

THIS month we devote a large amount of our available space to a very interesting letter from one of our most valuable contributors, author Martin Thomas.

Mr. Thomas raises a point of view shared by many newcomers to the *Sexton Blake Library*. And we believe it may also be the view of a large number of older readers.

Martin Thomas, in a searching assessment of the present-day Sexton Blake Circle, talks about—

THE QUICK AND THE DEAD

For more than two years I have read every issue of the *Collector's Digest*, and naturally with particular interest in the "Blakiana" section. As a result I have been struck by one remarkable fact. I have 29 consecutive issues of the *Digest* in my possession. Each issue contains Mr. Walter Webb's perceptive and forthright reviews of the current S.B.L.s.—but otherwise only four of those 29 issues have any reference to the modern Sexton Blake!

This fact inevitably evokes the question: does "Blakiana" cater for the Sexton Blake Circle—or only a small segment of that Circle?

Let us be quite frank about this. Of all the pre-war periodicals discussed in *Collector's Digest*, the *Sexton Blake Library* is the only one still in existence. And the circle of its worldwide reading public includes not only pre-war enthusiasts, but a large proportion of post-war recruits: new readers to whom Sexton Blake is not primarily a character of historical interest, but the most international and active detective of 1960.

To what extent does "Blakiana" cater for these new generations of Blake "fans"? To a newcomer, what is there in the C.D. to suggest that the *Sexton Blake Library* is even still in existence? Only those able reviews by Walter Webb. If it were not for them, any newcomer would imagine that the Blake magazine had expired with the other periodicals discussed.

At best, a newcomer would certainly gain the impression that no Blake stories published since the War have been worthy of discussion!

The situation is really ridiculous. Here is the Blake saga, revitalised and flourishing, with great things ahead—and attracting new readers eager to join the Sexton Blake Circle. Naturally they expect to find the Circle's monthly magazine feature interested in the present-day Blake they know and admire. But, on joining the Circle or sampling the C.D., what do they find in "Blakiana"? The atmosphere of an archaeological "digging," and antiquarian society, or an inquest on a body long dead! They find a feature immersed in the remote past, virtually oblivious of the Blake of the present and future.

Instead of lively discussions about the "living," atomic-age Blake, they find history lessons—and lessons in ancient history at that. To all readers under 20—of whom there are many—even 1939 is "history," and the 1920's are as remote as the

MAGAZINE SECTION



MAIL BAG

Boer War. It must be with a shock that such readers turn from the S.B.L.'s, contemporary Blake to "Blakiana's" absorption in the archaic.

It is right, of course, that new young Blake "fans" should be told of the long tradition they inherit, of the status of the character and the uniqueness of his record. But why is that record treated as though it had ended 20 years ago? It would be a very unbalanced history of motoring which concentrated on the old Model "T" Ford and completely ignored the Zodiacs and Fairlines now on the road!

Let me stress that the editorial direction of the *Collector's Digest* cannot be held responsible for this lamentable neglect of today's Sexton Blake. The late Herbert Leckenby, young in heart and mind, had no sympathy with diehards who go through life uninterruptedly looking back over their shoulders and missing all that is abreast and ahead of them. He was an enthusiast for the modern Sexton Blake and, had he been in charge of the "Blakiana" section, would no doubt have brought to it the same alert vigour he brought to the Hamilton section. He certainly ignored no current activity of the Hamilton characters!

His successor, the present editor, has shown a similar flair for raising ingenious and stimulating points for discussion—even though handicapped by the fact of dealing with periodicals no longer published.

The Nelson Lee fans, similarly handicapped, have gone even further. With no present-day St. Frank's to discuss, they have imagined one for themselves—and enthusiastically discuss its "present" activities!

The Sexton Blake Circle needs no such enterprise. It has a vigorous series in print every month and a modern Blake at this moment on the cinema screen. And the S.B.L. Mailbag feature underlines a fact which the "Blakiana" section of C.D. virtually ignores. That the ranks of Blake enthusiasts include a high proportion of new, young readers who deserve some consideration of any feature claiming to represent the Sexton Blake Circle.

It is natural, of course, to feel a certain nostalgic senti-



MAILBAG continued

mentality towards anything associated with one's youth—"when all the trees are green, and every goose a swan, lad, and every lass a queen." Stories read in one's youth have a sentimental aura due not only to their personal associations, but to the more impressionable, less critical age at which they were read! But a newcomer to "Blakiana" is apt to get the impression that almost every pre-war story had been a masterpiece—and every post-war story unworthy of discussion.

What attention has been spared for the modern Blake? The 1958 *Collector's Digest Annual* contained an expert analysis by Walter Webb of the transition to the New Order, and an equally capable assessment by Frank Unwin of the 1958 Blake. The March 1959 *C.D.* presented a fascinating study by Elizabeth J. Pate of the present position of the "Hands of Time" in Blake history. The following month Margaret Cooke graphically described some of the Perils of being Paula.

These four contributors have shown what can be done, and what should be done if the Sexton Blake Circle is to mean anything to today's readers. Yet the "Blakiana" section of this year's *C.D. Annual* contained no reference at all to the contemporary Blake: 25 of the last 29 *Digest* monthlies have ignored him—and in general the "Blakiana" feature treats the character as of historical interest only.

Total preoccupation with the past might be a symptom of mental old age, of hardening of the mental arteries. What must post-war readers think of a feature which dwells repetitively and interminably on run-of-the-mill stories of thirty or forty years ago—and completely ignores such modern landmarks as *The Last Days of Berlin*? Yet what has "Blakiana" had to say about that epic, powerfully painted on a vast canvas? About *A Touch of Evil*—Blake's first encounter with adversaries from Space? About Jack Trevor Story's individual, deliciously piquant humour, and the new gay dimension it brought to Blake fiction?

These are the stuff of the modern reader's interest. The ingredients which stimulate him into wanting to become a member of a Sexton Blake Circle. But does he find in "Blakiana" a reflection of the S.B.L.'s space-age detective? Hardly! He finds himself among gardeners engrossed with the roots of the Blake tree but oblivious of the post-war crops of fruit! He finds himself in an atmosphere not of contemporary Blake readers, but one in which the subject under discussion might as well be foreign stamps or matchbox covers.

In 1956 the S.B.L. took a bracing cold shower and emerged from its pre-war hangover. The Blake tradition had always been an adaptable, progressive one, never static for long: and to that fact it owes its survival. But one is compelled to remark that the "Blakiana" feature has shown no sign of such progressive adaptability, of emerging from its haze of pre-war nostalgia into a recognition that Time Marches On.

Unless and until it does so, it can cater for only

a tiny minority of Blake enthusiasts. And Sexton Blake's destiny depends, as it always has depended, on those with an interest in his present and future activities.

There is obviously a place for the collecting of, historical and statistical aspects of Blake lore. But if the "Blakiana" feature can cater for only those interests, there is evidently room and a need for a separate Circle—to cater for today's Sexton Blake reader.

A Circle to go forward with that reader and with Sexton Blake . . . into the 1960's.

Martin Thomas, BCM/Blizarre, London, W.C.1.

HAPPY COMPROMISE

Your recent Editorial dealing with the difficulties of introducing characters of the past into the modern *Sexton Blake Library* has really made the situation very clear. Already you have come more than half way to meet the wishes of the "Old Guard" and I am sure that now at last they will see the Editor's point of view as well as their own.

All good wishes for the continued success of the *Library*.

Miss Bette Pate, 8, Day Street, Drummoyne, N.S.W., Australia.

RECRUIT

I am a new recruit to the *Sexton Blake Library* and I am writing to tell you how much I enjoy the stories.

After reading just one issue I knew I had to have the series regularly. You and your staff are doing wonderful work: please keep it up.

Mr. V. Welland, Jr., 13, Haunchwood Road, Stockingford, Nuneaton, Warwickshire.

AUSTRALIAN LOYALTY

A recent rumour regarding a possible cessation of publication of the *Sexton Blake Library* struck an ominous note. The prospect of a "Blakeless" future is too grim to envisage, and is quite honestly something I do not care to contemplate after 43 years as a regular reader.

So, like one or two of your previous correspondents, I have ordered three copies of every future issue instead of one. This is only a small effort but if a sufficient number of other readers are doing the same and thereby securing new readers, the drastic alternative should not be necessary.

All good wishes for the continued success of the *Sexton Blake Library*.

S. G. Swan, 51, Beatty Avenue, East Victoria Park, Western Australia.

MORE LETTERS

A further selection of readers' letters is published in our companion novel *MURDER MADE EASY* No. 446, on sale now.

And don't forget to place a firm order for next month's issues with your newsgate today.

It is one way to ensure prompt delivery of your favourite monthly magazine.

Next month's stories, **THIS MAN MUST DIE** and **BRED TO KILL**, promise to be exceptionally good reading. So don't miss them on any account.

In the meantime, best wishes from

Your sincere friend,

THE EDITOR.

First to leap to BLAKIANA's defence was Bette Pate, a regular contributor to THE COLLECTOR'S DIGEST and wife of the Australian Sexton Blake enthusiast, Victor Colby. Directly after Mission to Mexico was published, she wrote directly to Martin Thomas.

Note: You'll need to persevere with Bette's rather impenetrable handwriting:

"copy"

29.2.60.

Dear Mr. Thomas,

As the writer of the article "The Hands of Time", I found your remarks in the February S.B.L. most encouraging - an amateur always appreciates favourable comment from a professional. However as an Australian with an innate sense of fair play I feel that the facts expressed by you did not present all the facts of the matter & this, I consider, is a most necessary feature of the position is to be fairly assessed by all readers.

One point I would like to make clear before you consign this letter to your waste basket - as the work of a "fanatical female" - whilst not belonging to the under 20 class to which you refer, neither do I qualify for the over 40 group on whom you have clumsily launched

this attack. Therefore I feel I am in an ideal position to see both sides of the situation.

