The Collectors Digest

Sept. 1948

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Sept 1948

Editor: Miscellaneous Section
Herbert Leckenby, Telephone Exchange,
C/o.Central Registry, Northern Command, York.

FROM THE EDITOR'S CHAIR

"Annual"Progress. Forty eight hours after the first meeting of the August C.D. orders for the Annual arrived, and they have been coming in nicely ever since. We are confident demand will be at least as great as last year but we should like to have our minds set at rest as early as possible. If it isn't convenient to remit your sub at the moment don't hesitate to send the form along for our main motive is to get an idea how many copies we shall require.

We are just a little worried about adverts for even at 7/9 we have cut the price very fine, and we shall require these to cover cost of postages,

envelopes, and all the incidental expenses which have a habit of adding up alarmingly. I am sure none of you want us to have a loss this year after all the months of earnest endeavour. So if you can help with just a few words we shall be grateful.

As for articles, well there's going to be no fears on that score I can assure you. In addition to those already mentioned theres going to be 'A History of the Popular' in Roger Jenkins best style (and that's saying something); versatile Eric Payne is writing on Christmas Numbers, and John Gocher writes enthusiastically about the 'Triumph! Then you are going to meet again "Mr Croft", who aroused so much curiousity last year, and Reg Cox has more to say about 'The Hobby'. Yes its going to be good I can assure you.

The Picture on the Cover. It depicts a dramatic scene from a Greyfriars story yet not one of you has seen it before. Perhaps familiarity with the artist will give you a clue to the mystery. Anyway its an illustration from No.3 of the Bunter Books - Billy Bunters Barring-out to be published shortly. We are able to reproduce it through the kind permission of Messrs Charles Skilton and the enterprise of Maurice Hall. We have one too from Billy Bunters Banknote which we propose having on the cover of the October issue. Another little scoop for the C.D.

Apologies. The name of the writer of the article Review of the Modern Boy in the August issue was accidentally omitted. It was Maurice Hall and the collector whose advert appeared at the bottom of page 206, was Henry J.H.Bartlett, Peas Hill, Shipton Gorge, Bridport, Dorset. It is repeated in this issue.

Too Much Leckenby? After the August C.D's. had been mailed I found my ears had a tendency to burn a little for I had a feeling that some readers might be saying as they scanned their copies, Um! the old editor's

hogging it isn't he with seven pages all to himself? If they were I shouldn't have blamed them for at first it did look rather selfish particularly to those who sent articles long ago and still waiting for them to appear. But I was also hoping they would notice the issue contained four more pages. However this was the way of it. Each month it is a very difficult job to fit so many articles into so many pages, without either ending an article abruptly or leaving a little blank space. Therefore its useful to have one article which can be run over two or more issues to fill remaining pages. My article Streets of Memories was intended that way but by a misunderstanding the whole of it was done. Therefore we get over the difficulty by simply adding four pages, so no one was the loser.

Anyway from the kindly comments I have received those recollections of mine seem to have been well liked, in fact the blush has spread to my cheeks. So alls well.

More Meetings. Since last writing I have greeted three collector friends, two for the first time on July 24th, Tom Puckrin came over on one of regular visits bringing a hefty volume of the Boy's Friend, to gladden my heart. Then a few days later I had another pleasant surprise, a visitor entered my office and eying him from my switchboard I said to myself "Whose this, some Post Office official I suppose. Then the stranger shot out his hand and said "I'm Granville Waine". Gee! I had expected Granville later on but not that particular afternoon. In twenty seconds we were chatting away as though we had been meeting for years. A good friend on the staff took over, so that Granville and I had several uninterrupted hours together. Was I sorry to see his train steam out of York station? I was!

Then on August Bank Holiday I journeyed over to Scarborough and there met Allen. I had to look out for

his car number. Prompt to time I saw it drawing up at the appointed place. Soon to the murmur of the sea we were hobby talking and running through my annual file in the compiling of which then is giving valuable help. We were talking all the way back to York, we were able to do that as Mrs Allen was at the wheel.

We had hoped to meet that good friend to our circle, R.A.H.Goodyear whilst in Scarborough, but circumstances prevented us. However we are hoping it is only a pleasure postponed.

And now theres a possibility that before I write my next chat I shall have met quite a number of my friends way down south. But for the moment thats in the lap of the gods.

Yours sincerely,

Herbert Leckenby.

Stop Press.
News for Magnet Collectors. We have reliable news of an almost complete set of Magnets being unearthed as a result of advertising. More news next month.

Have you returned the Questioniare yet? Times getting on.

Advertise in the Annual 2d Word. Name and address free.

