

# THE GOLDEN HOURS

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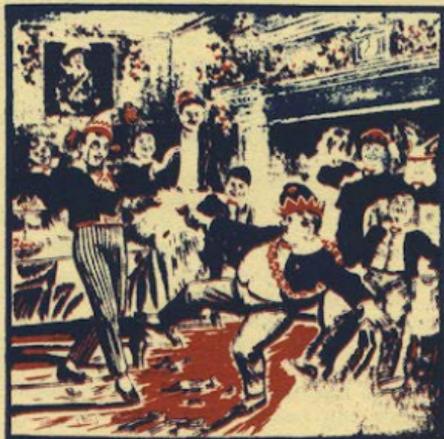
THE BEST CHRISTMAS NUMBER!



24 Pages.

Every Wednesday.

December 24th, 1961.



FUN AT THE CHRISTMAS PARTY!

No. 106

(Grand Long Complete School Story Inside.)

PRODUCED IN AUSTRALIA EVERY NOW AND THEN

## Editorial

Some years ago as a schoolboy, we, here in Australia, always had to wait until February for our Christmas numbers of the old books to arrive from England. So we are used to a late Christmas. I hope our English friends will not mind the reversal and will think this number has been worth waiting for.

I have made it as Christmassy as I could, even to the extent of delaying things deliberately, so that Vic Colby could complete his reviews with a criticism of the two Sexton Blake Christmas Nos. which took until early March to arrive!

Nice remarks continue to arrive addressed to the first two numbers of the GOLDEN HOURS magazines. Everyone was very sympathetic over my duplicating troubles and gave me plenty of encouragement to keep everything going if I'd needed it - which I didn't. But it was good to have it anyway.

All articles were well received and it's impracticable to repeat the comments here. However, the ones that make me feel that all has been worthwhile, are summed up by the collector who said that Harold Griffith's article on S. Walkley sent him seeking after the 'Chums' containing those yarns.

Another interesting point which came out was that many collectors do like a longish article. This is encouraging as this is a preference of mine too. I do not like having a continued on another page even, if it can possibly be avoided. 'Memories of the Magnet Office' was absolutely lapped up and No. 3 has another article by Mr. G.R. Samways.

I have to thank Mr. H.W. Tynmar for a large part of this issue and after reading his 'I Raise Some Christmas Ghosts', I just can't help envying him his memories. And I'm not a strong Sexton Blake man.

Regarding this issue's cover, not only is it an appropriate Christmas number and one which has not, to my knowledge, been reproduced before, it represents a period of the GEM during which its circulation overtook that of the MAGNET - probably the only time this happened since the beginnings.

I have been asked by Australian collectors to use this place to record their congratulations and thanks to Bill Gander on the production of No. 75 of the "Story Page Collector." That this is well deserved goes without saying for, not only is the printing faultless, but the contents of No. 75 would have to be included among the first ten issued for interest.

Both Bill Gander and Eric Payne have written welcome things about the contents and covers of Golden Hours magazine, and, believe me, they are good to have.

Syd Smyth,  
1 Brandon Street,  
Clovelly. N.S.W.

# STRANGE YULETIDE IN BAKER STREET

by

STANLEY NICHOLLS and VICTOR COLBY

An Improbable Comedy in One Act  
(Not Suitable for dedicated People)

## THE SCENE:

Sherlock Holmes' sitting room in Baker Street. It is Christmas Eve. A fire blazes in the grate. Holly and mistletoe decorate the gas bracket, and festoons of coloured paper stretch across the ceiling from corner to corner.

Mrs. Hudson has prevailed on her celebrated tenant to allow some festive touches to intrude on the wonted bleakness of his bachelor apartment.

The rise of the curtain reveals Holmes and Watson. Holmes is seated, smoking, and keenly observing Watson's re-actions to an array of articles on a small occasional table. These he takes, one by one, and examines. They comprise an empty bottle, a bookmaker's ticket, an Income Tax assessment notice, a revolver and a garter.

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Holmes: Well, Watson, there you have all the evidence. What do you make of it?

Watson: I er-hem-regard the whiskey bottle as significant.

Holmes: What about the whiskey bottle?

Watson: It's empty. Drained to the dregs. Our man was a heavy drinker.

Holmes: On the contrary, he was a total abstainer. This was his first drink.

Watson: You amaze me.

Holmes: An experienced drinker would have saved a little booze for next time. Now observe the document - what do you make of it?

Watson: It's a final notice from the Income Tax Department.

Holmes: And that card near it. Are the two connected?

Watson: I really cannot say. The card has a name at the bottom - "Silas Oddecaller" ..Tattereall's Club. You tell me the card was found in the pocket of the deceased. What does that mean?

Holmes: It means the horse lost.

Watson: You seem to know the Turf, as well as you know most subjects.

Holmes: It's no secret I've had associations with bloodstock. I was in a match race once; in Australia. They put me against a horse called "Carbine". I won, of course.

Watson: Holmes, you may have done irreparable damage to your breathing.

Holmes: Tush, man, a mere bagatelle. Now you've one more item of evidence. Let's hear your opinion of it.

Watson: (Handling the garter)

Well, er, really. As a married man -

Holmes: Married men know far less of these things than single ones. Come, now, could you describe the woman who wore that garter?

Watson: I should say she's a slim woman of - say - eight stone.

Holmes: Wrong. What made you think of that?

Watson: Well, the garter has a circumference of fourteen inches. That means small-er-hem-underpinnings.

Holmes: Watson, you have not allowed for feminine deceit. Observe a ridge on the garter, three inches from the present fastening. That ridge represents the normal extent of the garter, WHEN WORN. The reduced circumference is a mere blind. The article, when not in use, was drawn in another three inches, to convince any male, who should find it, that the owner's calves were a mere fourteen inches.

Watson: How little marriage has taught me.

Holmes: Chaser up, Watson. Now put all the items together, and see what they give us. You have the revolver, the whiskey bottle, the Income Tax notice, the bookmaker's ticket, and the garter. Surely they point to one thing.

Watson: Frankly, I'm at a loss. But there is something about this case that reminds me of an early adventure, "The Reigate Squires" - perhaps - "The Resident Patient." I'll glance through these volumes of "The Strand" to see if I can find it.

(Watson picks up a blue bound half-yearly volume of "The Strand" magazine)

Holmes: (Sharply) Put it down, man. Put it down this instant.

Watson: Why, Holmes. What is wrong?

Holmes: (still agitated) Be careful of that book. There, there, put it back. Put them all back, quickly now.

Watson: Of course, if you say so. But I really cannot see.

Holmes: You're not asked to see. You may take my word for it.

Watson: There's no need to remind me, that you think my intelligence is always at low water mark. But why my handling of "The Strand" magazine, should upset you, when -

Holmes: There, there, I'm sorry.

Watson: After all, we both owe a debt to "The Strand." Where should we be without it?

Holmes: (His anger flares again) Devil take it, I've apologised, haven't I?

Watson: Thank you. Well, now, about this case. The wretched man was a spendthrift of course. I see it. Whiskey, race-horses and er-hem-lady friends. He was unable to pay his income tax, and took the easy way out. He shot himself with this revolver.

Holmes: Dear old Watson. You never change. How often have I told you the obvious is not the case.

Watson: I know. But, surely, we have here incontrovertible evidence -

Holmes: Fiddlesticks! It's perfectly obvious that the Income Tax notice is a forgery. It states the exact amount the man owed in tax to the penny. Every GENUINE document from the Income Tax Department adds a hundred and fifty pounds for luck.

Watson: True, true!

Holmes: This faked notice was sent by a clerk of the department just to annoy our man. This clerk - a low villain, Watson, of a type found only in the public services.

Watson: Hush! Remember your brother Mycroft.

Holmes: I repeat. This miscreant was carrying on an affair with the victim's wife. That is her garter you are holding in your hand. (Watson drops the garter) Pick it up, Watson. It won't bite you.

Watson: Holmes, I cannot escape the conviction that this sordid story is not one of ours. It belongs in the pages of the "Union Jack."

Holmes: I don't agree. "The Union Jack", despite it's failings is, or rather was, a moral publication. It ran for sixty years, without reference to a single garter.

Watson: Of course, today, with this writer Jack Trevor Story -

Holmes: That, Watson, is not our responsibility. But to continue - The bookmaker's ticket is a forgery. I have interviewed Silas Oddscaller. He does not issue tickets. He is not a licensed bookmaker. All his business is done off the course, at starting price. As to the revolver - have you closely examined it?

Watson: Why, no. Have I missed anything?

Holmes: Look carefully.

Watson: (Examining the pistol) Why the barrel is not hollow. It's cast in a solid lump.

Holmes: Exactly. Such firearms require a special license. I have looked through the police list, and there is no record of our man's name there. Once, in 1883, he did receive a special permit for bow and arrow practice.

Watson: Good Heavens! So the revolver was not his. All the evidence is false.

Holmes: Every bit of it. Even to the whiskey bottle - it's a disguised coffee container.

Watson: I confess I'm completely in the dark.

Holmes: Come, Watson, it's obvious. While the poor fellow was in a state of shock from the false tax notice, the rascally clerk and the guilty wife, drugged his milk with coffee, and shot him with a real pistol. They wrote a suicide note, as well, on a used piece of butcher's paper, but that was eaten by the cat.