Also, whilst I am extremely interested in the Blake Saga, I have many other interests so am an enthusiast, not a fanatic. As secretary of the Sydney branch of the O. B. B. C. I enjoy a wide & varied correspondence with friends both here & overseas and am interested in various other hobbies — in other words I don't live, breathe & eat "Blake", neither do I consider either the old or new style perfection, or vice versa.

Your article implied that there had been discrimination against the modern Blake & that the Editors of *Blakiana* had been guilty of favouritism, or worse still, intentional suppression of articles dealing with the "New Look". I am quite certain that such has never been the case and whoever told you such an obvious lie was either misinformed himself or else a disgruntled contributor whose offering was too poor to publish — in my opinion your own

Jerie Packman in apology and
a published one at that for
this slur cast on her integrity,
whether intentional or not on
your part when you
have proved the truth of my
statement, as I know you will,
I feel sure you will have the
courage to say so in the S. B. L.

One point which you
quite omitted to mention
was that the articles published
in the C. D. are the result of
the interest and enthusiasm
of the subscribers as there are
no professional writers. Young
folks these days are notoriously
inarticulate as I have found
through close association with
the teenagers and early twenties.
My work as a supervisor of a
section staffed by fifteen girls
in one of Australia's largest Life
Insurance companies gives me a
first-hand opportunity to observe
this age group the
point I am ⁽³⁾ making is this.

are the under 20s interested enough in the current Blake stories to write an article on them and secondly, granting them the interest, have they the ability? As a generation reared on T.V. and the strip cartoon the written word does not come easily to them — even a letter is quite a struggle for most of them, I can assure you.

My recent three-part article to which you referred was written only after considerable research amongst borrowed books as my own personal contact with the Blake Saga did not reach back into those earlier days — my desire to find out how the characters started and later evolved prompted my research but in all honesty I must admit that the New Look Blake does not inspire me in the same way. In fact I can't see just what ⁴⁴¹ could be

written on this subject when it
is all so new in every one's mind
— granted the under 20s may
not cherish their copies as
was done formerly but back
issues are easily obtainable
so quite abundantly informative
articles on these current stories
are redundant. Articles on
the earlier Blake however
provide information which
is hard to come by as the
original stories are collectors
items — after all, if we are
to understand the present
world we study the past
to help us.

The final point I would
like to make — "Blakiana"
is open to all C. D. subscribers
and as I have been elected
a member of the Weston
Blake Circle it is quite
obvious that my remarks
on the modern Blake in my
last article did not count
against me (5) — as you

admitted, articles on the New
Look have been published
but the whole point is these
articles have to be written
first. You are a member
of the O. B. B. C. and with
your inside knowledge of
the modern Blake appear to
be the ideal choice to express
the views of your contemporaries
in the C. D. . . . surely
your contract with Fleetway
Publications would not
prevent your writing without
payment, rather, would I
think, that Mr. Baker would
have welcomed your
enthusiastic outpourings as
free publicity in the same
way as Walter Webb's
reviews of the current S.B.s
have provided excellent free
publicity for some considerable

time in the C. D.

Well, I have no doubt that if I do receive a reply to this letter it will be an interesting one and even if I don't hear from you on this subject at least I will have a clear conscience as I could not stand by and see such an unjust attack pass unanswered.

Sincerely

Bette Paté

In the March edition of THE COLLECTORS' DIGEST, its Editor, Eric Fayne, also had something to say:

TOUCH YOUR TOES, C.D.! The C.D. has been given twelve of the best across the Blakiana portion of its anatomy; the wielder of the birch was the Sexton Blake Library, personified in the famous author, Mr. Martin Thomas, who reads this magazine in the spare moments he has between writing first-class Sexton Blake stories.

Three whole columns of small print, headed "The Quick and the

Dead" are devoted, in S.B.L. No. 445, to a vigorous attack on Blakiana. The gist of the complaint is that our popular Column deals with the ancient history of Sexton Blake and his chroniclers, to the almost total exclusion of consideration for the present-day Sexton Blake Library.

Mr. Thomas writes: "At best, a newcomer would gain the impression that no Blake stories published since the war have been worthy of discussion. Here is the Blake saga, revitalised and flourishing, with great things ahead, attracting new readers. On sampling the C.D., those new readers find a feature immersed in the remote past, virtually oblivious of the Blake of the present and future."

Mr. Thomas also asks a question, and answers it: "To a newcomer, what is there in the C.D. to suggest that the Sexton Blake Library is even still in existence? ONLY those able reviews by Walter Webb." (The capital letters are ours,)

The Collector's Digest is by no means out of sympathy with the views expressed by Mr. Thomas. We concede that there is truth in his arguments. Since his criticism appeared we have received many letters on the subject from readers - some, but not all, fully agreeing with his comments. It is, perhaps, fair to add that between the beginning of December and mid-February, well over a thousand letters arrived at this office, and not more than one or two contained any criticism of Blakiana.

We assure our readers that it is not editorial policy to neglect the modern Blake, or to discourage exchanges of opinions on the present Sexton Blake Library. We are delighted that Blake is still with us, and hope that he will always be with us. Time may bring the C.D. a new section - the MODERN BLAKE. Nothing would please us more than to be able to present it. But we ask all to remember that the C.D. has to cater for a number of tastes and interests. With scant regard for economy, and notwithstanding the financial situation, every issue of the C.D. has been enlarged by FOUR PAGES since December, but we still seem to be in the position of trying to get a quart into a pint mug. The amount of space we can devote to Blake is limited.

It is inevitable, when criticism of this type is felt necessary, that someone's feelings are hurt. We feel it appropriate, at this stage, to pay tribute to our distinguished contributor, JOSIE PACKMAN, whose devotion and loyalty to Sexton Blake and to this magazine can never be in question. Josie has worked and is working, tirelessly and unselfishly. Her trojan efforts down the years have given joy and pleasure to countless readers, and she is assured of our gratitude and understanding.

And the Editor, as he wriggles under the weals of castigation

which have joined the cradle marks of editorship on his tender hind-quarters, promises readers that he intends, as he always has intended, to "do right" by the modern Blake.

The Editor

Martin Thomas replied to Bette Pate with the following letter:

MARTIN THOMAS

Permanent Address:

BCM/BIZARRE,

LONDON, W.C.1.

ENGLAND.

Miss Bette Pate,
8 Day Street,
Drummoyne,
N. S. W.,
Australia.

16th March, 1960

Dear Miss Pate,

Many thanks for your letter of February 29th, which I have read with great interest.

Among the several letters I have received concerning my remarks in the February "Mailbag," yours, so far, has been the only one to disagree with my complaint about the "Blakiana" feature's neglect of the modern Sexton Blake. Indeed, even the editor of "Collector's Digest," in his very sporting and good-humoured comments this month, concedes that there was some validity in my argument.

You are correct in assuming that if I had written anything requiring an apology, I should have no hesitation in tendering such an apology in print. But, quite frankly, I don't feel in the least apologetic about my remarks! On the contrary, I am quite startled by some of the implications you have "found" in them.

For instance, I made no suggestion that articles dealing with the "New Look" had been "suppressed" by "Blakiana." But it is one of the facts of life that a publication's, or feature's, policy is judged from the kind of material it habitually publishes. I therefore think it fair to say that "Blakiana's" past policy as revealed in its columns has hardly encouraged the offer of contributions about the contemporary Blake. (Even an articulate jet-plane enthusiast would not offer an article about jet-planes to a feature which dealt almost entirely with travel by balloon!) And, while the "C.D." has often pleaded for more material about Nelson Lee, I don't recall any request for material about the modern Sexton Blake.

I did not "launch an attack" on the over-40's. (I happen to be in the mid-forties myself!) My complaint was directed at a mental attitude which sees little virtue or interest in any entertainment produced since the days of its own youth. Such an attitude is almost as absurd and narrow as that of the young fanatic who regards any topic outside his personal taste as "square." What I did advocate was a comprehensive breadth of interest to include both pre-war and post-war eras.

Letters from young readers to "Mailbag" show them to be far from incapable of contributing to intelligent discussion of the modern Blake. One boy, as you may have seen, even expressed himself in verse.

Throughout history there has been a tendency to decry the younger generations. It is quite probable that there are fewer young people today with a taste for reading than in previous generations, but modern distractions make that understandable - and it's just as probable that many of today's 40 year-olds watch TV in the leisure-time their fathers would have devoted to a book! No age-group has a monopoly of readers or non-readers. But it's fairly certain that anyone, of any age, literate enough to read a Sexton Blake story is articulate enough to discuss the subject. It is impossible to generalise and classify by age-groups alone.

A specialised magazine like "C.D." is apt to give its readers a false impression of their own generation! Obviously "C.D.'s" middle-aged subscribers were keen readers in their youth, or they wouldn't be interested in "C.D." - but there were just as many people of their generation who never read a periodical in their youth. All specialised clubs create such false impressions. According to which one you join, you might imagine the world to be populated solely by stamp-collectors or motoring enthusiasts or amateur photographers or Meccano addicts or Billy Bunter "fans."

In the same way, the vociferous lunatic fringe of today's teen-agers might convey an impression that their generation consists entirely of twitching morons steeped in American "beat" slush. But if you saw the clamorous "fans" of the same age-group at the Promenade Concerts, you might judge that the most fervent interest of today's youth is symphony music!

The whole idea of a conflict of interests between the generations, as such, strikes me as ridiculous. (The versifying boy and his mother are "fans" of the contemporary Blake!) The Sexton Blake saga evolved on the basis of the slogan "For Readers of All Ages." Old readers may recall that slogan appearing on "Union Jack" covers during their youth - when they were no doubt glad that "All Ages" were welcomed! That is the policy a Sexton Blake Circle should follow. And old readers should realise that an impartial comparison of the respective eras is quite impossible. Pre-war fans have a mental amalgam of impressions left by thousands of stories of varying quality; those recollections, like the veteran's memories of service life, being mellowed by the mind's tendency to forget the tedium and cherish the highlights. "New Look" stories have to compete with the distilled essence of those thousands of past stories, garnished with personal nostalgia. You ask me what there is in the New Era to discuss. The answer is: the TWO vital things the well-digested Old Order lacks. The NEW (something fresh every month) - and the COMING ATTRACTIONS!