Advertise in the Annual Every Reader is interested in Old Boys Books.

Slip your sub in the Post if its due Please.

WANTED Aldine Publications, Dick Turpins, Claude Duvals etc. E.R.Landy, 4 Nuneaton Road, Dagenham, Essex.

Heres another delightfully original contribution from evergreen R.A.H.G. as a compositor myself in my younger days I only wish I had had his friends job herein described. It would have been a real pleasure to go to work.- H.L.

OLD BOYS' AUTHORS AND THEIR MANUSCRIPTS.
By R.A.H.Goodyear.

"Here's some waste paper - it'll set the fire going fine," murmured the housemaid in the home of Thomas Carlyle's friend. Thereupon she put a match to the MS. of the first volume of Carlyle's "French Revolution" and it blazed merrily away beneath the crackling firewood.

Carlyle's admiring friend had borrowed the MS. to read and carelessly left it lying about. Naturally, he was horrified at its fate. Carlyle did the only possible thing in the circumstances - he rewrote the whole volume while it was still fresh in his memory and "The French Revolution" became classic.

As a boy I read of what had happened to Carlyle's manuscript and there and then resolved that no such accident should ever occur to my own insignificant manuscripts. Nor did it. In more than sixty years of authorship I have never, to my recollection, lost a single sheet of manuscript or had to rewrite a solitary page of my stories and articles. They have all gone through the post, all been seen by some editor or other, and all either been passed through to the linotypes or been safely returned to me. This is indeed a credit to the G.P.O., for in my early years of writing I was compelled by poverty to use whatever paper I could beg and wrote many of my efforts on tradesmen's paper bags, neatly cut into quarto size, or on the rough backs of wallpapers from the discarded sample books which my father, a painter and decorator, procured for me from the workshop.

An old neighbour of mine, who in his retirement lived opposite to me, had spent all his life in a Fleet street environment and had known most of the authors whose stories I had read and admired as a boy. I gathered much information from him, though nothing like so much as I should have done If I had been wise. I deeply regret my missed opportunities - I was a fiercely busy man in those days and too rarely found time to converse with him.

Of course I had no proof that all he told me was absolutely accurate but his descriptions of the authors he had met tallied faithfully with what I read of them and it was apparent he thought none of them much out of the ordinary. He praised the handwriting of some of them and condemned the calligraphy of others.

"Never had so much bother with Bracebridge Hemyng's or Harcourt Burrage's manuscripts," he said, "but by heck, George Emmett's was often a puzzle and Ralph Rollington's a nightmare. Some of the smaller fry among the boys' authors were real rum 'uns. They'd go on the booze for days on end and then have to scribble away for dear life at the finish to deliver their copy on time.

"Often enough we compositors had to guess at what they were writing about and to swop words of our own for those of theirs none of us could make out - and because we'd spent so many years in setting up their blood-and-thunder stuff we managed it a treat. At any rate I can't remember ever being called over the coals by my alterations, either by the author or the editor."

Before retirement he had worked on the scripts of Henry St John, Reginald Wray, G.H.Teed, Allan Blair, Cecil Hayter, Maxwell Scott, Stacey Blake, Charles Hamilton and other celebrities of The Union Jack type, all of whose MSS were typewritten and so presented few difficulties. I mentioned to him the accidental burning

of Carlyle's "French Revolution" and asked him if he knew of any similar mishaps to the manuscripts of the Fleet Street boys' authors.

He said : "Ay, it wasn't unusual for a script to be lost or left behind - some of the old time men wrote in pubs because their houses or lodgings weren't comfortable to work in - and I knew of one script that was bunged on to a big bonfire on Guy Fawkes Night by the author's own youngest lad and only three chapters of it were saved by the kids mother, who burnt her fingers nearly to the bone by snatching it out of the blaze.

"As a rule, though, the writers only delivered one weeks instalment at a time and it fell through a hole in the author's pocket or was left in an omnibus it wasn't a big matter to scribble it out afresh.

"Tell me one thing,' I said - "whose handwriting did you consider best and clearest?" "Robert Justin Lambes," he promptly answered. "Small it was and a bit hard to read in a poor light, perhaps, but every letter was well formed and there were very few corrections from first to last or any of those marginal additions which some authors worked in as afterthoughts on every page of script. How we dreaded those!"

"Well, assuming that it was easy to decipher, which kind of boy's story did you best like setting up in type?" I inquired. "School stories always," the old man answered. "It was a particular pleasure to us compositors to set up a yarn like 'Mat Marchmont's School-days' or 'Tom Tartar at School; because there was always something lively in it and nobody in it had to be running somebody else through the ribs with a sharp sword every five minutes or so to keep up the interest. I disliked the slaughter house sort of tale - a young fellow always shedding blood was no hero to me, whatever the author may have thought him."

