

# COLLECTORS DIGEST

~ DECEMBER 1965 ~

VOL 19  
No. 228

PRICE

2

~ CHRISTMAS  
GREETINGS TO ALL ~  
from GOSLING





GOOD  
LUCK

# Collectors' Digest

FOUNDED in 1946 by HERBERT LECKENBY

Vol. 19

No. 228

DECEMBER 1965

Price 2s. 0d.

## A Christmas Letter from Your Editor

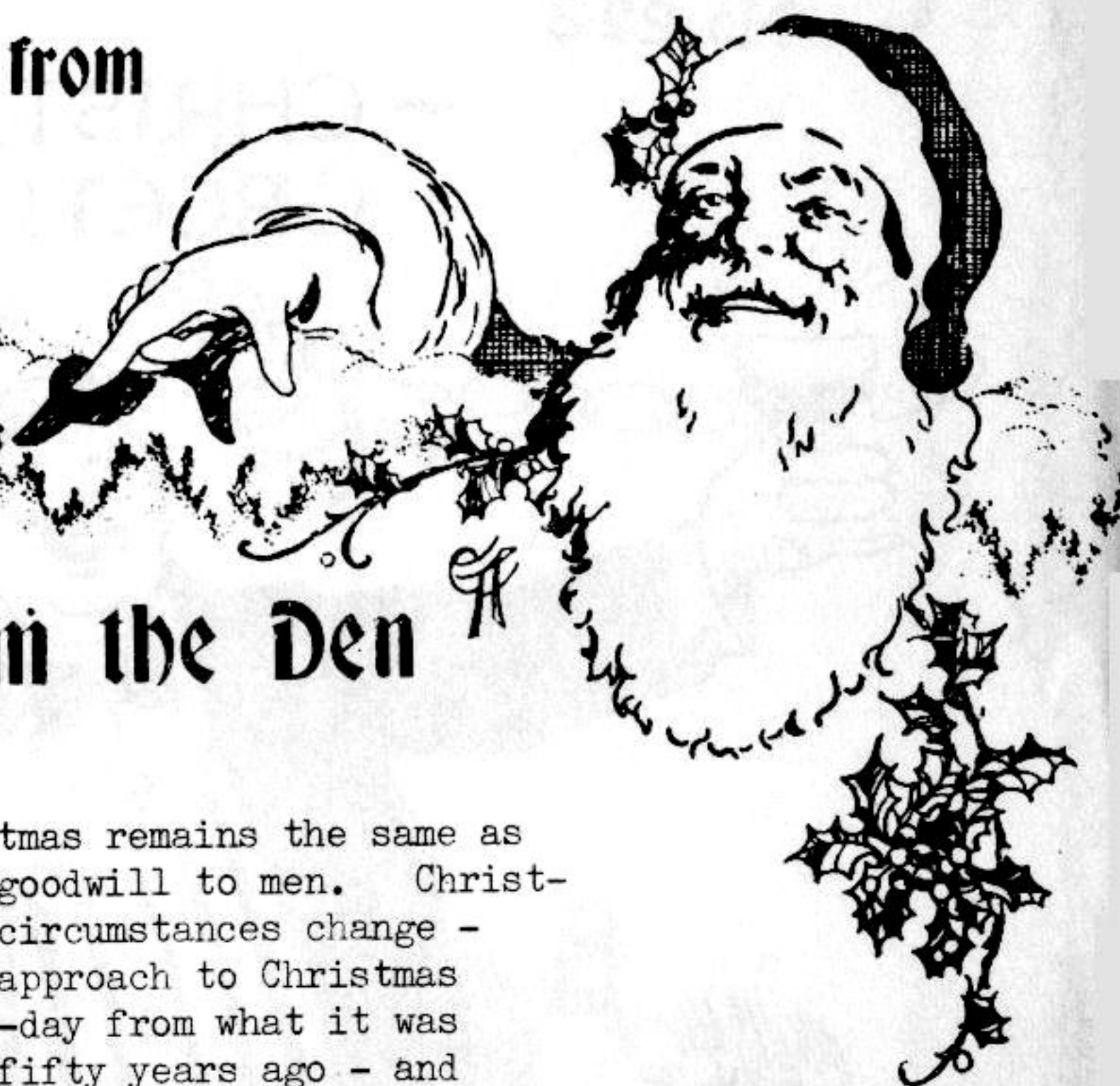
## Whispers from the Den

### A MERRY CHRISTMAS

The message of Christmas remains the same as always - peace on earth, goodwill to men. Christmas is unchanging. But circumstances change - and people change. The approach to Christmas seems vastly different to-day from what it was when Danny was a child - fifty years ago - and even a good many years later than that.

Christmas, long ago, was what we made it ourselves, and much of the joy of Christmas was in the making of it. I am ignoring the abject poverty which we know existed in the England of those times. That, at least, is something which is no longer with us to-day - one of the changes for which we can be grateful.

But most of us - probably all of us - had reasonably comfortable homes, where love and laughter were present. Money may have been





scarce - certainly we did not indulge in the spending sprees which are inseparable from the pre-Christmas weeks now - but we always managed to have a merry Christmas - and a memorable Christmas.

Mother made her own mincemeat and her own puddings and her own lemon-cheese. The fruit had to be prepared. She iced her own cake. We made most of our own paper-chains. If we lived in the country, we may have gone out to gather the logs for the Yule fire. We had a stir at the pudding mixture. And when Christmas came, we played the seasonable games and made our own music, for almost every home had a piano or a gramophone.

How different now! The fruit comes ready prepared. The mincemeat, the lemon curd, even the puddings, come ready made. The elaborate decorations cost quite a lot. A radiator has replaced the fire. A T.V. set occupies the corner where the piano once stood. Nowadays we do not dream of doing much for ourselves.

The after Christmas essential was the visit to the panto - probably a provincial or suburban one. We can't do that now, for all the music-halls are replaced by super markets.

Yes, Christmas has changed, even though much remains the same. We can at least be thankful that nobody has to work so hard nowadays. And, even if we can find a panto, it is no longer necessary for a performer to have any voice or talent. Providing he can groan, whine, and wriggle round a microphone, he will win tumultuous applause.

But what have we to complain about? If the modern world tends to leave us cold, we can always wind back the Christmases by digging into some of the old pre-war Christmas Numbers, and most of us will do that. It's good to be alive at Christmas time, even in 1965. A Merry, Merry Christmas, everybody!

#### A HAPPY NEW YEAR

In these pre-Christmas days we tend to look back over the year which will soon be passing into memory. For those associated with our clan, 1965 has been a pretty remarkable year. We have had the return of Sexton Blake, the appearance of some famous Greyfriars stories in Armada, and that startling re-issue of Magnet No. 1. Collectors' Digest has grown in stature and influence as the months have swept by. The numbers of our friends continue to increase, and our letter-bag gets heavier and heavier.

These letters which have arrived in their thousands during the year have been heart-warming and moving in the affection for and pride in the magazine which they display. My only deep concern is that it is not possible to write in answer to everyone. These letters should



be answered, but the pressure of work is so great that if they were all answered, the monthly and the Annual would never appear at all. I can only say that every letter is keenly appreciated and views expressed are always considered. Please do not stop writing. My life would be infinitely the poorer without your letters.

This year I think we have kept C.D. full of pep. It will be our aim to make it more successful than ever in 1966. A happy and prosperous New Year to all my readers.

### YOUR FAVOURITE ANNUAL

In conclusion, a few last words on that hardy Annual, our Giant Year Book - Collectors' Digest Annual for 1965 - which will be following on the heels of the Christmas Number of this magazine.

I hope and believe that all of you will vote this, the most remarkable Annual in the world to-day, well up to the standard of its predecessors. It is packed from cover to cover with articles, stories, and pictures to play a real Christmas carol on the strings of your heart. The following, in alphabetical order, is a list of the contributors to this year's Annual: Derek Adley, Gerald Allison, Robert Blythe, Charles Churchill, Victor Colby, Brian Doyle, Eric Fayne, R. J. Godsave, Frank Hancock, Roger M. Jenkins, Maurice Kutner, F. Vernon Lay, W. O. G. Lofts, Otto Maurer, Leslie Rowley, D. R. Spiers, J. R. Swan, S. Gordon Swan, Frank Shaw, Derek Smith, O. D. Wadham, Norman Wright.

The advance orders are heavier than they have ever been before for the Annual. It is far too late for us to arrange to print any additional copies. If you have not already ordered your copy (and orders should be accompanied by remittances) you may be risking disappointment.

YOUR EDITOR

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### LEONARD PACKMAN IN HOSPITAL

We regret to learn that Mr. Leonard Packman, one of the pioneers in the formation of the Old Boys' Book Clubs and probably the greatest living expert on anything associated with Sexton Blake, is in hospital at the time of writing, awaiting a major operation.

Digest readers will join with the editorial staff of C.D. in wishing him a very speedy return to perfect health.

WANTED: GEMS up till No. 1379 then 1452, 1512, 1526, 1531. Write with price required to:-

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P L A Y B O X      F O R      C H R I S T M A Sby C O M I C U S

There were four of us - born at neatly spaced intervals between 1905 and 1917. And so, every year from 1910 to 1928 one of us got the dear old PLAYBOX ANNUAL as a Christmas present. We could have done with one each - it was in such demand.

There has never been such a beautiful Annual for children before or since - we were indeed lucky. Delightful covers, superb glossy paper, printed in different coloured inks, weighing nearly three pounds, and containing 208 pages, it was an Annual to treasure. Some of ours have entertained three generations, and are still in good condition!

