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THE COLLECTORS' DIGEST

Vol. 13 No. 150 Price 1s. 6d.

JUNE, 1959

Editor: HERBERT LECKENBY
12 Herbert Street,
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From the Editor's Chair

HALF WAY TO THAT SECOND CENTURY! Yes, here it is, No. 150! Phew! how time does fly; it seems only yesterday that we were anticipating the coming of No. 100. Nevertheless, it seems a long time to the day of No. 200 - August, 1963! Lots of things will have happened by then - we may have got the Ashes back, for instance. As my years are already so many I hardly dare anticipate the day; but if I have had the good fortune to be spared to be the man at the helm I know I shall still be backed up by the same loyal crew who have helped so much to make the C.D. such a remarkable success. God bless you all!

Well, now, owing to the extra size we have had to get started much earlier this month. If I find I have something else to say on other matters I shall have to work it in elsewhere.

When it was decided to have a bigger number, I said we would have 12 extra pages, but it was soon evident that that would not be sufficient, so I increased it to 16. Even then, owing to the length of some of the stories, it will be necessary to complete one in No. 151. I think you will agree that the efforts of our amateur authors were quite good ones, even though short stories are admitted to be the most difficult ones to write.

Now, may I just repeat what I said last month? If any reader who does not happen to be a Club member would like to help towards the extra cost, any sum no matter how small, will be gratefully received. Don't leave it all to the Club members.

Last, but by no means least, my public thanks to that great

fellow, Bob Whiter, for his top-hole cover. I had an idea for it, but the ever versatile Bob had a better one - to so appropriately work in the generous member without whom the stories would never have been written - LES (JOHNNY BULL) ROWLEY, as he is affectionately known to all who know him.

Now on to No. 200.

Yours sincerely,
HERBERT LECKENBY

****

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Blakiana....

Conducted by JOSEPHINE PACKMAN
27, Archdale Road, East Dulwich, London, S.E.22.

Primarily for the benefit of new members of the Sexton Blake Circle, but also for the interest of Blakiana readers generally, this month I am reproducing a short article on Dr. Huxton Rymer which originally appeared in the UNION JACK.

One of the most popular of the old characters - and, I believe, without exception the one with the longest run - Rymer first appeared in U.J. No. 488, dated 15.2.1913, under the title "When Greek meets Greek." He was still featured in the U.J. when publication of that paper ceased in 1933.

In addition to this, reprints of earlier Rymer stories appeared in the S.B.L. until 1938, while Mr. W. Howard Baker has kindly featured him in the current S.B.L. series - No's: 379 "Flashpoint for Treason", dated April, 1957 and 405 "High Heels and Homicide", dated May, 1958.

I hope you all enjoyed the opening instalment of Walter Webb's CENTURY-MAKERS. As each instalment appears, so you will find them more and more informative.

JOSIE PACKMAN

* * * * *

CENTURY-MAKERS
(And a few other interesting statistics)
BY WALTER WEBB

INSTALMENT TWO — "THE GRAYDON-DARRAN ERA"

With the promotion of the UNION JACK from a halfpenny to a penny weekly, there rose also one of those inexplicable happenings which were a not altogether infrequent feature amongst the various old boys' story papers. Only a couple of years or so previously the editor had taken a census, in order to discover just the kind of yarn which was accepted the most favourably amongst the readers of the U.J. The result of that ballot proved quite conclusively that detective tales were the most popular, especially those which featured Sexton Blake. Yet, for some unaccountable reason, Blake was discarded from the pages he had graced at intervals for a considerable period - from December, 1902 to October, 1904, to be precise, and, according to Mr. H. W. Twyman, in a Round Table chat in a much later U.J., it was only a

sudden inspiration on the part of the editor of that time that Blake was ever recalled.

That editor was W. H. Back - "Willie" to all his friends - and never did an editor's "hunch" pay such rich dividends, for no sooner was Blake recalled than there was an insistent demand for ever more stories about him. The result was that he came to be featured every week from issue No. 107, in a yarn entitled "The Cab-Driver Detective." But one cannot help wondering, why, if a character had attained such wide-spread acclamation, it should be dropped with such an utter disregard to popular opinion. However, our thanks to Willie Back's inspiration; and now to the business of greeting those other candidates in the race for the century of Blake stories. Alas, with two exceptions, they were soon to find the pace too hot, and destined to drop, one by one, at the wayside. Figures in parenthesis in front of their names denoting the order in which they took up their positions in the field - the remainder were introduced in the first instalment - here are the writers of the revival of Blake stories which commenced in 1904.

(15) T. G. DOWLING MAITLAND, (16) W. MURRAY GRAYDON (both making their debuts in the year 1904), (17) STANHOPE SPRIGG, (18) BEVERLEY KENT, and (19) ARTHUR S. HARDY, who entered the race in 1905.

With 8 Blake stories in 1905, W. Murray Graydon therefore beat Shaw Rae's previous highest total of 6 in the years 1897-8. And then this American-born author, with the most un-American style of writing ever, really let himself go, and in the following year - 1906 - he had 16 stories published. But this figure assumes even more formidable proportions when it is added that the total includes a Sexton Blake serial, "Spy and Conspirator", and Easter Double Number, "The Tram Ticket Clue", and a Christmas Double Number, "Five Years After", the latter being one of the best he ever turned out. All appeared in the U.J.

Entering the fray in 1906 were (20) CECIL HAYTER, who was to conceive those popular characters, Lobangu, Zulu chief of the Etbaia, and Blake's old school chum, Sir Richard ("Spots") Losely, and (21) E. ALAIS, who, it has been claimed, was a relative of the well-known writer, J, Harwood Panting. Alais introduced a somewhat weird type of criminal in one Joseph Humm, who was first introduced to U.J. readers as a footman in a millionaire's household, which post he was soon ousted from.

Until identity is definitely established there is bound to be some element of doubt concerning the eligibility of the next entrant to participate. But three U.J.'s, all by the same hand, No's. 153,

167 and 183 - are, I am confident, the work of the writer known as "Max Hamilton". And, since, with all his usual thoroughness and devotion to the hobby, Bill Lofts has proved Max's identity beyond all doubt, I have no hesitation in naming the new contestant as (22) CICELY HAMILTON. In any case, there is no doubt about her claim for inclusion, for it is known that Willie Back named her as one of his authors when he edited the U.J. about that time. A very talented and competent writer, a good speaker on a wide variety of subjects, firm supporter of the Women's Suffrage cause, she was a gifted recruit and much admired - as a writer - by Hamilton Edwards, for whom she did a lot of work when he edited the GIRL'S FRIEND.

Although he just failed to reach his previous year's figure, 1907 was another fruitful year for Graydon, and his 14 stories included a long serial in the Green 'un, entitled "Sexton Blake in the Congo", which commenced on the 26th January, and featured the old Zulu warrior, Shumpogaas. This was immediately followed by another serial, also in the BOY'S FRIEND, entitled "Across the Equator."

There is no doubt that Graydon was the mainstay of the U.J. at this period, with Mark Darran as his chief support. The latter invariably introduced the character of a somewhat stodgy and unimaginative Scotland Yard official named William Spearing into his stories, and it has been said that both occupied a room at the top of Carmelite House, from which they reeled off their yarns with astonishing rapidity. It was Darran's distinction to introduce Blake into BOYS' FRIEND 3D LIBRARY, his story "Sexton Blake's Honour" appearing in No. 10 of that famous publication, on the 4th January, 1907. Nine months later, on the 5th October, the second Blake story appeared in the Library, this being entitled "A Woolwich Arsenal Mystery", and written by he of the effervescent style, Beverley Kent. The year 1907, was a fairly busy one for Darran, whose 9 stories included three double-length efforts in "The Mesmerist Detective" (Summer Double Number), "The Slate Club Scandals" (Christmas Double Number), both in the U.J., and that afore mentioned B.F.L. Novel. Useful work during that year was submitted by Herbert Maxwell, and this quartette, with a story submitted here and there by (23) REGINALD WRAY, Hayter, Alais, Hardy and Maxwell Scott saw the year through to a quite satisfying end, with Graydon's yearly record remaining unsurpassed.

1908 was particularly noteworthy, because, during its passage, two authors of outstanding ability entered the arena, unfortunately with stays of an all too brief duration. First (24) MICHAEL STORM with that character which was to enjoy a quite unique popularity - George

Marsden Plummer. Just recently Bill Lofts, with customary zeal, proved for all time that Storm was indeed Plummer's creator, and although I was sure of the connection because of the unmistakable style as compared with the Abbotscrag and Ravenscar school and detective stories, I had no concrete evidence on which to base my claim, so it is very satisfactory to know that documentary proof has at last been unearthed.

The following brief mention of that grand historian, (25) D. H. PARRY, is as unjust as it is undeserved, for many articles could be written about him and his long and distinguished record of books. Just consider. In 1892, when CHUMS was founded by Max Pemberton (later Sir Max Pemberton) Parry was one of the several writers who contributed to that historic first number. Forty-eight years later, in the 1940 and last edition of the famous volume, he was still in harness, and although his name does not appear as a contributor, there is a drawing of him by RIP in characteristic pose, placidly smoking a pipe. A somewhat gaunt man, the sketch depicts him as being somewhere in the 70's, with a high forehead, a head almost devoid of hair, and with a moustache, military fashion, waxed at the ends. An editor, still alive, who knew him well, considers him the best of all the A.P. writers, a claim likely to be hotly disputed in some quarters, but one which commands the respect befitting the opinion of one whose knowledge of writers and writing extends and plunges to depths quite beyond the jurisdiction of the mere collector. Parry's Blake stories can be counted on the fingers of one hand, but there is immeasurable satisfaction in pointing him out as one of the many worthwhile contributors to the Sexton Blake story.

When did Robert, Son of William Murray Graydon, enter this long and enduring struggle? In most collectors' lists - as in my own - his name appears for the first time in the 1916 list of stories, no doubt. But it is very likely that he entered much earlier than this. Glancing through an old volume of CHUMS recently, a short story which appeared in the 16th January, 1907 issue, under the title of "A Surprise for Uncle Samuel" riveted my attention. It was an amateurish sort of effort, dealing with a case of mistaken identity, and involving an escaped lunatic, a baronet, and two boys, so much alike that they would be assumed to be twin brothers. Their identical appearance landed the baronet into an embarrassing position when he was faced with arrest, because it was believed that he was the lunatic who was being searched for, There was no name under the title, but in small print at the conclusion of the story was a name - ROBERT M. GRAYDON. So it would appear that the man who was to gain such popularity with

stories of the Confederation, Dr. Satira and Paul Cynos, commenced his career not with the A.P. but with the publishing firm of Cassell and Co., in the year 1907.

