

The COLLECTORS³

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DIGEST

SEPTEMBER 1954



The Clock Tower at St. Frank's

(Specially drawn for Sipper's Magazine)

The Collectors' Digest

Vol. 8 No. 93

Price 1s.6d.

SEPTEMBER, 1954

Editor, HERBERT LECKENBY,
c/o YORK DUPLICATING SERVICES,
7, The Shambles, YORK.

From the Editor's Chair

BORED? NOT LIKELY! On the eve of my retirement, one of my office colleagues said to me, "Why an energetic bloke like you will be bored stiff - you'll go downhill quick." Well, I'll admit I had been having a few qualms myself. But so far my colleagues and my fears have been unfounded and here's one very good reason.

Since I wrote my last chat, Jim Shephered has been over from Sheffield for a day. Then followed Bill Lofts for a week-end. Shortly afterwards Gerry Allison and I had an afternoon together, and the following day Tom Sinclair from the same city of Leeds paid me a surprise visit. Three more days passed, then came Frank Case all the way from Liverpool to spend an hour or so.

If this keeps up I shall be going uphill, not down, for believe me, it makes me say "Aint life grand."

MORE ABOUT THE 'ANNUAL': So far as preparation is concerned, all goes splendidly, for several articles are ready for 'running off'. I have something to say about Eric Fayne's contribution in "Hamiltoniana" and since I last wrote, Jack Wood's great article on Nelson Lee has come along. Not only will this appeal to St. Frank's fans but also I warrant to those who knew the detective of Grays Inn Road as Maxwell Scott told of him, for Jack starts at the very beginning. A very thorough job he has made of it, there's very little, if anything, he has missed.

Then there's "The Cricket Test" a story in verse of a great game between Greyfriars and St. Franks by Bill Jardine. This is a perfect example of the amazing devotion shown by some of our members towards the hobby. The verses are very clever, but apart from that it is all so beautifully typed and presented that I only wish I could pass it round to everyone of you just to show the

trouble some of our fellows will go to without any thought of gain. I shall have more to tell next month. Orders are still lagging behind last year. This is mainly due to the holidays I think, for despite the weather, more of you have been away than ever, if my mail is anything to go by. However, now that the nights are drawing in no doubt we shall catch up. The sooner I have an idea how many copies to order the sooner the machine will get running. And we must have some adverts. too.

ANTICIPATION: Shortly after these lines appear in print, I hope to be in London once more to meet once again old friends and I trust some I know as pen-friends, but whom I shall be meeting for the first time. I am looking forward to an eighteen hour day.

Yours sincerely,

HERBERT LECKENBY.

THE 'ANNUAL' BALLOT

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MY COLLECTION NO. 7

by W.T. THURBON

"IN PIAM MEMORIAM W.T.H.T."

One of my earliest memories is of the old fashioned gas lamps outside a small newsagents shop and the yellow covered "Dick Turpins" and (possibly also) "Robin Hoods" on the racks outside the door. How long ago I cannot now say.

Looking back, my home, when I was a small boy, must have been

a treasure trove, for, for quite a number of years, my late father, who died while I was composing this article, took the Union Jack regularly, all the first series of Aldine "Robin Hoods", the early Aldine "Dick Turpins", and the "Marvel". Perhaps the saddest thought is of those "Robin Hoods" - alone of the mass of papers they survived practically a complete run of the first series until early in the last war they were given away. My father, as a boy of ten, in London, had purchased very regularly the old "Boys of the Empire" and as a small boy I had a wonderful time with these. Alas that the vicissitudes and hard wear of youth caused the disintegration of all this treasure. Later memories crowd in of comics, Puck and the Rainbow particularly, but odd numbers of most of the others, of "Pluck" in 1912-13 with the Reginald Wray "Dick Brittain" series, and many others. As Clark Hook was so fond of quoting:

"Of all sad words of tongue and pen,

The Saddest are these, it might have been."

If only I had preserved these, or the early Populars, or the first series of "Greyfriars Herald", and others. I collected Chuckles pretty regularly from 1916 to 1918 when that grand serial "Adventure Island" was running in them. But probably my most serious collection was "The Scout". I took this regularly from 1913 to 1915, and again from 1917 until 1924 or 1925. When I became a scoutmaster in 1926, I gave most of these away to boys in my troop. "If youth but knew!" I think from very early times "Jack, Sam and Pete" were among my favourite characters, and when I started work in 1917, until the "Marvel" finally ceased publication, I took this. After 1925 I began to concentrate more on serious reading, and what remnants of the old papers I had retained were cleared away save for the last few years run of the "Marvel" and a few J.S. & P.B.F.L. 4ds.

For many years I hoped sometime to come across a run of early "Marvels", but nothing ever came my way until at last a few years ago "Boys will be Boys" appeared. From this I learned that others shared my interests, and that my daydreams might become realised. A letter to the author brought a courteous and helpful reply and sent me off on the track of "Digest" and "Miscellany". Needless to say Mr. Leckenby became at once guide, philosopher and friend to a new member of the fraternity. It was Mr. Dick Whorwell who procured me my first "Marvels" and at once I was launched on my way.

Again, needless to say, I at once found many helpful friends in the hobby - particularly perhaps I should mention the late ever-helpful John Medcraft, who was not only a helpful source of supply but also a mine of information on all facets of Old Boys' Papers.

I have found friends and correspondents not only in England, but to date also in Spain, U.S.A., Canada, Australia and South Africa. I have learned a great deal about various boys' papers; not only the "Jack, Sam and Pete" stories which are my own line, but also quite a number of interesting byways. Many more papers have passed through my hands than I have retained. As I get older I find the passion to accumulate possessions in large numbers has waned, and my object is to keep only some few items that make a special appeal to me; but side by side with this I find great pleasure in tracking down various interests of the past - for example, many years ago I read various parts of a serial by Alec G. Pearson "City of Flame" in the "Gem", but missed the end. It was a great delight to read recently the story in B.F.L. No. 316 - but having read it I did not desire to retain it in my collection and passed it on to a friend.