Yours sincerely,

Martin Thomas

Unfortunately, only a fragment of Bette's response is in my possession; two pages:

that you have been one of the authors whose books appealed to me most and in happier circumstances I would have enjoyed writing to tell you so. As it happens, and this doubtless seems odd at my age, I gain most enjoyment from good Blake stories set in Baker Street days & however high the standard of the new book I have never had the same feeling about them from the Blake viewpoint. But never for one moment have I declared that all was perfection in the old or that nothing was any good in the new

Please give me credit for a wider viewpoint than this.

Just as I believe I have a right to my opinion in this controversy, and an equal right to express it by writing to you

I accord you the same right & realize that you see "Blakiana" from a different angle — it wasn't your opinion I was attacking, it was the manner in which you expressed it that so angered me. Either articles had been written & not published or else they had never been written at all. Mrs. Packman declares that the latter is true & I believe her, so from that it would appear that so yet none of your countless new readers have been sufficiently inspired to write about the modern Blake.

What puzzles me most of all is this — the S. B. L. is successful & thriving, receiving publicity from those famous publications you mention then why this furor because it has been ignored

In the April issue of COLLECTORS' DIGEST, Josie Packman, the then Editor of the BLAKIANA section, had her say:

BLAKIANA

Conducted by JOSEPHINE PACKMAN

27 Archdale Road, East Dulwich, London, S.E. 22.



In the MAILBAG section of S.B.L. No. 445 ("Mission to Mexico") 'Martin Thomas' has quite a lot to say about the lack of material on the modern Blake to appear in the pages of BLAKIANA. My husband has already answered this letter fully, and Mr. W. Howard Baker, the editor of the S.B.L. has kindly promised to publish this reply in one of the next issues of the Library. I do not therefore propose to take up the valuable space allotted to me by dealing at great length with what might be termed a controversial matter. There are, however, two things I would like to point out, for the whole argument actually rests upon these two vital factors. Firstly, the C.D. as a whole was (and presumably still is) produced primarily for those who are no longer in their youth but who delight in reading about and/or collecting the papers

of their boyhood, papers which - with but one or two exceptions - are no longer published. Secondly, articles on the modern Blake cannot appear if the material is not forthcoming! The solution here is for those who desire to read more of the modern Blake to furnish the material for publication. On this second point I would like to make it quite clear that all such modern material received by me has been published either in the pages of BLAKIANA or used by the Sexton Blake Circle in their feature THE MAN FROM BAKER STREET in the C.D. Annual, and no article has been 'put on ice.'

JOSIE PACKMAN

Josie Packman's husband, Leonard, also entered the fray, contributing one of a number of letters which appeared, in response to Mr. Thomas's, in the April issue of the SBL, *Conflict Within* (SBL 449):

RIGHT TO REPLY

It was with much interest that I read the letter from Martin Thomas in last month's Mailbag (vide S.B.L. No. 445 *Mission to Mexico*). In putting forward his case, however, Mr. Thomas is basing it on an erroneous premise. May I therefore be permitted to put the case in its true perspective?

In the first place it should be made quite clear that the "Blakiana" section of the *Collectors' Digest*, conducted by Mrs. Packman, has no direct connection with the Sexton Blake Circle. It is of course quite correct that membership of the Sexton Blake Circle is subject to becoming a subscriber to the magazine, the purpose of which is—as stated in the *Sexton Blake Library*—"To amuse, interest and instruct those whose pleasure it is to read of and collect papers devoted to the past and present adventures of Sexton Blake," but that is the only connection. At the moment the Sexton Blake Circle has its own section in the *Collectors' Digest Annual*, entitled "The Man from Baker Street." This comprises some thirty-odd quarto-sized pages of that magazine.

One of Mr. Thomas's points is the lack of material on the modern Blake appearing in the two magazines. I quite agree; but, as our youngest Circle member, Keith Chapman, points out, how can articles on the modern Blake appear in the magazines if the material is not forthcoming? I can assure Mr. Thomas that every single piece of material on the modern Blake that has been received has appeared in the pages of the magazines. Nothing has been rejected, and nothing has been "put on ice"! I openly challenge any reader who says he has submitted material on the modern Blake and not already had the article published to submit his name and details to Mr. Thomas, who could then take me up on this. Both Mrs. Packman and myself will, in fact, warmly welcome any articles on the modern Blake for inclusion in both "Blakiana" and "The Man from Baker Street."

Another point upon which Mr. Thomas is not clear is this: The *Collectors' Digest* is primarily produced for the older generation of readers, 80 per cent of whom are only interested in the past. This, let me stress, is not an opinion but the actual fact for the continuance of the *Collectors' Digest* by the present producer and publisher!

I agree with Mr. Thomas that there is a need for a magazine with, say, 75 per cent content "new-look" Blake, and it may interest him (and the readers) to know that the possibility of producing such a publication is now under consideration. The problem devolves upon the same vital question: How can a modern Blake magazine be produced if the material to put in it is not forthcoming?

Finally, whilst it would perhaps not be ethical for an author to supply material in the shape of an article for the *Collectors' Digest*, there is nothing to prevent his enthusiasm allowing him to submit such an article to be published



anonymously. Thus, if Mr. Thomas would do Mrs. Packman the honour of sending an article, I can assure him she will be only too delighted to publish it within a short time of being received (advance manuscript for "Blakiana" has to be sent to the editor of the magazine two or three weeks beforehand). What do you say, Mr. Thomas?

Mr. Leonard Packman, Chairman, Sexton Blake Circle, East Dulwich, London, S.E.22.

"NEW DEAL" FOR THE CIRCLE

I did not expect my remarks about "Blakiana's" neglect of the contemporary Sexton Blake to delight the die-hard fringe of pre-war Blake enthusiasts. But, though my complaint was written in January, it could have had no apter justification than the February and March issues of the C.D.

In the December, 1959, issues, the S.B.L. went to great trouble to produce two correlated Christmas novels, with specially commissioned covers by that old favourite Blake artist, Eric Parker. This was an event which one would have expected even the "Blakiana" historians to recognise and acknowledge as unique. But, all that has been published is a few brief lines containing "extracts" from the reviews which never appeared in full.

Such a state of affairs could not have occurred had those responsible for "Blakiana" not been fog-bound in the mists of the past, with a casual, disinterested attitude towards today's fiction.

Also, I should like to point out that I did not suggest that articles dealing with the New Look had been "suppressed" by "Blakiana." But it is one of the facts of life that a publication's, or feature's policy is judged from the kind of material it habitually publishes.

I, therefore, think it fair to say that "Blakiana's" past policy as revealed in its columns has hardly encouraged the offer of contributions about the contemporary Blake. (Even an articulate jet-plane enthusiast would not offer an article about jet-aircraft to a feature which dealt almost entirely with travel by balloon!) And, while the *Digest* has often pleaded for more material about Nelson Lee, I don't recall any request for material about the modern Sexton Blake.

The historically minded fans are entitled to their own interests, of course. But aren't readers of the modern Blake



also entitled to some consideration ?

Mr. Martin Thomas, BCM|Bizarre, London, W.C.1.

QUALIFIED SUPPORT

I agree wholeheartedly with Martin Thomas's letter in S.B.L. No. 445.

I cannot help feeling, however, that if the very brief and tantalising reference given to Nelson Lee and Nipper in a recent Christmas get-together in the S.B.L. had blossomed into a more promising revival of this famous pair of detectives it might well have enlarged the Sexton Blake Circle.

Mr. James W. Cook, 32, Pilgrims Way, Wembley, Middlesex.

ANTI-THOMAS

Why not tell people—through the columns of the *Library*—that the Sexton Blake Circle would welcome their views on the modern Blake if they care to write short articles. The average *Digest* article is 1,500 words long.

And why don't the authors themselves supply newsy paragraphs or articles to the "Blakiana" Section ?

They would not have to labour over the work as I do. I think that writing is the most difficult job in the world. It reduces me to a nervous wreck—but it should be child's play to the professionals.

What Martin Thomas said in his letter was true, of course. Moreover, it was something which needed saying, I am afraid—but he had no right to say it.

I think that if a new Circle for enthusiasts of the modern Blake were to be formed it should have its own club rooms, lectures and discussions, competitions for aspiring reader/authors, a badge or button so that members can recognise each other whenever and wherever they may meet; and it should be run officially from Fleetway House . . .

Miss Margaret Cooke, 10 Ashdene Road, Withington, Manchester 20.

AUSTRALIAN OPINION

A remarkable development in the Sexton Blake Saga took place a few months ago with the publication of the first Blake novel with a Science-Fiction flavour: *Touch of Evil* by Arthur Maclean, S.B.L. No. 438.

The story was topical, believable and horribly gripping. This was one book I could not put down until the end. It represented a new and interesting phase in the development of the Sexton Blake Saga.

Congratulations for two very fine Christmas numbers. Each had a distinct Christmas flavour, each conveyed the Editor's seasons greetings and to really make these issues redolent of Christmas, and of fondly remembered days of yore, each was graced with a superb cover by that greatest Sexton Blake artist of all time—Eric R. Parker.

Thank you, Mr. Editor, for so splendidly infusing into these Christmas issues all the atmosphere of Christmases past and present.

Mr. Victor Colby, 8 Beresford Avenue, Beverly Hills, New South Wales, Australia.