Let us have a look at the contents. First and foremost, Tiger Tim - but more about him later. Do you remember The Furry Fluffkins, though? Their exciting adventures were mostly portrayed by S. J. Cash, but occasionally the master cat-artist, Louis Wain, would contribute. (See page 184, PLAYBOX 1914.) What a raffish lot of felines his were. They remind one of those cat criminals, friends of Macavity the Mystery Cat - "whose wicked deeds are widely known. I might mention Mungojerrie, I might mention Griddlebone."

"The Little Sparrowkins" were drawn by Mabel F. Taylor, whose strip column "Jungle Jinks" appeared in HOME CHAT. The Sparrowkins were always in trouble, but usually Dr. Rook's boys came to the rescue.

Quite the most unique feature in PLAYBOX were the wooden dolls, photographed against weird backgrounds by Louis Robbins. They were illustrations for the funniest verses I ever read. We could recite them all - and they remain in my memory still. I wish there was space for "An Uncivil War" which began -

There was a most uncivil war,  
I think it was in ten nought four,  
I wish to be precise.  
For when one's writing history  
It's best to have no mystery,  
For mystery's not nice.

Dolly Dimple and Reggie - two other regulars - were a quaint couple. A large mother crow, who wore a white bonnet - always appeared in their adventures, which covered four pictures, spread over a double page.

There were pictures everywhere, including many pages in full colour. And what superb artists! My favourite was A. E. Jackson,



whom you may remember, drew Bonnie Bluebell in THE RAINBOW. He - or she - had a magic brush - and his - or her - princesses were out of this world.

The artist who received the most publicity was H. R. Millar - famous for his pictures in E. Nesbit's books, and other children's classics. Every story for which he drew the illustrations was headed 'Pictures by H. R. Millar.' See "The Princess of Babylon" 1915, for an amazing example of his genius.

Other famous artists were Tom Browne - creator of Weary Willie and Tired Tim, Hilda Cowham, Mabel Lucie Attwell, Ethel K. Burgess, W. Heath Robinson, and always the master of all, Louis Wain.

To return to Tiger Tim. He and his friends are remembered best in the drawings of H. S. Foxwell. Before he took over, the pictures had been drawn by S. J. Cash, M. C. Veitch, and their creator, J. S. Baker.

The Mystery of Tiger Tim and the Bruin Boys was elucidated in Collectors' Digest No. 193 by Bill Lofts, but perhaps I can add a few details. No. 1, PLAYBOX ANNUAL appeared at Christmas 1908, but was dated 1909. Mrs. Hippo was the teacher in charge of the famous Kindergarten.

As stated by Bill Lofts, the characters also appeared in Arthur Mee's NEW CHILDREN'S ENCYCLOPAEDIA for 1910. I possess a set of THE CHILDREN'S TREASURE-HOUSE, also edited by Arthur Mee, and in Volume IX, "The Bedtime Book" there are over thirty pages of "The Adventures of Tiger Tim and the Hippo Boys." There are many more characters here than appeared in PLAYBOX.

What puzzled us however, when we were children, was the front page of THE RAINBOW, which we took from its first appearance in February 1914. There were all the boys, Tiger Tim, Jumbo, Jacko, Bobby, Willie, Georgie, Joey, Fido and Porkyboy, under the control - if you can call it that - of a Mrs. Bruin.

We continued to be presented with PLAYBOX at Christmas, and found Mrs. Hippo still in charge. However, in PLAYBOX ANNUAL for 1917 - page 7, A New Teacher arrived. She was introduced to the boys by Mrs. Hippo who said "This is your new teacher, boys." The new teacher was, of course the already very well-known Mrs. Bruin. After that, Mrs. Hippo, disappeared, and now some of the pictures in PLAYBOX were reprinted from RAINBOW.

I have to buy Annuals for two grandchildren this Christmas. If only I could give them PLAYBOX!

\* \* \* \* \*





# DANNY'S DIARY



December 1915

It is a wonder we got any puddings this Christmas. There has been an awful shortage of dried fruits like currants, raisins, and sultanas. Even my Mum can't make bricks without straw - I mean puddings without currants. Of course, we should have had just one pud in any case, for Mum always keeps one over from the previous year, though she might even have given that to Gran.

However, Mr. Tonge, our grocer, came to the rescue. He sent Mum a note to say that he had found many pounds of dried fruit at the back of the drawers where the dried fruit was always kept. Mum was able to buy enough for our puds and mincemeat. The fruit was a bit dried up, but it came up all right after Mum had washed it and soaked it. And the puds tasted as lovely as always.

Very early in the month Doug had the Christmas Double Number of the Union Jack. The very long Sexton Blake story was entitled "Fugitives of Justice" and it featured Yvonne Cartier and her brother. Doug liked it, but I found it a bit spongy when I settled down to it.

I can't think what's coming over authors. They seem to think that a whole pile of descriptions of sporting events makes a whole pile of stories. Not long ago we had "Sportsmen All" in the Magnet with a long list of events between Greyfriars, Rookwood, St. Jim's and Highcliffe. Then we had "The Remove Eleven on Tour" which was a long list of football matches.

Now, this month, we have a Boys' Friend Library entitled "School and Sport." They say it's been written by Frank Richards and Martin Clifford in combinations. It made my breath come in pants. Not a vestige of a plot. Of corsets awful! A long list of sporting events between Greyfriars, Rookwood, St. Jim's, and Highcliffe. Oh, and Tom Merry boxed Bob Cherry, and Bob Cherry won. I wish I could get my threepence back.

Still, the Gem started off on an original note. The first story of the month was "The Great Sports Tournament." It was a long list of sporting events between Greyfriars, St. Jim's, Rookwood and Highcliffe. Oh, and Tom Merry boxed Bob Cherry and Tom Merry won. Oh, and the Head of St. Jim's gave them all a holiday from lessons for a week because an old boy had won a medal. As if any Headmaster -- Corks! I've said that before. The editor's a bit of a cheat. A little while ago he gave us a tale called "Mason's Last Match," which sounded like a promise. But Mason is back in the Sports Tournament. I forget why the Heads of Greyfriars, Rookwood, and Highcliffe gave their holidays so their boys could take part in all those Sports Tournaments. It couldn't all have been on account of the old boy winning a medal. Or perhaps it could.

By the next week, Martin Clifford had abandoned his combinations, for the second story was "Redfern's Barring-Out" which was fairly good. Mr. Ratcliff cut down on the boys' food, so they ordered a big meal at a restaurant and had the bill sent to Ratty.

After all those Sports Tournaments, "Talbot's Rescue" came like a breath of sea air. This was grand. Quite one of the best Gems I have ever read. A new boy named Loring, whom Manners had met in Switzerland, came to St. Jim's. But it wasn't really Loring. It was a chap called Ecker, and, as a result of Manners' detective work, Talbot rescued Loring. Best tale of the year.

I wasn't so keen on "True Blue" in which a new temporary German master came to St. Jim's. In the end he wasn't really a German, but he spoke broken German because he thought he wouldn't be accepted as a German master unless he did. He wasn't really a Herr at all. Just a mister. A bit tripey, this one.

My gran, who lives at Layer Marney in Essex, sent me a postal order for five shillings as a kind of pre-Christmas present. It was very thoughtful of her, for I was able to buy some presents for Mum, Dad, and Doug. I bought them at Woolworth's 3d and



6d store. I also bought the Christmas Number of Merry and Bright which now has Harry Tate and his son on the cover. They do funny things with a motor-car.

I had the Christmas Number of Chuckles, which was a double number costing a penny. There was a school story about Teddy Baxter of Claremont School called "True to His Colours." Tom Merry & Co came into this story which was quite neat. There is a rather fantastic serial called "A Trip to the Stars" about a visit to Mars by some men who have conquered space. Far-fetched, of course, but exciting. Breezy Ben and Dismal Dutchy had a Christmas adventure on the cover, and there was a page of pictures called Chuckles Cinema by an artist named J. MacWilson. Also there was a funny story about Captain Custard and his nephews, the Nibs. A very good Christmas Number for a penny.

The editor of the Magnet says he has had 900 entries in the competition for writing stories of Greyfriars. I hope we are not going to get them in the next 900 issues of the Magnet. At any rate, the Magnet has been pretty good this month.

First story was "Rebels of the Remove" which featured a newish boy in the Remove named Rake. I liked it, though there are far too many new boys turning up at both Greyfriars and St. Jim's. Rake thought Harry Wharton & Co "also rans," and got up his own football team. Harry Wharton & Co, disguised as girls, played football against Rake and Co - and beat them. Quite funny, but awful rot, really.

An excellent Christmas Double Number of the Magnet. A very long Greyfriars story was "Harry Wharton & Co's Pantomime." The Co helped a Mr. Montague Whiffles, whose car had broken down. He was the producer of a pantomime at the Lantham Theatre. So the Co helped him by appearing in his pantomime, and went into "digs" during their vacation. Frank Nugent fell in love with Conchita, the leading lady, until she brought him to his sense by admitting to him that she was really an elderly woman of 37, and not sweet 17 as he had thought.

The Magnet gave the words and music of a song called "Rally Round," with music by Frank Witty and words by G. R. Samways. The editor says it will be sung by soldiers at the front and all over the country. Some song! If it is, we shall lose the war.

The double number also had a kind of school prospectus of Greyfriars given loose, with particulars of the staff and a lot of the chief characters. Quite neat. And a new serial called "Rubies of Sheba" by Edwin Woolin - but I seldom read serials.

Next week, "Bunter the Masher." Not so bad, but not really a very nice story. Bunter was blackmailing Marjorie Hazeldene by pretending that he had lent money to her brother Peter.

I wasn't very keen on "The Bounder's Relapse." They thought that Vernon-Smith had returned to his naughty ways, but he was really typing out a story for the mother of an author who had been sent to the front before he could satisfy his publishers. So ended 1915 in the good old Magnet.