(Note. There is no report of the old Boy's Book Club so here's an excellent substitute. Lucky Bob Whiter! Would that all wives treated hobby of story paper collector with such tolerance and understanding.

It's the first contribution, too from a lady member of the circle. We hope it won't be the last. How about it ladies? H.L.)

A COLLECTOR'S WIFE.

by Eileen Whiter.

The wife of an ardent Magnet and Gem collector, who is also a member of the Old Boys Book Club in London has many happy experiences and a few trials and tribulations.

First of all the meetings of the Club. It is my turn to be hostess once in three months, when the meeting is at "Cherry Place," and what excitement there is in the household. I help Bob with the programme as much as I can, and Bob's brother Ben also helps considerably in this field; then there is the room (happily a large one) to be prepared, and I sally forth and scrounge round my bakery for some nice tasty cakes etc. The ration situation is happily alleviated by the fact that most people bring a little "something" with them.

Soon people start arriving, and there is plenty to do until everyone is esconced in a chair in the front room, and the clock announces that the meeting is due to begin. I usually take a few notes while the business of the meeting is discussed, and then I retire to the culinary regions to prepare the inevitable cups of tea, with their attendant sandwiches and pastries. The other ladies usually rally round and give valuable assistance. The meeting is always a red letter day for me whether it is here, or at our other 'homes', as I love seeing the other members, and joining in the fun which usually ensues at the different meetings.

Then we often have someone popping in to see us, which gives occasion for a pleasant chat, and also refreshments of the tea nature. Usually a swop is managed between the two men.

Bob has quite a decent correspondence, and sometimes I help him with it, especially if he has something important to do; i.e. making up a quiz for a meeting.

As to the books themselves; I love them, but unfortunately don't get much time to read them, as I have other irons in the fire, i.e, a job, theatricals, and of course housework etc.

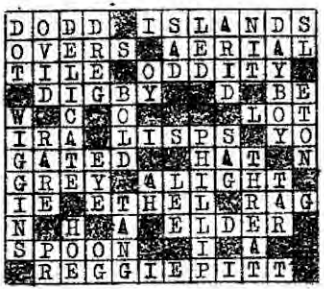
Did I say I have a few trials and tribulations? Well they are of a small nature, mostly grouses on my part when Bob leaves the books sprawled all over the room, just when I want to dust, and I daren't move them!

Still, that is as nothing as compared to the interest derived from the hobby, and the meeting of other members of the club, with some of whom I have cultivated grand friendships.

In winding up, I may add that I am starting a modest collection of the Schoolgirls Own Library, and though I haven't many as yet, I hope to have a good collection one day, as I did enjoy reading about Cliff House and Morcove when a schoolgirl, and I still love them as much now.

RESULT OF CROSSWORD COMPETITION NO.2.

There was a good entry for this competition but no one got an absolutely correct solution. There were two with just one error. The competitors were:-
Anthony Blunden, 43 Elmfield Avenue, Taddington, Middlesex.



James W.Cook, 62 Queen's Gardens, Bayswater, London.W.2.
The prize has therefore been divided and 10/- sent to each. Here is the correct solution.

COMPETITION NO.3.

Here is an interesting and novel new competition once again compiled by our man of ideas, Eric Fayne and who again gives the prize £1, generously increased to 30/- in the event of a tie.

In the story there are suggested a number of names of famous characters which should be familiar to collectors. Mind you we said suggested for they are not all in the strict spelling. However your eye should catch quite a number. Write the names out on a separate sheet of paper and give the total. Prize will be awarded for the largest list of names.

Closing date September 18th.
Effort should be accompanied by 2½d stamp.

When my sister decided to marry, her eyes fell as she approached my father for permission. Her young man began to tremble, as father eyed him with disdain. The wart on father's nose glowed crimson, and I prepared to nip along should he start to load a gun.

Father pressed his hand to his temple, as Ray began to sing his own praises.

"I can't understand you", he roared, like a bull. "You may be tall, but it is something new, gentlemen, for such small fry to come after my daughter."

"I have cherished your daughter for weeks", faltered Ray.

"I daresay", scoffed father. "Ethel. What was your last beau? Clerk?" His eyes glinted. "This man does not impress me either. I bet this man has no money. Probably owing everybody, and has a price on his head".

"They love each other", I murmured, "and does money matter a fig in such a case. It isn't what we've got in the banks that counts".

"What, son?" Father turned on me. "This fellow begrimes his hands. If he puts his hand forth, it is covered with dough. He is a baker".

