as usual by our librarian, Tom Porter, and were Magnet No. 1132, October 26th, 1929 "Skinner's Shady Trick" and the last S.B.L. to be published "The Last Tiger."

Stan Knight's monthly letter was read by all present and it was remarked that it is a pity Stan could not attend a meeting, but he does the next best thing and always has something interesting to say. The new Howard Baker volume the Gem series of "Gussy the Runaway," was discussed and all agreed it was excellent, but not quite so much for money as usual including only six thin Gems.

The raffle prizes were won by Jack Bellfield and Win Brown who received respectively a Nelson Lee and an S.B.L. as prizes.

The next meeting is on November 30th at 7.30 p.m.

J. BELLFIELD

Correspondent.

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NORTHERN

Meeting held Saturday, 13th November, 1971.

There were fourteen members present when the Chairman opened the meeting, and he had a special word of welcome for his distinguished predecessor J. Breeze Bentley, after a long absence from us,

and for Elsie Taylor's friend Dorothy Dobson, who had found us sufficiently congenial company to persuade her to enrol as our newest Northern member.

Mollie Allison had some interesting items of correspondence for us after the Chairman, in the Secretary's continued forced absence, had read the minutes of the two previous meetings. One letter came, via Cliff Kelly, from a Mr. F. Laidler, who works as a children's artist and who had some reminiscences of the illustrators of yore. Both Mollie and Geoffrey had letters from our President, P. G. Wodehouse, acknowledging a card and letter sent on the occasion of his 90th birthday. The Treasurer's statement was also read, and business in connection with the forthcoming Christmas party discussed.

And so to the programme. The main item was a selection of Desert Island Books by Geoffrey Good. The speaker was recovering from a bout of 'flu and apologised that we should have (like his congregation the next day) to take "pot luck." What we got, however, was an extremely diverting and absorbing talk delivered with all a master's ease and fluency. Geoffrey assessed both the more serious and the lighter aspects of the castaway's situation, the fantasy and the reality. On the way he touched upon the merits of 'Robinson Crusoe,' 'D'Arcy the Runaway,' and 'The Courtfield Cracksman.' The latter series, as he remarked, embraced every aspect of Frank Richards' art, and wherever one dipped into it one could touch on some delight - and he proved the point with an entertaining random extract.

After refreshments, an enjoyable game: "Who Am I? Who Are You?" A member was given a secret identity which the rest had to guess in twenty questions answered only with Yes or No. The one making the correct identification then became the next mystery personality. A pleasant variation on 20 Questions, which all joined with great gusto.

Don't forget - next meeting, Christmas Party on December 11th. Try to let us know if you are hoping to join us.

JOHNNY BULL

LONDON

There was a distinct flavour of Nelson Lee at the home of Blakiana when a large attendance enjoyed a very good meeting. Mary Cadogan read a paper on the girls featured in the St. Frank's stories. Bob Blythe followed this up with Archie Glenthorne's tale of Trackett Grimm which was entitled "Cunning Carl the Cowboy Crook." Prior to these two items, Bill Lofts read a paper on how he was introduced to Sherlock Holmes, in his schooldays, by the teacher who read a story to the boys each Friday afternoon. The story chosen on this occasion was "The Blue Carbuncle." Subsequently, Bill told of his search for the exact site of Sherlock Holmes' residence in Baker Street.

Eric Lawrence read another fine article by Basil Ambbs of "The Reading Post" re the 90th birthday anniversary of P. G. Wodehouse.

Arrangements were made for the members to attend Brian Doyle's residence when part of a tele-cast documentary is to be made for the programme "Man Alive" on 29th December.

Final arrangements were made re the Rembrandt Luncheon Party on Sunday, 5th December. Aperitifs will be served at 12.30 p.m. for 1 p.m. luncheon. Kindly inform Secretary if attending - that is those who have deferred their intentions to the last minute.

The hostess of the meeting, Josie Packman, was suitably thanked for her untiring efforts to cater for the large attendance.

Next ordinary monthly meeting at Friardale, Ruislip, on Sunday, 12th December. Kindly inform Bob Acraman if intending to be present. The President of the Club will be present at this meeting with his latest opus.

UNCLE BENJAMIN

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SYDNEY, AUSTRALIA

Club members foregathered at their usual rendezvous, Cahill's Restaurant, Sydney, on Tuesday, 26th October, at 6.30 p.m.

The item of greatest moment on this occasion was the announcement of the award to member Ernie Carter of the Imperial Service Order of which he had been advised by the Prime Minister of Australia

on behalf of Her Majesty The Queen. Ernie Carter had served for 45 years in the Dept. of The Army of the Commonwealth of Australia, and to him we extended our heartiest congratulations.

Stan Nicholls raised a most tantalising question when he discussed a recent B.B.C. T.V. show "A Family at War" now screening in Sydney. In a recent episode the son of the family, Phillip, produced copies of the Magnet, Chums and B.O.P. (Bound Copies) and these were apparently his main interest during the war years. What we are wondering is this, . . . was any O.B.B.C. member involved in supplying these props for the series or is there a hidden hoard somewhere? The episode was named "When No. 7 Was Hit." Did any of the English collectors see this show and follow up this possibility with the producers?

Thanks were expressed to Ron Hodgson for his informative letter re the Howard Baker reprints.

Further discussion included the arrangements for the Christmas Party to be held on 14th December - members are to be the guests of member Ron Brockman and his good lady at their club. This invitation was accepted with gratitude by all present.

B. PATE

Hon. Secretary.

IT IS MY SINCERE WISH THAT ALL MY CHUMS WILL HAVE THE
JOLLIEST CHRISTMAS
THEY HAVE EVER KNOWN, AND THAT IT MAY BE FOLLOWED BY THE
HAPPIEST OF NEW YEARS. THE EDITOR.