And so to my actual collection. This is in two parts. The first consists of some early numbers of "The Scout", collected recently as part of my interest in that Movement and in its early history; two rather battered volumes of 1909 and 1910, and some sixty loose numbers from 1913 to 1915. The second and more "hobby" part at present consists mainly of "Marvels", with a few "Populars" and "Union Jacks". The latter are all "Lobangu" tales - most alas in very poor condition, including a treasured relic from my youth of No. 206 "Sexton Blake, Whaler", preserved from my father's purchases, and No. 504 "The Long Trail" of June, 1913. This last I can still recall purchasing myself, on a Thursday, a school half holiday, and I still treasure that tattered copy that has survived the adventures of over 40 years. The ones I have are 171, 181, 206, 404, 504, 592, 672, 696, 752, 795, 851, 866. It is perhaps a curious example of nostalgia that among my Populars I have a few of the very early numbers containing reprints of which I have also possessed early ld Marvels containing the same story - but I have chosen to retain the Popular rather than the early Marvel. I believe the very early Popular reprints gained by the compression and by J.A. Cummings' illustrations and were actually improvements on the Marvel originals. Of the reprints in the Popular

from the Halfpenny Marvel which comprised P.P. Nos. 30 to 50 I have 16. Of Marvels themselves, the backbone of my collection, I have concentrated mainly on those before No. 300, especially those set in the Wilds (for which latter reason I have avoided the two "tours of Britain"). Apart from odd numbers which have a special appeal, my main efforts have been to get as complete runs as possible of the "Balloon Series 113 - 151," "The Steam Man 231 - 251" and the "New Old Hoss" Aeroplane and Ira the Huron Chief series 273 - 283. In none of these have I so far achieved complete success; I suppose I have about 100 Marvels altogether. I hope some time to write up both the Balloon and Steam Man series, then to cut down my collection again only to the cream of the tales.

What are my daydreams at present: well, first to complete my runs of the Marvels referred to above. Then to get a few more "Lobangu" tales. Then I would like to get a run of Plucks for 1912-13 with the "Dick Brittain" series. And I want a few more B.F.L. 3ds. - particularly 117, 118, with the John Tregellis "Britain at Bay" tales, and finally a title that has always haunted me since I saw it first in an advertisement of my youth, alas a year or two after publication. B.F.L. 222 "Through Trackless Tibet" - what pictures that title conjures up.

And what memories this article recalls - the first Union Jack I ever read, a Lobangu tale, "The Flying Column" - does anyone now recall the cover with its picture of Zulu warriors; the first Aldine "Robin Hood" I ever read, No. 20, "The Branded Arrow" - and what a rush of Union Jack titles: "Sexton Blake, Territorial Lumberman", in the floods, taking part in Pageants, a very good Xmas tale "The Coster's Christmas", and a tale that gave me, as a very small boy, a nightmare, about Plague in China.

Perhaps ~~"his distance lends enchantment to the view"~~ but what an enchanting view it is.

WANTED - YOUNG FOLKS TALES - W. HALL, 46 WALDER ROAD, HAMMOND-VILLE, LIVERPOOL, N.S.W., AUSTRALIA, is anxious to obtain any or all. Will exchange Magnets, Gems, Nelson Lees, S.O.L's, or pay reasonable price. ALSO WANTED COMICS. All letters answered. Correspondence welcomed with O.B.B. Collectors anywhere.

CHUCKLES! CHUCKLES! 3/- each offered for any issues of this comic. LEONARD PACHIAN, 27 ARCHDALE ROAD, EAST DULWICH, LONDON, S.E.22.

BLAKIANA

Conducted by Josephine Packman

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

By the time this issue of our magazine is in your hands, the Blake Circle Quiz entries will have been checked. The full result will be published next month, the winners of course being notified beforehand.

The good friend who sent me the Spanish Sexton Blake has 'done it again'. This time he has sent me a couple of issues of a Swedish Weekly, featuring Sexton Blake in picture-story form. The paper - "Lektyr" - is a Stockholm publication, the Blake story being entitled 'Sexton Blake and the Motor Cycle Mystery'. Well drawn and in colour, Tinker plays a leading part in what appears to be a very exciting picture-yarn. The popularity of 'our Blake' abroad is very patent, and I am now wondering what the next language will be in which the famous detective's exploits are recorded!

As promised, this issue contains the controversial article on Anthony Parsons. I invite your comments, for publication in Blakiana.

Strangely enough, I recently received a letter from Eric Fayne in which, amongst other things, he mentions Pedro. With Eric Fayne's permission I am reproducing the letter exactly as received. Maybe some of you would like to reply to Mr. Fayne, through the medium of Blakiana.

It is regretted that Gerry Allison is unable to continue his S.B.L. reviews as a regular feature, but I am pleased to say he has kindly given up a little of his limited 'free' time for the current issue reviews.

Next month's Blakiana will contain, amongst other items, an interesting article by Herbert Leckenby.

Finally, I am sure you will be pleased to hear that our good friend Bob Whiter has promised to do a cover design for the 'Digest', depicting Sexton Blake, Tinker and Pedro.

JOSIE PACKMAN.

Dear Josie,

I was fascinated with the article on Pedro, but I was rather startled that the writer should allege that the old dog's heyday was past early in the "twenties".

Pedro played a substantial part in almost every story by Pierre Quiroule, and this writer's work was appearing regularly until after the outbreak of war.

I am rather at a loss to understand why it is that Pierre Quiroule seems to be so neglected in Blakiana, while constant reference is made to other authors whose work, in my humble opinion, was vastly inferior. For me, at least, there was no other writer of Sexton Blake stories who remotely reached the high level of the Pierre Quiroule tales. I can read and re-read such masterpieces as "The Mystery Box" (the finest Blake story of all time, in my view), "The Living Shadow", "The Turkish Agreement", "The Six Black Dots", "The Missing Envoy" and many others, but I should have to be paid before I could digest the work of some writers who are so highly praised in Blakiana.

The neglect of Pierre Quiroule by Blakiana contributors is a mystery, for these stories contained everything that we usually agree contributed to the perfect Blake story. We saw Blake himself, well-educated, of vast human sympathy, with high medical qualifications; Tinker as a lovable and youthful assistant, setting just the right note; Mrs. Bardell, whimsical, comfortable and homely; Pedro, supreme old dog, ready to bring his sagacious nose into play at frequent intervals; the Baker Street chambers, correct to the last detail, always the main background; Dr. Baily, dry old Harley Street practitioner, as believable as Blake and Tinker themselves; Grant and Julie, never introduced too ostentatiously, but supplying a genuine Secret Service flavour; the plots, skilfully worked out and building up to a thrilling climax; the geography, authentic and intriguing; the stories, fascinating, humorous, sometimes even macabre, but always feasible reading.