(Enter Sexton Blake)

Watson: Amazing

Blake: Elementary, my dear Watson.

Watson: I was not aware you were the party addressed.

(Enter hurriedly Mrs. Hudson)

Blake: Nor was I, but if I had not spoken, your lord and master, would have made precisely the remark that I did.

Holmes: My dear fellow, it is customary here to be announced before you burst into a room.

Mrs Hudson: I'm awfully sorry, Mr. Holmes, this gentleman would not give me a chance to -

Blake: I apologise madam. The circumstances are unusual.

Blake: (Continued) But I've a real sympathy for housekeepers, I have one of my own.

Mrs Hudson: So I've heard. Bardell is the name, I believe.

Blake: Correct

Mrs Hudson: (Sniffing) H'm'ph'ph!! I've heard of HER

Holmes: Mrs Hudson - you seem well informed on the point

Mrs Hudson: Oh, sir, it's my nephew. I get my information from him. He reads "The Sexton Blake Library."

Holmes: How singular. Thank you, Mrs. Hudson. You are excused.

(Mrs Hudson exits slowly)

Holmes: And now, Blake, I'll hear your explanation of this visit, for which you've made a somewhat unceremonious entry.

Blake: Let's say I was curious. I've always wanted to see my famous rival at close quarters, and Christmas Eve seemed as good a day as any.

Holmes: "Rival" is an inept choice of word, sir. We do not move on the same plane.

Blake: Oh, you needn't put on SIDE, you know.

(Tinker enters hurriedly followed by Mrs. Hudson)

Watson: Holmes, this is insufferable. Shall I -

Tinker: No, doctor, you won't. You'll just stand there, and hear the truth.

Mrs Hudson: Oh Mr. Holmes, what shall I do? These people simply rush in before I -

Holmes: There, there. Don't distress yourself. I'll deal with them.

Mrs Hudson: And another thing. There's a police officer outside the front door. It's that Inspector Lestrade, sir.

Holmes: He's probably come for some help on a case

Tinker: No, Mr. Holmes, he's had all the help he needed on this case.

Mrs Hudson: Begging your pardon, sir, but I should watch this young man, if I were you.

Holmes: Thank you, I shall - don't worry.

(Mrs Hudson exits)

Holmes: (To Blake) A while ago your young friend told Watson he would hear the truth. So shall you, Blake, so shall you. Here it is - You are a cheap imitator, sir.

Blake: Indeed

Holmes: A cheap copy, making capital on my good name and fame, and with the colossal effrontery to move into the same street, hoping, no doubt, that people will confuse you with me.

Blake: Here, stop, that's unfair. I'm a good detective in my own right, well respected and highly regarded. My exploits have occupied two hundred million words of the printed page, and my fame has gone before me into all lands.

Tinker: Bravo guvnor! I've not heard you talk in that style since Nineteen Twelve.

Holmes: Would you mind telling me, my office boy's detective hero, do you ever read books of commentary on detective literature?

Blake: No. I'm too busy bringing criminals to justice.

Holmes: If you did you'd realise that in these writings it is MY name that is repeated with monotonous regularity. These fellows know there is one master detective - the great, the inimitable, the one and only -

Tinker: Inspector Cottle! Hooray!

Holmes: Be silent, sir. You and your meater belong where you were born, in cheap ehoddy paper weeklies, that were known for their poor printing and -

Watson: (Wietfully) I believe there were monthlies too. Wasn't there a "Boys Friend?" I seem to remember a "Boys Friend."

Holmes: The names have no significance. They were all cheap jobs, mase produced.

Blake: Don't forget Newnes "Sixpennies." You were glad enough to come out in those when sales were falling.

Holmes: Wherever I appeared I never lost my identity. In seventy-five years I have never changed.

Watson: Hear! Hear! Chengelees. Pre-eminent. Matchlees.

Tinker: Oh, yeah.

(A noise is heard in the adjoining room. Then the faces of O.M. Plummer, Beece and Marie Galante appear through the trancom.)

Holmes: I have not your trick of changing like the chameleon. For every decade you have a new personlity. How convenient!

Blake: I try to serve every age of the reading public in the form it prefers.

Holmes: Even to the extent in this present day and age, of a blonde secretary, whose initials match those of your true description. Pseudo - detective.

(Yvonne enters hurriedly)

Yvonne: (To Blake) Then it's true, it's true.

Holmes: Observe, Watson, the spring like character of the walk. It has a slight resemblance to the hop of a kangaroo. Obviously, she has lived in Australia.

Blake: My dear Yvonne, how nice of you to come. I could not

Blake: (Continued) have thought of a nicer Christmas gesture.

Ivonne: You may not be so pleased when I tell you why I'm here. I have read these latest stories about you in the new "S.B.L.". All of them mention a blonde secretary, Paula Dane. Tell me, it isn't true.

Blake: Well, now, different times require different methods.

Ivonne: It looks to me like the same old method.

Blake: Paula is with me purely in a business capacity.

Ivonne: I shall get her story on that.

Watson: Holmes, this is most embarrassing. Shall I call Mrs. Hudson? (To Ivonne) If I can help, madame, pray call on me.

Ivonne: Thank you. I suppose that's YOUR method

Tinker: One for you, Watty!

Ivonne: I've no doubt it's all very funny - for you men. But to have loved a man for something like six hundred numbers of the "Union Jack" and then -

Plummer: (Shouting through the transom) Pie, Ivonne! Don't lower yourself. He's not worth it.

Ivonne: (To Blake) Yes, it's your old enemy, Plummer. Well, goodbye, my friend. (Meaningly) We shall meet again.

(Exit Ivonne)

Watson: Good heavens! Who are those people, peering through the fanlight?

Tinker: That's easy. The distinguished gent with the agate glow in his eyes, and the green Larego cigar is George Manden Plummer.

Watson: And that extraordinary fellow with the dome like head. Who is he?

Tinker: Oh, him! He's a nasty bit of work, he is. Name of Reese.

Tinker: (Continued) One time head of the Confederation and about the hardest nut my guvnor ever had to crack.

Holmes: Ha! Ha! Ha! (Disdainful laugh)

Blake: Laugh away. Your day will come.

Holmes: Reece! Moriarity would be a match for three of his kind.

Blake: That fellow who nearly did for you at the Reichenbach Falls? You know, I've always been suspicious of that little business.

(Moriarity suddenly appears through the balcony window)

Moriarity: You needn't be. The story was true -- in it's main points. Mr. Holmes nearly did for me with his Japanese wrestling. But I didn't go all the way down the falls. A friendly ledge caught me as I fell. I climbed up the short distance to the top. Mr. Holmes had disappeared for a time, and I decided to do the same. One grows a little tired of notoriety. (To Holmes) I see you well, I hope.

Holmes: Robust, I thank you, Professor.

Moriarity: I seem to have interrupted something.

Holmes: It's a distinctly odd occasion. These fellows, and their friends there, peering through the fanlight, came here uninvited.

Moriarity: Who are they, then?

Holmes: Characters from the Sexton Blake saga. Two hundred million words in sixty five years -- from more than one hundred authors.

Moriarity: Tut, tut! I'M not interested in mass production.

Reece: (Through the fanlight) Greetings Professor Moriarity.

Moriarity: (Waving him away) The effrontery! A cheap criminal of that class! However, he appears to have cerebral development. Well, my dear Holmes, my dear doctor,

Moriarty: (Continued) I'll not keep you. I see you are busy. But I advise you to get rid of these fellows. One should keep to one's class; (whispering) Seriously, I think they should never have published us for less than seven and sixpence - Good-bye. And next time we meet, perhaps you will go down the falls, and stay there.

(Exit Moriarty)

Tinker: Guv'nor, what a partner he'd make for Zemi th the Albino?

Blake: Stow it, young 'un. We've work to do.

Watson: (Pointing to transom) Good heavens! Holmes, Holmees, who is that creature there, rolling her eyes. She looks as if she's casting a spell.

Tinker: That's Marie Galante, voodoo queen from the West Indies. Look out, doc - she's got her eye on you.

Blake: Enough of this nonsense (To Holmes) Let me tell you the real point of my visit.

Holmes: To wish me a happy Christmas. No? Then, doubtless, to tell me of your latest exploits. Oh, yee, I've heard of the Sexton Blake circle.

Blake: Established in my honour.

Holmes: What a humorist you are. Does the name of Martin Thomas mean nothing to you? Surely, by now, you must know that the Sexton Blake circle, so called, is a collection of "squares."

Blake: (Bitterly) I may not play a violin. I may not take drugs. And I don't use the walls of my room for target practice, but I can still shoot straight and true. When the occasion calls.

Plumbers: That's the way he talked in U.J.808.

Blake: Why, my drug-taking, sneering, arrogant, rival -

Blake: (Continued) Have you the stamina, to bear the bullets, beatings, beshings and brainings, that I have had to endure over the years?

Reece: I see his point.

(Outside in the street the carol-singers are rendering "God rest you, merry gentlemen")

Blake: Have you been a gnat's whisker from death by flood, freezing, fire and famine, fought to safety and survival against fearful odds?

Holmes: You have a weakness old boy, for the dialogue of the early twentieth century.