"Father. Is it necessary to maul everything into the matter?" I pleaded.

"Leave us, son", ordered my father. "You're all in co", curtly he added. "There is a car due, now. Go, sling this pig out,- I won't have him snooping around here,- and lock the door after him".

Father's words were like the cuts of a whip. Ray took the car, and the next morning turned his thoughts, and made up his mind to force it upon father that he was not fishing for money.

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"Im" she said disdainfully "Well I 'opes as 'ow they'll mi miss 'im".

And so saying she went her way-back to the work of housekeeping for the best known sleuth in the world.

I sighed rather sorrowfully as I passed out of the front door and closed it behind me. I had had so much more to say to Sexton Blake that August afternoon.

For Sale:- Magnets 1925-1939. Send wants to W.Colcombe 256 South Avenue, Southend-on-Sea.

TWO VETERANS AGREE.

204 High St,
Wealdstone,
Harrow,
Middlesex,
July 26th.48.

Dear Mr Leckenby,

Many thanks for No.19 C.D. I read with great interest friend Goodyear's Article "Floods which taught me History.

I can heartily agree with him on his view for I have always said I learned more English history from the journals of Brett and Fox than I ever did at school.

Yours sincerely,
Henry Steele.

Can You Help Frank Richards?

August 16th 1948.

Dear Herbert Leckenby,

I have just finished reading through the August C.D.for the second time: and I think I liked it best of all the numbers so far. I am

specially interested in the notice on 'Modern Boy'. I have derived from it an item of information that is new to me. The writer says that the "Len Lex" stories were issued in S.O.L.353 and 371. I had the former, but never knew about the latter, and as I have not seen it, should be very glad to get a copy, if anyone has No.371 to dispose of.

"Billy Bunter in Brazil" is expected to appear about Easter: probably to be followed by "Billy Bunter's Christmas Party" in time for Xmas.

I think I told you about the hymn I wrote last year: words and music by Frank Richards. I have lately been giving it some finishing touches, as there is a hint that paper may be found for it in the not too distant future. I wonder how many old Magnet readers would expect anything of the kind from the author of Billy Bunter!

With Kind Regards,
Yours sincerely,
Frank Richards.

(I don't think those who know Frank Richards will really be surprised to hear he has written a hymn. For, many of his stories taught lessons as fine as those heard where hymns are sung. H.L.)

A PLEA FOR MORE CO-OPERATION.

Ingalstone,
Essex.

Dear Editor,

I have had little response from adverts recently and I think some Greyfriars, etc., enthusiasts should be willing to loan a few out of their collections in exchange for others, to be returned in same condition a sort of chumminess.

Best Wishes,
W.E.Edwards.

(Maybe M.Edwards could see his way to attend the London Meetings of the Old Boy's Book Club. Exchanges have been a popular and successful feature there. Ed.)

TOUR EDITOR BLUSHED.

Dundee,
August 4th.

Dear Mr Leckenby,

Just a wee note to say how much I enjoyed your "Street of Memories" in current "Collector's Digest". R.L.Stevenson couldn't have done it better.

I hope some of these days you might find time to write a similar article for "Side Notes".

Regards,
J.A.Birkbeck.

ANY MAGNETS TO SPARE?

63 Thoresby Street,
Hull.
August 17.48.

Dear Mr Leckenby,

Many thanks for the copy of "C.D." and your interesting letter. I fully intend to become a subscriber to your bright little periodical.

In the meantime I'd better let you know my position because I think you are the best person to advise me. I am passionately fond of the "Magnet", so you can judge my dismay when my collection was destroyed during the war. At the moment I have about 4 copies only (Gathered painstakingly from secon hand shops)

It was only by a fluke I happened to see a copy of "Exchange and Mant" and saw to my delight that people were advertising for "Magnets" and "Gems". Also I saw an ad. about a collector's club in London run by Mr Blythe. I wrote to Mr Blythe asking him if he could help me and he strongly advised me to get in touch with you and to become a subscriber to "C.D." He also offered me 100 "Gems" of the 1929 period, an offer which I have just accepted, although I want to build up a collection of "Magnets" first, these being my greatest love.

So if you have any pearls of wisdom to drop, I should be eternally grateful.

Yes, I too am pleased that Hull is so near to York, as I shall take the opportunity some time of coming over to see you. Needless to say, if you ever find yourself in Hull you must not leave without calling at this address (You will be interested in my 4 "Magnets" I'm sure)

Now in return for your advice I'm sure I can be of help to you, as I am a commercial artist, engaged in the production of booklets, so any time you want a drawing for your publication, or a special page designing, let me know. (No charge of course)

Well I think for the moment, that's the lot.