Pierre Quiroule lifted the Sexton Blake story high above the errand-boy class of literature into which some S.B.L.'s fell. He was a master of descriptive writing, and had a command of excellent English.

Yet our Blakiana experts pass him by, while they wax enthusi-

astic over the far inferior work of — well, many of the others.
It beats me.

Yours sincerely,

ERIC PAYNE.

—ooOoo—

ANTHONY PARSONS

by

James W. Cook.

I so enjoyed the two recent Sexton Blake yarns by the above author that I decided to write and thank him, because, as far as I can judge, the old S.B.L. is fast becoming a woman's novelette. Parsons is, I think, the only author who actually gives us the old Sexton Blake as we used to know him, and you can imagine my surprise when he wrote and told me he hadn't "even heard of the gentleman" until the editor asked him to write a Blake story, in 1935 or '36. Since then he has gone on writing them. Prior to that, he wrote for the STRAND, ROYAL, WIDE WORLD, BLACKWOOD'S, NASH'S etc., and also, for women's magazines, stories and serials which he still does under a dozen different names. Oddly enough, he never read boys' stories and never bought boys' papers!

He little knew when, as a boy, he read Rider Haggard he was destined to spend five years of his life roaming round Central Africa in the steps of that famous author, amusing himself shooting elephants for a living. And when he read Marie Corelli and Maud Diver, he little knew that as an officer of the 98th Regiment, and later as a pilot of the R.F.C. and R.A.F. he was fated to spend ten years of his life marching and flying over that same North-West Frontier of India. Haggard's "She" and "Ayesha" Anthony simply lapped up — again never dreaming that the time would come when he should spend three years in Cairo, and roam around amid the ruins of Upper Egypt.

Yes, he tells me, he loved all those parts. They were already alive to him, from the ancient Nile to the Indus, from Peshawar to Damascus and Samarkand. They were great days to him. Arabia, Persia, Kashmir — he lived in them and loved them. Deserts and all!

But do you know he never knew the UNION JACK. He says he did some stories and serials for the old THRILLER and DETECTIVE WEEKLY

until the war killed them - and for a time he wrote serials for the MODERN BOY.

I had to smile at his reply to my query about Shephard's Hotel. This was Blake's favourite stopping place, and I asked A.P. where Blake was going to stay when he was in Cairo as Shephard's had been burnt down. He said the editor of the S.B.L. dropped him a line, asking him what he was going to do without it!

Incidentally, Mr. Parsons lived at Shephard's Hotel for eighteen months. Now he has transferred his custom to the Continental or the Semiramis.

He then goes on to say something which might be somewhat controversial, for he says both he and the editor are under the impression he must have written more "Blakes" than any other writer. He opines that he must be nearing his century by now. Anybody object to this statement? No doubt some of the old authors did more than that for the UNION JACK, but Parsons is referring to the present S.B.L.

Speaking of the U.J., I was told of an observation made by a man who was on the old UNION JACK, that if only the paper had shut down on all those old characters and kept up-to-date with new characters and new stories, it would have been alive today.

That's where Anthony Parsons scores with his yarns - they are bang up-to-date, topical, and with Blake as we knew him. Sort of satisfactory to both sides.

But in some of the reviews of current Sexton Blake stories recently in Blakiana, I cannot agree that we should have Pedro included. After all, 'Blakes' are not written as museum pieces for the benefit of the small band of enthusiasts who have collected Blake from the year dot. That fact alone invalidates the criticisms and suggestions which from time to time appear, directed toward S.B. authors.

These 'oldsters' want to keep Blake as he was at the beginning Tinker and the rest with him. They want Blake to speak as he did, act as he did, and proceed upon his investigations exactly as he did fifty years ago.

The editor's foresight is responsible for the S.B.L. being in circulation today.

It's no good, you know, you have to see their point of view. There never was any sentiment in business, and the Sexton Blake Library is a business.

It would be quite absurd to try and sell such stuff as the very old 'Blakes' were made of - except, of course, to a handful of 'oldsters' wallowing in their own nostalgia. As well offer a 1905 car to a man who wants a 1954 model!

Dear old Pedro has gone into the limbo of all out-of-date tools, as it was inevitable that he should.

He was useful in his day, but his day has gone. Now we use "Walkie-Talkie" or fast 'planes and the laboratory - or would some of us still prefer Blake to go about his business in a Hansom cab?

But it is a tender thing this nostalgia longing for old days and scenes. The authors commissioned to write tales of Blake and Tinker must, of necessity, do so on the policy laid down by the A. Press. So really, it is no use decrying these present day stories because they do not connect with the old yarns - rather let us be thankful that Sexton Blake still lives on.

To me the old 'S.B.' is still there in Anthony Parsons' stories minus Pedro, of course.

Since he began - in 1935 or '36 - to write about Blake, he has made a good job of recapturing a lost thrill.

The constant battle of wits between Blake and Venner make, I think, that old time reading we miss so much.

Good luck, Anthony Parsons, and more Sexton Blake yarns please.

I must agree commercially with the policy of Fleetway House, but in my heart of hearts I am still an 'oldster'.

THE SEXTON BLAKE LIBRARY.

AUGUST ISSUES.

No. 317. "The Crime at 3 a.m."

by Hugh Clevely.

A very readable tale of murder and swindling in London. I quite enjoyed it, although Blake seemed rather off-colour. How often do we hear of him being 'tired', 'worried', 'ill-tempered', 'unfriendly'?

But Mrs. Bardell is marvellous for her age. When Blake having been out all night, arrived in Baker Street at 6 a.m., bringing with him Inspector Iverson of the Yard the old girl heard him come, and had coffee ready in a jiffy.

"Anyway, you've been to bed", said Blake, "which is more than I have". He broke off as Mrs. Bardell came in with a pot full of coffee and cups, and protested: "What's this, Mrs. Bardell? I

didn't ask you to get up".

"I heard you come in", Mrs. Bardell answered, "and I knew you'd like some coffee. I brought up a cup for the Inspector too".

Well, what do you think of that? And notice the perfect Queen's English? Good old Martha, she must have been having elocution lessons!

No. 318. "The Case of the Council Swindle". by Walter Tyrer.