In bringing this instalment to its close, it should be emphasied that the total figure of authors given to date - 25 - does not comprise the full and complete list, for there are one or two stories of which the authorship is still unknown and which may have been penned by men other than those already given in this record. The origin of such stories as appeared in U.J. issues Nos. 81, 96, 104, 117 and 143, all by the same hand, remain undiscovered, as does the writer of No. 109, who may also have written No. 127. No. 130 is also unknown; but Alfred Barnard, I feel sure, wrote Nos. 111, 147, 151 and 192, although this has still to be verified. With new discoveries being made and known at the rate of practically one in every issue, through the medium of the DIGEST, verification may not be long delayed.

* * * * * * * * * *

DOCTOR HUXTON RYMER

(Reprinted from Union Jack No. 980 dated 22.7.1922)

Dr. Huxton Rymer originally made his name in the fields of medicine, specialising in surgery and attaining an eminence in that branch which placed him in the forefront of his contemporaries.

He it was who, in Vienna, had first discovered that very delicate hip operation which revolutionised modern surgery, and which he gave to the world through the medium of the Franz Josef Hospital. Europe and America had rung with the name of the great Dr. Huxton Rymer.

He had been the recipient of invitations from every University of note; a Pittsburgh millionaire had paid a fabulous sum to induce the wizard to make a rush journey to America to perform an operation on his young son; Royalty of every country had sought him; and decorations from scientific bodies had descended on him from every quarter.

And then, at the very apex of his fame, Dr. Huxton Rymer had suddenly and inexplicably dropped out of things. His mysterious disappearance was far more than a nine days' wonder, and a thousand-and-one theories were advanced to explain the puzzle.

But, though his pupils carried on the teachings of him whom they called "The Master", the surgeon did not return to haunts, and after a time the scientific world knew him no more.

Of his life and his doings after that there still remains extant a patchy record in the volumes of the famous "Index" which the famous criminologist, Sexton Blake, has patiently compiled over many years, and

a study of that would serve to provide the answer to many of the questions that have puzzled his former colleagues.

This record was a startling tale of criminal adventure in which Sexton Blake himself played no small part in pursuit of the errant doctor, and of which the chapters were laid in almost every part of the known globe, and in many unknown parts of it, too.

Then, as suddenly as he had drifted across Blake's orbit, he had drifted out of it, and it was not until Blake had once again come across him in India, during the course of a dangerous investigation there, that he knew that Rymer was still following a life of active criminal adventure.

After that Blake had again encountered him in New York during his investigations of a big whisky-smuggling conspiracy, and once later on, when he encountered him in London accidentally, in the grill-room of the Hotel Venetia.

On that occasion Blake had gone out of his way to inform Rymer that the old warrant for his arrest which had been issued by Scotland Yard had been quashed. The detective had gone even further, and had told Rymer that, providing he ran straight whilst in England, he, Blake, would not advise Scotland Yard that he had returned.

Dr. Huxton Rymer had apparently taken the advice to heart, for he had lain low for a considerable time. He had bought a small estate in Sussex, had spent a good portion of the money he had obtained in New York on fitting it up in a wonderful way, and had also devoted himself to experiments, to writing, and to the manufacture of scientific instruments of the most delicate nature.

But the restlessness of his temperament finally impelled him to conceive a scheme which he thought would satisfy his desires for criminal excitement, and yet keep him clear of the clutches of the law. Accordingly, he let it be known amongst the denizens of the underworld that he was prepared, for a substantial consideration, to advise on all subjects dealing with criminality.

His first case of this description - the affair of Mrs. Stuyvesant Courtlandt's jewels - once again brought him to the notice of Sexton Blake, and it was through information which reached him in this case that Sexton Blake discovered the existence of Rymer's estate in Sussex, which was called Abbey Towers. Thus also the alias of Rymer himself became known to him as "Professor Butterfield."

* * * * * * * * * *

THE GREAT GREYFRIARS CUP CONTEST

(Note: As the stipulation was four pages Annual size it has not been possible to get the four stories into sixteen pages C.D. size, so, as mentioned in my chat, it will be necessary to carry one of them over into the July number, particularly as it is longer than the others. It may also be necessary to encroach on some of our regular features. If so, it can't be helped, can it? We'll start off with Eric Fayne's story with the arresting title. H.L.)

- TOM MERRY FOR BORSTAL -
by Eric Fayne (London)

"Tom Merry's been arrested."

"What?"

Manners and Lowther almost shouted in reply to Baggy Trimble's startling announcement. It was enough to make fellows shout..

The next day, St. Jim's was breaking up for the Christmas holidays, and Tom Merry and Co had planned a celebration in Study No. 10 that evening to mark the welcome event. The party was timed to commence at 7, and the chums of Study No. 6, together with Figgins and Co of the New House had been invited, and had accepted the invitation.

Immediately after classes ended, Manners and Lowther had gone to Study No. 10 to decorate that celebrated apartment and to set out the Christmas fare which was to gladden the hearts of the guests. A hamper specially packed for the occasion, had arrived that day from Laurel Villa, and Manners and Lowther had removed the contents of the hamper, setting them out on plates on the snow-white tablecloth.

In the meanwhile, Tom Merry had departed for Rylcombe to collect a Christmas cake, baked and iced by Mr. Bunn, the village pastry-cook. Tom had said that he would be back at St. Jim's within half an hour, but six o'clock had boomed from the clock tower by the time that Manners and Lowther finished preparing Study No. 10, and Tom Merry had not yet returned. Paper garlands festooned the room, holly had been inserted over the picture frames, a bunch of mistletoe dangled from the electric shade overhead, and the table groaned under its mass of appetising viands.

After gazing at their handiwork for a few moments with satisfaction, Manners and Lowther strolled down to the big doorway of the School House to await the return of their leader. They were beginning to wonder what had happened to delay him.

The December dusk had long fallen over St. Jim's, but the dark sky glittered with stars. A mist, which had prevailed during the day, had cleared, and there seemed no reason why Tom Merry should be taking so long over his cycle-spin into the village.

As Manners and Lowther stood waiting in the doorway, a number of fellows came in from time to time. There was no prep to be done on this, the last evening of the term, and lock-up had been extended by an hour, so that Taggles would not be closing the main gates until 7.

The two Shell fellows peered into the gloom, and they became increasingly puzzled as the minutes ticked by and still Tom Merry did not return.

It was after half-past six when Levison and Cardew came in, muffled up against the chill December air.

"Seen Tom?" demanded Manners.

Levison unwound the muffler from his neck, and shook his head.

"Tom Merry? No! Has he gone out?"

"He went into Rylcombe on his bike. We expected him back at least half-an-hour ago."

"The Green Man opens at six" suggested Cardew.

Manners stared at him.

"What's that got to do with it?"

"He might have popped in for a quick one."

"Ass!" said Manners.

"That rustic hostelry looked very attractive when we passed it a while back," went on Cardew. "Some of the customers were singing, and seemed to be oiling up in readiness for an old-fashioned Christmas. Do you think it possible that Thomas, seeing the bright lights and hearing the festivity and the clinking of glasses, may have slipped in to join the merry throng?" He eyed the two Shell fellows seriously.

Manners grunted. He had no intelligible reply for such a bright suggestion.

And then Baggy Trimble happened. There was the sound of puffing and panting, accompanied by hurried footsteps from the dark quadrangle, and the fat fourth-former came into the radius of light from the doorway. Normally, Trimble did not move with speed - he had too much weight to carry. But now, he had exciting news to impart, and he was anxious to find listeners.

He rolled in at the doorway, his little gooseberry eyes almost popping from his fat face.

He panted out: "Tom Merry's been arrested."

And Manners and Lowther shouted "What?"

Trimble pumped in breath, while Manners and Lowther glared at him, and Levison and Cardew eyed him curiously.

"Oh, dear, what a shock!" moaned Trimble. "I never thought I'd live to see a St. Jim's chap yanked off to the cells by a bobby."

Cardew chuckled.

"Like Eugene Aram, with gyves upon his wrists," he murmured.

Lowther seized Trimble by the shoulder and shook him.

"You fat lunatic," he yapped. "What have you seen, and what do you mean, if you mean anything?"

Trimble twisted away, and rubbed his shoulder indignantly.

"I've seen Tom Merry arrested - that's what I've seen, so yah! I had a Christmas postal-order from my Aunt Emmie, and I went down to Rylcombe to cash it. When I came out of the post-office, there was Tom Merry walking along the High Street, with a big bogey's grip on his neck. There's no mistake, you fellows. There was plenty of light from the street lamps and the shops. I followed on, and Tom Merry was yanked into the police station like a sack of coke."

Cardew chuckled again. He said: "My beloved 'earers, bail is indicated. I suggest a whip-round in Lower School."

Manners and Lowther, more puzzled than angry, were staring at Trimble. That there was some grain of truth in his story was possible, but, with Trimble, it was always difficult to sift the wheat from the chaff.

"Do you know why Tom went to the police station?"demanded Manners.

"I think he'd been caught shop lifting," said Trimble.

"What?" Once again Manners and Lowther roared in unison.

Cardew burst into a laugh. He found something entertaining in the peculiar situation.

"The immaculate Thomas!" he said. "A fiver to a quid that his comment was 'I don't know what made me do it'".

"Shut up, you lackadaisical fool," snapped Manners. He looked worried. "What the dickens can have happened to Tom?"

Cardew thrust his hands into his pockets. He said, reflectively: "In this week's 'Wayland Gazette' there was a report of a young thug being arrested for carrying a razor and a cosh. Do you think that perhaps they searched Thomas, and found something of the sort? It's against the law, you know, to carry such weapons."

"Cheese it, old man," said Levison, though he was grinning.

Manners breathed hard. He glanced at his watch, which showed ten minutes to seven. Something certainly was delaying Tom, though Manners was not likely to believe that it was due to any of the reasons mischievously suggested by Cardew.

Manners said: "Look here, Trimble——"

Trimble raised his hand loftily.

"Don't speak to me, please, Manners. I'm not a snob, I hope, and I can be tolerant, but I object to being addressed by the pals of a prospective Borstal boy." Trimble's little fat nose was turned up even further than it had been elevated by nature.