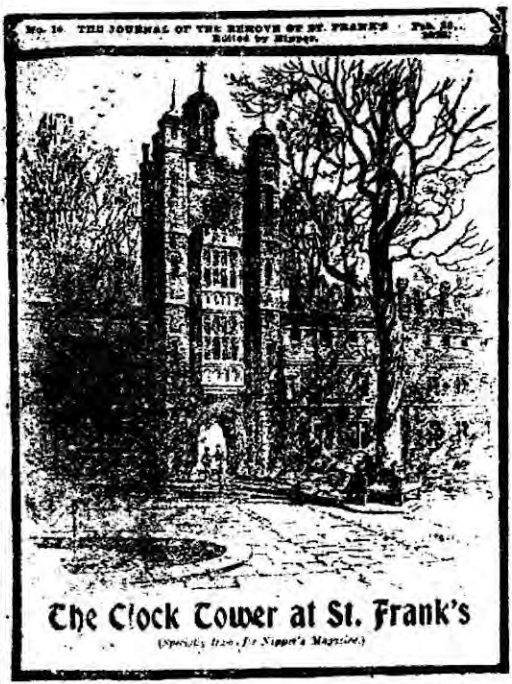
All the best,
Sincerely Yours,
W.L.Branton.

(I feel sure M.Branton will soon be able to see a new collection arising from the ashes H.L.)

THE NELSON LEE COLUMN.

First, for Frank Keeling of Stanmore, here are the studies and their occupants of the Fourth Form.

Modern House Study 1. Robert Christine, Roderick York, Charles Talmadge; No.2. George Holland, Hubert Churchman, Ernest Lawrence; No.3. Empty. No.4. Sessue Yakama; No.5. Empty. No.6. John Busterfield Boots, Percy Bray, Walter Denny; No.7. Walter Skelton, Eugene Ellmore; No.8. Hubert Vandyke, Terence O'Grady; No's 9 and 10 Empty.



East House. Study No.11. John Holroyd, Edwin Monroe, Peter Cobb; No.12. Timothy Armstrong, Arthur Kemp, Louis Griffiths; No.13. Clement Turner, Joseph Page, Donald Harron, No.14. Julian Clifton, Robert Simmons, No.15. David Merrill, Frederick Marriott, Enoch Snipe; No.16. Eric Dallas,

Arthur Steele, William Freeman; No.17.Arthur Kemp,Cyril Conroy,Minor; No's 18.19.20.Empty.

Next to L.P's query about the numbers of the N.L. containing stories of Tim the Penman and the Circle of Terror. Here we are L.P.- Jim the Penman.O.S.No8s 39, 42,45,49,51,54,59,62,64,66,72,74,76,78,80,84,90,94,99, 169, and the Circle of Terror O.S. No's 85,88,93,98,104, 113,117,121,123,127,132-135,142-146,167,168,169.

I might point out that the list of Jim the Penman stories, as well as the Eileen Dare list that I gave last month, are not quite complete,as numerous short stories of these characters appeared later on in the history of the Nelson Lee. I'll be letting you have them L.P. as soon as I've got all the data sorted out.

Did you know that:-

Ralph Fullwood was captain of the Remove when Nipper first came to St Frank's?

The Tuckshop in Bellton is kept by Mr Ebenezer Binks?

The St Frank's private telephone exchange is situated in the School House?

There are three houses at the River House School? Marshall's,Bragg's,and School House.

The original site of River House School was Moat Hollow (scene of revellion O.S.No's 501-502)a large house near Bellton Bridge, facing the River Stowe?

I have been asked by John Young, of London,if St Frank's stories appeared in any other paper.If so, what papers were they and what were the numbers? S'Trewth well,John, I can't give you a complete list,for the simple reason that I don't know them all.However I can say with certainty that St Frank's stories appeared at various times in the Nugget(1½d) and also later,when it became a 3d library. The Union Jack, Boy's Realm, Boy's Friend 4dlib. and the Gem. Then,of course, there were the monster lib. S.O.L. And the Holiday Annual. (Incidentally,if any of my readers possess any of the aforementioned papers containing stories of St Frank's, would they be good enough to write and let me know the numbers

And now for this months list of titles.

No.31: The Frozen Man.

No.32: The Prison Breakers
" 33: Amazement Island
" 34: Robbery Wholesale
" 35: The Mummy Mystery
" 36: The Mystery Man of Llassa
" 37: The House of Fear
" 38: The Presidents Peril
" 39: The Lightning Clue
" 40: The Red Menace.