The first half of this book contained some of the driest humour and best characterization we have had for a long time. Tyrer kept me chuckling away for pages. Such passages as: "... attendance at council meetings has fallen away, since the B.B.C. have provided such excellent opportunities of being bored without leaving our own homes".

Or this: "At last the ushers appeared. Two big uniformed men came rushing into the gallery, pushing the startled schoolgirls aside fearlessly".

The ending did not keep up this standard however, and brought in a lot of new people, leaving loose ends galore. Still, those who enjoy satirical humour will relish the first part of the story.

But those ratepayers at Farriport were an incredible lot of dopes to pay all that money for nothing.

Gerry Allison.

Another grand scoop enables me to offer FOR EXCHANGE about 120 Magnets and 50 Gems (75% and 50% originals respectively) and 80 Populars, all covering roughly 1919/1926, also later numbers of each. Condition fair to mint.

I Require:— Most pre-1916 Magnets and Nos. 419, 420, 437, 438, 439, 442, 455, 456, 461, 463, 474, 493, 515, 525, 526, 532, 540, 560, 561, 586, 590, 821, 823, 826, 834, 843, 846, 848, 862, 865/869, 881, 906, 907, 1007/1009, 1011, 1013, 1016, 1025, 1032, 1038, 1051, 1062, 1117, 1125, 1132/1134, 1136, 1174, 1194, 1204, 1205, 1221, 1223, 1226, 1230, 1232, 1236, 1238, 1240.

ALSO most Gems 590/1220 (originals only). Offers and "wants" lists welcomed. Please write airmail. CHAS. v REWEN, BOX 50, Uitenhage, SOUTH AFRICA.

HAMILTONIANA

Compiled by HERBERT LECKENBY

Looking through "Gem" No. 1520, "The St. Jims Charity Fund" April 3rd, 1937, I found the editor's page particularly interesting and some of it well worth quoting here. For instance he said he had had a letter from the secretary of the Vincents' Old Boys Club. Its members had been voting on the ten best stories (or series) in 1936, together with the Wilmot Sports Club, the Gem Club (West End), the Magnet and Gem Club (Wiltshire); the Good Companions Club and the Grangemere Old Girls' Club. Over 300 members of these various Clubs had voted with the following result: (1) The "Toff" Series, (2) "The Mystery of Eastwood House" stories, (3) "For the Honour of St. Jims", (4) "They Called Him a Coward", (5) "Micky Makes Things Hum", (6) "St. Jims on Strike", (7) "The Sign of Three", (8) The St. Jims "Captaincy" series, (9) "The Last Laugh", (10) "Wally on the Warpath".

In addition voting had been taken on the most popular characters. They came out like this: (1) Talbot, (2) Wally D'Arcy, (3) Figgins, (4) Lumley-Lumley, (5) Tom Merry, (6) Bernard Glyn, (7) Kerr, (8) Cousin Ethel, (9) Levison, (10) Blake.

Talbot seems to have been popular in any generation, but Gussy completely out of it is rather surprising.

I wonder if any of these 300 odd members are still interested in the stories of their youth. And what became of the Clubs?

Another interesting point was that in answer to two correspondents, the editor said he had no more details about the Greyfriars film. Still coming, isn't it?

MORE PRAISE FOR THE "MAGNET" AND "GEM": Browsing in a library the other day I picked up at random a book called "Ritchie" by John P. Barter. On the very first page I opened some dialogue caught my eye, which I guess will interest all Hamiltonians. It concerns a conversation between Lord Fleeth, Press Baron, and the editor of one of his newspapers. They are discussing the present taste in literature. Here it is:

"Lord Fleeth nodded.

"Well, I do, I meet some of these chaps. They come to my parties because there's a buffet and the drinks are free. They think it's the first stage towards the Order of Merit: about one in ten is worth cultivating, but one has to invite the ten to find

out which. The rest are unhealthy climbers, after a subsidy. I expect you read The Gem and The Magnet when you were young, Arkwright?'

'My boy has some, I often read them even now!'

'What do you think of them?'

'Topping! That is, they're not the kind of thing one tires of, even at my age!'

'Haven't any time for reading myself these days, but I thought they were damned fine stuff when I was young. Billy Bunter, Harry Wharton, Bob Cherry!'

'Arthur Augustus d'Arcy, Loder of the Sixth.....'

'No doubt some of it would seem crude and to give an over-simplified view of life, but so, for the matter of that, does the Bible. The great thing is that they were healthy. No sandals, corduroys and long-haired intellectuals. The Owl of the Remove is a great creation and the public like it by paying for it. That's the test of greatness in the arts. What is wanted is the same kind of outlook adapted where necessary to the adult novel. If we had that, we would have a lot more of the proper kind of order and stability.' "

Well, that's a fine tribute if you like. Isn't it amazing how they keep cropping up in all sorts of places? John P. Barter seems to be "one of us" doesn't he?

KEN KING OF THE ISLANDS: Despite all that has been written about the works of Charles Hamilton during the past few years, there's still quite a lot to be written. This struck me forcibly when I was checking the stencils of Eric Fayne's "The Development of the Modern Boy" article for the Annual. Take 'Ken King of the Islands' for instance. Here are over 200 fascinating stories which have hardly been mentioned up to now. Here at random are some of the titles; "Island of Silence"; "Cannikals of Kua"; "The Chast of Terror"; "The Isle of Surprises"; "The Grinning Pirate"; "In the Head Hunters' Lair"; "Island of the Wolf". Grand spine tingling yarns of the Pacific seas in a setting of coral islands, sun-drenched tropic beaches, beachcombers, pearl-ers and cannibals.

What's more, on reading the 'proofs' I marvelled at the way in which Eric Fayne had summarised them. In crisp, graphic sentences he tells of the stories like this:- "White Man's Luck" - a threat to the 'Dawn', a night attack, a terrific hurricane, and

valuable cargo flung overboard. "Island of Silence". It was weird - uncanny. As the 'Dawn' approached the usually busy island of Lalua there was not a soul to be seen, not a sound to be heard. "The Lost Galleon". The rivals find the galleon and the treasure only to discover that a giant octopus has got there first.

Masterpieces of ideal "reporting" telling of a score of 'Treasure Islands' rolled into one. What a feast of reading for the fire-side next Christmas Day. Have you ordered your Annual yet?