Blake: Never mind how I say it, I was right, wasn't I?

Holmes: I admit you can take more knocks on the head than any detective I've heard about. Perhaps there's a reason for that.

Blake: The same old sneer.

Holmes: But you've one shortcoming. You never detect.

Reece: This Holmes is a comedian.

Plummers: We mustn't take sides. They're both minions of the law, damn 'em - And both amateurs.

Reece: True. I despise amateurism in all its forms.

Marie Galante: But it is grand, is it not, to see Mr. Sexton Blake getting it in what you call the neck?

Watson: Holmes, what shall we do about these extra-ordinary people. I'm sure they are a contaminating influence.

Blake: So I can't detect. They explain, please, why the British Government assigned to me the task of tracking down this present drug traffic to its source. Tell me how an inept detective could trace certain peculiar comings and goings in Baker Street, to this very house.

Holmes: Stop! Stop!

Tinker: Ah! That makes you sit up.

Blake: It's too late, Holmes. Bad enough that you should take little snifters of cocaine yourself. But to trade in it, to import it in quantities for re-sale, at one hundred and three per cent profit.

Watson: Will you leave these premises? Be off with you, or by heaven, I'll make you regret it.

(He opens a drawer in the bureau)

Tinker: Too late, doc. Yes we know what you're after, your old service revolver. It's here. (He produces it from his pocket) We lifted it last night.

Blake: Tinker and I paid a visit here last night, while you and Holmes were down in Sussex. We made a few discoveries.

Holmes: Watson, the poker. (Watson hands the poker to Holmes)

Watson: (In a tense whisper) It's peculiarly light.

Tinker: Yeah - it's plastic. We lifted the real one last night.

Blake: That one can't hurt us. You see, we know your methods - and now Tinker, bring me that book, third from the left, second shelf.

Holmes: Stop! I forbid you to touch that book.

Tinker: (Secures book - The Strand magazine - 1891 June to December. It is the same volume which Watson had handled early in the evening, when Holmes re-acted violently..)

Blake: It's a fake - Open it, that's right. Two solid halves with a hollow in the middle. Open it carefully. Now take out those small envelopes. There's cocaine in every one of them.

Watson: I don't believe it.

Blake: Fact, I assure you.

Watson: I'm sure that analysis will show it's nothing more harmful than sugar - finely granulated, of course.

Holmes: Dear old Watson, loyal to the last.

Blake: Yes, it does him credit. But this time his faith is misplaced.

Watson: Holmes, tell me he's lying.

Holmes: Unfortunately, no. Well, well - you know the old saying, Watson - A long lane that has no turning - the pitcher has gone to the well too often.

(Enter Mrs. Hudson)

Mrs Hudson: Please sir, the "waits" are at the door. I've give them sixpence each, and a mug of cocoa. They want to know if there is any carol you would like specially.

Tinker: What about "Danny Deever?"

Watson: Bah!

Tinker: You know. "They're hangin' him in the morning."

Holmes: No preferences, thank you, Mrs. Hudson. (Exit Mrs Hudson)

Blake: Now shall we we go? Inspector Lestrade is outside. I'm sure you would rather be arrested by an old friend, than a stranger.

Holmes: (In a passion) Him! That foxy faced bungler. That dumberheaded idiot. That - I'll not submit! Anyone, anyone but Lestrade.

Blake: You've no choice.

Holmes: Wait. Wait - we must talk this over. Watson, please, leave the room.

Watson: I'm here while you need me.

Holmes: Staunch as a rock, as usual. But, please, leave us. It is my wish.

Watson: (Sadly) Very well. (Watson moves to exit)

Tinker: Cheer up, Watty. He'll only get ten years at the most.

Watson: Don't drive me too far, sir.

Tinker: With a month off for each year he behaves himself.

(Exit Watson)

Holmes: Please ask your asseitant to leave us.

Blake: Tinker, wait outside.

(Exit Tinker)

Plummer: I don't like this. It's all wrong.

Beece: Strange, I agree. But intensely intereeting.

Holmes: I have a confession to make.

Blake: Yes

Holmes: There is a story current in the clubs. It was started by an author called Aldous Huxley. I knew his grand-father, the famous Thomas Henry, in the eighties. Well, the story is this. Irene Adler - you have heard of her?

Blake: The one you always call the woman. Watson did her full justice in his account of "A Scandal in Bohemia."

Holmes: The same. Young Huxley avers that Irene Adler and I -

Blake: Yes, yes, go on.

Holmes: He says we were eecretly married.

Blake: And were you?

Holmes: We were. We had a son.

Blake: A bright fellow, I should imagine

Holmes: He was. One of the brightest. He came to fame in the pages of "The Union Jack."

Blake: Well, now, who could it be? Not Huxton Rymer?

Holmes: No, no.

Blake: Splash Page?

Holmes: Of course not.

Blake: Not that ehocking fellow Beece.

Beece: Mr. Blake, if you impagn my origins -

Holmes: (Wearily looking at the transom) No. At least, I'm not responsible for HIM.

Blake: Tell me then - who is it?

Holmes: Why, SEXTON BLAKE - My boy, my boy, my one and only boy.

Plummer: Jumping Jeosaphat!

Blake: You're joking. This is a trick.

Holmes: Official records of the marriage and your birth certificate are in a black Japanned box in the cloak room at St. Pancras Station.

Blake: This is amazing.

Holmes: Elementary, my dear Blake.

Blake: Me, your son - I can't believe it. And yet -

Holmes: Look in the mirror. What do you see? The same tall figure, the same aquiline nose, the same keen glance. Put a magnifying glase in the hand, put the same low cut collar on the neck, and the likeness is unmistakable.

(Blake stares in the mirror. Compares his reflection with the figure of Holmes. Obviously he is convinced)

Blake: (Brokenly) Father

Holmes: And now, I ask you. In the face of all this. Can you arrest me? Will you bring my grey hairs - well a little off black, then; Will you bring them down in sorrow -

Blake: My duty! Oh, my duty!

Holmes: My son. Oh my son - can you do this thing?

Blake: (A tear stands in his bright blue eye. But still he answers with a sigh) No, father, I cannot.

Holmes: Ah!

Plummer: (To Reece) What did I tell you? Amateurs, the pair of them!

(Tinker peers around the door)

Tinker: Did you call, gov'nor? (Seeing the state of affairs) Oh, my eye! Aren't we taking him in?

Blake: No, Tinker, it's all been a mistake.

Tinker: But, gov'nor, the evidence!

Holmes: (calling) Watson!  
(Re-enter Watson)

Holmes: Be seated, old fellow. You're not going to lose me after all.

Watson: Splendid, splendid. Doubtless, this fellow Blake has realised his error.

Holmes: Something like that.

Blake: Relax, Tinker. Ther'll be no arrest.

Tinker: (Disgusted) Then what are we going to do? Turn it into a Christmas party?

Holmes: A capital suggestion, youag fellow. I'm sure Mrs. Hudson has some good things in her larder. Pray ring for her, Watson. After such a night, I'm sure we're all ready to re-fortify with some good English Christmas fare.

(Reece is making frantic signs to Tinker)

Reece: (To Tinker) What about us? Madame Galante and my colleague, Plummer. May we have the pleasure?

Tinker: Guv'nor, they want to join the party.

Blake: (To Holmes) What do you think?

Holmes: Why not? One is disposed to be broad-minded in these modern times. Besides it's Christmas.

Blake: (To the three at the transom) Come along down. Mr. Holmes invites you. (To Tinker) I hate to think what poor old Teed and Gwyn Evans would say to this. But before the dinner's over we'll drink to their memory.

Tinker: Yes, gov'nor. And to all the other fine fellows who created us.

Watson: Good thought, my boy. And let me include in the toasts a man called Doyle, to shom Holmes and I owe a great deal,

Watson: (Continued) in truth, an incalculable debt.

Holmes: Carried unanimously - -

Slow curtain, as Mrs. Hudson enters with a table cloth, followed by Inspector Lestrade, who, quite oblivious of the famous characters in the room, sniffs in anticipation of the good food to come.

The End

STOP PRESS

The Golden Hours Magazine's Greatest Scoop

Mr. Edward C. Snow, one time member of the A.P. staff, was in Australia. We had known that for some years. At last that well read Nelson Lee man Ernie Carter, (who was responsible for locating W.E. Stanton Hopesome years ago) applied himself to the problem of contacting Mr. Snow. With justifiable pride and some excitement Ernie informed me of the success of his efforts. Mr. Snow had written him and he was now on a cruise with the 'Oriana' after which he would contact Ernie. Mr. Snow not only did that but he called on Ernie the afternoon of the same day the 'Oriana' berthed! So it happened that red letter day, that Ernie and I were sitting in his book filled reading room talking to Mr. Snow.

Mr. Snow's pleasure matched our own. He was a mine of fascinating information and answered all our questions fully and freely, adding much that was new to us. As Mr. Snow fingered through book after book it was hard to keep up with his comments.