SOME NOTES ON EDITORIAL POLICY.

by F.Addington Symonds.

(Note:- A great many of our readers place The Champion among their favourites.The Champion in its early years that is for the paper bearing the name now is but a pale shadow of the fine lively champion of 1922-24. The following article is therefore of particular interest for it is written by the man who created it who made it at the start one of the most sensational successes in journalism- F.Addington Symonds. -H.L.)

The editor of The Champion and its companion journals was first and last an editor before he was a writer. Though he was naturally concerned about the kind and quality of stories published in his papers, his overriding interest was in the lay-out, the appearance of the printed page. He was once accursed of "over-editing" his papers,which double-edged compliment may or may not have been deserved! The fact remained that not a single page,not a single column,not a single picture went with it to any of his papers without his first approveming of it. And, so far, as The Champion was concerned, he personally directed its production down to the last full stop from No.1. to the last issue under his control, and personally wrote every one of the "Editor's Chats" which appeared each week.

His interest was thus that of the pictorial lay-out man, the publicity man,since,having once accepted a story for publication, he concentrated exclusively

on the way in which that story should be presented- the kind of pictures that should go with it, the style of title heading, the whole general lay-out.

His aim was originality above all things-to be constantly surprising and even startling his readers with new tricks. That is why no two issues of The Champion were ever exactly alike; and the same went for Pluck, though The Rocket was not perhaps so closely guarded, for various reasons. The Editor saw everything in pictures often enough his idea of agood story would depend upon how much of it would provide exciting, dramatic, or amusing illustrations. And the "personal touch", as between editor and contributor and editor and reader, was of paramount importance. Authors and artists always had full recognition for their services, both in publication and in payment. They were made to be real personages to the readers, as real as their own characters. Everybody whose work appeared in The Champion and its associated journals had his name appended to his work; everyone was "brought to life" as it were and presented vividly so that each fresh issue of any of the papers should be as fresh and alive as if it had been No.1.

Ideas, too, were of first importance. Authors, artists, staff members, even readers, were invited - even bullied - to produce them and the Editor's office was ever open to receive anyone who had anything new or original to suggest in the way of stories or features or make-up. Every member of the staff - even the office boy - was at full liberty to criticize the Editor's policy if by so doing he was uncovering any fault or weakness or offering helpful suggestions. Many new ideas were gleaned in this way. The Editor was always the "boss" and his word was final; but he was at great pains to make it clear to his staff that he was not infallible, that he was just as likely as they were, to make mistakes, and that he would be grateful to them for a kick in the pants if it were necessary. Sometimes the Editor's Secretary, or one of the juniors, would come into his office and say: "I think this week's issue is a disgrace;" and explain why he thought so. If his reasons were good, The Editor immediately admitted the fact; if not, the

Editor explained why and always thanked him or her for their interest.

The personal relationship of editor and staff was always of the happiest. They worked together as a team and their mutual loyalty was something of which the whole organization was proud. The atmosphere of the office was adventurous, exciting, enthusiastic. There was always plenty to do and no time for dawdling. Nothing ever slipped into a rut. Each fresh issue of the papers was regarded as a new adventure and routine-except insofar as observing the time-tables - was never allowed to "rust" one's weapons. Observing the time-tables was the one unalterable law- the printer's calendar was hung on the wall, dates and times had to be adhered to. Apart from that, each day brought its own time-table, its own fresh duties. The whole atmosphere was electric and exhilarating from the first day to the last. Everyone recognized his job as important, and that enthusiasm was infectious. One well-known writer once said: "You know, it does me good to come and see you, even if only for five minutes at a time - its like a tonic".

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and has completely disappeared. Belford last saw him entering a wood out in the depths of the country.

"So what" grunted Tinker "where do you come in?"

"I don't, exactly" grinned Blake "I have to take Pedro along to try and scent him out.

"Well I'll be ---" gasped Blake's assistant "and we were just saying that bloodhounds were----".

"I know" said Blake "Come on let's go Tinker. Goodnight Mr Bond. Let yourslf out".

The last I saw of the Baker Street trio was a glimpse of a man a youth and a tired looking dog, speeding away down Baker Street W.

As I turned from the window Mrs Burdell entered the room to collect the tea tray and probably to satisfy her curiosity.

"Where are they off to now?" she sniffed "arter some looney or other I 'spect".

"They've gone to look for Superintendant Venner of Scotland Yard" I told her.

The sniff was more pronounced this time.

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I VISIT BAKER STREET AGAIN.

by H.Maurice Bond.

The "Grey Panther" drew up at the kerb as I mounted the steps leading up to Sexton Blake's front door. Before I had time to ring the door bell, a tall lean figure was at my side. It was Blake himself.