BLAKE IN IRELAND

Some months ago you intimated your intention

of including in the Sexton Blake Saga a story set in Ireland. I have been waiting with eager expectancy for the publication of this story and I feel that this is the appropriate moment to remind you of that assurance.

Sexton Blake, in his role as renowned international criminologist, has had many diverse and fascinating adventures in many corners of the world, and I feel sure that a man of his unique talents and experience must ultimately be provided with an opportunity to exercise his skill in the Emerald Isle.

I realise that you are probably experiencing some difficulty in finding a writer with the knowledge and flair for local colour to project authentically the Irish background required for a story of this kind.

But Ireland is Britain's nearest geographical neighbour and I feel that the situation must inevitably arise there involving criminal investigation of a kind requiring Blake's resource and ingenuity.

I am convinced that there are several authors in your stable with the breadth of vision and imaginative scope to have a crack at this theme.

There are many Irish people in the British Isles who would be delighted to see the scope of the Blake Saga extended to include their native land. Jack Trevor Story might well have possibilities as a potentially suitable writer in this connection, as he would find in Irish characteristics, idiosyncrasies, customs and folklore, an ideal vehicle for projecting his own exclusive and delicious brand of humour. Such a story could provide satisfaction for nostalgically reminiscent Irish readers living in Britain.

Incidentally, as a personal relish, I should like to see the local female glamour represented as a lighter diversification from the intricacies of detection in a story of this kind.

Mr. Michael John Fee, 68 Heston House, Tanners Hill, Depford, S.E.8.

BLAKE FELLOWSHIP

The December issues, *A Cold Night for Murder* and *Guilty Party*, arrived in Australia recently. Both issues have been greatly enjoyed, not only for the stories themselves, but for the entire format.

It was pleasant to see Eric Parker featured on the covers with all his old skill, and to see the old custom of stories with a Yuletide flavour revived once more.

You have certainly tried to please everybody with this very happy blend of the old and the new, and you are to be sincerely congratulated upon the success of this venture.

Miss Bette Pate, 8 Day Street, Drummoyne, New South Wales, Australia.

NEXT MONTH

All keen Blake fans are due for a big surprise in next month's issue, *The Angry Night*. This novel sees the return of two almost forgotten characters of the pre-war years. We won't spoil your enjoyment of this unique surprise by disclosing identities beforehand—but rest assured, it is worth waiting for. So, order your copies now. Till then, best wishes from

Your sincere friend,

THE EDITOR.

Meanwhile, Bette received another letter from Martin Thomas:

MARTIN THOMAS

Permanent Address:

BCM/BIZARRE,

LONDON, W.C.1.
ENGLAND.

Miss E. J. Pate,
8 Day Street,
Drummoyne,
N.S.W.,
Australia.

11th April, 1960

Dear Miss Pate,

Thank you for your further letter. It contains statements and accusations which can hardly be allowed to go unanswered.

First let me admit that your letter leaves me wondering just who those 'countless' people are who have communicated to you, but not to me, their disapproval of my comments in the February 'Mailbag.' I've had no difficulty at all in counting the disapproving letters I've received. They amount to a grand total of two. Both of them having come from you!

Among letters received by me, and by the S.B.L. on the same topic, the majority from even C.D. subscribers have admitted the justice of my remarks; and from the much wider range of S.B.L. readers in general (people whom you apparently consider unworthy of notice!) the reaction has been overwhelmingly in favour of a genuine Sexton Blake Circle, concerned with the contemporary Sexton Blake.

You accuse me, and also the Editor of the S.B.L., of overlooking that the 'Blakiana' section of the C.D. is only a part of the whole magazine - yet you personally ignore the fact that those people immersed in the past constitute a very small, and unrepresentative, section of the total Sexton Blake public of today.

In my previous letter I pointed out the fallacy of your assumption that I'd imputed to the C.D. a 'suppression' of discussion of the New Order. (What I'd actually complained about had been not a 'sin of commission' but a conspicuous error of omission! As revealed in the undeniable fact that, whereas material about Nelson Lee had been pleaded for and 'controversial' discussion of Billy Bunter fiction had been actively inspired, there had been no such encouragement or invitation regarding material about the modern Sexton Blake.) Now you come forward with another unfounded accusation, which would be shocking if it weren't so comic. That Mr. Baker has attempted to 'dictate the policy' of a section of the C.D., 'to benefit a commercial publication'!

That accusation, of course, is flagrantly and absurdly unjust. My personal impression is that a small group of diehards tried to dictate to him the policy he should follow in the S.B.L. - even though the policy they demanded had been proved to have lost its general appeal. If the Editor of the S.B.L. were looking for fresh worlds to conquer, I rather doubt whether he would yearn, as you quaintly suggest, to exercise dictatorial powers over a sub-section of a duplicated amateur magazine! Incredible as you may find it, there are more powerful organs of publicity. (The 'Daily Mail' and 'Punch,' for instance, have published articles about the S.B.L. New Order; and the New Order S.B. film now released is also reaching a public which, if not 'countless,' is quite considerable!) Far from having tried to dictate the policy of a section of the C.D., Mr. Baker has given those critical diehards the freedom of the widely read 'Mailbag.'

Regarding your second slur: can you name ANY character in periodical fiction which has NOT been produced by 'commercial publication'? Have the Bunter books, the Bunter play and other productions so thoroughly discussed in the C.D., been presented to the world by philanthropic institutions? (You must lead a very dreary life if you refuse to enjoy and support any current book, magazine, concert, musical show or film which is a commercial production!)

But, since you mention that the S.B.L. is a commercial production, you might be expected to realise that there would have been no New Order had the Old Order maintained its former popularity. Where were those 'countless' diehards of yours when the Old Order was expiring for lack of practical support? The fact that the S.B.L., like any other fiction magazine, is a commercial publication should make you aware of another fact too. That the Library is still in existence because the New Order has attracted more readers than the Old Order had become able to retain!

As I mentioned in my previous letter, Mr. Baker has a duty to all of those readers. And anyone in any way concerned with presenting the surviving, contemporary Blake to a growing public has some reason to feel irked by an alleged Sexton Blake 'Circle' whose favourite theme has been "Fings Ain't Wot they Used to Be." Even the diehards should by now have absorbed the fact that things never were what they used to be. As Tennyson wrote, it's always been a fact of life that "The old order changeth, giving place to the new."

I find your present attitude doubly surprising after your final 'Hands of Time' article. Apparently that article was less sincere than the enthusiasm animating the Sexton Blake 'commercial publication.' But if you must now disparage the contemporary S.B.L. and its authors, at least don't disparage its new readers. There is no reason why new readers should not be 50 or 60 years old. Many of them are.

Yours sincerely,

Martin Thomas

Mr. Thomas also made another contribution to the *Mailbag* section of THE SEXTON BLAKE LIBRARY, this time appearing in issue 542, *Witch-Hunt!*:

"BLAKIANA"

I read with sympathetic enjoyment Mr. Eric Fayne's wryly humorous, fair-minded comments in the March *Collector's Digest* on my February Mailbag letter. I have also appreciated the more reasonable points made by Mr. Leonard Packman in the April Mailbag.

Mr. Packman's news that the possibility is now under consideration of producing a magazine largely devoted to the "new order" Blake is very heartening indeed.

If C.D.'s "terms of reference" and limitations of space make it difficult to deal adequately in its pages with the contemporary Blake, then a companion magazine for that purpose would be an ideal solution. A magazine which, without encroaching on "Blakiana's" historical discussions, would be complementary to them, so that the entire Blake saga would be covered and all Blake fans catered for.

I naturally do not doubt Mr. Packman's statement that 80 per cent. of the *Digest* readers are only interested in the past. Since C.D. has devoted most of its space and attention to the past, that is only to be expected.

A magazine naturally attracts readers with similar interests to those it has itself shown. Which means, of course, that all those people throughout the world who buy the current S.B.Ls. are interested in the present-day Blake.

However, I very much doubt whether those "Blakiana" readers who are interested only in the past, would outnumber the readers there would be for a feature or magazine dealing with the contemporary Blake!

It may have escaped Mr. Packman's attention that the "new order" was necessary because the "old order" had lost its attraction for today's public. But since "Blakiana" has not yet seriously catered for today's Blake fans, what significance can be attached to the percentage he quotes? And even the diehards must surely realise that the people who buy today's S.B.L. because they like today's Blake (—and who are potential subscribers to a "new order" fan feature or magazine—) saved the Blake saga from extinction.

Had a majority of the S.B.L.'s present public preferred the past, the S.B.L. would have expired with the other periodicals discussed in the *Digest*.

That the 80 per cent. of C.D. readers quoted by Mr. Packman are not representative of Blake fans in general has been proved by letters received from S.B.L. readers, as a result of my February letter. An overwhelmingly high proportion of these readers' letters—considerably higher than 90 per cent.—have supported what I said. They confirm that one must be realistic about the matter.

New readers would almost certainly find much to interest them in "Blakiana's" information about Blake's history—if the contemporary Blake were not treated as an unimportant epilogue to the "real" Blake saga. And that has been the impression created, no doubt unintentionally, by "Blakiana's" past attitude.

An annual discussion of the modern Blake would be little

MAGAZINE SECTION

MAILBAG

THE EDITOR,
SEXTON BLAKE LIBRARY,
FLEETWAY PUBLICATIONS LTD.,
FAR RINGDON STREET,
LONDON, E.C.4
ENGLAND

enough: but the last C.D. Annual, despite its 30-odd pages entitled "The Man from Baker Street," contained *nothing* about the contemporary Blake!

Mr. Packman's letter postulates an appealing answer. And Mr. Packman is right, of course, to emphasise that a feature or magazine devoted to the modern Blake would depend upon a regular supply of copy. But that should involve no problem. The knowledge of an available platform for their views and discussions would surely inspire a flow of contributions from people who buy the current S.B.Ls. because of their interest in the contemporary Blake. Just as the existence of C.D. has inspired hundreds of articles from people who wouldn't have written a line on the topic if there had been no C.D.!