We dug out the Holiday Annuale 1921-24 and Mr. Snow saw once more his own material after all the years. The Who's Who's of all the schools in those years are his work, as are the maps and diagrams of St. Jims, Rookwood and Greyfriara. Even the long forgotten details of production such as type used, etc., came back to him as the pages turned. Mr. Snow originated "The St. Jim's News" in 1921 which gave the Gem a spectacular leap in circulation. As a matter of fact this issue's cover is as much a tribute to Mr. Snow as a Christmas symbol. Mr. Snow contributed the map of the school inside the cover and other items.

Editor

# CHRISTMAS CHIMES

MORE MEMORIES OF THE MAGNET OFFICE

by G. R. SAMWAYS

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"'Twas Christmas Eve.

The glorious company of guests had vanished, and the minstrel, clattering down from the gallery at Tonnacombe Hall, went roaring home.

I stood by the mullioned window, and watched their forms grow weirdly chaste as they vanished into the snow.

'God rest ye merry, gentlemen!  
Let nothing ye dismay.'

Admiral Yorke Martyn hummed the carol softly to himself, his eyes dancing to the sparkle of the wine-glass he held in his hand."

IT must be all of fifty years since I was thrilled by that seasonable opening to a tale of piracy and adventure. To my boyish mind, the words seemed to breathe the very spirit of Christmas. They are — as nearly as I can recollect after the lapse of half a century — the opening words of S. Walkey's immortal saga, "Rogue of the Fiery Cross."

Mr. Harold T. Griffiths' article on S. Walkey, in No. 2 of "GOLDEN HOURS" magazine, awakened vivid memories of boyhood. With what eagerness we used to await the next instalment in CHUMS of the current serial, written by Walkey and illustrated by that consummate black-and-white artist, Paul Hardy! With what gusto did we fall upon the magic words, which transported us straightway from our insular world of school to the Spanish Main, or to some enchanting tropical island, where dead men's gold awaited discovery by devil-may-care adventurers!

Our school library was rich in boys' fiction; yet although it contained the works of the great masters of that era — O.A. Henty, G. Manville Fenn, Stanley Weyman and Herbert Strang — not even the finest of their books could compare in popularity with "Rogues of the Fiery," as it was affectionately called. S. Walkey's saga was in perpetual demand. There was many a fierce battle for possession, so that the library's single edition was soon reduced to tatters, with vital pages missing, and more copies had to be procured by the school authorities.

Of the school story writers of that and earlier generations, the official favourites were Talbot Baines Reed, Warren Bell, Gunby Hadath, and Harold Avery. The unofficial favourites were Frank Richards and

Martin Clifford, whose MAGNET and OEM yarns were smuggled into the school and circulated secretly. For at that time the companion papers lay under an interdict, and woe-betide the boy who was caught with a copy in his possession!

Happily, the ban was lifted later, when masters grew more enlightened, and came to realize that MAGNET and GEM stories were healthy fare for schoolboys, and that the powers of good invariably triumphed in the end over the forces of evil!

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"CHRISTMAS Eve!

The wind whistled and shrieked around the old turrets and chimneys of Mauleverer Towers.

Harry Wharton & Co., the Christmas guests of Lord Mauleverer, drew their chairs closer to the open fire of Yule logs which blazed upon the ancient hearth, and settled themselves comfortably for a merry evening."

A typical opening gambit to a MAGNET Christmas story. For the Christmas spirit was by no means confined to CHUMS. It haunted the corridors of the Fleetway House, and especially that corridor in which the editorial office of THE MAGNET was situated.

I was delighted to discover, when I joined the MAGNET staff in my youth, that the Christmas Number was regarded as a highlight of the year, special care and forethought being devoted to its compilation.

The issue was invariably a double one; the main feature, of course, being the long complete story of Harry Wharton & Co. This story, upon which the Editor used to expend a good many superlatives -- "marvellous," "smashing," "breath-taking," "stupendous" -- was nearly always entrusted to the famous creator of the schools and characters, Charles Hamilton. And the superlatives were usually justified, for the great master excelled himself on these occasions.

Only very rarely did a substitute story appear in THE MAGNET at Christmas time. For many years it was believed, by those steeped in MAGNET lore, that "Harry Wharton's Trust" was a substitute story; but I can now confirm, from the official records, that this story was in fact written by Charles Hamilton.

The next important feature was the cover. It generally depicted a Christmas scene, and the artist was urged to take special

pains with it, since an attractive cover had great pulling power with the boy public.

Both C.E.Chapman, for the MAGNET, and R.J.Macdonald, for the GEM, produced some of their finest work for the Christmas Number. I was often presented with the originals of these cover drawings, and for many years they were among my most cherished possessions; but alas! in the vicissitudes of war and peace, they became dispersed, and fell into other hands. This was the fate also, I grieve to say, of many old issues of the MAGNET and GEM, which have now become priceless treasure trove. But who could have foreseen, in those far-off days of which I write, that the companion papers were destined to attain such renown as they now enjoy?

In addition to the long complete story, with its seasonable illustrations, there was of course a special Christmas Number of THE GRETFRIABS HERALD, which occupied the centre pages of the MAGNET until it bloomed out as a separate publication.

Frequently, too, there was a play in vree, suitable for performing by amateur actors.

Altogether, the Christmas Number was a very creditable production, especially when the main story was the work of that wizard of words, Charles Hamilton.

Readers in the British Isles enjoyed their double number well before Christmas. Colonial readers, less fortunate, had to wait until January or February, so that for them it was a post-Christmas treat — but a treat well worth waiting for, as the MAGNET post-bag duly testified!

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"IT was Christmas Eve in the morning.

The window panes were covered with frost and rhyme, and outside in the Close the snow lay deep and crisp and even, like it did when Good King Wencey's lass looked out."

Thus Dicky Nugent, opening one of his hilarious stories of St. Sam's, that remarkable seat of learning presided over by the ancient and bearded (but very far from venerable!) Doctor Birchmall.

Christmas Eve found the rascally old Head wondering how and where he would spend the Vacation. His first idea was to tuck himself on to Mr. Lickham, the master of the Fourth; but when Mr. Lickham explained that he was spending Christmas with a vegetarian

aunt, who shunned the fleshpots and lived on lettuce leaves and nuts, Doctor Birchmall decided that this sort of thing was not to his carnivorous taste. So he proceeded to angle for an invitation to Bulkeley Towers, the ancestral home of the captain of St. Sam's.

Bulkeley, however, had no wish to be saddled with the Head's company.

"Sorry, sir," he said, "but I can't invite you to Bulkeley Towers. The fact is, my pater has fallen on evil times. He has sold up the ancestral home — the seat of the Bulkeleys for generations — and has been forced to go and live in the sordid squaller of a slum."

"A — a slum?" gasped the startled Head.

"Yes, sir. He has quitted the marble halls for a humble alley. There will be no Christmas dinner for us this year, I'm afraid. No plump turkey — no plum-pudding — no mince-pies — not even a blomm-ongel!"

"Bless my soul!"

"My pater is now so poor, sir, that he is obliged to seek the aid of charity. He is living, in fact, on parish's food."

This was too much for the Head!

"Mizzerable pawper!" he cried, pointing fiercely to the door. "Leave my study at once, charity brat! And tell your father from me that unless he pays your next term fees in advance, I shall sue him for libel! Beg on! I mean, begone!"

Doctor Birchmall was now deperate. It seemed that nobody wanted his company for Christmas, which was surprising, for surely such a distinguished personage as the Head of St. Sam's would add lustre and dignity to any Christmas assembly?

In the end, the Head was compelled to inflict his unwanted company upon Jack Jolly and his two henchmen, Merry and Brite, who were spending the Vacation at "Merry Manner."

This time, the bearded old rascal was not to be denied; for mere juniors could not say him nay.

The Head's subsequent antice at Merry Manor — such as paying a nocturnal visit to the pantry in order to fortify himself against night starvation — proved very embarrassing to his schoolboy hosts, but very diverting, it is hoped, to Dicky Nugent's readers.

It is pleasant to write of the Christmas Numbers of the past. It would be pleasanter still to have them before one now, re-reading them by the Christmas fire, and recapturing something of the

joyous, care-free atmosphere of time long past.

But although most of the old MAGNETS and GEMS have long since vanished into limbo, one's memories yet remain -- memories of the hustle and bustle of the preparation of the special Christmas Numbers; of the authors and artists attached to the MAGNET office; of an era when life seemed sweeter and saner; when the Spirit of Christmas, revitalised by Charles Dickens and Charles Hamilton, was something tangible and real and true!

### FAME!!!

Book Collectors' Society of Australia - Box 905 G.P.O. Sydney

Subject: OLD BOYS' BOOKS by Members of the GOLDEN HOURS CLUB

At this meeting several members of the Golden Hours Club, Sydney, will speak on the interests and activities covered by their Club. Members of the Book Collector's Society will find this a fascinating as well as nostalgic evening, taking them back to the books that they read despite their parents' disapproval. The widespread circulation of these books no doubt helped to form the reading habit for many of us.

Started three years ago by a group of collectors interested in Old Boys' Books, the Golden Hours Club meets at monthly intervals for lectures and discussion evenings at the I.M.C.A., Pitt Street. Subjects covered range from "blooms" of the early nineteenth century through the evolution of the school stories, starting with Talbot Baines Reid to the modern publications featuring Charles Hamilton's famous characters, the best known of whom is, of course, the one and only Billy Bunter. Comics of the past sixty years as well as detective fiction featuring Sexton Blake and Nelson Lee, are also included among the interests of Club members.