I have the Greyfriars Herald every week, and I like it very much. Some of the short stories are very good, but I especially like the Herlock Sholmes tales. This month's Sholmes stories have been "The Bound of the Haskervilles," "The Freckled Hand," "The Sign of Forty-Four," and "The Death of Sholmes." But I can't get on very well with the serial "The Pride of the Ring," which is supposed to be written by Mark Linley.

Some time early in December Dad told us to decide what show in London we wanted him to take us to on New Year's Eve. We had to make up our minds early for it was necessary for him to book in advance, for the London theatres are very packed with people nowadays.

Doug, who is inclined to be a bit pompoose, said: "Let's leave it to the kid" (meaning me) "for Christmas time is the kids' time."

They all thought I would choose a pantomime, and, of course, I did think about it. There was "Puss in Boots" at Drury Lane, starring George Graves, Will Evans, and Florence Smithson. I think Will Evans is the man who plays "Pimple" in the cinema English comic films.

But I ruled out "Puss in Boots." There was "Babes in the Wood" at the Aldwych, with Cressie Leonard and Johnnie Schofield as the adult stars, but somehow that didn't



appeal much.

There was "Cinderella" at the London Palladium, with Daisy Burrell as Cinderella and Norah Delany as the Prince. But I surprised them all. I plumped not to go to a panto at all this year, but to go to the revue "Joyland" at the London Hippodrome. I will tack on a bit more about this lovely show at the end of my diary for 1915.

There is a new serial called "A Tale of Twelve Cities" by Maurice Everard in the Boys' Friend. So far, I haven't read any of it.

The first Rookwood story of the month was the final one about Jimmy's uncle, John Silver. It was called "His Last Chance," and in the end he joined the army. The army seems to cover a multitude of sinners.

Second story of the month was "Jimmy Silver's Guest." The guest was Billy Bunter. A scream all through.

The Christmas Double Number of the B.F. was mighty. A lovely huge coloured cover, on art paper, by R. J. Macdonald. The Rookwood tale was very long - 15 chapters - but not very Christmassy. It was called "The Rookwood Raiders," and was all about rivalry with Bagshot. A good story, though not festive enough for the constipation of the season.

Last tale of the month, to end 1915, was "Dishing the Dandy" in which Flynn took up betting under the influence of Smythe and his set. Excellent Rookwood tale.

It is only seven months since that terrible train smash at Gretna Green. Now there has been another dreadful multiple crash. It has occurred at St. Bede's junction between Newcastle and South Shields. A passenger train ran into a banking engine, early one December morning. Both engines toppled down an embankment. Almost immediately another train ran into the wrecked carriages left on the line. The passenger train was gas-lit, and fire broke out at once. 18 passengers were killed, and 81 injured.

The day before, there had been another train crash, this time at New Cross when a fast train ran into a stationary one. 20 people were injured.

We have seen some good films this month. "The Exploits of Elaine" is still going strong. I thought it was to be in ten episodes, but I see it will run for fourteen. We saw Mary Pickford in "Cinderella" during Christmas week, and it was a nice picture.

Earlier we saw Lewis Waller and Madge Titherage in "Brigadier Gerard" by Conan Doyle. There was also "Charlie at the Bank." Outside our Gem Cinema there was this notice:

"Charlie at the Bank  
Is here with all his swank.  
He takes deposits large and small-  
You bet your life he keeps them all."

A very big film, Gabrielle D'Annunzio's "Cabiria" was on for a whole week, and it was accompanied by a huge orchestra of 20 players. It is a Bible story, and they say it was on in a New York cinema for a year.

Other times we saw Elsie Janis in "The Caprices of Kitty;" Henry Ainley in "Jelfs;" Blanche Sweet in "Stolen Good;" Marguerite Fischer in "The Lonesome Heart," and a very thrilling one called "The Juggernaut" which showed a terrific train crash. There was also "Chip off the Block," performed entirely by children and one boy gave what was supposed to be a wonderful imitation of Charlie Chaplin. I get rather sick of Chaplin imitators. Imitations are nothing like so good as the real thing.

Then, on the last day of the old year, we went to see the Albert de Courville revue "Joyland," at the London Hippodrome. It was glorious. There were some lovely tunes, written by Herman Darewski. Harry Tate was in the Revue. As I mentioned earlier, he is now on the front page of Merry and Bright. The leading lady was Shirley Kellogg. But the most striking of all was Bertram Wallis who sang a lovely song called "Our Own Dear Flag," backed by a crowd of banner-bearers and drummers. Then a huge Union Jack swept right across the entire theatre. It was quite breath-taking.

Happy New Year, dear Mum, Dad, and Doug. Let's hope we soon have Peace again.

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**NOTICE TO CONTRIBUTORS AND ADVERTISERS:** Owing to the Christmas Holidays we shall be going to press several days earlier than usual in December, in order to avoid much delay in January publication. We cannot guarantee that any items received after December 15th can appear in our January issue.





# BLAKIANA



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

## HOW SEXTON BLAKE PREPARED FOR CHRISTMAS --

(but quite a long time ago).

It was a busy day at Baker Street; busy in the sense that the period of the year had once more come round when Sexton Blake and Tinker endeavoured to some extent to remember in all parts of the globe the host of friends which made a formidable list when the festive season came.

In some cases valuable gifts had to be wrapped and addressed; in others, books, mementoes, bric-a-brac, and what not, were to go on their long journey to distant climes; and in others engraved cards bearing Blake's seasonal salutations were to be directed.

The consulting-room looked far more like a Christmas bazaar than the business room of the world's greatest criminologist. Blake's desk, Tinker's table, the old gate-legged centre table, the floor, and the window-seat were piled with a variety of presents, cards, papers, ribbons, and twine.

All day they had been at it, and the present confusion was only a part of the chaos which had existed at Baker Street for weeks past. It was some time now since the packages for the South Sea Islands, Australasia, New Zealand, and China had been sent. A little later India, South America, and South Africa had been got off. Then had followed parcels and cards to the United States, Egypt, Italy, France, Spain, Portugal, and the northern coast of Africa. And on the present occasion they were attending to the last Canadian post, parcels for the North of Scotland, Ireland, and a few names for more distant places which had missed the first rush.

Christmas was a serious event at Baker Street. From early in December gifts and cards and seasonable letters began to pour into Baker Street, for there could be few men with a vaster circle of friends and acquaintances than Sexton Blake.

Nor was he the sort of man to pass the season by with a shrug. For all the seriousness of his nature, Blake delighted in the honouring of the great festive day, and it was a deep and abiding joy with him to start off on their long journeys the packages which would mean his gifts of goodwill and remembrance to every quarter of the globe.



But perhaps the keenest joy of the whole season was on Christmas Eve, when he and Tinker and usually one or two very intimate friends, repaired to the East End, laden with baskets of well-cooked food, and money, for the really deserving poor, and highly coloured gifts for the children who swarm in those labyrinths, and to whom Christmas usually means nothing.

And so whole-heartedly was Blake accustomed to throw himself into the joy of it all that for three weeks before the great day he endeavoured to avoid as far as possible every suggestion of business.

Therefore, it is not to be wondered at that one stormy night about a week before Christmas, when he and Tinker were working like Trojans tying up parcels and addressing them, a loud summons at the street door brought a frown of annoyance to Blake's face.

"Now I wonder what that means," he said, as he snipped off a length of twine. "I hope, Tinker, it is not a business call."

(Not a great piece of writing - but pleasantly nostalgic. Yes, quite a long time ago.)

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#### ANTHONY SKENE

By W. O. G. Lofts

"My namesake ANTHONY JUAN SKENE seems to be getting well in with the T.V. people, which is more than I can do, try as I may; but at my time of life -- I am 81 -- it is less easy to invent, to create. Still I keep knocking at their door" - thus wrote to me the well known creator of Zenith the Albino, who pitted his wits for so long against Sexton Blake.

Later still Mr. Skene wrote "The play which was signed G. Norman Philips was by me. I was forbidden to use the name of ANTHONY SKENE because another writer had already done so in connection with the B.B.C. For all I know ANTHONY SKENE may be his real name. I have never used the name of DUDLEY HOYS\* in any form, and don't know the writer at all - though the name seems a good one for a nom-de-plume for a writer.

This I hope clears up the mystery of the recent controversy over the B.B.C. and T.V. writers using the name ANTHONY Juan SKENE - and I see no earthly reason why one should not accept his word on the matter. I have written to ANTHONY JUAN SKENE c/o the B.B.C. but have had no reply so cannot say whether this gentleman's name is a nom-de-plume or not. In closing the subject - readers must remember that there have been hundreds of famous people (or at least in the public eye) with similar names. I know for years I thought that Harry Corbett "Steptoe Junior" was the same man who pulled the strings for "Sooty" until I



saw the latter on a children's programme.

Anthony Skene was first contacted by a former member of the Sexton Blake Circle many years ago, but in writing to Mr. Skene, now living in a cottage on the Isle of Wight, I thought I would try and get a few more details about his own career not revealed before.

"As a boy" said Mr. Skene, "I only had twopence a week pocket money - and that at 13 and 14! This all went on THE UNION JACK; PLUCK; SURPRISE; and MARVEL - all  $\frac{1}{2}$ d each in those days. I always had as a Xmas present a volume of the B.O.P. every year. I belonged to a library, and for several years in my teens read a book every day beginning to end."