What is needed is an all-embracing Blake Circle. Whether that Circle is represented by "Blakiana" or by "Blakiana" and a complementary magazine is really immaterial—so long as all Blake fans are catered for.

Mr. Martin Thomas, BCM|Bizarre, London, W.C.1.

BACK NUMBERS

I would be very much obliged if you could send me a full list of those back numbers in the *Sexton Blake Library* which are still available for sale. My own collection was recently destroyed by fire.

Mr. Graham Stoggles, 27 Bostock Road, Ipswich, Suffolk.

—AND AGAIN

I should be very grateful if you would send me a full list of back numbers of the *Sexton Blake Library* which are still available.

In four years of collecting the *Library*, I have obtained over 120 books and would like to fill in a few "gaps."

Mr. D. J. Hill, 110 Gloucester Road, South Kensington, London, S.W.7.

Lists of available S.B.L. copies have been sent to Mr. Stoggles and Mr. Hill.

Normally, requests for back numbers should be made direct to the Back Numbers Department, Fleetway Publications Ltd., Far-ringdon Street, London, E.C.4.

S O S

I wonder if any readers of *Sexton Blake* can supply me with



In the May edition of COLLECTORS' DIGEST, Eric Fayne had words to say about the letter from Martin Thomas which had appeared in the previous month's *Conflict Within*:

WE'RE 'BARRING-OUT' THIS TIME. The Martin Thomas criticisms provided some interest and fun, which are always welcome in this sad life, providing they don't go on too long. In a current issue of S.B.L. Mr. Thomas renews his criticism of this magazine. The gist of the complaint seems to be that we held over the reviews of the December S.B.L's until March, and then only offered short notices.

Blakiana had nothing to do with it. It was a decision of this office, as the editor of the S.B.L. knew.

As a result of the printing dispute, the S.B.L. was behind with production. The notices of the December tales reached us in January, and were plotted into our February number. In the middle of January, S.B.L. published two further stories, and, eventually, Walter Webb rushed reviews of these to us. With a packed issue of C.D. prepared, we had no space to publish a double set of reviews. At some inconvenience, we took out the December reviews, replacing them with the more recent one. Then, in our March issue, we printed shorter, quite favourable, notices of the December stories.

It is something which would never have occurred but for the internal trouble at Fleetway House last year. The C.D. was in no way responsible for the printing strike.

The Sexton Blake Library is entitled to its own opinions. It is not entitled to dictate to this magazine.

THE EDITOR

The companion novel to SBL 452 – *The Angry Night* – also contained letters concerning the ongoing controversy:

NIGERIA READER

I have closely followed the adventures of your immortal Sexton Blake for a number of years now—probably eight years in all. He has solved crimes and murders in Australia, Canada, South Africa, Cyprus, Mexico, West Indies and other far-flung corners of the world.

But there seems to have been nothing to bring him down to West Africa—Nigeria in particular!

Of course, you may say that he recently solved a case in England in which a Nigerian was involved—(GUILTY PARTY No. 442); but why doesn't he come down here and get involved in a case that is completely indigenous to Nigeria?

Femi Morakinyo, Teddar Hall, University College, IBADAN, Nigeria.

URGENT REQUEST

It is only during the past year that I have discovered Sexton Blake. I would very much like to get hold of some old copies as I have become a devoted fan of the great detective and it seems that I have been missing a lot in the past.

Have any other regular readers back numbers of the S.B.L. which they can offer for sale?

Mrs. R. Bull, 66 Park Buildings, Bermondsey, London, S.E.16.

FAULT

BRED TO KILL by Martin Thomas, published in March, was a most enjoyable story—except for one major error.

The astral body can never travel more than approximately 25 ft. from the physical body. Should it do so, the silver chord linking it to the physical body would break, resulting in death. Even a "Master" couldn't get round this problem. A projection of the type described in **BRED TO KILL** is a mental projection. It might also be called rank interference by telepathy!

Miss Sandra Hall, 41, North End House, Fitz-James Avenue, West Kensington, London, W.14.

BLAKE/LEE

I read Mr. Derek Adley's letter in S.B.L. No. 447 with great interest. Despite the constant controversy



MAGAZINE SECTION



over the now defunct Nelson Lee Library, I have held and still hold that Nelson Lee and Sexton Blake are just about equal in so far as efficiency is concerned.

In my opinion both of them are good detectives, and, so far from not wishing to see the decline of Blake, I would welcome the return of Lee. Both are obviously gifted men—born detectives to put it briefly.

In common with Miss Brenda Stevens (who wrote in the same issue) I, too, would welcome the appearance of a Sexton Blake buttonhole badge. Perhaps something can be done?

Mr. Richard C. Gouge, 33, Camp Way, Maidstone, Kent.

FAIR PLAY

I read the recent letter by Martin Thomas, *The Quick and the Dead*, with great interest.

I was rather puzzled, however, by the mistaken implication contained in the cover of the April *Collector's Digest*. This very excellent and amusing drawing portrays a schoolmaster, bearing the label S.B.L., whacking a schoolboy with the letters C.D. on the badge of his blazer.

Surely this interpretation is incorrect, as Martin Thomas was most careful to point out that no criticism was intended for the Editor of the *Collector's Digest*, Mr. Eric Fayne, who has, as we all know, always given the modern Blake a very good showing and supported it in every way.

Martin Thomas' broadside was directed solely against Blakiana. Therefore, the legend on the blazer should have read "Blakiana" and not C.D.

*Mr. William Oliver
Guillemont Lofts, 56, Sher-
ingham House, St. Maryle-
bone, London, N.W.1.*

MAILBAG continued

VOLTAIRE-SCHMOLTAIRE!

Mr. Leonard Packman's "Challenge," contained in

the Mailbag of S.B.L. No. 449 is rather absurd, since my original letter on the "Blakiana" issue made no suggestion or implication that any New Order articles had been suppressed.

But the pleas for more Nelson Lee copy and the Hamilton talking-points posed in nearly every issue of the *Digest* have been in marked contrast to the lack of any invitation for copy dealing with the modern Blake.

And Mr. Packman's seemingly hurt reference to the fact that there are "thirty odd quarto-size pages in every issue of the Annual" is completely irrelevant. A yearly reference to the modern Blake in the Annual would be little enough in all conscience—but the last Annual contained no reference to the modern Blake at all!

I was mildly amused by Miss Cooke's remark (also in S.B.L. No. 449) that my complaint "needed saying"—but I had "no right" to "say it"! That is Voltaire in reverse and turned upside down—"I agree with what you say—but how dare you say it!"

Mr. Martin Thomas, BCM-Bizarre, London, W.C.1.

MISSING COPIES

Can any reader help me obtain the two back numbers of the Sexton Blake Library for February 1960?

The issues in question are MISSION TO MEXICO (No. 445) and MURDER MADE EASY (No. 446).

I have been a reader of Sexton Blake for about fifty years now and enjoy the modern Blake more than ever. I often wish that you could publish four issues a month instead of the customary two.

Hoping that some kind reader can help me obtain my two missing copies and wishing you all success with the *Sexton Blake*

Library in the future.

Mr. David Wilson, 20, Kilmailing Road, Cathcart, Glasgow, S.4.

FRIENDSHIP

The Mailbag section is meeting with great success and is helping to bring many Blake enthusiasts in touch with each other to their mutual benefit. Sharing one's hobby certainly does double one's interest and pleasure, as I have discovered since I first contacted the other Blake enthusiasts here in Sydney, Australia.

Since becoming Secretary of our Club two years ago, my circle of friends both here and overseas has widened amazingly, with a corresponding increase in knowledge and pleasure as I share their views and news on our mutual interest, Sexton Blake.

In the last couple of months I have written over sixty letters, which, naturally, has taken up most of my leisure moments—but every word has been an investment in friendship which has brought me much pleasure in return. This is the reason I am so pleased to see other people share their happy experiences through the medium of the Sexton Blake Mailbag.

Every good wish for the continued success of this excellent feature.

Miss Bette Pate, 8, Day Street, Drumoyne, New South Wales, Australia.

MORE LETTERS

More letters are published in the companion novel WITCH-HUNT No. 452 on sale now.

If you haven't bought your copy yet, don't delay any longer. Buy now while stocks last.

And don't forget to place a firm order for next month's issues with your newsagent. It is the only way to ensure prompt delivery of your favourite monthly magazine.

Best wishes from,

Your sincere friend,

THE EDITOR.

Don't miss our companion novel—on sale now :



WITCH-HUNT!

by Desmond Reid

BUY YOUR COPY TODAY!

These letters drew a comment from Blake scholar Walter Webb in June's COLLECTORS' DIGEST:

MAILBAG:

Martin Thomas has been throwing many brickbats lately. In the direction of Blakiana mostly. Now, a lady correspondent tosses one back at him. And, by all accounts, has registered a direct hit; for she points out a major error in his latest novel, "Bred to Kill." In fact, MAILBAG this month features Mr. Thomas very prominently. He has two letters, one in each volume, in relation to the recent controversy and Bill Lofts mentions him in a letter headed "Fair play".

Did the cover of the April C.D. portraying a schoolmaster wearing a label S.B.L. whacking a schoolboy with the letters C.D. on the badge of his blazer give a strictly accurate interpretation of the author's criticism? Should "Blakiana" have been substituted for the letters C.D.? In my opinion, Bob Whiter's illustration was quite correct. For, surely, if you condemn the archaeological, you condemn it completely and absolutely? Is a pink-covered UNION JACK any less antique than a Red MAGNET? Discussions on those rare issues, substitute authors and the merits of J.N. Pentelow when wearing the mantle of "Frank Richards" are no less archaeological in outlook than anything that has appeared in BLAKIANA, and although, as Bill Lofts remarks, the author did not include HAMILTONIA in his scathing comments, the bullets which struck BLAKIANA ricocheted on to it, and, to a lesser extent on the N.L. feature as well.