The Sydney Golden Hours Club is affiliated with four similar clubs in England and a monthly magazine, "The Collectors' Digest", is published there by Mr. Eric Payne, Grove Road, Surbiton, Surrey (2/- per copy). It contains valuable data on authors and artists (past and present) as well as articles on all aspects of the subject written by the collectors themselves. A similar publication ("The Golden Hours Magazine") is now being published by the Sydney group at quarterly intervals. Copies may be obtained from the Club Chairman and Editor, Mr. Syd Smyth, 1 Brandon Street, Clovelly, at 4/- per copy. Mr. Smyth also welcomes inquiries re Club membership or any information dealing with books on the subject, such as "The Magnet", "Gem", "Chums", "Union Jack", "Sexton Blake Library", &c, &c. The Hon. Secretary is Miss B. Pate, 8 Day Street, Drummoyne.

WALTER W. STONE,  
President.

C. B. BERCKELMAN,  
Hon. Secretary & Treasurer

# I RAISE SOME CHRISTMAS GHOSTS

by H. W. TWYMAN

CHRISTMAS, for we editorial people of the MAGNET, GEM, UNION JACK and other such Amalgamated Press papers of the old days, was all over by about the third week in November or earlier. The hard work of it, anyway; the part it's readers saw.

By that date we'd out our Grand Xmas Numbers to bed. With our OK'd proofs back in the hands of the printers, the extra work and planning that had gone into them was done with, for better or worse.

These issues were of course a milestone in our year, a climax, a summit, or, if you prefer, a winning post. The next milestone ahead was Christmas itself, when editorial efforts of brilliance and brightness would be having their shirtsleeves down and their feet up. So, you see Christmas for us came in two instalments, frenzied and festive.

Both were good, in their contrasting ways, though both could provide headaches -- the figurative kind when author or artist simply would NOT deliver in time and printers expostulated over the phone in gobbling tones of tension; and the morning-after kind, when one deploras the weakness of the flesh, during a hang-over.

In the year-end interval immediately afterwards we had rung in the New Year and were well into January when the actual Christmas loomed, and the morning of the blessed 24th saw us heading for our offices at the Fleetway house with great expectation. That is where our Christmas began, and not, as it did domestically, by examining stockings in the bedroom half-light, and enthusing about what Santa Claus had brought the children in the night.

The routine which had evolved in course of time for the last day before the holiday was more spontaneous than organised, and very simple. It was a goodwill visit EN MASSE, the only preparation necessary being to have made sure there were no left-over jobs to be done. There should be nothing more than a few 'specials' for semi-credit caases.

These terms will be explained.

THE penultimate day to Christmas (if it were a week-day) was to a larger extent like the year-round Fridays that had preceded it. They too had a marked air of relaxation, for the imperative deadline jobs had been (or should have been) disposed of during the week; there were more callers, and sociability - stimulated

by that week's pay-packet - burgeoned. It was the day when authors in credit and out of funds visited the office in the hope of reversing that situation, and there was a consequent taking-out to disposition all round. Lunch usually lasted half the afternoon.

In fact, during the early days of my staff membership hardly anybody ever thought of returning to the office at all that day, but alas! this pleasant and productive custom eventually died out with the coming of mergers and take-overs around 1922 and - the reform having persisted into recent times as unwelcome reforms will - I am told that the place is now more like an insurance office or a bank.

If you say that my adjective is paradoxical, I still suggest, advisedly, that that easy-going, Friday-frittering custom was productive. As likely as not, anyway. Let it be remembered that the people concerned were journalists, workers creative in mind and dealers in ideas. They could be, and often were, as productive of profitable ideas at a lunch-table or a bar in seemingly purposeless conversation with a kindred spirit - journalists in such circumstances talk hardly anything but shop - even more than if continually at their desks. They are not bank clerks, whose minds are most demonstrably at work in the office, totting up figures.

The practical truth of this principle had long been recognised by the greatest of all modern journalists, and put into practice by him as an employer. He was our Chief, Alfred Harmsworth, Lord Northcliffe. He is said to have been the first employer to reduce his staff's working week to five days, by giving them Saturdays off.

His appreciative workers were merely improving on the principle a little.

ON the day before Christmas the Northcliffe notion became intensified and simplified, with no economic or productive angles. Merely it was Christmas. Everyone was loosened up, and for all I know even the clerks in the counting-house didn't return after lunch that day.

For us in the Boys' paper Department it began with a foretaste of festivity. Little or nothing was done except in writing notes to the cashier, authorising him to mitigate the unfortunate state of one of the toilers in our Sexton Blake vineyard. This person (named) could be credited with the delivery and acceptance of a manuscript (also named) which was complete and would duly be published, subject to any necessary editorial amendments.

That was the understanding, but the amount of the cheque authorised was explicit. It varied a little to above-average with the more popular writers, according to what sort of bargain they had been able to make, but it was never excessive for in consideration of that figure they undertook to relinquish all copyright.

This was 'getting a special.'

(Fergus Hume, early Australian detective-thriller writer, sold his MYSTERY OF A HANSOME CAB outright for £25, and, when it became a bestseller running into thousands of copies, regretted it.)

There were few 'special' applicants this morning, though on this holidayfied occasion nobody would have the heart to refuse one to a legitimately deserving case. Nevertheless, practically all the habitual suppliants of the Literary Cashier's indulgence soon began to turn up and presently filled my room. It was more than usually pleasant to see them, not with grim, intent countenances and mercenary motives, but with smiling morning faces and no more serious purpose than to wish us 'Merry Christmas.'

THIS 'special' business perhaps needs a word of explanation. It was the rule of the firm that literary and other such work was paid for only on publication - which might not occur for weeks or even months after the work had been done. Some other firms pay on acceptance, soon after receiving it.

Now this publication rule, if strictly enforced, could be very tough on freelance writers, who have only their wits and their typewriters as capital assets and prefer to eat while some overworked editor is finding time to make up his mind. So the firm, mindful of this great truth - and likewise of the prospect that they might lose some of their best writers either to starvation or to rival firms who had seen the light and paid on acceptance - made a concession. A contributor who was in credit but out of funds would be allowed to receive his due reward in advance of the date his work actually got into print - provided only it had been completed (or was a complete instalment in the case of a serial) and had been editorially approved.

No human contrivance is perfect. This arrangement was, in turn, a bit tough on the editor. He too had a heart, and with a nonstop procession of hungry writers to pacify, and facing also the difficulty of not knowing just how much, and which, work he could use, the temptation was for him to buy too much and thereby get himself into trouble with the Literary Cashier. This faithful watchdog of the firm's money - and a not too genial type - didn't seem to like the idea of parting with that money in wholesale amounts for the benefit of a lot of spendthrift, boozy authors who were making too much anyway. So the editor's stock of unprinted manuscripts was subject to sudden census.

The cashier was right about that. On an occasion in 1922 a certain magazine editor (who didn't happen to be also a chartered accountant) was found to be harbouring an appalling amount of typewritten paper. Stories which had become outdated in the passage of time, most of them. He had for months been obligingly signing 'speciales' as lavishly as a water-cart lavishes water. Rather more

than a thousand pounds' worth of that paper had to be written off.

Against that, incidentally, nobody except perhaps the auditors has taken the trouble to compute how much money has been accumulated for the firm's benefit by way of interest in delaying payment to writers until publication date.

ARE we drifting away from Christmas a little? Not really. During this morning of the 24th my door at the Fleetway House has hardly ceased swinging as new arrivales continue to show up. The razzmatazz is building up. Work is impossible, but it would be an unwise editor who neglected to ensure that his desk was clear of everyday tasks on that day of all days in the year.

Most of the Sexton Blake gang are known to each other. And, what with the salutations and the sociability, and multiple conversations going on all at once, and getting louder by the minute, my sober workaday office seems marvellously animated and party-like. And so, I can be sure, do all the other offices of the department. But in that room I was by way of being host, and in courtesy could hardly wander.

My mind, at this Christmastide of 1960, dwells nostalgically on the same season of those past years and shows me a composite Christmas composed of many. It is as if I were gazing hypnotised at a television show gone haywire - a confused blur when I try to remember things, and sharp-focus little pictures springing into movement when I stop trying. Sometimes they are of just a head and shoulders and a face looking not a day older; sometimes two or three of the happy bunch; abruptly displacing the first. Sometimes, suddenly, I am held by the sound of a voice above the uproar, or the tone of a well-remembered laugh, or some brief wisecrack, forgotten but coming back to me as clearly as it did at the moment I first heard it in that din.

The sound cuts out as I try to recall the unseen speaker. The pictures go on. They are as confusing as the crazy patterns of a kaleidoscope - unrelated to time or dates as they shift about senselessly; in focus and out; mixed-up and not to be unscrambled by any wits of mine. But - the human mind is an unfathomable thing - I just know that they are truly the veritable sights and sound of some actual moment, revived intact despite their long immolation in some mental vault.

THE image of George Hamilton Teed is the one that comes clearest and oftener to that screen. He was never absent from these gatherings, and I had known him longer than any. Alas, he was my most frequent contributor, the DOYEN of the Blake writers, and we saw much of each other during the working year. He was -

in honesty we have to admit it - quite unprincipled, but there was something about him . . . fascinating but without any element of admiration for him.