I mentioned to Mr. Skene that some years ago whilst dining in the West End of London a true Albino was sitting at the next table to me, and was the centre of all eyes. He was dressed in evening dress - with cape - had long flowing white hair, whitish face and pink eyes. Any possible relation to his own creation? Anthony Skene, it must be mentioned to new readers, first saw an albino about 55 in the West End about 1913. He was slovenly; fingers stained with tobacco, clothes soiled by dropped food, yet he was expensively dressed, and had about him a look of adequacy. He would have forgotten him, but only an hour later this very same albino sat down at the next table to him at lunch! When he wanted a character to pit his wits against Blake, this albino had made such a strong impression on his mind, that he "re-created him moulded nearer to the heart's desire."

Maybe I saw the actual son of Zenith in the flesh!

In closing these few ramblings on ANTHONY SKENE - I must mention that Mr. Skene has recently written an article on SEXTON BLAKE - which he hopes to get published in the near future. Being privileged to see a carbon copy, and also being discreet before its publication - I can only say that it contains interesting things which I did not know before. I will however keep readers informed - if and where it will be published.

\* According to a former sub-editor of the "Thriller" Dudley Hoys was the real name of the writer - but this needs further confirmation to make it authentic.

#### THE BROWN STUDY

Mr. Walter Webb's comments on the inferences we can draw from the disappearance, after 10 weeks, of Sexton Blake from the paper Tit-Bits are interesting, but I do not find them altogether convincing. I should be inclined to think that Tit-Bits might have been as wrong for



Blake as Blake was wrong for Tit-Bits.

Tit-Bits has always struck me as a periodical which has a very large casual readership - it is the ideal paper to acquire for a train journey. But a serial is no use to casual purchasers.

Also, I would question whether a story written as a complete novel would normally make a good serial. The art of serial-writing is to make an instalment end at a spot where the reader is anxious to carry on.

Can one really judge by letters published? I imagine that editors select for publication letters which suit their policy of the moment.

Mr. Webb says: "If Blake is thought an old-fashioned bore in a story reprinted from only as far back as 1963 ---"

But surely the age of the story is of far less importance than the quality of same?

Mr. Webb seems defeatist when he writes: "It would be pleasant to go back to the old days when the stories were of a purely adventurous nature, and ... I would welcome them; but what point is there in publishing tales of adventure for a generation from which the spirit of it has disappeared?" That is well put, but it all depends what is meant by adventure. Most readers of a detective story like to read of crime detection. I should have thought there must be adventure of some sort in any crime story. Or does our contributor mean that the only answer is stories of an impurely adventurous nature?

Mr. Webb comes to the conclusion that "the publishers dare not risk reprinting any of the old Blake stories in their original form, though bringing them up to date with a corresponding revving up of the action and dialogue might prove fruitful and well worth a trial." Yet Sherlock Holmes stories written over 60 years ago are constantly reprinted. So are Agatha Christie's crime novels - every one of them from 1920 onwards.

What Mr. Webb means, perhaps, but avoids saying, is that a great number of the Blake stories before the war (and also plenty since) were complete tripe and badly written. They were hack stuff in their generation, and are unreadable to-day.

But there was gold among the dross. There were some first-class tales, competently written, with excellent characterisation and skilful plots. These yarns would stand up to comparison with the best of to-day. I am nervous of the "revving-up of action and dialogue," because this could be awful. But I think that careful and restrained editing - with no change for the sake of change - and I stress that - could be beneficial. A well-written story will always appeal,



whatever its age.

There is no doubt that the presentation of the S.B.L. was improved after the price rose to 3/6, and, like Mr. Webb, I do not regret it. He found compensation in the return of the correspondence columns in August. This particular compensation had disappeared in September, October and November.

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NO DECEMBER BLAKES FOR MISS BLANDISH!

Or for anyone else either! The Bedside Sexton Blake, which was to include the Pierre Quiroule novel "The Living Shadow," has "been postponed until the Spring." In consequence there will be no new editions of the Sexton Blake Library issued for December. It is hoped, however, to bring forward the publishing date for the January issues, so it is just possible that you might get them in time for Christmas reading. Did I hear a horse laugh among readers? Surely neigh! "And when they were only half-way up, they were neither up nor down." If you don't know what is meant by that last sentence, please do not write to the Digest office to enquire.

We understand that the fine Pierre Quiroule novel "The Mystery Box" is to be published very soon in the Sexton Blake Library under the title "The Case of the Bismarck Memoirs." There is some splendid imaginative writing in this story, which gets some wonderful atmosphere in a prologue which covers several chapters before the modern story begins. Then Sexton Blake comes in to investigate a mystery which is linked with events of thirty years earlier. The yarn is packed with incident, showing Blake, Tinker, and Pedro at their very best. A fascinating tale of brilliant detective work, with some deliciously restrained humour, in which Granite Grant and Mademoiselle Julie are faced with a problem of their own: Has Sexton Blake really sold Pedro to a wealthy American?

If - and there seems always to be an "if" these days - we really get this story, - it will have been well worth waiting for.

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THE SEXTON BLAKE CATALOGUE

The Sexton Blake Catalogue, which has been years in careful preparation, will be ready very shortly. Next month we shall tell you more about this superb work and how to obtain it.

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WANTED: Digest Annuals before 1963.

WOOD, 367, BADDOW ROAD, CHELMSFORD



# HAMILTONIANA



DO YOU REMEMBER?

By Roger M. Jenkins

No. 56 - Gems 930-931 - The Christmas Chase series

The secret of the attractiveness of Charles Hamilton's most justly celebrated Christmas stories lies in the character of Billy Bunter. Like many of Dickens' grotesques, Bunter is the sort of person one delights to read about but would hate to meet in real life. Christmas time being the season of goodwill, it was only fitting that someone who enjoyed all the good things of life should be seen doing just that, and our tolerant indulgence of Bunter's antics at Christmas time lent a magic glow to the later Magnet Christmases. By contrast, the Christmas story in Magnet No. 776, for example, from which Bunter was rigorously excluded, had a chill tone that made all the jollifications at Mauleverer Towers ring rather hollow in 1922.

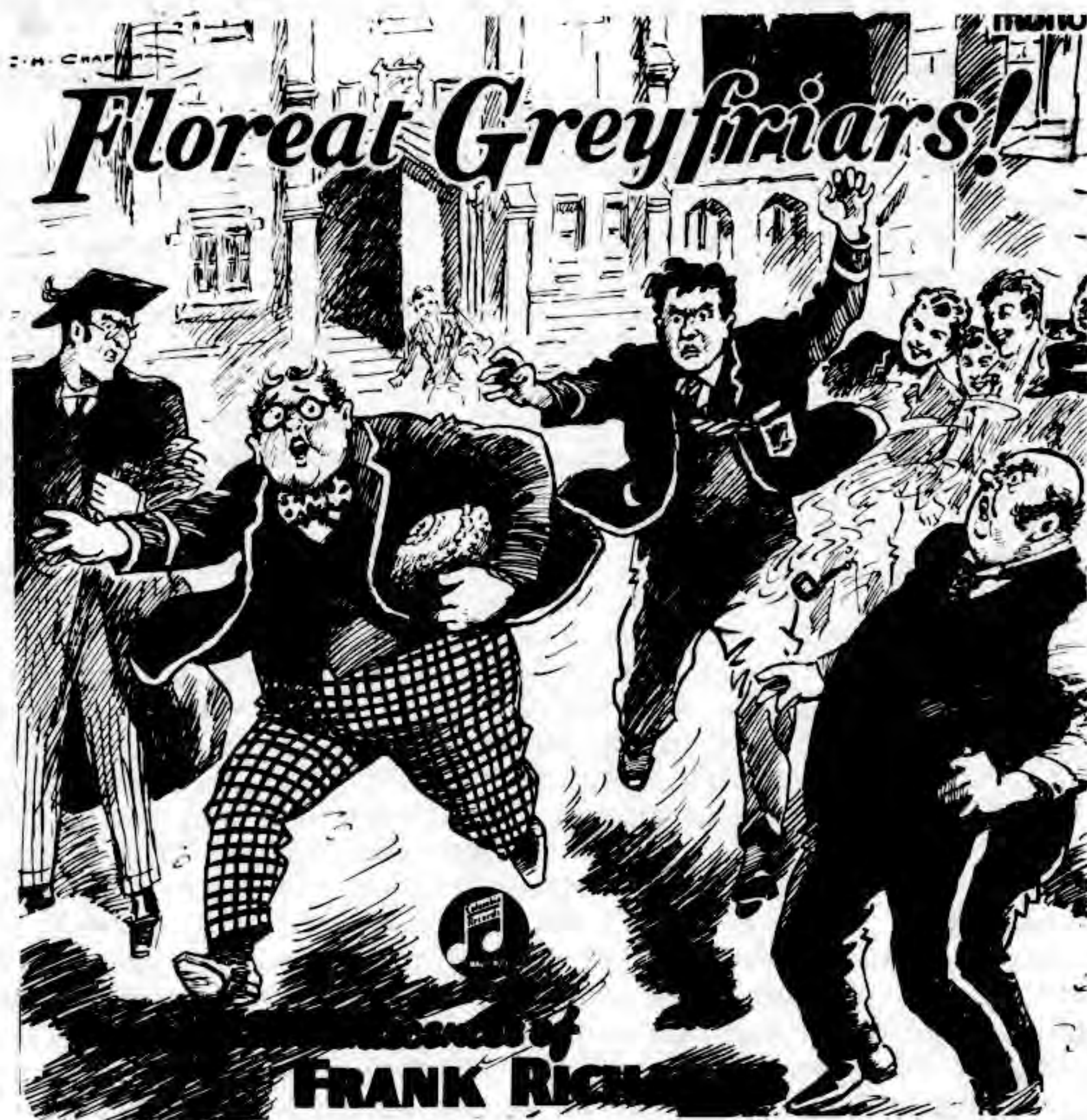
The Gem, having no Bunter in its cast, was always at a disadvantage at Christmas time. Sentiment might demand a setting at Laurel Villa, Miss Priscilla Fawcett's home at Huckleberry Heath, but in fact it possessed a dead atmosphere that rendered it barely tolerable as a background. (Perhaps we were too conscious that it was the home of a fussy old spinster; perhaps we realised that Miss Fawcett was really only a caricature, amusing enough in the early Gems, but not really designed to stand the wear and tear of a thirty-two year run.) It was Eastwood House that offered the strongest challenge to Wharton Lodge, but here the danger lay in presenting too wide a cast, for Tom Merry & Co. had to be joined by Blake & Co. at least: add Wally D'Arcy and his friends and Cousin Ethel and hers, and introduce another group of St. Jim's juniors like Levison & Co., and the result was a party of such mammoth proportions that all sense of friendly intimacy was lost. Instead of the Famous Five and Bunter listening to ghost stories in a cosy atmosphere round the fire at Wharton Lodge, Eastwood House at times could seem as impersonal as the lounge of a grand hotel.