* * * * *

MORE TREASURE TROVE: You will remember Charles v Renen out in South Africa telling of a haul of Magnets which had come his way as the result of an advert. Well he's had another stroke of luck as will be seen from the following quotations from a letter recently received:-

"Recently had yet another stroke of good fortune. After following up a clue I heard from a lady in Natal to say she could supply me with quite a number of the old papers. This letter came to hand a day before my family and I were due to go up to the Free State for our holiday. Of course, I had to change all our arrangements at the last minute and we shot up to Natal instead! As it turned out the holiday there was a most enjoyable one. We toured the province at our leisure, stopping wherever it pleased us to do so. From the foot of the snow-clad Drakensberg mountains to sweltering Durban and the rest of the South Coast thence right around Basutoland and down through the Free State after all. This is all beside the point, of course. More to the point is this. The highlight of our trip was a few days spent on the farm of the good lady who'd offered me the papers. Her family and mine have become staunch friends! The lady herself is an old Hamiltonian and even now has her beloved 1916/1919 Gems which she did not wish to part with. However she did give me nearly 600 Magnets, Gems and Pops. Unfortunately, nearly half of these are either in a deplorable state or very sadly soiled, but I have managed to salvage about 300 copies ranging in condition from fair to mint. The bulk of these are 1923/1926 Magnets and Gems which you no doubt know are pretty rare for some or other reason. The haul has reduced my wants list quite a bit especially as far as the Gems go as I have only just started to collect these seriously. I need not tell you what a thrill it gave me sorting out this little lot. I'd stuck them

away carefully in the boot of my car after I got them and believe it or not I did not even attempt to gauge the extent of the haul until after me had returned home a couple of weeks later. There's will power! I must admit tho' my mind was in the boot of my car half the time we were getting around!"

I like that bit about his thoughts dwelling on the haul in the boot of his car as he bowled along. Wouldn't we all have been in the same frame of mind? And there's that about Charles' family and the lady's now being firm friends now. Another letter from Frank Case told me of how he and his wife had been invited to spend a day with Norman Pragnell and his wife who were on holiday in North Wales.

You know such letters make my mail a joy to read.

-----ooOoo-----

POTTED PERSONALITIES. No. 5 (Second Series)

MR. QUELCH

That Henry Samuel Quelch, the form-master with the gimlet eyes, is the greatest of all the masters in the Hamilton schools and the finest piece of adult character-painting in school literature, few will gainsay. Right from the beginning of Magnet history we have seen this conscientious, severeman - a beast but a just beast, as Bob Cherry once said - tapping away at his "History of Greyfriars" as Frank Richards tapped out the history of the same school from a more modern view-point.

Mr. Quelch has figured largely in dozens - perhaps scores - of the Magnet's greatest series, but in my own memory I have one small cameo of this great man, and in this particular cameo I find the finest illustration of the fundamental character of the Remove master. In the Smedley series, Mr. Quelch visited Wharton Lodge where the Bounder was on holiday with Harry Wharton and Co. Mr. Smedley, the Bounder's "RIVAL FOR A FORTUNE", arrived to accuse Vernon-Smith of conduct of which the latter was not guilty. In a real gem of authorship, a few delightful, unforgettable chapters, Mr. Quelch took the matter in hand and in characteristic style sent the imposter, Smedly, about his business.

I have always regarded the Stacey series as the greatest of all the Greyfriars stories, but, strangely enough, it is here that Mr. Quelch does not appear in the best light. One feels that he

made something of a favourite of "HARRY WHARTON'S DOUBLE", and that an experienced schoolmaster should have been a shrewder judge of boys. Yet it was that very weakness on the part of Mr. Quelch which helped to make this superb series so memorable.

Weak again, perhaps, but humanly weak this time, was Mr. Quelch in two magnificent series, two series which I would vote only the most veritable fraction second to the Stacey series. In the two long series, where Harry Wharton was in feud with his form-master and became "THE WORST BOY AT GREYFRIARS", Mr. Quelch completely lost patience with the leader of the Famous Five, and showed far less than justice to the troublesome schoolboy.

Completely delicious were the many wordy-spars that Mr. Quelch had with Mr. Prout and Mr. Hacker from time to time, and it is a dull ache at the heart that we were not permitted to read that series of "THE BATTLE OF THE BEAKS" which was due to appear at the time when the Magnet ceased publication. I would that some persuasive voice would urge Frank Richards to use that theme in a Cassell book.

Looking back down the years, we can recall Mr. Quelch in many tussles with the Bouncer or fighting with all his power against the injustice of some new Headmaster. Mr. Quelch was superbly shown as a determined pedagogue when Mr. Prout became Head for a time; on one occasion as dismissed from Greyfriars through the trickery of Skinner; yet again, tearing his scanty locks over the machinations of the unpleasant Tracy, who wanted to be expelled; and finally, in the Magnet's last Christmas, as kidnapped by Slim Jim.

It can be said of Mr. Quelch that he really lives, as perhaps no other character in the stories really does. I shall never be the least surprised to meet him at Waterloo or to see him in the street.

DO YOU REMEMBER?

BY ROGER M. JENKINS

No. 3 - Schoolboys' Own Library No. 220 - "The Son of a Cracksmen".

Charles Hamilton has stated "I don't quite know how it is - unless it be my own sweet nature! - but all my bad characters have a tendency to reform, and get there sooner or later, and I always liked to see them on the right path." Valentine Mornington of Rockwood in his early days was one of the worst characters of all, and though he never completely reformed, he certainly made a great

improvement. His friendship with Kit Erroll was one of the decisive factors in this improvement.

Schoolboys' Own Library No. 220, with its rather melodramatic title which belies the real merit of the story, is a reprint of a 1917 series from the Boys' Friend. Kit Erroll was brought to Rookwood by Captain Erroll who was recognised by Mornington's protegee, 'Erbert, to be a notorious cracksman called Gentleman Jim. Mornington at once set himself the task of unmasking Erroll. Few would believe 'Erbert, but Mornington was wrong in judging Erroll to be of the same calibre as Gentleman Jim. The climax to their feud came when Erroll was driven to blackmailing Mornington to keep himself from being exposed, whereupon Mornington jeeringly remarked that no decent fellow would have resorted to such a device:-

"Erroll had won the game, and in his hour of success came doubt and hesitation.