At one moment he was recalled to me, talking to someone my memory had failed to register who appeared to be remonstrating mildly with Teed about the rackets life he led. "Yes, but I HAVE lived!" his gravelly, Canadian-accented voice rasped back. I had heard the answer as it was given, and it had remained in my conscious memory, and stuck there.

And he HAD lived, in his own fashion. It was what made his stories what they were. And now he is one of those - just one - who have gone on ahead from among those who filled my room with memories those many Christmaass ago, and live again in my musings now.

Edwy Searles Brooks, bluff, burly, gruff, was caught by my mental retina as he materialised from that blurred background with his amiable smile; the man who had created Waldo - in his own image, it seemed. We who knew him must often have been struck by that thought. And Gwyn Evans -

Of course Gwyn was there, making himself impossible to ignore as usual; Gwyn the plot-spinner of the gay cynicism and distorted beliefs who in spite of that, had come to be the UNION JACK Dickens by virtue of his succession of inimitable, thrillsome stories blending Christmas and originality so deftly. Incongruous, that mixture, like his own complex character as he ebulliently laughs off with a joks congratulations on his just-published Yuletide Blake.

My visitors continued to come and go, as impulse or further social obligations urged them, and the door still kept swinging. On that morning each year it was my good fortune to preside, not over an office, but a salon.

Young Robert Graydon, economical of utterance and of Red Indian-like impassivity ordinarily, smiled and talked now almost as animatedly as any. Anthony Skene (The Thin Man), wryly sardonic but entertaining just the same, had taken time out to absent himself from His Majesty's Office of Works, neglecting his official obsessions connected with an activity known as quantity surveying - and also the society of fellow Civil Servants much less remarkable than his Monsieur Zenith the Albino - to join our gathering. Erect, soldierly Rex Hardinge, that sometime explorer from Africa, lent a quiet distinction to it by his unmistakable personality and force of character.

On these occasions artists were not to the fore - they hadn't acquired the "speciale" habit - but of course Eric Parker was present, and outstanding as a good mixer. It was rather amusing to notice the sly, observant looks of some of the authors as they watched

him, as if puzzling to penetrate the secret of his slick presentation of the Sexton Blake they laboured so long to portray.

My impressions, year by year repeated, merge into the composite picture I recall. I was heart-warmingly gratified by these parties. I believe a custom seems to have grown up in later years - an export from America, maybe - of Christmas office - parties which are organised and perhaps a trifle forced. To me they don't seem to compare with those Fleetway House get-togethers - spontaneous, unplanned and unprovided-for. No stimulants, even. Just the spirit of Christmas.

The stimulants naturally came later, with lunch-time. Lunch itself was on that day liable to postponement.

There are plenty of pubs in and around Fleet Street, most of them catering more especially, in their various occupations, for people of the publishing trade, including printers. These mainly serving journalists were - and still are, I believe - the Punch, the Codgers, the Falstaff, Cheshire Cheese (former haunt of the famed Doctor Johnson), and another whose real name I never knew. But that is because everybody knows it merely as Poppin's, from the fact that it is located in Poppin's Court, hard by Ludgate Circus.

And, on the farther side of the Circus was Shirreff's, a wonderful wine-house which is now no more - a place in the old City of London tradition where friends could sit at dark oak tables amid serried punchons - or whatever the largest-known-size of barrel is called - arranged round the walls and placarded with noble, recounding, tempting names of the wines they promised. Here one was attended by an old, genial wine-wise, perfectly in-character waiter named Fred. He had no surname to our knowledge.

It was a delightful place, perfect as to atmosphere and environment. All the literary lights of Fleet Street have been seen there at one time or another, some of them famous; G.K.Chesterton, for example. Usually present, lending dignity to his domain, was the owner, Mr. Shirreff himself, complete with top-hat and taking a companionable glass with one of his favoured intimates.

On the flat wall - the others were curved - were painted some appropriate verses from Omar Khayyam: "I often wonder what the vintners buy, that's half so precious as the stuff they sell," etc.

Shirreff's occupied the space under some arches of the railway overhead (hence the curved walls) and its exact position is indicated in the familiar pictures - familiar in Australia too, perhaps? - showing St. Paul's and Ludgate Hill, by overhead bridge in the foreground. Shirreff's winery was on the right-hand side of the road as one looks up the hill.

There is hardly a Fleet Street journalist today who does not consider that the most disastrous night of the entire war was when

one of a fearsome force of Hitler's incendiary bombers flew over the city and reduced Shirreff's to a complete and permanent ruin . . . but that, on those long-vanished Christmases, was yet to be.

Three or four of our UNION JACK party made for it in happy ignorance of things to come; the others, lingering to pick up their 'specials', could doubtless be found easily enough later. We appreciatively sampled meanwhile some of the precious stuff the vintners sold.

The bar, and most of the tables, were occupied, and there was a warm undertone of conversation, but the place was not uncomfortably crowded; a railway arch furnishes a surprising amount of floor-space underneath. It was a different matter when we crossed Ludgate Circus and got to Poppin's Court.

'Poppin's' - an ordinary pub - was designed on more constricted lines, and was, moreover, rather the mode among Amalgamated Press people at that time. There was only one bar, not very long, and the space between it and the street-windows was barely more than six feet. It was pack-jammed, standing room only and elbow-to-elbow. Conversation was conducted at almost shouting level and the din could be heard outside from yards away.

When the door was opened - dislodging one of the revellers inside who had an unlucky position with his back to it - about the first familiar face we saw on gaining admittance was that of Gwyn Evans. Near him in the crush was his wife, a diminutive lady whom he sometimes referred to as the Pocket Venus, and more usually as The Bug; and also a mutual friend of theirs whom he had once introduced merely as Dolores, with a parenthetical footnote: 'A model of Epstein's.' (This, by the way, was in the day before that world-famous sculptor had become Sir Jacob).

Gwyn himself was, as usual conspicuous. He presented an extraordinary appearance, even for this time of year. Christmassy, one could call it. Around his neck and hanging down around him were festoons and loops of hand-made, multi-coloured paper chains, green, red, white, orange, blue, yellow. It was the only form of decoration Gwyn had ever worn, and doubtless he had bestowed it on himself, at that.

I couldn't get near him for the crowd between. Not that I really needed to. I was near enough to distinguish bits of printing on his Christmas chain, and caught on at once. His raw material had been printers' calendars. Each week the Printing Works supplied all the offices of the editorial staffs with a sort of timetable or schedule of the firms: 80 or more publications, showing the deadline-date for sending copy, passing for press, and the like, each week's calendar being printed on paper of a different colour. It had taken the whimsical, ingenious mind of a Gwyn Evans to discover a better use for them than of hanging disregarded on the editorial wall.

Suddenly he turned my way and broke into a grin. He raised his glass. He said something, evidently a greeting from his gesture, but in the uproar I caught only one word: "Condiments."

I knew what he meant, though, and waved back, also grinning.

In my Round Table page of the Christmas Number just out I had included a sketch of dear old Mrs. Bardell by Eric Parker, with a caption written by myself.

The recollection of this incident that Christmastide somewhere around the early 'thirties brings a more recent memory to mind. I don't remember the exact date, but it was about three years ago, say 1957, when I heard a bit of cross-talk at this time of year from the British Broadcasting Corporation.

1st Comedian: "The condiments of the season to you."

2nd Comedian: "And a preposterous New Year."

THEY'RE great lads, these comics! It's a gift!

The End

#### MORE ABOUT MR. SNOW

Mr. Snow came to the Amalgamated Press as a young man of 15 in 1919 and left in 1922, and packed as much interest and work into those 3 years as possible. He saw the elusive Charles Hamilton once or twice coming out of Harold Einton's office; at that time C.H. would be 54. Like C.H. he had strong views on the deputy writers business flourishing at that time and, given time to go through the books of that period, he feels sure he can pin point authors.

Mr. Snow's first articles appeared in the Popular - but I think I'll leave it to him to tell us in his own words his A.P. story for future G.H.'s magazine.

In the between years Mr. Snow has been and is a successful journalist and business man. He has contributed to most of our newspapers and periodicals and also regularly writes for journals and travel magazines covering with authority such subjects as Pacific travel and the luxury passenger ships. He belongs to, and keeps in touch with, many clubs and societies, as does his friend Mr. W.S. Stanton Hope.

# CHRISTMAS AT BAKER STREET

(AS IT ALWAYS WILL BE)

by BETTE PATE

The gaily decorated room, hung with festoons of silver tinsel, and scarlet holly berries — the huge log blazing on the hearth and over the doorway, the timeless sprig of mistletoe.....all these proclaimed that it was Christmas at 23A Baker Street, and as Sexton Blake looked around the cosy room at his old friends' the memories of other Christmas days came crowding close. Slim and elegant in his well-fitting dinner suit Blake stood beside the log fire, sipping his aperitif whilst he sampled Mrs. Bardell's excellent hors d'oeuvres.