By this point, Martin Thomas had received the following letter from Bette Pate:

copy

Dear Mr Thomas,

Unfortunately your letter took so long to reach me by sea mail that quite a different state of affairs now prevails - Eric Fayne in the May C.D. Editorial has publicly expressed what I had said to you privately "The SBL is entitled to its own opinions. It is not entitled to dictate to this magazine."

Naturally I have been a little amazed at the vehemence of your replies & whilst I quite appreciate that you have a living to earn with your writing I cannot understand the intensity of your feelings. . . . They seem so out of proportion to the matter under discussion. Surely you must have expected criticism when you published your attack! My reply was open,

direct to you, not behind your
back to your employer, Mr. Baker
or "Mailbag" for publication.
I had the courage to sign my
name in defence of my friend
Mrs. Packman which is I think
fighting fairly. On the best
possible authority I can assure you
that there were ~~a~~ many letters
written expressing the same views
as mine but unlike me these folk
did not think of writing direct to
you. Mr. Baker has not published
one letter, except Mr. Packman's
which expers these dissenting views
— yet I know that he had plenty!
Frank Unwin originally offered to
run the new Blake section then
re read your article, had second
thoughts & wrote direct to Mr.
Baker himself to express his views
in no uncertain terms — he is
an ardent supporter of the new

Blake but like me he was not attacking the new look, the new S.B.L. authors or the new readers. He was attacking you and your questionable tactics.

Had I wished to express an opinion on the story content of the S.B.L. I would have written direct to Mr. Howard Baker as I have done in the past. When the S.B.L. changed over in 1956 I did not find the new characterisation to my liking and when I wrote Mr. Baker to express my opinion he accorded me a courteous & reasonable reply, suggesting that I give the New Look a trial & at the same time asking for support in his new undertaking as the S.B.L. was passing through a difficult period of adjustment. I saw his point of view & although preferring the old to the new I have continued

my annual subscription, quite prepared to admit I was wrong should the new prove more to my liking than the old.

Since then I have written quite a few times to Mr. Baker, praising what I liked as often as I aired my dislikes. My elder brother who works on T.V. both as a writer & actor suggested the possibility of Blake on T.V. & supporting him in this I contacted Mr. Baker to secure an option for him. Unfortunately there was no market for Blake in America where my brother lives so the project was dropped.

When I traced out the format of my article "The Hands of Time" the new look was naturally necessary to complete the canvas. However Mr. Baker learned of this article through his friendship with Bill Tofts with whom I

correspond. & when next he wrote
me said he was looking forward
to reading it & suggested I write
an article on the modern Blake.
In view of this I enlarged that
section of the article dealing with
the current era as a friendly
gesture of support to Mr. Baker.
Apparently the article was well
received for I received favourable
comment from quite a few folk
amongst them being Mr. H. W.
Leyman with whom I now
~~share~~^{share} a most enjoyable pen-
friendship as he is interested
in helping me to write.

So you see it wasn't the
new Blake or its authors I
was attacking - it was you,
and not in your capacity as
an S. B. L. author. And strange
as this may sound to you I
am quite sincere when I say

by an "unimportant amateur
magazine" like the C. D.! Your
sphere of influence is as limited
as you suggest then surely it
wouldn't matter then whether
we published articles about the
modern Blake or not. Also
if the C. D. readers wanted
these articles then why didn't
they do something about it—
enthusiasm can prove an
excellent starting point. The
new readers of the S. B. L. have
been aware for some considerable
time of the existence both of
the C. D. & the various O.B.B.C.
so there has been plenty of
opportunity for them all
to become subscribers, both
financially and as writers of
articles. It is only by
contributing the articles that cover
their own sphere of interest
that the readers will get the
magazine they want as the

entire production is dependent upon its readers for copy.

The old "dehards" as you call them may not have enthused about the modern Blake but they did rally round to give their support when Mr. Baker asked for it. gave it generously too, as I know from personal contact. Many of these folk bought up to six extra copies each month to boost the sales out of loyalty to the S. B. L. These same folk have also refrained from any public criticisms of the new set up & have wished Mr. Baker & his associates success because they have appreciated the great effort he was making personally to keep Blake alive in these difficult times when competition is so strong.

(2)

you may or may not
be aware that I am secretary
of the O.B.B. here in Sydney
& in this capacity correspond
frequently & at length with
Eric Layne & the other club
secretaries as well as numerous
other folk around the world.
These folk have expressed not
only their own opinions but
those of many other folk - hence
I have had quite a wide
choice from which to draw
my own conclusions. One will
wonder according you the
right to fight for a place
in the sun for your new
Blake have not approved of
your tactics in this fight.
There were other ways in which
you could have achieved your
object and in so doing gained
supporters for your cause instead
of antagonising the very folk
who could have helped you

most. Those contributors who
in the past have members of the
old Blake would, I am sure,
have held their hand at the
new medium had an appeal
been made to them by Mr. Baker
through Eric Fayne Eric is
a most approachable person &
above all a fair & reasonable
man & would have been quite
prepared to accord the new
Blake additional coverage if the
copy had been forthcoming.
The late Mr. Leckie, when he
corresponded with me, often
mentioned that he had met
or been in touch with Mr.
Baker so it does seem unfortunate
that this matter was not
brought out for open discussion
then instead of in February
when Mr. Fayne was just
gathering up the reins as
editor.

So it appears that all we
can do on this subject is
agree to disagree — you

have your opinion, dictated
by the necessities of your
profession & I hold mine,
dictated by regard for a very
good friend. Nothing will
change either opinion so it
would appear the position
is stalemate unless our mutual
friend Seston Blake can
help to solve the impasse

Sincerely

Bette Tate

To which he replied:

MARTIN THOMAS

Permanent Address:
BCM/BIZARRE,
LONDON, W.C.1.
ENGLAND.

Miss E. J. Pate,
Drummoyne,
N.S.W.,
Australia.

6th June, 1960

Dear Miss Pate,

This is to acknowledge your further letter, dated May 29th. You really do make a habit of casting imputations which simply cannot be allowed to go unchallenged; so let me, entirely without rancour, make a final effort to clarify one or two points upon which you still seem to cherish misconceptions. (And it is quite surprising that you should accuse me of 'vehemence' in my replies to you, after the heat of your letters, particularly the last one.)

You persist in seeing mercenary motives in opinions different from yours. First you wrote disparagingly of the New Look S.B.L. as a 'commercial publication,' as though it were exceptional in that. Now you attribute my criticism of 'Blakiana' to the fact that I have a living to earn! Since the S.B.L. is a commercial publication, you might have been expected to recognise that its editorial policy must, and does, cater for the taste of the majority; that its preference for the New Order is due to the fact that the New Order enjoys greater public support than the Old Order was able to retain. But what difference it can make to my "living" if "Blakiana" concentrates on the Old Order is quite beyond me! Your suggestion rather implies an assumption on your part that New Order Blake stories are all I have ever written or could write; that my "living" and career as a professional writer began with the Blake New Order. That supposition is so amusingly wide of the facts that I feel obliged to enlighten you a little.

I was making my living as a professional writer long before the New Order was thought of. Before I wrote my first Blake story, in 1957, I had published several million words - which included over two dozen novels (each double the S.B.L. length), published in Britain, Sweden, Spain and Norway; plus over a hundred newspaper and magazine short stories, over 300 newspaper articles and over a dozen newspaper serial stories. My first series of short stories, syndicated by Mirror Features in 1946, has been published in Britain, France, Australia, South Africa, Sweden, Finland, Denmark and Switzerland. From 1950 to 1956 I also had my own weekly newspaper page, which I gave up in order to concentrate on fiction writing. In addition, as a cartoonist and illustrator, I have published many thousands of sketches in English and Irish newspapers and magazines - work which I also gave up in 1956 in order to concentrate on fiction writing. So you will see that my literary career (and "living"!) did not begin with my Blake stories. Neither would my career

or living have been affected one whit had C.D. and "Blakiana" never existed!

You ask me why, if "Blakiana's" influence is so limited, I bothered to criticise it. There is only one reason, which was clearly explained in my original Mailbag letter. I criticised "Blakiana" not because of its influence, not as part of C.D. - but simply and solely because it professed to be the organ of the Sexton Blake CIRCLE, yet catered for only a small segment of that Circle with any enthusiasm or adequacy. Surely, in undertaking to represent the Sexton Blake CIRCLE, it undertook an obligation towards all parts of the circle? And can anyone honestly say that a new reader of the modern S.B.L., hearing of a Sexton Blake Circle, would not expect something far more up-to-date in its fan magazine than "Blakiana" had been presenting?

I agree it was perhaps unfortunate that my complaint should have been made so soon after Mr. Payne became editor of C.D., but since, as I made plain, the editorial chief of C.D. could not be held responsible, that circumstance was irrelevant. It is "Blakiana" itself which has sought to drag the Hamilton and Lee sections of C.D. into the scope of my criticisms - in flagrant contradiction of my own statements, on record in black-and-white. In that original Mailbag letter of mine I specifically quoted the Hamilton and Lee sections as examples of enterprise which "Blakiana" ought to emulate. Haven't you noticed what the Hamilton section has done regarding the modern Bunter books and plays? No lack of enthusiasm there! "Blakiana's" attempt to drag other sections of C.D. into the sphere of my criticisms is presumably prompted by a subconscious wish to enlist their sympathy and support as "fellow victims"! "Blakiana" deliberately ignores the obvious vital difference that it alone deals with a character still appearing in periodical fiction.

If, say, David Niven's fan club devoted most of its attention to his very early films and neglected the fans of his current films, there would be room for complaint. But such a complaint would be no reflection upon the admirers of the late Rudolph Valentino, who still meet and view and discuss his old films - because they have no modern films of his to discuss!