Mornington's taunt had struck home. It was the son of Gentleman Jim who had planned this defeat for Mornington; not the frank honourable schoolboy that Jimmy Silver believed him to be.

Erroll knew it. He knew that in driving Mornington into this bargain he was giving up all that he had come to Rookwood for; he was abandoning the path he had marked out for himself - the path of honour. He would save himself by becoming what Mornington had accused him of being."

Erroll released him from the bargain, but before Mornington had time to denounce Erroll he was kidnapped by Gentleman Jim. The story had still a long way to run, but it managed to reach the heights early on, and stay there to the end, when Erroll rescued Mornington, thus establishing their friendship, and the genuine Captain Erroll turned up to recognise Kit as his long lost son.

Probably no other story in the Boys' Friend surpassed this fine tale, and few managed to equal it. To have maintained a successful sequence of tales for eleven years in the miserable five or six chapters allotted weekly to Rookwood in the Boys' Friend is no mean achievement; to have contrived to write therein series of the standard of the coming of Kit Erroll is nothing short of remarkable.

"CHUCKLES"! "CHUCKLES"! 3/- each offered for any issues of this Comic. Send at once. Cash by return. L. PACKMAN, 27 ARCHDALE ROAD, EAST DULWICH, LONDON, S.E.22.

WHARTON LODGE AND THE ENGLISH TRADITION

By Basil Adam

When as a schoolboy I first started reading the "Magnet", I just looked on it as a paper containing very readable school stories. On reaching the age of fourteen I happened to see the film "The Four Feathers", and for the first time felt a surge of pride for England and the English Tradition.

Also from that moment, I realised that the Greyfriars stories were part of that glorious English Tradition too. Especially this was so after reading "The Taming of Harry Wharton" in the School-boys Own Library series.

I have a vivid mental picture of the old oak panelled dining room at Wharton Lodge, and the tall soldierly Colonel Wharton facing the defiant Harry before he is sent to Greyfriars. That is why I have the warmest regard for all the "holiday at Wharton Lodge" series, especially the Easter holiday period, when a peaceful golden haze appeared to hang over the Lodge, and the lovely Surrey countryside.

I can link up this very English atmosphere with Francis Brett Young's book "Jim Redlake", Galsworthy's "Forsyte Saga", Jeffery Farnolt's novels of Old England, the Sherlock Holmes stories, the P.G. Wodehouse "Blandings Castle" stories and last but not least A.E.W. Mason's "The Four Feathers".

As long as we have these books and Frank Richards stories of Wharton Lodge, the spirit of the English Tradition in all its many facets will always be with us.

MAGNET TITLES (Cont'd): 1320 Barred by His Form; 1321 The Boxing Beak; 1322 The Kidnapped Master; 1323 The Worst Boy in the School; 1324 Aunt Judy at Greyfriars; 1325 Bunter's Hundred Pound Boater; 1326 Billy Bunter's Hat Trick; 1327 The Shylock of Greyfriars; 1328 Bunter the Ventriloquist; 1329 The Bounder's Good Turn; 1330 The Millionaire Detective; 1331 Micky the Sprat.

I Off 5/- Each for any of the following Detective Library numbers in good condition. 10/- for No. 1. 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 8, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 17, 19, 21, 24, 29, 31, 33, 35, LEONARD PACKMAN, 27 ARCHDALE ROAD, EAST DULWICH, LONDON, S.E.22.

Gossip ABOUT St. FRANK'S



By JACK WOOD, Nostav, Stockton Lane, York.

This month, as perhaps the colours of an all-too rapidly approaching autumn are tinting the richly-wooded Sussex countryside, we resume our conducted tour of the St. Frank's district with a walk round the town of Helmford, where we made our first overnight stop.

HELMFORD is, like most Sussex towns, an unobtrusive sort of place and, in fact, owes its position in St. Frank's lore more to its being the outer bastion of the Franciscan citadel, so to speak, than to any particular clarity with which the author has depicted it.

When we first hear of it, the town lies in a hollow an indeterminate distance from the school, and is reached by a generally hilly and winding road. It is so little used by the St. Frank's boys compared with the bigger town of Bannington that its distance from the school has never been computed, and the nearest we can get to it is by realising that Bob Christine, leader of the then College House, created a record by scorching by cycle from Helmford to the school in 59 minutes.

Later, Nipper & Co. made the round trip in one hour 29 minutes!

As the years passed, however, Mr. Brooks painted in the picture a little more clearly and we found that Helmford lies about 20 miles to the north-east of St. Frank's and is quite a thriving place with its own trams, a racecourse on the heath to the north of the town, early closing day on Wednesday and market day on Saturday

(later Market Day was reported to be Wednesday, so take your choice!).

Helmford's was the big racecourse of the locality, so presumably there would be at least three meetings a year. On the bus route to the station from the outskirts lies the Greyhound Racing Stadium, which is a blaze of light and activity at night, while only seven minutes' walk from the station in the High Street is the Ring Pavilion, the converted Old Town Hall, where Mr. Wrench referees some of the biggest boxing tournaments in the country. Helmford 5301 will enable you to book a seat!

Also in the High Street is a reasonably modern cinema, while summer variety is coming to a close at the Winter Gardens. Soon football will be in full swing and we shall be able to watch Helmford United, the former 3rd Division Bannington Town who took the place of the old Southern League amateurs, Helmford Athletic some years ago.

From our headquarters at the Imperial Hotel, then, we have a variety of entertainment offered to us in addition to pleasant walks through the narrow, winding streets bordered by the familiar half-timbered houses and quaint little shops of a typical Sussex Downland town.

Helmford, of course, is losing a little of its former old-world charm in the face of modern advances, and among other things the rattling old trams of yesteryear have given way to the green and gold buses and luxury coaches of a country service. On the outskirts, too, light industrial factories have developed with the passing years.

The old castle, which once dominated the town, has long disappeared to make way for a new reservoir, but its stones, redolent of the history of South Saxon England and the Norman conquerors are still to be seen in the walls of St. Frank's.

The Post Office stands in the rambling High Street, while further up, on the opposite side of the road, stands Simpson's Grocery Stores. Nearby are the premises of the Southern Bank Ltd. and beyond the sign of the blue lamp are the divisional headquarters of the Sussex police with Insp. Payne in charge and Sgt. Timson his right-hand man. Insp. Payne is a worthy successor to Insp. Komball who was there some years ago when Nelson Lee rescued Tommy Watson's Uncle Benjamin from crooks near Melhaven, a little village some $3\frac{1}{2}$ miles north of Helmford.