"You fat slug," hissed Manners.

Levison and Cardew, both laughing, were turning away when Figgins, Kerr and Wynn came in at the door. Fatty Wynn was beaming. He addressed Manners and Lowther.

"It's nearly seven, you men. Is the Christmas feed ready?"

"No, it isn't," said Manners, shortly.

Levison and Cardew had halted, and Kerr looked shrewdly from one to another of the little group in the hall.

"What's the trouble?" he enquired.

Baggy Trimble supplied the answer: "Tom Merry's been arrested."

"What?" hooted Figgins, Kerr and Wynn, in their turn, with synchronised effect.

Cardew shook his head in mock concern.

He said: "The hitherto blameless Thomas has brought disgrace on his Alma Mater. If you have tears, prepare to shed them now. Thomas has been incarcerated in the cells of Rylcombe Police Station - for shop-lifting in the High Street."

Figgins and Co jumped.

Manners compressed his lips with annoyance.

"It's nothing, Figgy," he said, darting an angry glance at the humorous Cardew. "Tom Merry went into Rylcombe to collect our Christmas cake. He isn't back yet, and Trimble has rolled in with a tale that he saw Tom walking with a policeman."

Figgins whistled, and Fatty Wynn looked anxious. Fatty was thinking about the cake.

"The bogey had Tom Merry in a grip of iron," supplemented Trimble. "He said 'You come alonger me. We're getting too much of this sort of thing in Sussex. Borstal's the place for you!'"

Levison checked a chuckle as he saw the expression on Manners' face. It was evident that the humour of the occasion was quite lost

on Tom's closest chums.

"It seems possible," observed Cardew, quite undismayed by the annoyance he was causing, "that Thomas may have been arrested for carrying offensive weapons - a razor and a bicycle chain. If such is the case, take notice that next term the Terrible Three will be reduced to the Teddy Boy Two."

Smack.

Manners swung round, and his open hand came sharply across Cardew's smiling face.

"That's for your cheek," said Manners.

The smile left Cardew's face as though wiped away by a cloth. He hurled himself at Manners, who put up his hands at once.

"Can it, you two!" said Levison. He gripped Cardew by the collar, and pulled him back. Figgins stepped hastily in front of Manners.

Cardew jerked himself away from Levison. He straightened his tie. His burst of temper seemed to have passed as quickly as it had arisen, though the marks of Manners' fingers glowed on his white skin.

"Why stop him?" said Lowther. "Let Manners knock some of his dashed impudence out of him."

A whimsical smile hovered on Cardew's lips.

He said: "I'm ready - if you promise not to use a flick-knife."

"Here's Tommy - and he's got the cake."

All eyes were turned on the doorway, as Tom Merry came into the House from the dark quadrangle. His face was flushed from his brisk ride on the cycle, his cap was on the back of his head, and he carried a large parcel under his arm.

"Better late than never," he said, cheerfully. He looked over the staring fellows, and added: "What's up? Did you think I was a ghost?"

"It's just on seven. Where the dickens have you been?" demanded Lowther.

"I know it's seven. I got in just before Taggles locked the gates," said Tom. "You see, I had to go to the police station——"

"Oh!"

"Is there anything startling in that?"

Cardew laughed softly.

"Thomas, your pals find it very startling indeed. A stout youth, by name Trimble, informed us that you had been jailed for shop-lifting. Knowing your unblemished character, I felt it unlikely——"

"Trimble's an ass, and you're another," said Tom. "Levison will you oblige me by kicking Trimble?"

"With pleasure," said Levison, but Trimble was disappearing up the staircase at record speed, and he was not pursued.

"What happened, Tommy?" asked Lowther.

Tom Merry passed the large parcel into the open arms of Fatty Wynn, and removed his cap and scarf.

"I had an accident," he explained. "After I collected the cake from Mr. Bunn, I got on my bike, and as I rode along the High Street, a motorist opened his door without seeing me. The door caught the bike amidships, and I came a purler. I wasn't hurt, and the bike wasn't damaged, but——"

"Is the cake all right?" demanded Fatty Wynn, anxiously.

Tom Merry laughed.

"I think the cake's all right, though the parcel rolled in the road. But P.C. Crump saw what happened, and he insisted that I should go to the police station to give particulars. Well, I didn't want to get the motorist into trouble just at Christmas time, though he was a careless lunatic. I spent half an hour trying to pursuade Crump not to make a case of it, but he's pretty determined. Anyway, the motorist admits what happened, so I shan't be called as a witness, luckily."

Manners grunted. "You might have broken your neck."

Fatty Wynn added: "You might have wrecked the cake."

Cardew shook his head sadly.

"How disappointing life can be!" he observed. "What a sensation it would have been for the close of term, if Thomas had gone to Borstal. I'm sure the whole institution would have taken him for a model, and he'd have reformed all the inmates thereof."

Manners and Lowther looked warlike, but Tom Merry only smiled.

"If Cardew's finished his funny turn, we'll go up to the feed. Blake and his gang will be waiting. You and Cardew had better join us, Levison. There's tons for all."

"Thanks, Tommy, we will," said Levison. Manners looked rather grimly at Cardew, but made no comments.

The eight juniors ascended the stairs, and made their way towards the Shell studies. The light was on in No. 10 and Blake, Herries, Digby, and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy were awaiting their hosts.

"We thought you were never coming," said Blake. "Was the invitation for this Christmas or next?"

"Absence makes the heart grow fonder - and sharpens the appetite," said Tom, cheerily. "Pile in, everybody."

As ten hungry fellows seated themselves, not without wedging and pushing, on chairs and boxes placed round the table, Cardew re-

mained in the passage. He signalled to Arthur Augustus, who joined him with a rather puzzled expression on his face.

"Weally, Cardew——"

"Can I beg a word of advice, Gussy?" Cardew was serious. "Would you, as an expert on etiquette, regard it as infra dig to sit at the same table as a fellow who has just smacked your face?"

Arthur Augustus screwed his monocle in his eye, and gazed severely at Cardew.

"I hope you have not been scwapping with Lowthah, Cardew——"

"Not at all. I'm merely stating a case. Would it be out of the question to feed with a man who has clouted you?"

D'Arcy was thoughtful. After a moment, he said: "You seem to be talking in widdles, Cardew. But, since you pose the question, I must say that I should wegard it as imposs to bweak bwead with a fellow who had wecently stwuck me."

Cardew heaved a sigh of relief.

"There is no bread, Gussy, and the same objection could hardly apply to the breaking of cake. So let us break cake, before Fatty Wynn scoffs the lot." He entered the study, and called out: "A merry Christmas, everybody."

And a very merry Christmas party it was that evening in Tom Merry's study.

* * * *** * * *

HANDY'S EXCITING CHRISTMAS
by Jack Wood (Northern)

"Nelson Lee must die, and quickly."

The words, spoken almost in a whisper so that they did not carry far beyond the speaker and his companion at the quiet table in a corner of the typical country inn on the outskirts of the Somersetshire village of Somerton, came clearly to a young man sitting with his wife at a corner table some distance away.

His abnormal hearing enabled him to catch the words, and he half turned so that he could see the speaker. He saw two men, hidden in the gathering gloom of a wintry afternoon. One was slight, almost un-noticeable but for the high domelike forehead which betokened the man of great intellect, and the piercing eyes which the watcher could almost feel from his vantage point.

The other man, more impressive, was taller and with an air about

him. His reply was only just caught by the observer.

"I agree, Professor, but we have not had much luck in the past."

"That, Jim, must change. I have been in touch with some of my old friends, and two of the ablest, Marshall Bond, the great financier, and Ivor Hayes, the eminent lawyer, will be joining us tomorrow. Then, with your help, we can begin my new campaign. But, first, Lee must be dealt with, and fortunately for our purposes he is down here spending Christmas at Somerton Abbey with that young brat of his, Nipper, and those troublesome boys from St. Frank's, who have spoiled so many of my plans in the past. But let us go and meet Simpson Lorne, the painter, who has got a cottage near the Abbey. He will be able to tell us more about the movements of Lee and the boys."

Professor Cyrus Zingrave, one-time Chief of the infamous League of the Green Triangle, and his companion, whom Nelson Lee and Nipper would have had no difficulty in recognising as an old enemy, Douglas James Sutcliffe, Jim the Penman, rose, and walked out into the snow of a darkening afternoon.

They did not notice the watcher, his eyes sparkling with the thrill of a new adventure, following them along the lonely road through the deserted village. Even if they had turned round, they would only have seen what appeared to be a young courting couple, oblivious to their surroundings, following behind them.

How were they to know that the well-known Gay Desperado, Norman Conquest, and his charming young wife, Pixie, had overheard their conversation and were once again on the track of the ungodly!

* * *

"Glorious".

Nipper, assistant to Nelson Lee, made the observation as he stood on the terrace at Somerton Abbey.

"Begad, you're right, dear boy," agreed Sir Montie Tregellis-West, and the third member of the group, Tommy Weston, grunted assent.

The chums of Study C in the Ancient House were indeed looking at a glorious scene. Their gaze took in the frozen lake, glinting in the frosty brilliance of a winter evening and the reflected glow of myriads of coloured lanterns.

Before them all was gaiety and bustle. Workmen under the guiding hand of their host, the youthful Duke of Somerton, and his uncle Lord Norbury, had cleared the heavy fall of snow from the lake, and all was set for the night's carnival dancing and skating on the strong ice.

Behind them the grey stone of the ancient Abbey, once the ancestral home of Saxon kings from whom the Duke claimed descent, had been softened by the white snow.

They walked slowly down the steps to the lawn stretching to the lake. Their progress was slow because they had to keep stopping to chat with groups of young people enjoying the activity.

Willy Handforth, captain of the Third, was laying down the law to a group of his fellow-fags, while William Napoleon Browne, the genial skipper of the Fifth, was in earnest conversation with Doris Manners near one of the refreshment tents. Horace Stevens, his bosom companion, was deep in conference with some workmen fitting up an improvised stage for an entertainment to follow later in the evening.

"We've had some grand times and thrilling adventures here in the past," went on Nipper, "but, my sons, this is the best Christmas of all. Everybody's here, including the governor, and Dorrie....."

"And the Moor View girls," put in Tommy Watson, whose sister, Violet, was among the crowd of boys and girls whom they joined round the refreshment marquee.

"Great doughnuts, it's prime." Fatty Little was comfortably feeding at the refreshment counter as if dinner was more than the half hour away it was in reality.