On looking through the June "Blakiana" I was amused - but, human nature being what it is, not astonished! - to notice the alacrity with which "Blakiana" had accepted Miss Sandra Hall's criticism of a point in my story "Bred to Kill." Although that lady's criticism was not, in fact, a valid one, "Blakiana's" ready acceptance of it, unquestioning acceptance of it, as a "direct hit" was in marked contrast to "Blakiana's" reaction to criticism of itself! "Blakiana" even went to the length of claiming that "all accounts" support Miss Hall's criticism. I challenge "Blakiana" to specify those "accounts" which support Miss Hall's fallacy. In its resentment of criticism of itself, "Blakiana" was evidently only too ready to pounce upon a chance to criticise the author concerned - without any analysis of that criticism!

Incidentally, Mr. Baker was fair enough to publish Miss

Hall's criticism of a New Order S.B.L. story, without getting into the pettish frenzy in which "Blakiana" has indulged since being criticised. My reply to Miss Hall's letter, quoting specific and authoritative "accounts" of astral projection, reached Mr. Baker two days too late to be printed in the same issue as her letter. But, with my reply in his possession, Mr. Baker has no doubt shared my amusement at the alacrity with which the not-to-be-criticised "Blakiana" grabbed at the first available stick with which to beat Martin Thomas!

Now, through you, may I put two suggestions to "Blakiana." The first is that they read my letters as they are, without adding misconceptions bred from their own resentful brooding - some of their misconceptions being actually the direct opposite of what I have written. Secondly, it's about time that those responsible for "Blakiana" grew up, and learned to accept criticism in the same spirit that professional authors do - the spirit in which professional authors (even with their "livings" involved!) have accepted "Blakiana's" reviews of S.B.L. stories, which have not always been complimentary.

The "furore," as you call it, has been in "Blakiana's" reaction to criticism. It is fortunate that S.B.L. authors have not shown a similar reaction to some of "Blakiana's" reviews.

Finally, if the S.B.L. and its authors are not permitted to express an opinion on the Sexton Blake CIRCLE - who is? Surely they, who present Blake to his reading public, are very intimately and cogently concerned in the question of what kind of Sexton Blake CIRCLE is offered to those readers? The problem boils down to what I said in my original letter. If "Blakiana" is not very interested in the modern aspect of Blake, why call itself the organ of the Sexton Blake Circle? But if it does claim to be that, why not justify the title by showing some enthusiasm for the entire Blake saga?

Mrs. Packman, in the June C.D., announces that only one article on the modern Blake has been received since April - but she announces it triumphantly, with an exclamation mark, as a vindication of her own lack of enthusiasm. Not as something to be regretted - and remedied by some positive encouragement. She makes it only too plain that the lack of such contributions pleases her - and would-be contributors, not being fools, are able to perceive it. Does she expect such lukewarm, *laissez faire* editorial atmosphere to inspire articles? And does she expect her habitual use of inverted commas in referring to "Martin Thomas" (but not to Anthony Skene, Gilbert Chester, Donald Stuart, etc.) to be mistaken for anything but a childish expression of personal pique in one direction? Please assure her that I do not for one moment begrudge her that infantile little pleasure!

Yours sincerely,

Martin Thomas

The dispute rumbled on. SBL 454 *Design for Vengeance*, featured the following letters page:

CONTROVERSY

I READ with a great deal of interest Martin Thomas' rather lengthy "letter to the Editor." Before dealing with the points raised, however, I would like to take this opportunity to say that I thoroughly enjoy Mr. Thomas' books, which are always very good and of a high standard.

We know that primarily the *Collector's Digest* deals mainly with the "remote past" as Martin Thomas puts it. It certainly makes no pretence at being an organ catering for modern literature. But, at the same time, I would agree that it is impossible to present a balanced account of the Blake saga in the *Digest* without properly giving our modern Blake his full due.

The present-day Sexton Blake stories are definitely timely, topical and of a very high quality. We find Blake, one of the greatest, if not the greatest detective of fiction living on in a very high standard of detective stories which far eclipse the old-time Blake for thrills and excitement.

But does "Blakiana" ignore this? No: these modern stories are reviewed monthly and indeed the reviews are so interesting that any true lover of detective stories—even if Blake were unknown to him—would find it difficult to overcome his curiosity and fail to take out a subscription to the *Library*.

And as for a newcomer to "Blakiana" getting the impression that "almost every pre-war story was a masterpiece—and post-war stories unworthy of discussion": I will say that he has only to read the tales of Blake of yesteryear (not too difficult to obtain) and the stories of our present-day Sexton Blake to see that there lies a world of difference between the two and comparisons are odious. The stories of today are of a much higher quality and can meet the most exacting demands of detective story fans.

The past is mainly linked with the present with the succession of improvements evolved over the years. Yet the Old Order stories must not be belittled in any way, as they were good of their period. Improvement has necessarily come with the changing times, and more competition and keener criticism has made the new high standard an absolute "must."

It would have been more to the point for Martin Thomas to have suggested that "Blakiana" devote more space than at present to the modern Blake, while retaining the data dealing with the Blake of yesteryear. After all, we readers are eager to learn as much as possible about the old Blake as well as the Blake of today. And how better can that be achieved than the way it is being done right now?

Mr. Robert W. Story, 40
Howland Avenue, Toronto 4,
Ontario, Canada.

FARAWAY PLACES

I would like to thank you, Mr. Editor, for publishing my last letter to you in Mailbag No. 447. In this letter, I stated that I had a quantity of

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duplicate copies of *Sexton Blake Library* to dispose of, if any readers were interested.

This letter brought me a tremendous number of replies, the letters coming from a vast number of faraway places. Readers wrote to me from Sarawak, Borneo, Sierra Leone, Singapore, Jamaica, Nigeria, Ghana, West Africa, Canada, South Africa, and the United States. It just goes to show the world-wide interest existing for the *Sexton Blake Library*.

I would be obliged, therefore, if you could publish my thanks to those who have written to me and have not received a reply.

All my duplicates have now been disposed of and I offer my regrets to those who have been disappointed. Unfortunately, it is impossible to reply to everyone personally, but perhaps they will accept my thanks through the columns of the Mailbag.

Mr. Derek Adley, 100 Coles Crescent, South Harrow, Middlesex.

BACK NUMBERS

Would you please let me know if you have any back numbers of the *Sexton Blake Library* in stock.

Mr. L. Seaton, The Stores West Street, Welford, Nr. Rugby, Warwickshire.

Applications for back numbers should be addressed to the Back Numbers Department, Fleetway Publications Ltd., Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4.

COLLECTOR'S DIGEST

Congratulations on bringing back George Marsden Plummer into the *Library*. Although the story had not quite the style of G. H. Teed, it was well done. Could you bring back Leon Kestrel too, please? He is my favourite pre-war character.

Also I would like to know how I can obtain the monthly magazine, the *Collector's Digest*.

Keep up the good work on the *Sexton Blake Library*, and may it continue for many, many years to come. I shall always remain a reader.

Mr. C. Lowder, "Eye-thermes," Cradley, Nr. Malvern, Worcs, England.



In July, ruffled feathers began to smooth out somewhat. Martin Thomas received the following from Bette Pate:

"copy"

(See Letter)

Drummayne.
29th July '60

Dear Mr. Thomas

It would seem that at last we have met on common ground - however much our opinions may differ it is apparent that we are both fated to be misunderstood. On my own account I can quite understand this as my thoughts on paper do not always convey what was in my mind, but for you, with your skilled pen, it does seem a shame that so many folk have misconstrued your statements on the "Blakins" controversy.

Please believe me that there was not the slightest intention on my part to disparage your ability as a professional writer when I remarked that

cuttings etc. most interesting but as I have said there was not the slightest need to justify yourself in my eyes. There is a member of our Sydney club who has a great admiration for your stories so I let him borrow them to record details in his collection of data on Blake and his creators. Knowing from experience how much you must value these clippings I'll return them by registered sea mail next week.

You have asked me to pass on several comments to Mrs. Pechman but I have refrained for several reasons. Firstly what I have had to say in my letters to you have been my own personal opinions prompted certainly by my friendship with Jessie Pechman but not dictated

by her I have not been her
mouthpiece in any way so if you
still wish to express the opinions
included in your letter to me
may I suggest you say them direct
to her next time you visit London
or else by letter from Bristol.

The original matter under discussion
seems to have snowballed, under all
these side factors, into a many-sided issue
now out of all proportion. Obviously
when you first wrote your article
either you or Mr Howard Baker
must have had an object in view
and it would be most interesting
to know if you have succeeded
in your aim. As things stand we
each have our own opinion as to
which, as I have said before, we
are equally entitled and as I see
it neither one of us is going to be
converted to the other viewpoint. So
the position is stalemate now but
I'll certainly be most interested to
see the next move on this controversial
subject.

Sincerely,

Belle Hall

By August 1960, the storm was blowing over. In SBL 457 *The World-Shakers*, W.O.G. Lofts provided the calmest view of the controversy so far:

THE CONTROVERSY— LAST WORDS?

IN the light of Mr. Robert W. Story's letter published in Mailbag No. 454, I feel that some previously unacknowledged but important facts should be made known to all Blake readers.

As I can probably claim with justification to be one of the leading contributors to the *Collector's Digest* and "Blakiana" for many years, I have naturally read the recent criticisms made by Martin Thomas with particular interest. And although taking a completely neutral attitude to the pros and cons of the argument, in fairness to Mr. Martin Thomas I would like to put the record straight.

Contrary to Mr. Story's statement, the Sexton Blake book reviews published in the *Collector's Digest* are not part of the "Blakiana" section. They are independent of "Blakiana" as per the agreement first reached between Mr. Herbert Leckenby, the late Editor of the *Digest*, and the present Editor of the *Sexton Blake Library*. It was discovered at that time (circa 1957) that the book review feature, dealing as it did with the *modern* Blake was not welcome within the columns of "Blakiana." So it has remained an independent feature to this day.