However infrequently the boys of St. Frank's may visit Helmsford at other times, we may be fortunate enough to meet some of them in town if they are meeting Helmsford College or Helmsford Council School on the sports field, or even if they are passing through to Hazelhurst College, some miles farther on.

Edwy Searles Brooks did not introduce us to many Helmsford notabilities apart from Jevous and the College junior team, but we may well come across Sir Cyril Fitzgibbon, Baronet, or his son, Clarence, from Helmsford Hall; Sir William and Lady Norton from Oakley Manor; or even that very down-to-earth family from Dunkerley Lodge - the Dowager Lady Dunkerley, Lord George and Lady Margaret and the Hons. Claude and Cecil - who proved their worth when the rancher Earl of Edgemoor and his son, Viscount (Skeets) Bellton first arrived in the neighbourhood.

And now, having explored Helmsford, we will set out on our journey to Bannington, one-time Royalist stronghold, seat of a bishop, the large town only three miles from St. Frank's. See you at The George Hotel in due course (Phone, Bannington 688).

(Note - Ron Burrows of Leeds, draws my attention to two points in my earlier article. The Levis, he points out, lived in Maida Vale, whereas I said Fenchurch St. This, of course, is true and I slipped up through misreading my cross-reference to what was presumably Mr. Levi's business address.

Secondly, Mr. Burrows points out that Horsham was only on the way from London when St. Frank's was in eastern Sussex, and not after Mr. Brooks transferred the setting to western Sussex. Well, I prefer the first version, so we went by Horsham!).

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POST BAG

MORE NEWS FROM FRANK RICHARDS

Rose Lawn, Kingsgate,
Broadstairs, Kent.
August 14th, 1954.

Dear Herbert Leckenby,

What an excellent article, "The Summer Term", in the C.D. this time! It brought back many summers quite unlike the one we are having now, when the rain it raineth every day, and the stormy winds do blow.

There is a spot of news: "Books for Pleasure, Ltd.", are to republish the Tom Merry and Rookwood books in a cheap edition, at 2/- or 2/6. I like this idea very much; it is always good news when any price goes down. My "Lone Texan" seems to have been held up on the trail, for he has not materialised yet; expected next month. Anyhow, Bunter will put in his accustomed appearance in September, in "Billy Bunter Does His Best", and the annuals will be along about October. And I have been lucky enough to secure that copy of Lucilius I have wanted so long; though so far the publishers are not falling over one another to secure what I have to say about him!

With kind regards,
Always yours sincerely,
FRANK RICHARDS.

THAT VITAL QUESTION

17/8/54

Yulden Farm,
Heathfield, Sussex.

The Editor, The Collectors' Digest.

Dear Sir,

The correspondence on what should happen to our collections when we depart this mortal coil is of great interest to us all.

In our desire to save our beloved (and valuable) items from falling into wrong hands, being disposed of at less than the current market prices or destroyed through ignorance on the part of those left behind, we must still bear in mind that the onus of responsibility that some have suggested be put on the Editor of this paper or the Chairman of the Old Boys' Book Club is no small one.

There is the responsibility not only of disposal but also of giving satisfaction to the legatee. For example a certain number of a paper which was needed for a long time to complete a long run finally to be bought for fifteen shillings from a non-recognised dealer may fetch ninepence or a shilling when sold in a mixed lot some years later to an honest dealer or to somebody whose collection is still in the early stages. But the legatee might well cry:- 'But I well remember when he got that one, he was as pleased as anything although he told me he had to pay fifteen shillings for it. And now you've let it go for only one!'

My own solution would be for three or four members of each branch of the O.B.B.C. to form a properly constituted and permanent Board of Trustees to whom collectors could will their items for disposal in the open market. In this way the collection would automatically be sent (say) to the Chairman by the next-of-kin and he would straight away convene the Board of Trustees. These would take over the collection, contact approved dealers or known fellow collectors and so dispose of the collection at the best possible prices. They would then prepare a proper statement of accounts, deduct 5% or 10% for their trouble and expenses and remit the account and the balance to the next-of-kin.

Adequate temporary storage accommodation, like the Board of Trustees, would always have to be available in case of sudden need which duty would I suppose evolve on the Honorary Secretary of the Local Club Branch.

A point now arises as to whether or not we should catalogue every item held and whether or not note should be taken of rare items purchased at certain dates for high prices. Personally I am against this as prices vary and fluctuate so from year to year, and what a Nelson Lee fan might give a pound for would not drag sixpence from my pocket at any time.

There are many other aspects of this problem but as we are as yet only at the discussion stage, they can wait awhile. For example collectors not in membership of any O.B.B.C. branch would not of course be able to let their next-of-kin enjoy the benefits of such a service.

Yours sincerely,

HARRY HOMER.

HANDS ACROSS THE SEA

20 Romar Crescent, Toronto, 10,
Ontario, Canada.

August 20th, 1954.

Dear Editor,

On looking back through my letter files, I note with amazement that ten months have passed since I first wrote to you asking where I could obtain copies of O.B.Bs.

Since then my collection has grown from 65 Nelson Lee Libraries and 18 Magnets to 425 Nelson Lees, 138 Gems, 150 Magnets, 50 S.O.L. and 4 Holiday Annuals. In addition I correspond regularly with some thirty collectors in Canada, England, Ireland and U.S.A. and among them are three of the five addresses you sent me in that first letter. And, incidentally, my daughter Berenice and I are members of the O.B.B.C. and have compiled quite a collection of Collectors' Digest and Story Paper Collector's.

But my appetite for meeting fresh friends is endless and if you can, through the medium of C.D. or the O.B.B.C., put me in touch with others interested in exchanging letters and views I should be grateful.

With kind regards,

Very sincerely,

BERNARD THORNE.