Perhaps it was with all this in mind that Charles Hamilton decided in 1925 to make a new approach to the Christmas story in the Gem. For a change, it was to feature only the Terrible Three, and, in theory, it ought to have been highly successful. In actual fact, it was vitiated by a number of adverse circumstances.

The plot revolved round a dishonest solicitor named Beaumont (did Charles Hamilton ever portray an honest lawyer?). He was absconding

(continued on page 18)..





THE FRANK RICHARDS L/P RECORD

This record, No. 33SX/1784, is released on December 3rd. It is entitled FLOREAT GREYFRIARS.

It must be a delight for anyone who has affectionate memory of Charles Hamilton and his stories. It starts and ends with the School Song, specially composed by Charles Hamilton, and sung by boys of Hendon Grammar School. Then comes "Greyfriars Remembered" with the voice of Nigel Anthony, followed by Charles Hamilton's "Personal Reminiscences."

The cover, and we reproduce the back and front of same here, is almost a collectors' piece in itself. In just one or two places the articles on the back cover will jar on







HAMILTONIANA (continued from page 15)..

with his clients' money, and one of them, named Jocelyn, was so incensed that he was hunting Beaumont with a revolver. Jocelyn came to believe that Tom Merry & Co. could lead him to Beaumont, and so they spent their Christmas vacation being shadowed by a potential murderer. This in itself was wrong: villainy at Christmas time should hide itself under the cloak of the supernatural, and the heroes should be confronted by ghosts, not revolvers.

Another defect was the constantly-shifting scene. The series began at St. Jim's, moved to Laurel Villa, then to Holly Lodge, and finally (in the last paragraph) to Eastwood House. A projected visit to Manners' home was also discussed, as well as a call on Levison & Co. who were staying near Holly Lodge. A summer holiday series demands such journeying, but Christmas ought to be a static time. In this series, no time was allowed for the atmosphere of any one place to build itself up. Furthermore, there is something most unseasonable about the episode in the besieged house, with Tom Merry firing back at the would-be assassin. To complete the indictment, there is no description of the events of Christmas Day itself, which got dismissed in a few vague lines at the end. The whole series bears a vague resemblance to the Dirk Power series of 1920, when the Levisons were chased all over Canada in a few numbers of the Gem - everything is fleeting, unreal, unsatisfactory.

What is to be put on the credit side? First of all, there is the small cast, which helps to focus attention exactly in the right place. Secondly, there is the description of Holly Lodge, the home of Lowther's crusty but kind-hearted uncle and guardian, James Lowther Esquire, M.P., J.P. Even this is an echo of the Holly Lodge series in the Easter of 1925, but the picture of the comfortable but dull household is effectively sketched in a few telling lines.

Of course, muddle at Fleetway House is partly to blame. Gems 932-4 were substitute stories, set at St. Jim's, and then Gems 935-6 continued the Christmas Holiday story with adventures of a different kind at Eastwood House, the explanation being given that it was a special holiday allowed in honour of Lord Eastwood's birthday. But even allowing for this muddle, it seems fair to state that, by 1925, all the famous Gem Christmases belonged to the past. The splendid Magnet Christmases were all to come.

#### LET'S BE CONTROVERSIAL

#### No. 94. A TALE OF TWO ARTICLES

Greyfriars had an outstanding honour on October 7th when a long



article entitled "Bunter the Bulwark" appeared on the front and second pages of The Times Literary Supplement. Well-written, it contains a few of those errors which seem inseparable from articles about Charles Hamilton written by professional writers. Nevertheless, it is heart-warming to anyone who remembers Charles Hamilton with affection and esteem.

In Collectors' Digest Annual for 1965, Frank Vernon Lay is responsible for an excellent study of John Wheway, a writer much beloved and respected in our circle. You will read and enjoy this article for yourselves when the Annual comes your way. At the moment, however, we are merely spotlighting the comments, quoted by Mr. Lay, which Mr. Wheway himself made concerning Charles Hamilton.

It is well-known that Charles Hamilton wrote only, at most, the first six of the Cliff House tales in the School Friend. In the past year or two, the story has gone around (originating apparently from somebody who was in the editorial department in those far-off days) that the Cliff House series was taken peremptorily out of Charles Hamilton's hands because he had failed with it; that the feminine readers did not like yarns about girls being smothered with soot; that Charles Hamilton was absolutely furious when this happened.

Personally, I would not rule out the possibility that the author and the editor might have clashed on some point so that the author withdrew his services. But I think it far more likely that Charles Hamilton accepted a fee to start off the series with a sound setting and a nucleus of good characters, and then willingly turned over the work to another writer as had been planned all along.

According to Frank Lay, Mr. Wheway has written of Hamilton:

"He was a law unto himself... he was almost Fleetway's bread and butter... it is not generally realised with what awe Hamilton was regarded at Fleetway House..."

Mr. Wheway asks: "Can you imagine how he was regarded by the rank and file? He came when he liked, and said what he thought, and departed, and yet he was revered for the sheer brilliance of his writing."

So a man who was "revered for the sheer brilliance of his writing" was expelled from Cliff House because readers did not like to read of schoolgirls being smothered with soot! What nonsense!

The School Friend went to press at least six weeks ahead of publication date, so readers could not have had the opportunity to write in and condemn the first six stories.

Mr. Wheway says: "Hamilton, the doyen of the writers, the man who



taught them all the tricks, was a born gambler, and a snob to boot. He appears to have made very few, if any, firm friends, and to have fallen out with several of his colleagues."

And there we have the root of the fairy-tale that he failed with Cliff House and was furious that the series was taken out of his hands. The A.P. did not risk infuriating their star. He "did as he liked." But this type of man, however "revered" he might be, would inevitably cause jealousy. He was shy, retiring, and introspective. He has told of the agonies he endured from his own shyness. He was not a good mixer. In consequence, to those who did not know him well, he seemed standoffish. Unintentionally he made enemies. Further, he committed the unforgivable sin of being outstandingly successful - and of knowing it.

And the "rank and file," inevitably, looked on, got together, and gossiped. Their gossip, like most gossip, was not always kindly.

I think that Mr. Wheway is right when he says that Charles Hamilton was a snob - but he was a gentle, humane snob. He believed in the old traditions, he believed that breeding counts, he believed in old-fashioned courtesy and respect.

Gentle snobbery peeped often through his stories, particularly in early days when kindness for the poor and the lowly was touched with patronage. But no snob, in the harsher sense could have written stories which were passionately loved by millions of boys in poor circumstances who remembered those stories with keen affection when they grew into more fortunate men.

The Literary Supplement article comments: "It was in the slum streets of London and Glasgow and Cork that this astonishing world (Greyfriars) was most admired. True, the boys in Cork, and, one suspects, in London and Glasgow, had no intention of imitating such absurd virtues as strict truth-telling."

That is an over-statement, and perhaps it is intended to be, though there is truth in it. If, however, the inference drawn is that the appeal of Greyfriars was mainly to the boys with the lowest educational advantages, then the inference is utterly wrong. The files of Collectors' Digest prove, beyond the shadow of doubt, that the admirers of Charles Hamilton came from every walk in life, and they include, probably in equal numbers, those who grew up to enter the professions, or to enter the arts, or to join those branches of mankind who use their hands more than their heads.

The author of the Supplement article says that "Frank Richards in his Greyfriars stories was quite remarkably tolerant." So he was.

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That was why his yarns had such appeal. But he had no tolerance for upstarts, and, in consequence, he did not handle upstart themes at all well.

While reading the long Times Supplement article, one becomes conscious that "Greyfriars Prospectus" has tended to blur the overall picture. The writer of the article uses it to illustrate the points he is making. He tries to prove that "Frank Richards knew little and cared little about the life of public school." All the boys, alleges the article, are called "scholars" which is "highly ambiguous as applied to an alleged public school. It is a term dating from the old Board Schools."

But, in fact, Charles Hamilton did not call the boys "scholars." I do not recall him ever using the term as applied to the boys of Greyfriars. It was Mr. Butcher in his "Prospectus" who called them "scholars."

"Prospectus" does, really, lay open Hamilton's Greyfriars to the type of criticism which it should never have to face. It shows up the preposterously top-heavy Remove form, compared with the small number of boys in all the other forms. It highlights the inadequacy of the teaching staff, and pinpoints the oddness of the curriculum. It enables the critics to say, quite rightly: "There was never a public school like this."

The old, old Who's Whos did the same thing, but they did not matter. They were novelties to please boy readers, and they served their purpose, whereas "Prospectus" was compiled for adults and professional critics.