The policy of Mailbag has been to provide an open forum in which readers can state their views and opinions freely and, therefore, one would expect criticism as well as praise to be taken in good part. Because Martin Thomas is a regular Sexton Blake author, that doesn't in my opinion de-bar him from criticising anything which he considers is not in Blake's best interests. It is true, of course, that the *Digest* is an amateur magazine, but it is not given away free. As its readers pay a fair price for the magazine, surely any of them—especially those whose interests are exclusively Blakian—are entitled to criticise the contents of "Blakiana" and attempt to get what they consider good value for money. And as Mr. Thomas, too, is a long-standing subscriber to the *Digest*, surely the same is true for him.

The fact that Martin Thomas used the columns of the Mailbag, and not the *Digest*, as the vehicle for

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his criticism is perfectly justified. If writers in the *Digest* can discuss, praise, dissect or criticise the Sexton Blake saga to their hearts' content why cannot a writer to the Mailbag discuss, praise or criticise the "Blakiana" section of the *Collector's Digest*? Or must he restrain himself solely to shrieks of praise? Obviously, some clear thinking is needed from the more vituperative critics of Martin Thomas. Their present attitude represents one of the worst examples of bigotry and muddled thinking that I have ever encountered.

(I should like to make it clear that the antagonists I refer to do not include any of the correspondents who have published letters on the controversy in the Mailbag, but is directed solely to those collectors who have remained in the background and have sniped unremittingly at Martin Thomas on every possible occasion.)

Moreover, it is most unfair of those people who say that Mr. Thomas should contribute to the *Digest* himself. It is most likely that since becoming a professional writer he just has not had the time to write articles on an amateur basis. But it may interest a lot of readers to know that he did so some years ago—when he contributed some very clever artwork for the late Herbert Leckenby under the pen-name of "Nemo."

On the other hand, as a regular contributor of articles to nearly all the collecting papers I do agree that it is slightly more difficult to write articles on the new Blake than on the old. (Recently I wrote a piece on Eustace Craille, only to see an almost identical article published by another collector from Liverpool.) But fresh and forward-looking articles



can certainly be written on the new Blake if only collectors will take the trouble to seek the data necessary for such work—and have the necessary initiative and enthusiasm.

The bitter hostility of the least active contributors to the *Digest* frankly baffles me. With the possible exception of Walter Webb, I personally have probably written more pieces on the old Blake than anyone else. Yet I don't feel the slightest annoyance at Martin Thomas' criticism. I can't see why certain other collectors should adopt such an aggressive attitude—considering that many of them have never penned a Blake article in any form in their entire lives!

This burning issue began during the bitter cold of February—we are now basking in the summer heat of August—but the argument, like the brook in the poem, bids fare to go on for ever. But may I express the (forlorn?) hope that these might be the last words on what has been a very interesting, though highly controversial, subject.

Mr. William Oliver Guillemont Lofts,
56 Sheringham House, St. Marylebone,
London, N.W.1.

BRAVO CAROSELLI!

The cover of *The Angry Night* was, apart from No. 399, the best S.B.L. cover I have ever seen. I thought the subtle handling of the predominant purples, mauves, and blues, superb. And the arrangement of the two figures and the head was a masterly work of contrast and balance. The group also conveyed a remarkable impression of depth and dimension. All three characters seemed about to spring into life. My congratulations to artist Caroselli for this most arresting and impressive piece of work.

Incidentally, I think that not only the cover of *The Angry Night*, but all the covers by this artist so far have been excellent—even by the S.B.L.'s very high standards. I hope he continues to contribute his work to the series for a long time to come.

Mr. Keith Chapman, 25 Capel Road,
Enfield, Middlesex.

WANTED!

I have read most of the *Sexton Blake Library* series up to date, and am now eager to obtain some back numbers. Would any other readers be willing to give or sell *Sexton Blake Library* novels which came out prior to S.B.L. No. 300?

Also, in order to complete my collection I am eager to obtain copies of *The Outlawed Black* by Rex Hardinge No. 338, and *The Case of the Frightened Man* by Anthony

Parsons No. 348. I would be happy to pay full cover cost and postage.

The writers I like best today are Peter Saxon and W. Howard Baker. Also, I am particularly keen on the Blake-in-wartime series.

How I look forward to the middle of every month when the new issues appear! I declare—without fear of contradiction—that there has never been any other detective in fiction to compare with Sexton Blake.

Mr. Nigel Gay, Jnr., 26 Sherborne Avenue,
Norwood Green, Southall, Middlesex.

GENEROUS RESPONSE

I would like to let you know that I have received many copies of the two *Sexton Blake Library* issues *Mission to Mexico* and *Murder Made Easy* as a result of your appeal on my behalf published in S.B.L. No. 451 *The Angry Night*.

Would it be possible for you to thank all those readers who kindly sent me the books I needed? I have circulated the extra copies I received among my friends in the hope that it may help to increase your circulation even further.

Mr. David Wilson, 20 Kilmailing Road,
Cathcart, Glasgow, S.4.

MORE LETTERS

Once again, shortage of space limits the number of letters we can publish in this issue. We hope that the longer novel will help to compensate those readers whose letters have had to be held over, but will be published just as soon as we have space available. However, more readers' views can be found in the companion novel *Large Type Killer*, No. 458, on sale now.

We hope you enjoyed the extra-length stories in these, the centenary issues of the New Order *Sexton Blake Library*. With *Large Type Killer*, Blake and Company have concluded their hundredth major case since they enlarged their sphere, and moved their offices to Berkeley Square.

Judging by the tone of the majority of readers' letters, the New Order has been welcomed with considerable enthusiasm and enjoyed by you all. We hope that you will not need to alter your tone when you write to comment on our next hundred issues!

Until next month, when Mailbag will be back with more news and views from readers at home and abroad, best wishes—and happy reading!

Your sincere friend,

THE EDITOR.

By September, in a letter to Bette Pate, Martin Thomas wrote the words — ‘I think it best to allow “the controversy” to expire’...

MARTIN THOMAS

Permanent Address:

BCM/BIZARRE,
LONDON, W.C.1.
ENGLAND.

Miss E. J. Pate,
8 Day Street,
Drummoyne,
N.S.W..

22nd September, 1960

Dear Miss Pate,

This is to thank you for the return of the clippings, which I have just received - safe and undamaged inside the very secure wrapping you so kindly gave them!

I must thank you too for your air mail letter dated July 29th, which I don't think I have previously acknowledged.

After this lapse of time I think it best to allow "the controversy" to expire. I agree with you that it has "snowballed out of all proportion," but perhaps the snowball will melt if people of differing views now thaw out a little. I've written my last words on the subject!

I was interested to hear of your brother's activities in Hollywood. He must be a very versatile as well as talented person. I have seen some of the 'Rawhide' TV films, though I'm pretty sure I haven't yet seen 'Escape from Fort Bravo.' I must look out for it - and for his name among the credits!

At this moment I am busy on my Christmas S.B. novel, which I hope will appeal to the older Blake fans in particular. You may be interested to know that its central theme concerns Tinker, the case having a very special and personal importance for him. I hope you will like the story.

Best wishes.

Yours sincerely,

Martin Thomas

Finally, almost a year after the storm broke, Martin Thomas, in a letter to Bette's husband, breathed a sigh of relief that it was all (finally!) over:

MARTIN THOMAS

Permanent Address:
BCM/BIZARRE,
LONDON, W.C.1.
ENGLAND.

Victor E. Colby, Esq.,
8 Beresford Avenue,
Beverly Hills,
N.S.W.,
Australia.

30th January, 1961

Dear Mr. Colby,

Many thanks for your very welcome letter, and sincere apologies for my delay in replying to it. I am afraid I have recently fallen into arrears not only with correspondence but with my S.B.L. work too, and I am now trying to catch up a little in all directions!

Your comments on the 'Blakiana' controversy interested me. As you say, it did cause quite a stir, but it has now been allowed to subside - for which I am not sorry! I agree with you that free and frank discussion is a good thing, but in some quarters the discussion tended to become a little heated. I am glad that good sense has prevailed all round, with mutual allowances for differences of viewpoint. Those differences, after all, are very small compared to the great bond of a major interest in common.

Glad you liked those short stories of mine. The one you particularly liked - THE GENUINE ARTICLE, about the return of a ghost-expert's ghost to correct the MS of his last supernatural story - was written about 15 years ago. You'll be amused to hear that it has since been almost paralleled in real life! A book has recently been published purporting to present spirit messages from the Other Side by a man who, when alive, was hostile to spiritualism. The former scoffer, it is claimed, now describes the spirit world as he has found it to be, and recants all he had said about the future life during his life on earth. So, once again, Life has caught up with Fiction!

In reply to your question, as far as I know my hard-cover books are now out of print, though some of them may still possibly be found in lending libraries, I daresay.

Yes, I had a very interesting chat with Bill Lofts last September. As well as being a very likable person, he's immensely erudite concerning the old periodicals, and our chat ranged extensively over Blake lore and other periodical fiction. It was an enjoyable evening.

You, too, are evidently an authority on the old periodicals and Blake lore. I much enjoyed reading your contribution in the C.D. Annual, which certainly added to my own knowledge of the publications in which Blake had appeared. Australia was impressively represented in the Annual by your article and Miss Pate's intriguing short story.

Again, apologies for my dilatoriness in replying to your letter. Please don't allow that delay to prevent you from writing again whenever you feel inclined.

With best wishes,

Yours sincerely,

Martin Thomas

P.S. If you liked BRED TO KILL, you may care to know that the S.B. novel I am just about to commence will reintroduce Gideon Ashley and have a witchcraft-science-fiction theme in a setting which I believe has not hitherto been featured in the S.B.L.