On his left, Yvonne, a vision of loveliness in blue and silver was chatting animatedly with Claudius Venner, Scotland Yard's ace superintendent, who, like Solomon of old, was arrayed even more gloriously than usual. All unaware of Blake's amused glance the superintendent was really putting on a great performance, for he considered himself a great man with the ladies and was making an all out effort to impress the fair Yvonne.

"The Super's in great form tonight", a laughing voice interrupted Blake's thoughts and he looked down at Splash Page who was seated on the fender, alternatively feeding himself and Pedro with samples of Mrs. Bardell's delicacies.

"Mrs B's certainly a great cook even if these are wasted on friend Pedro" the newspaperman said, as the sagacious hound deftly caught a tasty morsel and swallowed it at one gulp.

"I see Coutta and Ruff Hanson are both riding their favourite hobby-horse," Blake said, with a nod of his head towards the corner, where the two in question were engaged in a heated discussion. Burly Inspector Coutte, looking hot and bothered in his unaccustomed boiled shirt and dinner jacket was defending the merits of Scotland Yard as opposed to the methods of the F.B.I. as expounded by his old friend and sparring partner from the U.S.A. The stolid British "John Bull" voice was a startling contrast to the Yankee accent but these two had much in common, not the least being their mutual friend Sexton Blake.

On the opposite side of the room the Honourable John Lawless and Dirk Dolland, both as immaculate as usual, were swapping tall stories and their laughter added a gay note to the general chatter.

Engrossed in their own thoughts Tinker and Nirvana sat on the settee both blissfully unaware of Blake's glance of tolerant amusement and the other folk around them — for, to the young and in love, time is relative and every day is Christmas Day.

Sounds of puffing and panting were heard on the stairs and Splash Page, peusing in his conversation with Blake, held up his

hand in a dramatic gesture. "Hark, it is the witching hour! Methinks, foresooth 'tis the turkey arriving in state!"

As he spoke, he rose and crossed to the door to fling it wide open as the footsteps ceased outside. There stood Mrs. Bardell, Sexton Blake's housekeeper, her motherly face wreathed in smiles as she beamed on the assembled company. Ever the 'gallant', Splash swept her a bow with a flourish which would have done justice to a Regency buck and like a 'grande dame' Mrs. Martha Bardell swept into the room - it was the supreme moment in her hour of triumph as she gave a quaint little bob in front of Sexton Blake and announced "Dinner is served, Mr. Blake."

Blake thanked her with his usual quiet courtesy, and offering his arm to Yvonne led the way to the dining-room. Not to be outdone, Coutts and Venner, offered their arms to Mrs. Bardell and that worthy soul, blushing like a schoolgirl, swept in after Sexton Blake, her best Sunday gown of Black Bombazine rustling a dignified accompaniment. Tinker and Nirvana, once more back in the mundane world were joined by the other guests and so, laughing and chatting, they went into dinner.

Soft candlelight, reflected in the rich polished wood, caught the sparkle of crystal and silver, whilst the trails of scarlet berries and bright green leaves decorating the centre of the table were a perfect foil for the snowy napery.

But the 'piece-de-resistance' of the occasion was the turkey. The pride of Mrs. Bardell's heart, it reposed in all its glory on an antique silver platter - fit to grace the table of a king.

"A prime bird indeed, Mrs B." Blake, busily carving, complimented her on her choice as he had done on so many similar occasions - a remark heartily endorsed, a few minutes later, by his guests as they sampled the succulent flesh.

Gay chatter and merry laughter echoed around the festive board as the meal progressed - Blake and Tinker entered into the spirit of the day with all the abandon of carefree schoolboys whilst Coutts and Venner, their official dignity forgotten, were soon rivalling Splash Page in hilarity. Mrs. Bardell, her cheeks rosy with excitement (and the 'wee cup of cheer' she enjoyed at Christmas time) sat beaming fondly at the guests as they showed their appreciation of her culinary skill.

Pedro, of course, was not forgotten on this occasion, and after he had eaten his own generous meal he came silently into the dining-room where he prepared for a second snack. Under the table at Tinker's feet, the wise old hound soon realised that his young master was more interested in his fair companion than in feeding him, so he moved across the floor to the other side where he worked his blandishments on Mme. Yvonne, who, it must be recorded did neglect Sexton Blake a little as she fed dainty titbits to Pedro.

In triumph the pudding was brought in, and in traditional style the brandy lit, and as the blue flames died down Blake rose to make the

age old greeting "A Merry Christmas to You All." He proposed the traditional toasts in which the others joined most heartily; and so once more Christmas dinner at Baker Street drew to a close.

Later, over coffee in the lounge the conversation turned to other Christmas Days they had shared, and whilst Blake and his older friends enjoyed the talk and re-lived experiences, Tinker, in his usual high spirits decided that dancing was the order of the day.

He turned on the radiogram, gallantly offered his arm to Mrs Bardell and waltzed the dear old soul around the room until she stopped, puffing and panting, scolding him for dancing her off her poor legs ("Not as young as I used to be, dearie" she said to Nirvana) yet loving every minute of it. Tinker then, having stopped by design in the doorway beneath the sprig of mistletoe kissed her on the cheek "A Very Merry Christmas to You Mrs. B" he said affectionately as he led her back to her armchair. "The condiments of the season to you, Master Tinker," she replied, beaming on him fondly.

"What's sauce for the goose, ah, Mrs. B," Tinker quipped back and Mrs. Bardell joined in the laughter of the company at Tinker's ready sally.

And so, with the sound of their laughter echoing in our hearts, we leave our old friends at Baker Street to enjoy their Christmas celebrations, bidding them 'Au Revoir' until we meet again in the New Year.....always a happy year when shared with such good friends as Serton Blake and Tinker.

The End

VIC. COLBY'S IRRITATION CORNER: PETTICOAT HOLE

V.E.Colby

In the past, if Serton Blake wished to have a rendezvous with Mademoiselle Yvonne or with her reincarnated self, Roxanne, there was none to say him nay.

Now however, he has his secretary, the possessive Paula Dane to run his life, as well as his office, for him.

In S.B.459, glamorous and circaceous Beulah gave Blake an invitation to have the evening out with her so that she could demonstrate her heart-felt gratitude towards him for help received. Would this have suited Blake? We will never know.

"Chief!" Paula broke in, pointing to the detective's in-tray, piled high with paperwork.

Wryly Blake grinned, "As you see, Beulah, I'm just a work-slave really. So....."

WORK Slave?

HAH!

In a letter to Bette Pate, Mr. Twyman criticized Eric Parker's drawing of himself which we reproduced on the cover of No. 2, Bette mentioned it to me and obtained Mr. Twyman's permission to use it if we wanted to. I read it, and found it most interesting and felt that collectors may agree with me. So here it is straight.

"The No. 2 Cover Sketch"

Your remarks: I'm afraid I have to disagree with you. Eric's sketch is clever, in my judgment. You must remember it isn't a portrait, but (according to Bill Lofte) an illustration done accompanying spoken explanations by E.R.P. to explain the differences between my lineaments and Blake's, which Bill alleged to be similar. (He was not alone in this, by the way. There was a man in the A.P. business office who had the same notion and always addressed me as Sexton Blake. But neither of them is an artist and their impression must have arisen from some fanciful reason of their own.)

But I am better acquainted with E.R.P.'s method of artistic expression, his linear shorthand. Weekly he did for me as regards a cover subject we were planning, what he was doing for Bill Lofte in illustrating my facial characteristics. His flicked down lines were even more impressionistic than those of the head sketch - but just as sure and expressive, and anyway, have I learned a lot in my own efforts at portraiture since.

If you were here now, I could discuss this sketch line by line and you would see the features he was emphasizing. Like anyone else I did not see the likenesses at first, but everything was clear in a few split seconds - the hairline; the line of the forehead (frontal development); the two lines under the chin (suggesting a scrawny neck), one of them, done the same incredibly certain connected stroke a thin, hollow cheeked face; the firm mouth and the eye - particularly the eye. I have dark brown eyes, and from what I've been told they are piercing. Notice how emphatically he has rendered this (the only visible eye), even carefully defining it and including the highlight, and also isolating and intensifying it by leaving out distractions like eyelashes, etc. The eyebrow of greater area and about the same tone value, is likewise almost disregarded. The whole expression is piercing. He has not allowed the brown horn-rimmed glasses to interfere with his main objective.

This is not a portrait - a caricature, rather. And from what I have noticed at times, unexpectedly catching myself as shown in a mirror, it's true when I happen to have that expression on my face. He must have seen me many times like that, and the thing which brings out his cleverness, to my mind, is that he could recall and so slickly record it years after he had last seen me. (It was not 25 years, as Bill Lofte says, but about five, when we met briefly by chance in Fleet Street.) Only features I could perhaps venture to question would be the Mephistoclean eyebrow and the pointed nose. (I have not a pointed nose.) But maybe these things are deliberate, done to heighten the "piercing" effect. For the rest, notice how everything

but the features mentioned and which do not contribute to the likeness and expression, are only lightly indicated, but with the same certain, masterly touch. And remember - all done years afterwards and on the counter of a saloon bar! It is one of the things in my U.J. career that I'm proudest of - "discovering E.R.P."