The ambiguities of Greyfriars, which Prospectus makes obvious, do not come to mind when any reader is enjoying nineteen out of twenty of the great Hamilton series. There is no reason why even the most fastidious of readers should have thought of Greyfriars as anything but an English public school. The huge and incredible Remove Form comprised boys introduced over many years. Plenty of them should have been dropped - and plenty of them were dropped by Hamilton himself. They merely pop up again in Prospectus.

"Greek was not taught." But Greek was taught in the upper forms as Charles Hamilton occasionally mentioned - in the stories.

On the basis of the great Hamilton stories, Greyfriars is as deserving of its status as Wodehouse's "Wrykyn" or even Desmond Coke's "Shrewsbury."

"Hamilton," said Mr. Wheway, "was a born gambler."

Probably Hamilton sometimes lost - but he gambled against George



Orwell - and won.

Orwell, in a bitter attack on the school stories with which we had grown up, alleged that "Frank Richards" was a communal name under which a large number of people wrote tales of Greyfriars.

Now see what the Times Supplement writer says about it: "Orwell had asserted - and assumed - that a great many people wrote under the name "Frank Richards." Frank Richards, in his devastating reply, asserted truthfully that all published under that name had been written by him."

The Supplement was off-side this time, as we know. Charles Hamilton, in his devastating reply, had dissembled. Before we don our "holier-than-thou" haloes and condemn him for that, let us look at the exact position.

Orwell, when he made his sweeping assertion, apparently did not know that a flesh and blood Frank Richards existed. The question which Charles Hamilton took it upon himself to answer was rather in the line of "Have you stopped beating your wife?" It was not true that "Frank Richards" had ever been a communal name used by a large panel of writers. The name belonged to the creator of Greyfriars. But it was true that, many years earlier, the work of a number of other writers had been published under the name of "Frank Richards" with the object of giving readers the impression that all the tales were coming from the creator of the series. The assertion of Orwell was obviously one which it would be difficult to refute while admitting the actual truth.

I do not believe for a moment that Charles Hamilton simply wished to pose as a superman who had written every one of the Magnet stories - though he could have done even that, if he had not had so many irons in the fire. He had actually written every Greyfriars story since mid-1931, and even in the few years preceding 1931 there had been not many substitute stories. All the same, without any doubt he took a gamble on the probability that Orwell did not know what he was talking about.

And it was a gamble. Had Orwell's knowledge of the Magnet been anything but sketchy, he could have made a come-back to that "devastating reply" from Charles Hamilton. If Hamilton had been proved wrong in that one item, all the rest of his powerful arguments would have been weakened.

But Hamilton's gamble won. Orwell had not known what he was talking about.

It is, of course, possible that Charles Hamilton was thinking of the Greyfriars of the last twelve years of the Magnet, and regarded that as entirely his, as it was. There were many subtle changes to make Greyfriars more convincing after he reached the peak of his powers,



say about 1927. Later, he did not, I believe, regard the earlier Greyfriars as of any importance. But it is I fancy, to the earlier Greyfriars that "Prospectus" will admit you as a "scholar."

We can fully agree with the Supplement contributor who added: "Orwell was like a great many highbrows who think that, if they could degrade themselves, they could ... write like Frank Richards... All attempts to imitate Frank Richards have failed."

The Times Supplement article ends with a happy promise:

"But that (the social revolution that George Orwell hoped for) will not be, as long as Frank Richards finds readers or viewers to be fascinated by the fantastic world he created out of next to no knowledge, but out of love and admiration for what he thought was the great English tradition."

If love of tradition is one form of snobbery, we could do with a bit more of that form of snobbery to-day.

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### CONTROVERSIAL ECHOES

#### No. 92. THE PLACE OF RELIGION IN SCHOOL STORIES

FRANK UNWIN: With regard to your "Let's be Controversial" article this month, I never read "The Sunday Crusaders," but I'd love to, just for the laugh. It seems highly comical - but what dreadful writing! Your question, to a person who sincerely believes in the value of religious teaching, is a most difficult one. It must be accepted without any question whatsoever that all the leading public schools, including Greyfriars, place a decided emphasis on the teaching of religion and the need for a boy to follow Christian ethics and to attend divine worship up to the Sixth Form, anyhow, when I believe a public school boy should decide for himself. Having taken it for granted that this is so, it is wrong to make religion the theme of a school story, and especially to make all the atheists the rotters. From our own experience we know very well that many churchgoers are enough to put one off church for good, whilst the conduct of some atheists and agnostics is very "christian" indeed. In this particular story the "syrup" has been absolutely ladled on and it has become nauseating. I fully believe that a good boy is a better boy if he sincerely tries to follow Christian ethics, for his faith will "move mountains," but religion should not be rammed down anybody's throat, especially down the throats of thousands of readers who want nothing more than to read a rattling good school story. An occasional reference to a schoolboy's need for religious guidance, which after all is absolutely fundamental, is all that is necessary. The writer of this story, for all his possible good intent, should have been drowned in his own syrup!

W. LISTER: May I, as a Baptist lay-preacher, make a comment. Dean Farrar, Talbot Baines Reed, and Mrs. O. F. Walton were people with an experience of the Christ of the Christian faith. They knew what they were writing about, and this is a must in religious matters. I think Charles Hamilton wise in keeping within his own sphere.

However, as you point out, religious stories have been popular. Did they do any good? Did Sunday Schools do any good? Look at the world then - and now! By all means get religion over in school stories - in any stories. It can't do any harm. It may do a lot of good.

W.J.A. HUBBARD: Personally I feel C.H. was quite right in excluding religion from his school stories for a tale intended as a means of entertainment, and all school stories,



even of the dramatic type, are primarily intended for this purpose, should obviously not include such a sacred subject as religion. It is noticeable that even the writers of many of the hard cover yarns were wary of introducing the subject and when they did were far from convincing, mainly, I think, because religion is such a transitory emotion among boys. Please do not think I consider religion has not its place in school life for I feel the spirit should be cultivated along with both the mind and the body. I am of the opinion, however, that we only realise the importance of religious instruction when we are fully adult. I may add that I could quote a number of examples in support of this contention.

RON CROLLIE: I was very interested in the article on "The Sunday Crusaders." I have seen mention of it in other Magnets, but have never read it. Your quotations reveal that it is typical of the author: Skinner's commencing a comment with Ahem!; Mr. Quelch's reply: the description of Peter Todd's reclamation. I confess that I quite liked his melodrama when I was twelve years old, even though it had been published 15 years earlier. I might even have liked "Sunday Crusaders" if I had read it at that age, but, of course, to an adult it is utter rubbish.

#### No. 91. THE UBIQUITOUS BUNTER (Further comments)

JOHN TROVELL: No doubt in Billy Bunter Charles Hamilton created the potential money spinner that editorial policy decreed should overflow the Magnet pages until, like Coker with a hamper, or Smithy with a remittance, we were haunted by a Bunter it was impossible to avoid.

As provider of the humour in the lighter vein stories Bunter was an outstanding success, and as such could be appreciated and enjoyed to the full, but for those who knew and loved Greyfriars it is a matter for regret that deserving characters such as Tom Brown, Squiff, Lord Mauleverer, were excluded from the spotlight so dominated by Bunter.

Many of the more dramatic Magnet stories were marred by the untimely intrusion of the fat Owl, and Harry Wharton & Co on just one vacation without him, was a happy thought that we knew would never materialize.

Essential as he was to the Greyfriars scene a less ubiquitous Bunter would have been, in the words of Hamilton, both grateful and comforting.

A.J. SOUTHWAY: I think the whole point is that you either like Bunter or you don't. Personally I couldn't just stomach him, and would have willingly kicked him on any pretext. To my mind he had no redeeming features. The good he did, he did by accident, or to gain his own ends. How the Famous Five, and Mauly, could be hood-winked by the fat man every time a holiday came round, and get landed with his company always irritated me, although I guessed that Frank Richards had to get him on the scene somehow. Why were Bunter, Baggy Trimble and Tubby Muffin, picked out to be such detestable boys? Brooks made his fat boy, Fatty Wynn, one of the best and a good sportsman, too. However, on the other hand, his Handforth was a most impossible character. Nobody could be as stupid as he was surely? Boys like Wharton, Nugent, Redwing, Smithy, and Skinner, to mention a few, were characters that one met with every day and the stories about them, I consider were Hamilton at his best. However, if, as it has been suggested, and I am inclined to agree, it was Bunter that was responsible for us having the Greyfriars stories revived and presented between stiff covers, then I, for one, can forgive him.

ERIC FAYNE adds: A very large number of readers wrote in concerning "The Ubiquitous Bunter." We have published a representative selection, in November and this month, and have no space for more. We thank all who wrote. Mr. Southway obviously means Fatty Little. Perhaps a St. Frank's fan may like to discuss the merits and demerits of Fatty Little for the Lee Column, in the same way that Bunter has been analysed. Fatty Wynn was Charles Hamilton's first fat hero - a fine character who was neglected after blue cover days.

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Bunter was standing on the platform at Courtfield Station, gazing after the express that had vanished down the line.

His little round eyes gleamed with wrath behind his big, round spectacles.

"Of all the beasts --" said Bunter.

The express was gone. The chums of the Remove had gone in it - home for Christmas. Bunter was left.

It was no wonder that Bunter was wrathful.

Greyfriars School had broken up for the Christmas holidays. Greyfriars fellows had scattered north, south, east, or west. Only Bunter hadn't scattered. Bunter wasn't particular whether he went north, south, east, or west, so long as he went where the Christmas fare was good and ample. But from no point of the compass was a Yuletide welcome extended to William George Bunter. It was inexplicable, considering what a fascinating fellow Bunter knew himself to be. But there it was!

Bunter was left!