Nipper and Company waved a greeting to Mary Summers and some of the girls from Moor View who were waltzing on the ice, and hastened to put on their own skates in order to join them.

On the lake the boys of St. Frank's were skating with their companions from Moor View. Edward Oswald Handforth, the leader of Study D in the Ancient House, was arguing about his skating abilities with his long-suffering chums, Church and McClure.

"Rot," he roared. "Of course I can skate to the end of the lake and back. Just watch this."

He swung round, lost his balance and sat down heavily. His chums yelled unfeelingly.

"You rotters, I'll show you," roared Handy. He scrambled to his feet, and reddening under the amused glances of Irene Manners and her chums, made another effort.

"Do you want a push, Ted," queried Irene, stifling her laughter.

Handy smothered a hasty retort, and set off for the end of the lake. Floundering helplessly, he gathered momentum and tore for the bank, which he hit amid a flurry of snow and the uncontained laughter of his chums who were racing behind him.

Nipper was slightly ahead of the others as they swung into the

bank to rescue Handy, but to his surprise he saw two men pulling the burly Removite on to the bank. He was still some distance away when he saw that the men were hurrying a protesting Handforth towards the lane which bordered the lake at the lower end.

Then they disappeared amid the shrubbery and when Nipper and the rest arrived, there was no sign of them. And, as Nipper pointed out, no footprints on the virgin snow!

* * *

"Obviously the group must have gone underground," said Nelon Lee some minutes later when the excited and anxious schoolboys had brought him to the scene. And so it proved, for with the aid of torches it was possible to see a half-hidden opening behind a small shrubbery.

"Be careful boys," said Nelson Lee. "These openings often lead into the vast underground caves which abound in this part of the country and are a source of great danger to the unwary and unprepared."

The wisdom of Nelson Lee's warning was seen later as, following the detective into the opening, the boys found that it dropped steeply into a low cavern. Beyond them was a dark, uninviting lake leading obviously into another cavern, and Nipper quickly found signs that a boat had been moored near the bank.

Under Nelson Lee's directions, another boat was fetched from the Abbey boathouse, and it was decided that Nipper, and Handy's pals, Church and McClure, should accompany him into the unknown depths. The others would follow with marker, beacons and flares so that the search party should not get lost in the tunnels underground.

"These tunnels and caves," Lee reminded them, "can stretch for miles. Many of them are completely unknown, while others are offshoots of the Cheddar Caves and those at Wookey."

The expedition progressed slowly, for every step had to be carefully watched. There were many hidden terrors awaiting the unwary in caves and tunnels many of which were unknown to man, at least since the days centuries ago of the British cavedwellers. Vast, gloomy lakes, winding tunnels, low roofs, made the search party's task difficult, but to the experienced eye of Nelson Lee there were signs, however slight, of the hurried progress of the kidnappers.

At last, after hours of searching, Lee and his companions saw a faint unnatural light ahead. A whispered warning and the party made the final approach in silence.

* * *

As they drew nearer, they could see that the light came from

torches and flares in a small cavern from which in the flickering light other tunnels could be seen leading into the blackness.

As Lee watched the scene, he could see Handy in the middle of a group of men, his hands tied behind his back. He glanced at the men surrounding the Removite.

"Zingrave - and Jim the Penman. Most interesting," he whispered to Nipper.

His whisper, magnified by the natural properties of the cave, echoed back alarmingly.

"Yes, indeed, my dearLee," came the voice of the Professor. "Come in - with your hands up. And don't let any of your companions try any tricks, otherwise this gun will go off, with serious consequences."

Nelson Lee, Nipper, Church and McClure stepped into the lighted cavern.

"A moment I have long waited for, my dear Lee," purred Zingrave.

"We meet again, in less pleasant circumstances than our last meeting," observed Sutcliffe, with an unpleasant laugh. "I thought the kidnapping of one of your young friends would bring you on the scene."

"A neat trap," remarked Nelson Lee, "but you have had us in similar circumstances before and we always have escaped."

"But not this time," put in Professor Zingrave. "This time, my friend, it is the end."

"Not just yet," came a voice from one of the other tunnels. "O.K. Pixie, let Sweet William and his coppers have their men."

Zingrave, Sutcliffe and their companions were too flabbergasted to try and shoot their way out of trouble. They jumped for the other tunnels, but policemen were guarding every one, and the scuffle was soon over. Zingrave and company were led away, and Nelson Lee and the juniors thanked their rescuers.

"We've been watching them for a couple of days," said the Gay Desperado, "and Sweet William will soon be looking for Zingrave's loose cash. I'm afraid he's too late. Come on, Pixie."

"I say, who on earth are they, governor?" asked Nipper in bewilderment.

"Some useful friends in time of trouble," replied Lee. "You know, they remind me very much of Waldo and Eileen Dare."

"By George, yes," put in Handforth, who had by now recovered his full faculties, and was explaining to Church and McClure how he had known all the time that he was being used as a trap for Nelson Lee!

In fact, so often did he take the credit for the whole amazing

adventure, that Church and McClure forgot their long-suffering habits and bumped their study leader soundly on the ice before throwing him headlong into a heap of snow beside the lake.

After that even Handy took the hint, and forgot all about his strange Christmas in the gaiety of the evening.

He managed a few dances with Irene, and joined in the laughter later when, thinking he was kissing her under the mistletoe, he found he had been fooled by his minor, who had bet his chums in doughnuts that he could easily fool Ted. Irene, of course, had been in the plot from the start, and in the spirit of Christmas Handy took it all in good part, though mentally vowing to get even with Willy later!

* * * * * * * *

QUELCHY'S CHRISTMAS PUDDING

By Frank Unwin (Merseyside)

"Not old Quelchy!"

William George Bunter sounded indignant.

After all, how else could a fellow feel after wangling an invitation to Wharton Lodge for Christmas, and then learning that Mr. Henry Samuel Quelch, the rather grim and austere Remove master, was also to be a guest?

"Not Quelchy!" repeated Bunter.

"Yes, Quelchy, old fat man," replied Harry Wharton, gently. "He's an old pal of my uncle's, you know. In any case, we shan't see much of the old bean. He'll spend most of his time with uncle and Ferrers Locke."

"Ferrers Locke!" howled Bunter, in dismay, "That other beast!" "Is he coming too?"

"He's coming too," assented Harry, "so you'd better watch your p's and q's, old fat bean."

But Billy Bunter declared there and then that he would not be found dead in the company of two such awful beasts, and that, instead, he would honour "dear old Mauly" with his company over the hols.

To which Johnny Bull remarked, "Good!" and Bob Cherry, "Fine!" and Frank Nugent, "Spiffing!" which made the fat junior suddenly promise that, despite those two beasts, he would not dream of letting down his"dear old pals."

Greyfriars was "breaking-up" on the morrow, and the Wharton Lodge party would comprise the Famous Five, with the exception of

Inky, who was flying to India to visit his family, Bunter, the Bounder and Tom Redwing, Henry Samuel Quelch, and Ferrers Locke, the famous detective, who was also an old friend of Colonel Wharton. Everything pointed to a really jolly Yuletide.

* * *

"Prime!"

Billy Bunter was stretched out in the most comfortable armchair at Wharton Lodge. There were mince-pies to the right of him, a dish of fruit to his left, and in front of him lay an open tin of sticky toffees.

It was a cosy scene on this wintry Christmas Eve. The old, panelled hall was illuminated with a blazing log fire in the wide, old-fashioned fireplace. Holly and mistletoe were in abundance, and a huge, decorated Christmas tree stood in one corner.

Ferrers Locke was smoking a cigar as he chatted with his two old friends, Colonel Wharton and Mr. Quelch. Harry Wharton and his friends were noisily discussing the day's revelries, now past, and the morrow's yet to come.

Outside, the scene was delightful. The extensive grounds of the Lodge were under several inches of snow; and it was still falling blotting out the fields and meadows, blanketing the trees and hedges, and transforming the landscape into a veritable winter wonderland.

There was a lull in the conversation as Mr. Quelch proudly displayed a magnificent gold watch, which, he explained with justifiable pleasure, had recently been presented to him by a certain Historical Society as a mark of esteem for services rendered. Undoubtedly, it was a handsome "ticker."

Even Bunter left off munching to admire it. In his own waistcoat pocket reposed his own timepiece. Despite the fat Owl's protestations as to its value, the sad fact remained that it was rolled gold, it had not gone for several years, and its current market value, in the opinion of his studymate, Toddy, was about ninepence.

The little round eyes behind the big round spectacles gleamed as they fastened on that valuable "ticker." Bunter resented Quelchy's presence at Wharton Lodge: all schoolmasters were beasts, in his opinion, and Quelch was the biggest beast of them all. Actually, for all his severity, Harry Wharton and his friends had a deep respect for their form-master, and for all his strictness in the form-room, he was proving a very agreeable and benign guest at Wharton Lodge.

But William George Bunter always felt that those gimlet eyes

were boring into him. No doubt it was a guilty conscience, but the fat junior did not like it.

His eyes gleamed slyly at Quelchy's watch.

"I say, you fellows!" he breathed.

"Hallo! hallo! hallo! What's biting you, old porpoise?"

"Oh, num-nothing," replied Bunter, hastily, as Quelch glanced in his direction. And he left it at that.

* * *

"Pinched!"

"Quelchy's gold ticker!"

"During the night!"

Harry Wharton's face was serious as he confirmed the startling news. Apparently, Mr. Quelch had placed the watch on his bedside table before switching off the light. This morning it had disappeared.

The Remove master, in spite of the heavy snow, had left his window open, and there were signs of an intruder, but the falling snow had obliterated most of the traces. On the other hand, Quelch had not bothered to lock the bedroom door, so it could have been an inside job, although Harry was inclined to discount this theory.

All the Removites were sympathetic, with the exception of Smithy, who remarked, characteristically, that "beaks" were "beaks", and whatever befell them served them jolly well right, and Bunter, who appeared to regard the whole affair as a huge joke.

Christmas Day had dawned, bright and sunny. The snow had ceased to fall, but it was deep, and crisp and even. A jolly day lay ahead, and they were all prepared to spend the happiest Yuletide of their young lives. But the news that a theft had been perpetrated rather put a damper on things.

"He! he! he!" came from Bunter.

"You fat porpoise!" grunted Johnny Bull, "what are you sniggering for? Do you know anything about it?"

Six pairs of eyes fastened on Bunter.