"Why, it's Mr Bond!" he exclaimed, grasping my hand and shaking it so vigorously that I winced, "Pleased to see you again!"

"Pleased to see you too," I replied, a trifle nervously. "I hope that you are not busy or that I am making a nuisance of myself."

"Not at all" laughed the famous detective, opening his front door with a latch key, "Come along in Mr Bond - I say, Mrs Bardell!" His voice rose as he hailed his equally famous landlady, and as the dining room door opened the old lady appeared, her hands white with what looked like flour. "I wonder if you would be so kind as to bring up a tray of tea to the consulting room, Mrs B".

The buxom landlady (or should I call her housekeeper beamed. Somehow one could not at that moment

associate her with the Mrs Bardell who has appeared to be so sterm with Tinker in many of the past Blake stories.

"Why certainly sir - has you got a visitor sir" she replied eyeing me up and down, "or is it a -----".

"Yes, yes, a visitor" interuupted Blake and they, turning to me, come along upstairs Mr Bond. I believe Tinker is amusing himself in the consulting room."

I followed him upstairs to that famous room which I had so often imagined in my mind's eye and on this, my second visit, I still had the feeling that I was walking in the footsteps of thousands of clients. It was as if the whole past history of that room flashed through my mind in an instant. But it is not possible to put into words that feeling I had when Blake opened the door and I espied Tinker, sat at a table and literally surrounded with newspapers and magazines from which he apparently was cutting out sections and paragraphs. It rather reminded me of the heading once used in the "Union Jack" for "Tinker's Note Book" I thought. How splendidly Mr Eric R.Parker had captured that scene for his sketch of Blake's young assistant.

My eyes travelled round the room and came to rest on Pedro He was in his favourite position too, sprawled out at full length on the hearth rug and looking very bored with life. His momentary raising of the head as I followed his master into the room was followed by a canine yawn as he observed that it was just another stranger who was apparently on good terms with his boss. His expression conveyed that and no more.

When Tinker saw who I was he jumped up from his chair and gave me another hand grasp second only to Blake's in it's firmness and friendship.

"How are you Mr Bond" he exclaimed, "How is the old "Digest" getting on these days-got any branch offices yet?"

I smiled. "Not quite" I replied "but we seem to be getting somewhere all the same- every week seems to bring us something new, and we have considerably added to our circulation since I last saw you.

"Good" said Blake settling down in his saddlebag chair and taking out that rather vicious looking old

briar of his "Take a seat Mr B.and tell us all about this venture of yours."

As I sat down in a most comfortable chair opposite Blake, Tinker offered me a cigarette from his case.

"Have one of these gaspers" he said "sorry they are only Woodbines - just shows what we have to come to in jolly old Baker Street.- no decent fags to be had". Blake, who was stuffing his pipe with his favourite tobacc laughed.

"I believe Mr Bond smokes a pipe like myself" he sai

"Well, I do at times sir" Ireplied, "and from the look of Tinker's cigarette case I think I had better do so today, thanks all the same.

I pulled out my special favourite curved pipe. It was a minuature of Blake's. rather massive model but I didn't mind for it was something of an ambition that had been accomplished when I had filled up with my favourite "Three Nuns" and sat back in my chair ready to talk.

But Sexton Blake had been eyeing my pipe all the while.

"Quite a neat little job that" he remarked "had it long?"

"Well, as a matter of fact I have had it just over twenty years now" I replied "It has always been my favourite pipe and strangely enough it was the first one I ever smoked".

"My word it must be rather matured by now" laughed Blake "And no doubt you have always smoked the same 'baccy in it eh?"

"Quite right sir" I said with a grin "and I have read many of your adventures with it going full blast too". And this last statement of mine was a fact. If ever I have smoked a pipe while reading a Blake story it has always been that little curved one which I did not have the nerve to tell Blake cost me 6d out of a Woolworth store way back in 1927.

I don't know if the detective was pleased at the thought of my having copied him shamefacedly, but anyhow he settled back in his chair while Tinker drew another between us and settled himself down.

For a moment there was silence. It was broken by Sexton Blake.

"Thanks for sending along that copy of your Annual"he said I found it a most interesting publication and was rather amazed when I looked down the list of characters who have adorned the pages of my casebooks.I didn't quite realise that I had been in opposition to so many shady types and most certainly did now dream that so many of them had completely faded out of the picture".

"I expect you are kept too busy with present day problems to worry much over the past" I replied "but as I remarked on my last visit here,we collectors are a lot of sentimentalists and prefer to think of you as you were in the old days.Somehow you don't seem to have the exciting cases you used to have.