He had been, perhaps, a little careless. Having settled that he was going home with Lord Mauleverer, Bunter had left it at that. Unfortunately, while Bunter had settled that he was going home with Mauly, Mauly had settled that he wasn't. Mauly had disappeared quite early that day - without Bunter. So the fat junior had had to change his plans at the last moment and decide to go home with Harry Wharton. Now Harry Wharton had disappeared in the express, and Billy Bunter stood on the station platform and confided to the December winds what he thought of Wharton.

"The awful rotter!" said Bunter.

WANTED: Good loose copies or bound volumes containing any of the following: MAGNETS 131 to 149 inclusive; 195; 205; 237; 238; 239; 277; 318; 319; 353; 386 to 400; 417; 422; 435; 752; 753; 762; 763; 773; 809. Most issues between 821 and 890; 900; 921; 924; 925; 936; 938; 940; 942; 943; 946; 951; 965; 967; 988; 996. GEMS: 493; Some issues between 801 and 832. Also Nos. 935; 953; 954; 956; 975; 980; 984; 985; 989; 990; 992; 993; 998. POPULARS: 452; 455; 466; 474. Early Penny Populars: Nos. 12, 13, 45, 47, 58.

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NELSON

LEE

COLUMN

Conducted by JACK WOOD

With the icy winds howling round my rooftops as they must have done round the old turrets and battlements of St. Frank's in olden days, and a thin covering of snow on the ground, I feel very much in the mood for wishing all my many friends, known and unknown, a real Brooksonian Christmas and New Year as yet another year fades into memory.

How time does fly, and yet, how - thanks to the hobby and the many contributors to the C.D. and the Annual - time stands still. May I take this opportunity, too, of adding to seasonable good wishes, my warm thanks to all those who persevere throughout the year to keep our happiest memories alive and fruitful. They do a grand job. Thank you - and especially to those who have kept this Column in being.

A letter in last month's C.D. asked about an old friend of ours, Eileen Dare. So, coupling with it a reminder of one of the most important Christmases in St. Frank's lore, here are a few notes on the young woman who was, 50 years ago next July, introduced to NLL readers as "Nelson Lee's Lady Assistant, No. 1 in a new series."

The sub-title of that story was "The Case of the Girl Detective." For those who like such things, it might be interesting to compare the series which Teed was to provide on a somewhat similar theme relating to the vengeance of Roxane over those who had ruined her father. The similarity is, perhaps, not surprising when we realise that for several months Teed and Brooks were the sole purveyors of the Nelson Lee saga, and were also regular contributors to the Sexton Blake stories as well.

I find a curious parallel today with the stories written by John Creasey under his many noms-de-plume. It is fascinating to compare, say Creasey himself, with Gordon Ashe or Michael Halliday in their treatment of the same basic plot - say an insurance swindle, a jewel robbery or a kidnapped child.

However, back to Eileen, who in the months ahead was to figure largely in a series devoted to her vengeance over the financiers and business men who had killed her father by robbing him of an important invention and causing him to be charged with treason. Like Roxane's enemies, they met just deserts over the months, but Eileen stayed on to become an almost romantic influence in the lives of Lee and Nipper, who always took pride in her all-round athleticism, her "modernity," and her ability as a detective.

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If you want to read of her physical attributes, and can't get an old NLL, then turn to any Norman Conquest story and read Berkeley Gray's description of Norman's wife, the elfin Pixie. One and the same!

It was in NLL Old Series 130, however, that Eileen and Christmas came hand in hand with the St. Frank's saga. Behind the snow covered battlements of Tregellis Castle in the deep West country, Eileen and Lee, with the aid of Sir Montie and Tommy Watson, unravelled the mystery of the disappearing Cavalier ghost. Snow was about, in abundance in the best Brooksonian tradition, there were secret passages galore, and the background of a mentally-handicapped king and a childhood exchange of babies for good measure.

But from our point of view, the most important thing was that for the first time Sir Montie and Tommy Watson learned the real identity of Peter Alvington and Dick Bennett, and Lee and Nipper could take their rightful places at St. Frank's. The decision had been made; detective and school yarns COULD go hand in hand satisfactorily. And that was the pattern almost entirely from then onwards until internal affairs at Fleetway House brought about the end.

Yes, double length NLL 130, dated Dec. 1, 1917, The Phantom of Tregellis Castle, had much to answer for, and a great deal to commend it on its place in St. Frank's history.

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### ECHO OF "ODD MAN OUT"

By C. H. Churchill

I found Reuben Godsave's article on Nelson Lee No. 243 most interesting, as the unusual cover has often puzzled me. I am now pleased to be able to add to the mystery.

At the time of publication (Jan. 1920) the "Boys' Realm" was also appearing and contained stories of St. Frank's reputedly by E.S. Brooks or rather "The author of the St. Frank's stories in the N.L.L." Some, of course, were obviously not by him at all. Included each week was a small advert exhorting readers to also buy the N.L.L. These adverts included a small reproduction of the N.L.L. cover. The point is that in the Boys' Realm dated 31/1/20 the advert for N. Lee No. 243 shews a blank space where the title of the story should be, and the reproduction of the N.L. cover is only half shown (the top half). This top piece portrays a group of people around a table (which appears blank) with an Eton suited figure resting a hand on the "blank" table. All this is obviously meant to be a picture of Singleton in the gambling den, as described in the story.

To anyone reading this article, able to remember the cover of N.L. No. 243, it will be clear that this is nothing like the cover picture



that actually did appear on that number of the paper.

Being in the printing trade, I took N. Lee No. 243 and the relevant Boys' Realm to the factory and consulted the foreman overseer of the composing department. It is rather amusing to quote his first remark to me, -

"The Nelson Lee! I remember that book. All about St. Jim's wasn't it? A boy called Handforth in it. He had two pals who only put up with him because he used to lash out the money."

After I had disillusioned him on these points he examined the books and gave it as his opinion that the N. Lee covers would be printed by two tone blocks. He thought that something had happened to the blocks at the last moment before printing so that a substitute cover picture had to be produced at short notice. This would not give enough time for new two tone blocks to be made as this would take some time, so a "fake up" in two colours of the sketch in the middle of No. 243 was used as a front cover.

This professional view of our comps foreman is all I can offer as an explanation. I can offer nothing as to the change of title from that advertised in the previous weeks Lee. Anyway, something most unusual did happen that time long ago in 1920. I do not suppose we shall ever know the real truth, but I feel that the above suggested explanation is probably quite near to it.

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ROBERT BLYTHE WRITES:

Your correspondent, H. Chapman, raises an interesting point concerning E. S. Turner's remarks. It is true that the last new St. Frank's story appeared in the Gem in 1935, but reprints were still appearing in the S.O.L. as late as 1940. It is just possible that Turner, glancing at some covers without bothering to read the story, may have come to the wrong conclusion.

For example, the cover of "Rebellion at St. Frank's" shows the boys in uniform in trenches, repelling an attack. The occasion was the rebellion against Miss Trimble and her mistresses, and the boys were in cadet uniform. The book was dated February 1940.

Some of the covers of 1939 might be similarly misleading. The title of No. 393 was "War in the New World." One thing is certain. Hitler was never mentioned.

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# NEWS OF THE CLUBS

## MIDLAND

Meeting held 26th October, 1965.

Eleven members gathered for another entertaining evening which got off to a prompt start.

The correspondence contained a letter from Mr. W. N. Hull of Barrow-on-Trent, who wished to join our club as a postal member and a holiday card from Stan Knight, another postal member. These items were received with great interest. The Merseyside newsletter The Foghorn (September issue) was passed round by the acting secretary and was read with great interest - congratulations Merseyside!

The collector's items, our usual feature, were this month supplied by three members. "The Blue Crusaders" by A. S. Hardy No. 240 of The Boys' Friend (3d) Library was supplied by Harry Broster. The Dixon Brett Library No. 1 "The Black Eagle Mystery" came from Norman Gregory and Magnet No. 1132 dated 26th Oct. 1929, "Skinner's Shady Scheme," our anniversary number came from Tom Porter.

The programme as planned had to be modified as several members listed to give items were not present. In his absence Harry Broster sent along an article which appeared in "The Times Literary Supplement" on Oct. 7th, to be read to the meeting entitled "Bunter the Bulwark."

The theme of this long article was the curious fact that almost against his will and in spite of his own aims, Charles Hamilton had created in William George Bunter a folk hero who could rank with Dickens' Mr. Micawber and Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes as a literary character everyone knew about. This was a feat beyond the powers of some of our greatest writers: Hardy, Meredith and Kipling.

The writer lashes out at George Orwell for criticising Charles Hamilton before he had done his homework properly, but in point of fact his own homework had been very inadequately done for his article contains some errors quite apparent to Hamilton devotees. His statement that all stories appearing under Charles Hamilton's pen names were written by him is an inexcusable error after all the research that has been done by Bill Lofts and others in tracing the many substitute writers who used the great man's names as a cover for their often ineffectual efforts.

A quiz conducted orally followed the reading, members answering twelve questions on the well-known Hamilton schools and St. Frank's as they were inclined and this was followed by a game called "Guessing the Title."

"Were the St. Sam's stories an asset to the Magnet or did they detract from it?" This was the topic for discussion. After some lively exchanges opinion was unanimous that the St. Sam's stories were an asset and an attraction.

The final item was a splendid reading by Madge Corbett as an appropriate follow-up to the previous discussion, "Football Fever at St. Sam's." The reading underlined the fact that the St. Sam's stories were definitely an asset to the Magnet.

J. F. BELLFIELD

Correspondent.

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Meeting held 13th November, 1965

## NORTHERN

Geoffrey Wilde, our chairman, opened the November meeting at 7.0 p.m. and welcomed an attendance of 17 members. The warmth of our club room was very welcome after the cold raw weather prevailing outside.