"Beast!" yelled Bunter. "What could I know about it. Don't you fellows go round making out that I've snaffled the old gargoyle's ticker! And if Wells tries to make out that he saw me outside Quelchy's room late last night, he's a fibber! Come to think about it, it might have been Wells himself. He was there, you know!"

"What are you babbling about, you fat chump?" demanded Harry.

"Nothing!" howled Bunter. "Don't I keep telling you?"

"Oh, kick him!" remarked Johnny. And they had to leave it at that.

"I say, you fellows, pass the turkey!"

"Coming up, old fat man." Tom Redwing passed the turkey.

"Pass the stuffing, Cherry!" Bob obligingly passed the stuffing.

"I say, Bull, don't hog all the gravy. Leave some for a chap!"

The Owl of the Remove was in his element. This was Christmas Dinner at Wharton Lodge, and the occasion when even Bunter surpassed himself. Colonel Wharton had more than once gazed with considerable astonishment at his gargantuan efforts. Mr. Quelch glanced at him, frowned, and then smiled. Ferrers Locke had stared, then grinned, cheerfully. Really, Bunter was worth watching.

And now, the Christmas pudding, in all its glory, had arrived; a "thing of beauty and of joy forever." Clara, the cook, had really excelled herself this time. Portions were passed round, and even Quelch, in spite of certain qualms beneath his waistcoat, was determined to play his part manfully.

Picking up his spoon, he delved into the rich, brown pudding. It was many years since the rather elderly Remove master had dared to risk such a luxury as this. But he was prepared to do his duty, and to risk the consequences just for Christmas Day.

Then he paused, uncertainly.

His spoon had contacted some hard, metal object.

He prodded again. There was no doubt about it, something was wrong. Then he uttered a startled exclamation as his spoon uncovered an object.

"Why! What! What! Bless my soul!"

He blinked in astonishment at his Christmas pudding, as if doubting the evidence of his own eyes.

"Upon my word!"

All eyes were fastened on Henry Samuel Quelch, who almost spluttered in bewilderment at the sight of the "thing" in his pudding.

"Goodness, gracious me!" "It appears to be my watch!"

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Bob Cherry, "Quelchy's ticker!"

It was, indeed, Quelchy's "ticker", very slimy - very sticky, but otherwise in good working order, as it was still ticking strongly.

"Good gad!" exclaimed the old colonel.

"He! he! he!" came from Billy Bunter, still with his mouth full.

Ferrers Locke rose quickly, with the faintest glimmer of a smile upon his face.

"Gentlemen! Boys!" he appealed, "may I crave your indulgence for a few brief moments. I really must apologise to Mr. Quelch for the present condition of his watch, for I have to confess that I was fully

aware of its present whereabouts. You will all be relieved to learn that it was not stolen, as was at first feared, but that Mr. Quelch has been the victim of a rather misguided and thoughtless prank."

All eyes - and ears, were fastened on the famous detective.

"It was, of course, an "inside job", explained Ferrers Locke. "This morning, I must confess, I considered it extremely likely that Mr. Quelch's watch had been stolen by some passing thief in the night, who had climbed through the open window. However, after a little investigation, I realised that the so-called "theft" was no more than a practical joke."

The juniors looked at one another. Mr. Quelch sat, wondering, but considerably relieved. The detective continued.

"The culprit preferred to enter Mr. Quelch's room by way of the window to add weight to the theory that some passing tramp had committed a theft." Ferrers Locke paused, and looked at Bunter. "Bunter came to mind——"

"Beast!" howled that worthy, "It wasn't me!"

"Bunter came to mind, at first," repeated Locke, "especially as Wells had considered it his duty to inform me that he was acting suspiciously outside Mr. Quelch's room late last night. This morning I inspected the room and made a small, though important, discovery, which was sufficient to give me proof of the culprit's identity. No doubt he is feeling rather foolish, and, I hope, repentant, at this moment."

Ferrers Locke suddenly faced the Bounder, who was sitting, rather pale-faced, and a little sullen.

"Vernon-Smith". No doubt Sexton Blake would call this affair "The Clue of the Pyjama Button." It took me five minutes to discover that a pyjama button which I picked up in your form-master's bedroom belonged to you. I was very fortunate in also discovering a sticky, brown stain on one of your pyjama sleeves - undoubtedly a sample of cook's very delicious Christmas pudding."

There was a twinkle in the detective's eyes as he turned again to Colonel Wharton and Mr. Quelch.

"My visit to the kitchen was very rewarding," he smiled. "It was obvious that the pudding had recently been tampered with. Rather an ingenious hiding-place, I must confess. I trust Mr. Quelch will accept my apologies when I tell him that I had not the heart to ruin such a magnificent Christmas pudding before it was served, in order to extract his gold watch. He will, I am quite sure, be the very first to agree that it would have been a great injustice towards our very excellent

Clara. And I feel quite certain that Vernon-Smith is very sorry for his foolish prank, and will express his apologies to his form-master."

Ferrers Locke sat down, still smiling.

All eyes were fixed on Herbert Vernon-Smith, who sat, silent and shamefaced. Tom Redwing looked rather shamefaced too. Johnny Bull was scornful; Colonel Wharton, indignant.

"He! he! he!" from Bunter, broke the silence.

Smithy sat with a very red face. To do him justice, he was rather ashamed of his action.

However, Quelch played up sportingly, and after a very handsome apology, very quickly regained his good humour. Everything was "all serene." Even Smithy was forced to admit that Quelchy was a "brick."

After dinner, which was, after all, a huge success, Billy Bunter sticky, happy and almost bursting, remarked to Mr. Quelch: "I say, Sir, you needn't have worried if your watch hadn't turned up. I'd have lent you mine."

At which, even Henry Samuel Quelch had to smile!

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THE ROOKWOOD CAROL SINGERS

By W. H. Broster (Midland)

CHAPTER 1

"Br-r-r, jolly cold, but not much like Christmas. Wonder how long those bounders will be?" Thus George Raby of the Fourth Form at Rookwood. "Train due in any time now" said Newcombe. "But you can never tell with these local services." It was cold but so far the chums of Rookwood had seen no snow at Upper Freresby, where they were staying with Newcombe's uncle. "Jolly glad Jimmy and Lovell are able to come," said Raby, "happy family again."

"Yes, rather, except for that fat clam, Muffin. He would push his fat carcase on to me. By the way, old man, where is the idiot?"

"Where's the buffet, if there is one on this station. Could do with a snack myself, come to think of it." Newcombe grinned. "You won't find any buffet on this old ruin. Hardly ever used except market days. You find the nearest slot machine if you want Tubby."

"I don't want him" growled Raby, "I don't want him at any price. Any body can have the fat slug for me, but we don't want him in any trouble." There was a yell further down the little station.

"Yarough! Help you fellows! Help!" It was Muffin and up to his usual tricks. The two Rookwood juniors hurried round the little

waiting room. Muffin was straining at a chocolate machine. "Help me, you chaps. Don't stand there staring. Get my fingers out of this dashed slot." Raby grunted. "You shouldn't put them in you fat clam".

"You silly owl, I didn't do it on purpose" roared Muffin. "I was only - "

"Only what?" asked Newcombe.

"Well you know - " gasped Tubby.

Arthur Newcombe grinned, "Yes, we know. You were trying to get more than your pennies worth."

"Pennyworth" hooted Muffin, "it's sixpence in these blessed things, and not much for sixpence either. But get my fingers out, you rotters."

Raby glared at him, "You fat scrounger! Serve you right if we left you to the Station Master," and lifted his foot.

"Yoops!" hooted Muffin as Raby kicked. "Ow! Oh! crickey!" This last exclamation more of surprise than hurt. His flinching and squirming when Raby kicked him had jolted his fat paws loose from the machine.

The train rolled slowly in. At a window they caught sight of two Rookwood caps. "Here they are. Hi, you fellows!" They stared in surprise as the train came to a halt. "My hat! Not Jimmy and Lovell. Look who it is!" grunted Raby. "Peele and Gower of our form" gasped Muffin.

"Fancy seeing you fellows up here." Sneering Peele turned to Gower, "You never said we should run into these chaps." "I didn't know. My uncle wouldn't know them either. Anyway, what's it matter?"

Gower was uneasy. He glanced towards the station exit. "Here's Percy", he said as a dark, undersized fellow of about seventeen lounged through the doorway. "Percy Bertle," Newcombe frowned. "This your cousin, Gower?" "Yaas, you know him?" Newcombe pursed his lips, "I know him", and turned his back. "Hallo, hallo, here we are, all merry and bright," said a cheery voice. Jimmy Silver had arrived. "How are you, you fellows?" boomed Arthur Edward Lovell. "Tubby Muffin as well, large as life and fatter than ever. Hasn't Newcombe managed to drown you in the river?" "Oh really, Lovell, you rotter!"

"Hallo, who's this? My only sainted Aunt Tabitha. Peele and Gower." "Yes, they came up on the same train as you", offered Newcombe. "Didn't you know?" "No, by jove, but that explains the funny smell we noticed."

"Now, now, Lovell, old man" murmured Jimmy, "no ructions."

Peele scowled at this, "Alright, Lovell, we know what to expect

from you."

"You know these chaps, Peele?" asked the dark fellow after Gower had introduced them. "Know them, I should say so. Upstart gang, and that chap Lovell the worst of the lot."

"Why didn't you punch his nose?" asked Bartle. "We-ell, you see," commenced Peele. "He, he, he" cackled Gower. The idea of Peele punching Lovell's nose seemed to amuse him.

They followed cousin Percy into the forecourt of the little station where a large Austin car was waiting. "No chauffeur" murmured Peele, looking at Gower. "I can drive alright. Old enough, and not much danger on these old roads," said Bartle.

Away up the road they could see the cheery little group of Rookwood fellows footing it out, the fat figure of Muffin panting behind. A gleam of mischief came into Percy Bartle's eye. "Let's hold on a bit you fellows. Have a smoke before we start off." Peele and Gower stared at him. He grinned and it wasn't a nice grin. "Halfway between here and Newcombe's place there is a narrow bridge over the Frere. If we time it we can get to the bridge same time as they do and make them scatter. The road is very narrow too and a nasty ditch at one side, and," he grinned again, "with the rain we have been having the ditch is full and the road itself non too dashed pleasant."

CHAPTER 2.