"Maybe I don't want too many either" smiled Blake "it was a pretty strenuous life while it lasted you know. Just look at the ticklish problems that fellow Robert Murray found for me to solve. I nearly lost my life on dozens of occasions when I was working on his cases-and some of his contemporaries darn near bumped me off on occasions".

"Yes I know said I "but you must admit that some of the pre-war cases were far more fitted to your talents than are some of those which present day authors present for the solving thereof".

Tinker,who had been listening to our conversation intently, interrupted: I think we are gradually being put out of business".

Blake scowled at him.

"Nonsense" he grunted "there is still plenty of scope for private detectives".

"I don't know so much argued his assistant "the scientific methods in use to-day are rather beyond us guv'nor. Look at old Pedro there, he has not been on a scent of any importance for years. I doubt if the poor old fellow would know what to do if you told him to 'find" somebody".

"Well, he has most certainly been neglected in the stories"I admitted "but I expect his instinct would soon become alive if he were suddenly faced with a problem to interest his doggy mind".

"Of course he would" exclaimed Blake "the old chap is far from----------come in Mrs B."

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Have you returned the Questionnaire yet? Time is getting on!!

He broke off as Mrs Bardell knocked at the door and,at his bidding,entered the room with a tray of tea.

"Your cup o' tea sir" She announced "which I 'ope will be to your liking, though this yer modern himitation tea at double the pre-war prices is poor blooming stuff and no mistake".

"It will be fine I'm sure"said Blake kindly."Set it on that occasional table Mrs Bardell".

The old dame did as she was bid and in a few moments I had a steaming cup of tea in my hands which I sipped appreciatively. It was a real"cup o' tea"and no error.

"Speaking of bloodhounds and tracking down criminals" said Blake,stirring his cup vigorously (he was obviously a sweet tooth) "I am inclined to think that stories of this type have been rather overdone in the past and the modern reader wants something more exciting. That is why, in my estimation, you cannot read more of the uses to which we still put Pedro on occasions. Even if he is not taxed with the same problems as of old he is still doing a job of work as a housedog and a companion to Mrs Bardell during our absence on space. The modern youthful reader of detective stories would much rather read of an exciting chase by car or 'plane than of a slow, tedious tracking down of some insidious individual through thickly wooded country".

"That is probably so" I agreed reluctantly "but as I said, we older readers recall our youthful reading with pleasure and we used to like that sort of thing".

"Ah well, times change - like people"said Blake, draining his cup and relighting his briar, "How do tell us how that magazine of yours is going Mr B.

"Very well indeed sir" I said " We have had bouquets from all quarters during recent months and we are certainly leading the field in our own particular sphere.

"Careful there" grinned Tinker "Don't forget your contemporaries old man".

"Gosh, yes" I said "Perhaps I shouldn't have blown that trumpet too hard".

"Nonsense" cried Blake "Boost yourselves all you can - look how the daily papers do it- and how the public swallow their statements too".

"True" I agreed "but you see the other amateur papers all play their part in making our hobby popular and we must not be too boastful.But to tell you of some of the highlights of recent months,First there was the Annual.Now this was the first of it's kind ever attempted and proved successful beyond our wildest dreams.Put of course it dealt with all angles of the hobby of story paper collecting and not merely Blakiana,which is the part that really interests me. Then there has been very successful experiments with reproductions from the text of old stories and from miniature front covers. Look at these Mr Blake!

I pulled out a few C.D's from my inner pocket and handed them to Blake. The detective scanned them with interest.

"Pretty good" he remarked after glancing through them,"I particularly like the heading to Blakiana".

"That's good news to me I assure you" I exclaimed "It is my favourite page of you and I think most Blake fans like it equally well".

"I think I'd better subscribe to the C.D."said Blake "I might learn quite a bit about my past eh?"

I smiled."I doubt that" I replied,"But you COULD perhaps correct any over or understatements that may be made from time to time and--------".

Brrrr. Brrrr. Brrrr.

I was interrupted by the strident pinging to the telephone.

Blake reached out and grabbed his phone.

"Hullo"he said,a trifle impatiently I thought "Yes,this is Blake. Who? Oh Venner! He is? O.K.I'll come along at once. Right-o! Goodbye".

"Is that Sergeant Belford?" asked Tinker.

"Yes" grinned Blake rising to his feet "It was the housemaiden".

"What's up?".asked Tinker.

"You'll never guess" Laughed Blake "It appears that old Venner accompanied by Belford had been on the trail of some Black Marketeers down in Surrey. Something very hush-hush apparently.Anyhow it seems that Venner disguised himself for the purpose of finding things out

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