After formal business had been dealt with and the month's correspondence read out by Gerry Allison (an unusually large and interesting batch this month) we had a discussion on the Christmas Party, which will be held on Saturday, 11th December. It will commence at 4.30 p.m. with the usual feed, and we are looking forward to a very good time as

**STOP PRESS:** We deeply regret to report that Frank Hancock, Secretary of the Northern Section O.B.B.C., died suddenly on Thursday, November 25th. He was 54.



usual.

There was also a discussion on Armada Books and the Fleetway Press, and their various ways, at which some forthright opinions were expressed.

The first item in the evening's entertainment was a word-building puzzle by Frank Hancock, the contestants having to make up the names of eight Greyfriars Removites from a group of letters. Ron Hodgson won this, although he was closely followed home by Gerry Allison, Harry Lavender and Geoffrey Wilde.

Then followed a talk by Geoffrey Wilde, the theme of which was the skill of Frank Richards in writing stories to fit the season in which they appeared. The chief emphasis was, of course, on Guy Fawkes night, which the author utilised on a number of occasions, and Geoff. read a very entertaining extract from one of the stories in the Warren series, in which Coker and Bunter played leading parts, and which ended with Coker's bag of fireworks (cunningly disguised as a packet of toffee), found by Bunter, being thrown on the fire in the Remove form-room at Mr. Quelch's command!

Then refreshments were taken, after which Gerry Allison gave us a reading from a Jack North story, 'Prefects of Bowker's House,' which included a very realistic report of a school football match. Gerry found this rather taxing, and Ron Hodgson finished off the reading, which made an effective contrast to the Greyfriars story we had heard earlier. The meeting closed at 9.25 p.m.

F. HANCOCK                      Hon. Sec.

Next month, Christmas Party, Saturday, 11th December, 4.30 p.m.

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#### MERSEYSIDE

Meeting held 14th November.

Once again a splendid meeting, boasting the highest attendance for a very long time. With Frank Case from Nottingham, Bill Greenwood from Rock Ferry, and a most welcome re-appearance of our old friend and colleague, George Riley from Barnsley, four counties were represented; it was quite like old times to have such a full muster, certainly most gratifying to all present. Only the regrettable absence of John Farrell prevented us marking up a maximum attendance; we were extremely sorry he was unable to share such a pleasant evening with us. Bill Windsor opened proceedings with the reading of correspondence, etc; there were many items for discussion, and the first hour fairly flew over. Then came a quiz, devised and conducted by Pat Laffey; a most excellent one, dealing with general literature, which we quite enjoyed, even though it was not as easy as appeared at first sight. Once again the Brooks team triumphed, though the result was close indeed; Brooks scoring ten points to Hamilton's nine. The former are certainly holding on to their lead, which is now becoming a substantial one. The library business followed refreshments, and the rest of the evening was spent in arranging the programme for the Christmas meeting. A full and varied bill of entertainment should make this an occasion to be remembered; members are reminded that there will be much to get through, and their prompt arrival at 5-30 p.m. on Sunday, 12th December will be appreciated.

FRANK CASE

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#### LONDON

A very good attendance at the November Dollis Hill meeting thoroughly enjoyed two fine talks. Firstly, George Beal of Odhams Press, gave an address on Children's Annuals. When he had finished his discourse, he invited questions on the subject. These questions were numerous, one and all joining in. Mr. Beal had previously been with the "Daily Mail," and Fleetway Publications, thus he could speak with authority on the subject. A feature that was good, and it was through the chairman, Brian Doyle, that Mr. Beal attended the meeting. This brought up the time for tea ably dispensed by the hosts, Bob and Laura Blythe, plus the help of the ladies present.

After tea there was a reading about St. Sam's by Tom Wright, a "Magnet" number one quiz by Don Webster in which Charlie Wright was an easy winner. Messrs. Peters, Sutton, Bennett, Hopkins and Acraman were all joint seconds. (continued on page 32)...



# THE POSTMAN CALLED

(Interesting items from The  
Editor's Letter-bag)



GEORGE SELLARS (Sheffield): Dear old Danny, how he does revive my memories of that very eventful year of 1915. The Chaplin song (I have always remembered the tune and words since I used to sing it as a boy.) Like Danny, I was very fond of the "Pictures" in those days, and I still remember most of the stars. I used to visit the "pictures" at least 3 times a week. These days I've not been for years.

(And the cinemas are closing down all over the country because we don't support them any more. How disloyal can we get? Or are we just repulsed by the sex, smut, and horror? It's worth making an exception for "That Darn Cat," which must be the funniest since Chaplin. - ED.)

E. DAVEY (Christchurch): The Digest is a fabulous publication. Why didn't I get to know it years ago?

ALF HANSON (Urmston): I am getting perturbed about our wishful thinking in getting thrilled at possibilities of more old stories being published. Don't let's kid ourselves any more. The only way to penetrate the taste of to-day would be to have jet-propelled Harry Whartons and Bob Cherrys; Tom Merry and Figgins as planet rivals; St. Frank's as a space school; the Skinners and Cos. as beat groups; Loder and his like as leaders of great train robberies, etc.

I, for one, am not prepared to buy these new publications just to support what the publishers do to help the sales. I wait instead for the next Collectors' Digest Annual.

O.W. Wadham (New Zealand): The New Zealand Woman's Weekly has a circulation of over 200,000 copies a week. Some of its readers must remember the Magnet, and they must be puzzled. In a recent issue mention is made of the Magnet reprint by Fleetway, but instead of No. 1 the W.W. has printed No. 19 as the 1908 reissue.

Could this be prophetic? Was Magnet No. 19 anything special, and what was its title? (Probably a misprint. No. 19 was "The Greyfriars Challenge." - ED.)

FRANK SHAW (Liverpool): Danny, as you say, is always correct about his dates. I wonder does he recall an English comic in the kinemas called "Pimple." I think he was on the front of a comic paper. Was it the grand old Funny Wonder? I remember Chaplin's first appearance on a cover and still think Casey's Court, the stories of Cheerful Charlie Brown, Handsome Harry, our office boy and the cross talks were good stuff for kids of our age. But when we graduated to the Magnet, Gem, Penny Pop and Boys' Realm we found a grander pasturage. Unlucky modern kids!

(Of course they were good for us! Danny mentions "Pimple" in this month's extract, and we fancy he has mentioned him before. We cannot say whether "Pimple" was ever in a comic paper, but probably some readers will remember. -ED.)

E. THOMSON (Edinburgh): Danny certainly kept his Diary up to date. I remember all the old silent films he mentions - Clutching Hand, Perils of Pauline, Silent Menace, Hooded Terror, etc, all featuring lovely Pearl White. Another queen of the silent screen was Ruth Roland. I forget the films this other favourite of mine played in, but how I enjoyed those good old thrillers. Halcyon days!

JOHN LOMAS (Regina, Canada): Collectors' Digest is indeed an outstanding magazine of



interest for old boys like myself, and I get a kick out of reading facts and comments contributed by its writers and readers, and up to the minute news on future publications of school stories I so much enjoy.

PETER HANGER (Northampton): I thought "The Grand Old Duke of York" editorial a fine piece of writing. In view of all the frustrations you must feel on this subject, your good humour does you great credit. With regard to H. Chapman's remarks about St. Frank's boys in uniform. Could this refer to three S.O.L's in 1940? If I recall rightly, the covers depicted boys in uniform, but this had nothing to do with the war. They were, in fact, the Petticoat Rebellion series.

### OUR CHRISTMAS COMPETITION

The competition sheet is given loose with the Christmas Number of Collectors' Digest. It is a competition which featured in ANSWERS nearly sixty years ago, except that we are only asking for two pictures to be solved, while ANSWERS had a series of them.

Jig-saw puzzles were all the rage at that time. Everybody was doing them, and, according to report, people were paying as much as five guineas to purchase just one jig-saw.

In the competition we give you two pictures. The small picture piece of the flying machine at the top is a missing part of each picture. Carefully cut out the separate pieces of each of the pictures, making sure to keep the pictures separate. Then make up your two jig-saw puzzles. Fit the flying machine into one of the pictures. In the second picture, leave the space blank where the flying machine should fit. When you have assembled the two jig-saws, paste them on to a sheet of paper, add your name and address, and post the sheet to the editor.

In Answers, they gave as a first prize a Rover motor-car worth £150. We cannot be so generous. We shall award two prizes - the very latest William Book and the very latest Agatha Christie to the two readers who submit the best efforts.

Even if you don't have a shot at the competition, we hope you will still enjoy yourself with the jigsaws.

### LONDON REPORT (continued from page 30)..

Bob Blythe reported that 259 books were out on loan in his Nelson Lee section of the library.

Roger Jenkins also reported good business in the Hamiltonian section and stated that all the "Populars" were now in new binding.

Mention was made of the Columbia 12 inch record about Frank Richards. We hope to have a playing of this at the Cricklewood Christmas meeting.

Bill Lofts gave a talk on Sexton Blake and the author, Anthony Skene. This led up to a general discussion on detectives. This feature took up the remaining time that was available and with votes of thanks to the hosts and to W. Davan Neill of Hornchurch for his generous gift to the Nelson Lee library, it was homeward bound for all of us.

Due to the indisposition of our Len Packman, to whom the best wishes of all who attended the meeting go out to him in hospital, the December Christmas meeting will now take place at the home of Bill and Marjorie Norris, 71, Olive Road, Cricklewood, London, N.W.2., phone GLadstone 8148, on Sunday 19th. Kindly let hosts know if attending so as to facilitate catering arrangements.

UNCLE BENJAMIN

W A N T E D Chums Annuals before 1910. Reasonable price.

N. WOOD, 367 BADDOW ROAD, CHELMSFORD.