"Who's that chap who met Peele and Gower?" asked Jimmy Silver. "Not a very prepossessing sort of individual." "You mean he looks as big a rotter as Peele and Gower", growled Arthur Edward Lovell. "Well, maybe, but peace on earth to all men, you know, old man. But who is he Newcombe?" A clouded expression spread over Newcombe's honest face. "To start with, you fellows, I don't want any trouble with him. His father and my Uncle Ned are not exactly the best of friends and there is more to it than that." He paused. "Well, the thing is, both are after the same piece of property. Uncle was born and reared down here and the village life means a lot to him, if you know what I mean? They have not got a village hall here at Upper Freresby and Uncle and 'Toby Jug' have this property in mind for a village community centre. Actually, it is an old house and quite a fair sized piece of ground to it. Next to Uncle Ned's place." "Who the dickens is 'Toby Jug?" exclaimed Raby. Newcombe grinned. "Oh! that is the rector, the Reverend Tobias Judson. Quite a decent sort really. Reminds you of Greeley, about the same build too."

In the car, which by now was purring slowly up the road in their wake, much the same line of conversation was going on. Young Bartle

was giving his cousin and Peele his version of the controversy over the coveted house on the outskirts of the village. "Where is this place you are talking about?" said Gower, "I can't think of it." "Oh old Mainwaring's estate, next to the Newcombe menagerie. Dashed cheek of them wanting it for the use of these village clodhoppers. My father could make a nice little road-house of it." He scowled at the group of cheery juniors ahead. "Hallo, who's that climbing on the parapet of the bridge?" exclaimed Cuthbert Gower. "Look's like a little girl. One of the villager's brats. She looks like tumbling over, balanced like that" said Bartle. "Mind what you are doing when you go by her," Gower was his usual timid self, "I don't like this game. The kid don't look so good on the bridge there. If she should - " "Shurrup, you funky ass," growled Peele. "We shall be past her when we up-end those cads."

Meanwhile Jimmy Silver and Co. were passing the bridge. "I say, little missey" said Jimmy to the little girl. She seemed a happy little soul of some of seven years. "Don't you get leaning over the bridge wall too far." He was eyeing the swollen river below as he spoke. There had been a lot of rain the previous week. "I'se alright. I shan't fall over," smiled the little girl. "I can walk across the wall, I can."

"Well don't try now," said Jimmy, "the water is too cold and wet for bathing."

They were nearly past the bridge, when with a burst of speed and a loud honking of the horn, the big Austin car was on them. "Careful you silly fools," shouted Newcombe. "Oh! look out there." Jimmy Silver was looking back towards the bridge. "Great Scott! The little girl, she's gone." "Oh, my hat! She's tumbled into the river you fellows." But Jimmy was speeding like a deer now. With a tremendous bound he had cleared the low edge of the bridge. The little girl was struggling in the swiftly flowing river. Jimmy picked himself up, as he had sprawled when he landed on the river side of the ridge, he went on running up the bank, throwing off his overcoat and coat as he ran. Some rushes were growing by the water and the girl's body was pulled up short by them for a moment. This was Jimmy's chance. He took a mighty leap over the bed of rushes and clutched the girl. "B-r-r-". The water was deadly cold, and took away the Rookwood junior's breath. But he held on to the little girl's dress and also clutched the rushes with his other hand. "Alright now missy," he gasped. "Alright you'll soon be out now." But the little girl could not speak. Her blue eyes took a last look at Jimmy and then closed. She had lasped into

unconsciousness. "Hold on, old man. Give us your hand, Newcombe and you hang on to Raby." Lovell was not far behind Jimmy when he had run along the bank. "I'm all right. Grab the kid." Jimmy pushed the child towards Lovell. The unconscious girl was soon on the bank in Newcombe's arms. Lovell tugged at Jimmy Silver. Jimmy was having trouble with the rushes. His cap had gone and he was soaked up to his neck. "Good job you didn't dive in, Jimmy", gasped Lovell, "you would never have got out of them blessed reeds."

By now the three fellows from the car had come on the scene. Even Peele was looking troubled. "Is she alright?" thus Bartle. "You rotten cads," shouted Lovell, if you had not hooted as you went by the kid would have been alright. Oh you cowardly curs." George Raby pushed back his cuffs. "Hold on", said Newcombe, we've got to get this kid to a doctor or at least to her home. Wonder who she is? Bartle gulped, "I know that much. It's old Mainwaring's grandchild." "That's a blessing for one thing," exclaimed Newcombe, "the house is only just over the hill, a few hundred yards away. Anyway, this is old Mainwaring's ground." "Tell you what," Jimmy broke in, "You three take her in the car. It won't take you many minutes, quicker than carrying her. Hurry up, don't start any arguing." "We aren't going to." Bartle was only too eager to do what he could. Like the other two he was badly frightened. "In the car with her and hurry up," Jimmy was shivering himself now. "Get a move on Gower, and Jimmy, you had better run along the lane toward's my uncle's house. There it is on the right, the white one. I'll follow you and these three fellows can bring your bag along. Here's your coat but where's your cap?" Newcombe's eyes searched the bank. "Oh never mind that, its in the rushes, or floated away." Jimmy started off at a run for the village.

To be concluded next month.

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continued next page

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HAMILTONIANA

Compiled by HERBERT LECKENBY

Despite the extra pages it has been found necessary to curtail this section somewhat this month. As however, three of the stories in the Cup contest are Hamilton ones no one I am sure, will complain about that. So straight away to Eric Fayne's ever engrossing and provocative column.

LET'S BE CONTROVERSIAL

(Eric Fayne turns the spotlight on comments made by the famous, the not-so-famous, or even the infamous. He gives his own views superficially. If you will write to him, expressing your opinions on any of the topics he discusses, he will summarise readers' views in a future issue.)

No. 27. SOMEBODY SAID. (Third Spasm)

"THEY WROTE OF CLIFF HOUSE SCHOOL" (W.O.G. Lofts; S.P.C. January, 1959)

Mr. Lofts has written an excellent and informative article on a subject which has long been neglected. About just one or two of his points however, I must be a trifle controversial.

He suggests that Bessie Bunter had been featured in many of the Greyfriars stories many years before the first issue of School Friend appeared. I doubt this. Bessie certainly arrived as a new girl in School Friend No. 1, and I cannot recall her featuring in the early

Magnet stories.

I am not too happy over Mr. Lofts's comment that, after Frank Richards had written six stories for the School Friend, "the editor was forbidden to accept any more work from him." This seems to infer that Mr. Richards was anxious to write the Cliff House stories, and, in fact, might write them without having been commissioned to do so. I find this rather incredible. It seems more likely that Mr. Richards was commissioned to write the first six tales to give a flying start to the new paper, after which it was intended that another writer should take over.

It is, of course, possible that Mr. Richards was expecting to carry on with the School Friend stories, but he was always so busy that it seems improbable that he would have been much bothered about the matter. It also seems improbable that, should the star author have found time to write a Cliff House story in addition to his other commitments, an Editor would have had instructions to reject it.

Mr. Lofts refers to a writer, whom he calls, L. E. Ransome, who took over the writing of the Cliff House tales in 1924, and he infers that from this time onwards was the "golden age" of the School Friend. I have not read the paper since I was a lad, but my own opinion is that the "golden age" comprised its first two years. I thought the long series concerning Augusta Anstruther-Browne, the handsome rich girl who was expelled, and returned to Cliff House as another personality, was really first-class, and a South Seas series about Grace Kelwyn was fine of its type. The first hundred-or-so stories were full of variety - drama, humour, and charm - a charm which, in my view, was lost in later years.

With the passing of time, the main character seemed to become one, Jemima Carstairs, whom I personally found a bore. The introduction of boys from new and unknown schools seemed absurd under the circumstances and I found them entirely alien to the spirit of Cliff House.

Mr. Lofts adds that from March, 1925 the School Friend was issued in much smaller size, while the programme offered comprised a much shorter Cliff House story, plus a number of tales of equal length by different authors. To my mind, this radical change does not suggest that Mr. Ransome was the most successful of all the Cliff House authors.

"I HAVE ALWAYS FELT A DOUBT, TO SAY THE LEAST, THAT YOUNG READERS WERE CAPABLE OF DISTINGUISHING BETWEEN THE REAL HAMILTON AND THE 'SUB-WRITER"

(Story Paper Collector, April 1958.)

If they were not, they must have been very young or very dumb. I contend that any regular reader could and should have been able to

detect the difference. I myself was of no more than average intelligence - as a boy I could hardly distinguish a tangent from a co-sine, or a noun clause from a participial phrase - but I learned very early to know a sub story when I saw it.

This may prove that I was a freak, though I prefer to think I may have been a good Hamiltonian but a bad scholar.

"KEEP SMILING!" (Tom Merry or Jimmy Silver, in pre-war days).

The modern rendering of Tom Merry's advice is "Keep Smiling! It makes everyone wonder what you've been up to!" - vide "English Digest" 1958. How cynical has our mid-twentieth century become!

That's just how I look at things! I may be wrong! Why not write to me and let me have your views?

CONTROVERSIAL ECHOES

No. 25. SOMEBODY SAID (First Spasm)

LEONARD PACKMAN writes: "With reference to the recent television feature 'To-night' in which the Midland branch of the O.B.B.C. participated (see April C.D.), may I be permitted to supply the full details and thus clear up what appears to be a misunderstanding.

Further to certain meetings between myself and Miss Sylvia Milson, the Press Representative connected with the Bunter show at the Palace Theatre, Miss Milson contacted the B.B.C. with a view to members of the O.B.B.C. appearing in their programme 'To-night'.

About ten days prior to the actual event, I was contacted on the 'phone at my office by the B.B.C. who asked if I could supply some material and details about the Club's activities - particularly in regard to Billy Bunter and Greyfriars. I suggested a 'phone call later that evening to my home address would enable me to think more clearly, and thus allow me to give such information as was requested. This was agreed upon, but it was until several nights later that I did, in fact, receive this call. Following this, I sent certain documents together with a programme similar to that which covers our normal Meeting activities.

Two evenings later I received another 'phone call, asking if I could arrange for some members of the club to appear on the 'To-night' programme due to appear one evening that week; also - what was more to the point - which branch did I consider to be most appropriate?

As you can imagine, I had to think quickly. It was not possible for me to contact members of the London branch (and I subsequently ascertained that certain of them could not have been able to participate

any more than I could), and in addition I must make it quite clear that whilst in London we are 75% Hamiltonian we are not a Bunter Club pure and simple.