The End

Here I must make an explanation. When I received the light pencil sketch, it was folded and the crease cut exactly across the point of the nose. During process of reproduction, I very lightly touched where the crease had broken the pencil line. I tried to follow the impression of the whole sketch, but I am definitely not an artist. So, most probably, the nose had a rounded tip which the crease had obliterated.

EDITOR

#### NEWSPAPER ARTICLES

The following par appeared recently in a Sydney newspaper article on the "Reading Habits of To-day with the Emphasis on Youth." It is interesting only as another example of the lack of research and accuracy local (and otherwise) reporters put into their work on the subject of the old boy's books.

"Boys find five days of school enough for any week and don't want to read about it in their spare time. Librarians, with apologetic nostalgia, still keep the odd copy of "The Hill" and Tom Brown on their shelves, but Talbot Baines Reed has gone altogether. Billy Bunter, so much more red-blooded than the pale, earnest prefects of St. Dominic's and Fellegarth, nevertheless had a yellow streak of class consciousness about him, and he has passed unlamented from the printed word to the British TV screen."

Even with the reporter attending a Golden Hour club meeting last year to gather data for a four page cover of the club and the O.B. books, the chairman still had to write a long letter to the paper correcting inaccuracies in the text. However, it was good temperedly received and quite a lot of the letter was printed in the next issue.

# ***THE REVIEW PAGE***

Conducted by VICTOR COLBY

## REPORT ON CURRENT SEXTON BLAKE LIBRARY

June to December 1960

### S.B.L.453 "Man on the Run"

Arthur "Splash" Kirby vied with Sexton Blake for star rating in this story, which commenced in Spain and moved through Portugal and thence by coffin ship to Algiers. There was plenty of life in it, also death - in sickening, revolting form-brain like, grey jelly splashing from a pulped head, and a dead disconnected, milky glazed eye looking up from the carpet. Not for the squeamish. Some of the action scenes were in the best Blake tradition, particularly on the coffin ship when the boiler had blown up and the mutinous crew set on Blake and Kirby - Flying fists, boots, bullets, hammers and wrenches were the order of the day. I particularly liked the description of Blake on Page 18, and Blake's burst of philosophy on Page 19 - "God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference "he quoted" I think it's a fine prayer" he added. Then too, I liked Blake's bold policy on Page 54. "We've got to take chances. We've got to go right out on a limb. We've got to strike the very heart of this criminal conspiracy - be bold, imaginative." Spiced with lust jealousy, greed, treachery, suspense and excitement, together with an unforgettable set of characters, this story could not fail to command attention.

### S.B.L.454 "Design for Vengeance" by Martin Thomas

"Mrs Bardell" cried Blake "Unless all Baker Street is in flames or this particular penthouse flat has gone into orbit, I fail to understand the commotion." What a thought! Penthouse flat, chrome plated Berkeley Square offices and all the unwanted modernisation of the Blake saga sent for a one way trip to outer space! Maybe then Sexton Blake, Tinker, Mrs Bardell and Pedro would return to the cosy Baker Street consulting rooms, the scene of so many stirring tales and good comradeship in days of yore. This particular story was not Martin Thomas at his best. A byline on the cover read "The charge was murder - the accused, Sexton Blake." What possibilities these words conjure up! Blake in dire straits, sentenced to death, a last minute reprieve? No! For a time he was slightly inconvenienced by the suspicions of an obscure Inspector,

but it didn't take Blake long to make him look eilly. However, I did like the neat burglary arrangement employed in stealing the "Star of Atlantis." The thieves wrote in chalk across the safe door "Many thanks for the Star." They had not opened the safe, but jammed the mechanism through the keyhole, so that it could not be opened by the owner. The latter, acting on the obvious inference that the safe had been forced open, the jewel stolen and the safe door jammed when shut, sent for the safe firm's maintenance men. These cut a hole in the safe door for him, and by sleight of hand stole the jewel that was supposed to have been stolen previously. The maintenance men were, of course, imposters. Very neat! A great pity, about the dwarf. He looked through the keyhole of Paula's prison hoping to get an eyeful. He did. Paula had chosen that moment to fire a shot through the keyhole from the other side in order to break the lock!

S.B.L.455 "Murder comee Calling" by Desmond Reid

Good stuff this. A queer collection of odd bods in a big ugly old stone house called "Devil's Tooth Lodge" in the wind swept wilderness of Dartmoor. Here, like the famed ten little niggere, the occupants came one by one to a sudden and sticky end. I do feel that we could have been spared the spectacle of female cats Beulah and Paula circling around Blake as if he were a lump of meat, spitting and clawing at each other to establish sole ownership of this tasty morsel.

S.B.L.456 "Hurricane Warning" by Richard Williams

Ocoasionally a story appears that can be described as "big in etature." This story is such a one. From the very commencement, with torture by Chinese using alivers of bamboo in tropic Babaul, this story was good to read. Of interest to Australiana is the fact that Blake and staff were in Sydney when the call went out for his help in Babaul. I do like stories featuring a police inspector who proves cynical and obstructive, and who finally eats a large slice of humble pie. Inspector Carr, senior officer of the New Britain Police Force detested "private eyes", classed Blake as one, and as a snooper to boot.

Ho Shan the Chinese-negro with lizard skin shoes, white shark skin suit and purple tie, together with predisposition to torture and violence was a character that could have been exploited more. Instead, he was fed to the sharks. The exotic atmosphere formed a good backdrop for this story. What better could one want than Blake battling his way through a hurricane along Torture Street Chinatown, for a midnight rendezvous with a man who arrived bearing a card transfixing by knife to his body, bearing the legend "He's Dead - On Time."

S.B.L.457 "The World Shakes" by Desmond Reid

In a previous report, I urged the revelation of authors behind the editorial stock-name "Desmond Reid." In this particular issue we were told that the novel was based on an original story by Rex Dolphin. Excellent! But why just this one issue, and why not credit the man who re-wrote the story? I earnestly request that all "Desmond Reid" stories state "from a story by Rex Dolphin, re-written by Arthur McLean" (or whatever the case may be.) It is most satisfying for enthusiastic readers to know the actual people behind these stories. Please, Mr. Baker? Few books have thrilled me more than this one, which has all the elements that made the S.B.L. great in the past, including High Adventure; Blake and Tinker in an indelible back to back fighting partnership, enduring the hardship and peril of snow and ice in Arctic Iceland; being machine gunned on a ice floe; enduring a perilous journey by canoe through arctic cold and fog, the dangers of a cliff ascent; and perils from a foe with frightful weapons in an extinct volcano. Chapter 16 will stand for all time as one of the most action packed, suspense filled, chapters ever. The race for the helicopter, with the volcano about to blow sky high, was powerful stuff. The dissolution of the island, the organisation and the enemy, was reminiscent of the destruction of the erstwhile Criminals Confederation of Union Jack fame. One jarring note. I am a great admirer of the desiccated Craille, but I do deplore the unnecessary and completely out of character trait imposed on him - an aesthetic regard for feminine beauty, leading him to surround himself with a bevy of beauties. It doesn't fit. It makes a farce out of an excellent and serious character. Must be something in those turkish cigarettes!

Xmas Numbers

Remember those splendid Eric Parker Xmas Covers last year? Nothing Xmasy about this years covers. Very drab and ordinary. However, the Editor did at least wish us all a Happy Xmas, which we did appreciate.

Xmas S.B.L.466 "Dead Man's Destiny" by Martin Thomas

I had thought that only the Russians re-wrote history. In this story Martin Thomas shows he can beat them at their own game, completely altering the accepted tradition of the origin and early days of Tinker. I would be the first to admit to the ingenuity of his version, but felt it was entirely artificial and contrived, and found myself wondering who WAS that pleasant young man I encountered so often in the pages of the S.B.L. prior to 1934, the birth-date of the current Tinker? And what a poor substitute for the loyal, sagacious Pedro, is that alcohol swilling Siamese cat Millie!

S.B.L.465 "Danger on the Flip Side" by Jack Trevor Story

A delightful fantasy featuring prominently a thinly disguised Greyfriars school (St. Garlicks), Mr. Quelch and Bunter being easily recognised, though rejoicing in the new names of Mr. Welch and Crump.

The plot, involving the recording on an ordinary gramophone record of sound waves, reproducible on a television set as a visual representation of a scientific formula of deadly import, was extremely ingenious. Two of the boys of St. Garlicks had become possessed of this record, which was urgently sought by Sexton Blake in competition with sundry scoundrels and scientists.

Mr. Story produced some excellent Xmas atmosphere in this tale exemplified in the following phrases:-

"The Xmas spirit was in the air...For days now, through the stately and tall stained-glass windows of the main hall, could be seen the coloured lights of the Xmas tree. The tempo of school life was quickening to a joyful crescendo. Masters became indulgent, avuncular, benevolent, almost kindly. The tuckshop window was brightly lit, scattered with cottonwool and silver frost, and gay with Xmas gift boxes of chocolates and cigars."

**A REALLY GOOD CHRISTMAS**

The End

"FORTY YEARS ON"

Charles Hamilton in his school stories refers to this school song many times. I think, from memory, it belongs to Eton, but I'm not sure. I have always wished to know the entire stanzas, but here in Australia this has been difficult. Can any friend in England oblige me in this? Perhaps there is a book containing school songs only. Any information on these lines will be gratefully received by the EDITOR.

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