On the other hand, having been to a meeting of the Birmingham branch (and hearing quite a lot about their activities) I know that they are, to all intents and purposes, a Bunter Club. Thus, I had no hesitation in suggesting this branch. Apparently the B.B.C. work very quickly, for they asked me for a 'phone number of someone in Birmingham whom they could contact very speedily. I gave them one such number, the sequel to which is now well known.

Thus, there is no question of the Midland Club "taking it over". I gave it to them as the most suitable branch for the particular purpose. I would, however, like to congratulate Birmingham on the speedy way in which they handled the matter.

There is just one point that is not so satisfactory; why did someone have to make the ridiculous statement that Magnets were worth £10 each? It is no good them saying they didn't, because I have received over forty letters (via the B.B.C.) from people quoting this fact, many of them offering me 1939-40 Magnets at that nice price!"

MISS P. J. HYMANS (for the B.B.C.) writes: "I am afraid that it is not possible for us to give prior information about items to be included in 'To-night'. This programme is intended to be mainly topical and it is frequently not known until the last moment how many topical items will be included and the number of non-topical items can likewise not be decided until the schedule is completed shortly before the programme goes on the air. I regret that it is only very infrequently that we are able to repeat an item, and, in any case, for the reason previously mentioned, we should not be able to give advance notice of such a repeat."

FRANK VERNON LAY writes: "I can well remember that, when I was a lad, the size of the 'Green 'Un' definitely prejudiced me against it. It was too unwieldly, I didn't like the green colour, and in any case much preferred long complete stories and one serial. To-day, looking at the paper over a period, I can see much to admire, but it will always give pride of place to the Magnet, Gem, Nelson Lee and Union Jack.

ROGER JENKINS writes: "I don't think I would agree with you that Levison became colourless after his reform. He certainly became a completely different character, but he did retain his old cunning, and I can think of a number of occasions when his quick-wittedness

saved Cardew from trouble. And, of course, he made the perfect foil for Cardew, who never tired of taunting him about his murky past. Levison as a reformed character was far more successful than Talbot, Lumley-Lumley, or Bulstrode.

I was pleased to hear that the Birmingham Club made a success of the T.V. Broadcast, but was a little puzzled about the reason stated for the London Club's refusal to go in and bat themselves. Is there nobody in the London Club who knows anything about Hamiltoniana - or was the Greyfriars Cup won this year by a team of substitute writers?"

GEORGE SELLARS writes: "I agree with most of your comments on Gerry Allison's 'Poor fish' remarks. Even so, our friend is correct to some extent. Martin Clifford's best stories were before Lumley and Levison reformed. I would not say Lumley was overdrawn, any more than any other black sheep in the Hamilton flock, but he was a colourful character.

Of course, some of the finest stories of Talbot, were after his reformation, the final great story being 'In the King's Khaki'. I believe that strong loyal friendship was mutual between Tom Merry and Talbot, and proof of this can be found in most of the Toff tales.

I have never been interested in collecting the 'Boy's Friend', and the size of it was the reason. If it had been the same size as the Magnet, I would have been glad to have it in my collection."

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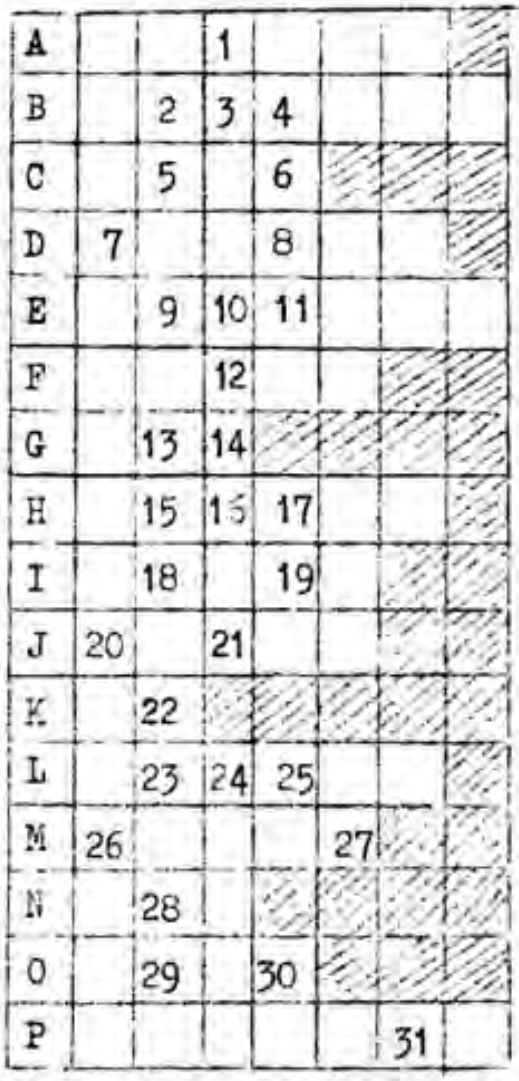
Old Boys Book Club

LONDON SECTION. Home from Kuwait, Persian Gulf, Les Rowley, (Johnny Bull) must have been very pleased at the special Greyfriars meeting at 'Cherry Place'. Bob and Eileen had fixed up a splendid spread, and a full and happy agenda was greatly enhanced by two superb efforts by Eric Fayne, who, incidentally, had brought along some very fine prizes for the winners. The warm weather did not deter the 'old boys' from attendance and a good gathering thoroughly enjoyed themselves. The Christmas meeting coloured photographs were projected by Eileen and it was good to see our happy faces on the screen plus the old books in evidence.

Other quizzes, readings, impromptu talks and the usual sales and exchanges all went together to make up a very carnival and happy occasion. Finally Eric Fayne invited the club to hold the June meeting by the river Sark, that is the Thames; continued page 178



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QUIZZLE NO. 7

The letters in the numbered squares, if placed in sequence in the lower grid, will spell out a message to the C.D. from the St. Jim's cricketers.

CLUE DOWN: A. A message from all of us to Mr. Leckenby. (4,4,2,6.)

CLUES ACROSS:

A. Mr. Brander was one, Bunter has one, and Skimpole is one.
B. To flood, unite with Dane. /Does the
C. Bounder often show it? Never, perhaps?
D. At Rookwood, find the Merchant's money between points.
E. Fatty Wynn's favourite apple, maybe.
F. Bunter gives his low expression.
G. Only part of Redwing's craft - but it still floats.
H. Eye knot for Hoskins.
I. Mrs. Kebble walks - no tram for her.
J. Possibly Old Joyce is curt.
K. A good one was once an expression of approval.
L. Disturb Bill Gander to a point.
M. Silly asses!
N. Bunter takes his watch to the tuckshop, but he gets it from neither.
O. Evident when Glyn makes his chemical experiments.
P. The early Magnet, distinguished in Dover rec. (3,5)

Write on a postcard the words in the lower grid and the answer to the Clue Down. Three prizes of 5/- for the first three correct solutions received by the Editor.

\- - -

RESULT OF QUIZZLE NO. 6. Solution to Clue Down - "Coker's Motor Bike"
Hidden words:- "Alight Here for Greyfriars."
First correct solution received from CHARLES CHURCHILL, 103, Sidwell Street, Exeter, Devon, to whom 5/- has been sent.

so let our host know whether you can make it on Sunday, June 14th, at Excelsior House, 23 Grove Road, Surbiton, Surrey. Our Herbert will try to attend. Thus with Les Rowley giving us 'Prout' as the key word in the ever popular eliminator as the final item, we then called it a day and wended our way home. "BREEZY BEN"

NORTHERN SECTION MEETING, MAY 9th, 1959. Happy feature of the evening was that we had Cliff Beardsall and Mrs. Beardsall with us. It's quite a distance from Stockport to Leeds, as I can confirm, for I travelled between the two places on my return from Liverpool the following night. Anyway, they evidently enjoyed themselves and we hope they will both be able to come again soon.

The date of the Chesterfield meeting with Midland, June 28th, was confirmed. We are hoping there will be a record attendance. Main feature of the evening was the start of Desert Island Books. Over four meeting three members will give their three selections. The starters were Gerry Allison, Ron Hodgson and Frank Hancock.

Gerry revealed that for years and years he has kept a diary and never failed to keep it up to date, a distinction very few can claim; I know I can't. And he proved that long before the Harry Wharton - Mr. Quelch series was voted the most popular of all in the C.D., he was praising it highly. Needless to say, it was one of his choices. Another interesting selection of his was a volume of "The Scout", a publication which has never had the credit it deserved.

Ron Hodgson was loyal to the Hamilton schools and Frank Hancock made "Boys will Be Boys" one of his choices, which, though not strictly according to rules, would certainly pass some pleasant hours away.

We'll look forward to three more interesting turns at the next meeting, the date of which is June 13th.

HERBERT LECKENBY, Northern Section Corres.

MIDLAND SECTION - MEETING HELD 27th APRIL. By far the most successful meeting for a long time, that is as far as attendance. Fifteen members assembled to do justice to a full programme. As we have now quite a selection of Nelson Lee fans and a preponderance of Nelson Lees in the library, we had decided it was time we had a change from Greyfriars and Billy Bunter and so Nelson Lee and Nipper made their appearance. We had the pleasure of welcoming another new member in Mrs. Anne Mercer of Sutton Coldfield, and also were very glad to see Ray Bennett and Ron Dickens back in their usual places after a few months absence. Very nice too, to have John Tomlinson and Joe Marston (our Burton "Sub-branch").

Jack Corbett started the fun going by putting to us 12 questions on Greyfriars, some of them very "tricky". The writer was the winner with seven of the twelve. The next item was one of Ted Davey's (unprepared) talks and as usual, he was highly entertaining. With Ted he seems to get as much enjoyment giving the talk as we who listen. Ted illustrated his fine talk with many examples of the authors' humour and generally, for an unprepared talk this was a truly great effort and deserved the applause it received at the end.

Next was my turn and for my part, I asked the rest their various views on the following subject. When Maxwell Scott was writing the early Nelson Lee yarns in the early days of the century he sent Nipper to St. Ninian's School. There was quite a lengthy series of this school and I believe that St. Ninian's was everything that one could wish for as schools go. But what puzzled me was why when Edwy Searles Brooks was commissioned to start a series of school yarns on the lines of St. Jim's, Rookwood, Greyfriars, etc., he did not use this previous school of Nipper's. He was using Maxwell Scotts characters, why not this school? Various interesting opinions were expressed and I gather that the general idea was that the powers that be thought a "new broom" was best, and that way Brooks could develop as he went along. Which he did, as we all know. The last part of the programme was taken over by George Chatham who read some selected passages from the Cassells "Billy Bunter's Bolt." Next meeting is the Annual General Meeting, the date, May 25th, Room No. 8, Chamber of Commerce, Birmingham. HARRY BROSTER.

MERSEYSIDE SECTION MEETING - 10th MAY. This meeting was extra-special in that we had the great pleasure of the company of our two esteemed Vice-Presidents, Sir Frederick Bowman and Herbert Leckenby - both at the very top of their form. Other members present comprised Frank Case, Bill Greenwood, Cec Hardingham, Pat Laffey, Norman Pragnell, George Riley, Ernie Steen, Frank Unwin, Jim Walsh, Don Webster and Bill Windsor. The meeting was a winner right from the start, for, after the usual reports, etc., and a few welcome words from Herbert, who was looking as fit as a fiddle, we were treated to a splendid talk by Sir Frederick entitled, "The Hangman in Byegone Fiction," and supplemented by many rather gruesome, though intriguing, relics that once belonged to hangmen and well-known murderers who were far from fictional.

Jim Walsh again very generously brought along his tape-recorder, and Herbert, and Jim himself, recorded messages of greeting from the Merseyside Section to our friends of the "Golden Hours Club", "down under". Next meeting, the rest of the members are to add their greetings to the tape. This is a grand innovation of Jim's, and we feel that it

could have a great future in O.B.B.C. cricles, assuming that we shall always be fortunate enough to take advantage of Jim's generosity.

Then followed a literary "Criss-Cross Quiz" which brought the evening to a close in enjoyable style, and won by the St. Frank's team, with Greyfriars second and St. Jim's third.

To sum up: a Merseyside meeting at its very best and brightest, so what more need be said? Only that Yorkshireman Herbert appeared to revel in it, and we trust that was not merely politeness. To him we say, warmly, "Come more often!"

Next meeting - Sunday, 7th June, when we revert to our usual time 6.30 p.m.

FRANK UNWIN

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NELSON LEE COLUMN

By JACK WOOD, NOSTAW, STOCKTON LANE, YORK.
Phone: 25795

* * * * *

This month we carry on with the remainder of Jim Sutcliffe's fascinating Randon Recollections of notable St. Frank's series. Next month, Jim Cook, our Roving Correspondent returns with another entertaining newsletter from the Old School.

"THE CASTLE OF TORTURE"

Reggie Pitt's turn comes next and the scene of his ordeal in Zinestro Castle in Bellton Wood. His first test comes when he is faced by a priest with a red hot branding iron which is being brought nearer to him, then his eyes are covered and he feels something ice-cold pressed to his chest and as his eyes are uncovered he sees a priest with a long thick icicle in his hand! Satisfied with his courage so far, Pitt is now taken to another chamber of the castle and placed with his back to a solid wall while the priests build afresh wall in front of him with bricks and mortar. Struggling to escape he finds that the old solid wall behind him has been carefully weakened by the priests and as he pushes his way out he falls into the moat and is told Taay is well satisfied with his courage.

THE NEEDLES OF NEMESIS"

Handforth was the next victim and the site chosen for his test was Surf Island, but the priests found Handy was a different proposition. While not lacking in courage by any means, he displayed his usual stubborness abd obstinacy, for which he was famous. His first test

was to jump from a high boulder onto the top of a barrel from which protruded many wicked gleaming steel spikes. He knew that there was no fake about them for he had seen the priest driving them in as he arrived. What he did not know, however, was that as he was clambering up the boulder a substitution had been made of a barrel top of rubber spikes cleverly painted to resemble metal! By refusing to jump when ordered to he lost his chance of atonement and Taay required his life.

He was taken to a cave and bound to an iron ring below high water mark and left to drown, as the tide rose, but he was rescued in the nick of time by Church and McClure.

"THE PRISON OF PERIL"

Archie Glenthorne's call came next and the venue for his ordeal was the old derelict prison on Bannington Moor where he encountered a ghostly animal which leapt out at him but Archie promptly gave it a sledge hammer blow between the eyes and finds he has knocked out one of the disguised priests.

He is next taken to the condemned cell of the prison and from there to the scaffold itself and there, with the noose around his neck and one of the priests taking the role of the executioner, Archie takes them all by surprise by wriggling out of the noose. The priests satisfied that nothing they did could daunt the spirit of Archie let him go in peace!

"THE FIFTH VICTIM"

This was Sir Lancelot Montgomery Tregelis-West and his summons came during an evening football match. Directed by the hypnotic influence of the mysterious Tibetans to the West Tower he is kept until the middle of the windy night and then his test is revealed to him. It is to walk on a wire stretched between the West and East Towers with his hands bound behind him and a death drop of hundreds of feet beneath him. Needless to say, once satisfied that Monty was not a coward the priests "took over" and controlled his movements with their extraordinary will power and another of the "marked" ten had vindicated himself.

"THE FLAMING PIT"

Next to undergo the dreaded ordeal was Tommy Watson and this time the men of the East exerted their power on him while he was cycling home from Bellton where he had purchased a quantity of chestnuts, and directed him to Bannington Moor, this time to the old quarry workings again. He finds that his test is to jump into a pit containing hundreds of hungry rats. Tommy Watson, with his usual subbornness refuses and

attacks his captors and thereby forfeits his chance of proving his courage. His captors throw him into the pit but needless to say, the rats did not attack him or come near him because the priests had sprayed him with a rare Tibetan juice during his passage to the quarry for this very purpose.

Poor Tommy has lost his chance however, and is lashed to a pole, the pit was filled with paraffin and set afire and in about fifteen minutes the pole would have burnt through and Watson would have crashed to his death in the blazing inferno below - Taay was not satisfied, and was claiming a life.

Just in time rescue came, his chums having followed a trail of chestnuts spilt on the trip from the village to the Moor quarry.

to be continued.

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THE GOLDEN HOURS CLUB, SYDNEY.

When the meeting opened at 6 p.m. it was noticed that several familiar faces were missing from the circle.....victims of the current 'flu epidemic now raging in Sydney. Syd Smyth opened proceedings and then three interesting letters were read by the Secretary, one from Ron Hodgson which gave some interesting details of the Greyfriars Cup to satisfy the curiosity of our Hamilton enthusiasts. Greetings from Bill Gander were then read together with a letter from Ben Whiter who had been busy obtaining books for several of our members - his friendly service to the Australian collectors were greatly appreciated and a vote of thanks is sent to him for his help.

As the first speaker, Bill Hall was unavoidably absent we were able to devote the extra time to Ernie Carter and his talk on the Nelson Lee Library and other papers featuring Nelson Lee and St. Frank's - there was something for all collectors in his most informative and entertaining discourse - there was even a Union Jack in which St. Frank's was mentioned, to satisfy the Blake enthusiasts - Ernie illustrated his talk with some of his priceless treasures and from the enthusiasm displayed by the members, as they passed the copies around, I feel sure that there will be some new recuits to the ranks of Nelson Lee collectors (and a few envious sighs as Ernie gathered his books together) altogether a very wonderful offering by this veteran Nelson Lee-ite.

An enjoyable evening which concluded with regret at 8 p.m.

B. PATE - Secretary.

S.B.L. REVIEWS - JUNE, 1959

By Walter Webb

PASSPORT INTO FEAR (No. 431) ..... W. Howard Baker

The Great Cross of Saint Constantine, proud possession of one of Russia's noblest families and reputed to be rich in gold and precious stones to the value of two million pounds, is the much coveted prize which flings together oddly assorted members of the community into a maelstrom of straining human endeavour, a riot of emotions into which the combined - and rival - forces of Sexton Blake Investigations and certain representatives of Scotland Yard are pitchforked, when Katrina Romskoi, an attractive young Russian and kinswoman of the Romanoffs, enlists the aid of the organisation in regaining the priceless Cross given to one of her ancestors by Catherine the Great on the occasion of his leadership of the Cossacks when gaining a great victory over the Turks in the Crimea in the long and enduring war against them for possession of the southern provinces.

Such a treasure to inspire the active interest of the Syndicate, and the substantial shadow of that gigantic and infamous confederation of criminals is soon in evidence when an emissary, recovering the Cross from a graveyard in a Polish village and discovering the vast wealth that would be his could he but keep the fabulous article for himself, decides to doublecross the organisation.

Sexton Blake Investigations have many setbacks before an inspired Tinker puts his finger on the key to the puzzle of the destination of the Cross and Blake follows up by exposing the master-mind behind the whole affair - a very real surprise, this. And for an even bigger - and pleasant - surprise see back cover for Eric Parker's best ever illustration of Sexton Blake & Co., in celebration of the third anniversary of the New Look S.B.L. Rating ..... Excellent.

COURIER FOR CRIME (No. 432) ..... Jack Trevor Story

The title-role in this novel is enacted by a character named Reggie Batford, one of a gang of conscienceless young thugs, who, endowed by nature with masculine charm in large quantities, uses that weapon with the same subtlety as his opposite number in corresponding circumstances might utilise hers in furthering the ends she wishes to attain. Batford is a middle man dealing in confidential insurance information, using - or rather, abusing - his natural gifts in enticing information from female secretaries employed by such firms and selling it.

When Executives of a bitten company - the Venus Life and Property

Ass. Soc. - decide to enlist the assistance of Sexton Blake Investigations, it is a step which brings quite a large share of grief into the lives of two young people - Tinker and Marion Lang - but at the same time drawing them closer together. Hitherto, the feelings shared by Marion and Tinker were portrayed as being on a purely friendly basis; but this assignment, in which they play the principal roles, brings their emotions very appreciably to the surface. The organisation finds itself under a cloud - that of betraying the trust of its clients, and Grimwald of the Yard is faced with the distasteful duty of detaining Tinker in custody on a murder charge. Things look black until Blake is hurriedly recalled from a well-earned holiday in Cannes.....

In rather more chastined mood, Jack Story yet again demonstrates his versatility in a story strong in human interest and dramatic development. Rating.....Excellent

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GEMS: 313, 314, 315, 316, 319, 320, 321, 322, 356, 358, 359, 375, 376, 386, 385, 387, 392, 457, 459, 493, 773, 775, 877, 879, 881, 935, 946, 948, 950, 951, 952, 953, 956, 964, 967, 968, 970, 971, 974, 975, 976, 977, 979, 980, 981, 984, 986, 989, 990, 992, 993, 995, 998, 1116, 1126, 1129, 1133.

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