* * * * *

AVAILABLE: Magnets, 1917-22, 150 copies; also 1923-5, 1933-40. Gems, 1917-22, 100 copies, 1936-40, 150 copies. Marvels, 1916-21, 75 copies. Populars, 1919-23, 60 copies. Nelson Lees, 1924-33, 500 copies. S.O.L's.: Union Jacks, early double numbers; Sexton Blake Libs., 2nd and 3rd series; Boys Friends; Boys Realms; Young Britains; Boys Magazines; Rovers; Adventures; Giantland; original Robin Hood Libs.; Dick Turpin Libs.; Claude Duval Libs.; Monster Libs. No. 19, etc., etc. All books as stated. Money refunded if not satisfied. S.A.E. please. 1st and 2nd series Sexton Blake Libs. 1915-35 wanted; also Nelson Lees, 1d. 1915-18. Good price paid. RONALD ROUSE, 3 ST. LEONARD'S TERRACE, GAS HILL, NORWICH, NORFOLK.

OLD BOYS' BOOK CLUB

LONDON SECTION : The August Vacation meeting was held at Blackheath with Ron and Marea Deacon being the hosts. A small, but highly efficient gathering managed to dispose of three very intellectual quiz competitions, after the ordinary business of the agenda had been disposed of. Bob Blythe had prepared his "Bob Cherry's Barring Out" quiz and Roger Jenkins and Len Packman made short work of it by both coming first. That mind of information Bill Lofts came third and not to be outdone he won the Triple Deadheat quiz from Roger Jenkins, Bob and Ben Whiter. Host Ron Deacon then conducted his quiz and the hard questions were successfully answered by Bob Whiter and Len Packman with Roger Jenkins filling third place. After this quiz Ron gave his impromptu talk, chief subject was the great enjoyment that he derived from the science fiction stories in the old boys' books.

The Hamilton library makes steady progress and a presentation of Gems and Populars by Miss Evelyn B. Flinders was greatly appreciated.

Annual trip to the St. Frank's and St. Jim's country takes place on Sunday, September 19th. Meet at Victoria Station under Big clock, Brighton side, not later than 9.45 a.m. Hosts Bill and Gladys Jardine, 52 Kipling Avenue, Woodingdean.

Finally a good get together and the usual talks are going home on this perfect summer evening.

UNCLE BENJAMIN.

NORTHERN SECTION MEETING, 239 HYDE PARK ROAD, AUGUST 14th, 1954.

Due to the holidays there was only a small attendance; our chairman was touring the "Hamilton country", our secretary had gone to France, Vera to London, to name only three. However, Gerry Allison was with us so we did not want for a programme.

Usually, when I act as chairman I have the pleasure of welcoming someone; on the occasion unhappily I had the sad duty of referring to the death of Jack Munro which had occurred since our last meeting. I mentioned that it was the second death in our short history. I expressed a hope that it would be a long time before another had to be reported.

After the usual business, we got down to a fifteen question

Quiz set by Jack Morgan, of the Merseyside Club. Gosh! to say the least some of them were very cryptic and subtle, yet, when we learned the answers, quite fair. Seven correct was as near as anyone got.

After refreshments, Gerry read an amusing extract from the Magnet Cram series and Jack Wood followed with an example of E.S. Brooks humour in telling of "The Coming of Archie". Both were much enjoyed.

Gerry also gave details of the programme arranged for several months to come. The programme is to be printed and sent out to members. So attractive is it that I think we are assured of some large attendances with the coming of the longer nights.

Next Meeting - September 11th.

H. LECKENBY,
Northern Section Correspondent.

—ooCoc—

MERSEYSIDE SECTION, 8th AUGUST, 1954: We were very pleased to see quite a large attendance at this meeting, as this was "Quiz Night", and a fair number of members were necessary to ensure the success of the evening's entertainment. We were pleased to see Mr. Horton again; we have missed him over the past few months, due to his enforced absence.

The Chairman and Secretary quickly disposed of the official business, in order that we could proceed to the "quizzes", etc., without delay, and we were soon indulging in the intricacies of a questionnaire devised by Frank Unwin - though, as far as some of us were concerned "questionnaire" is a kindly term. However, it was not too difficult, and the result was a win for Mr. Laffey, with Mr. Windsor and Mr. Pragnell second and third. Then came a game between two teams led by Mr. Unwin and Mr. Pragnell; this was submitted by Mr. Windsor, who, with Mrs. Webster, acted as judges. "Keywords", as it may be called, was adapted from a game popular on the radio a few years ago, and all present were more or less familiar with the rules, which includes an extempore talk by each contestant on a subject drawn from a hat. There were many obstacles to be avoided by the speakers (hesitancy, "of the subject", etc.), and the greatest hilarity was caused at the efforts of the "victim" to talk knowingly on subjects of which he knew little, whilst trying not to let his side down. (It may be remarked, in passing,

that Mr. Switzer made a most singular and original contribution, but that is another story!). Mr. Pragnell's team won, but points were of little consequence in view of the immense enjoyment afforded to all participating, and we intend to have a repeat at the earliest opportunity.

The meeting closed at 10.15 p.m. with the library business.

Next meeting, 12th September.

F. CASE,

Hon. Secretary.

NOTE: As the Midland Club meeting was held later in the month, report has to be held over.

WANTED: Nelson Lees First New Series, Various Numbers 1 - 85. Also 150 - 151 Second New Series. Please state condition, price and serial numbers available. Some Nelson Lees for exchange.

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5/- each offered for the following in good condition - GEMS 582, 586. MAGNETS 739, 795, 1003, 1004, 1011, 1013, 1015, 1024, 1027, 1028, 1034, 1047, 1114, 1142, 1154, 1177, 1215, 1223. ROGER JENKINS, "THE FIRS", EASTERN ROAD, HAVANT, HANTS.

BLAKIANA SAFE: There's been a fine response for Blakiana articles. The two this month for instance from Eric Fayne and James W. Cook are just the goods, provocative and forthright. For instance, whilst I was checking the proofs, I thought Jim Cook had scored a point when he said Pedro was rather out of date, then at that moment the wireless announced that bloodhounds were being used to trace some escaped prisoners! And it was a real eye-opener when he said that Anthony Parsons told him he had never heard of the Union Jack, the paper which was looked upon as Sexton Blake's own for nearly 30 years. Yet when you come to think of it is quite believable for there have been Blake authors who were not born when some of the stories were written. And having just written that I've just spotted this in the "Jester & Wonder", March 4th, 1905. Announcing the start of "Sexton Blake, or, the Clique of Death" the following week, the Editor said:

"Sexton Blake was the first and greatest detective whose adventures appeared in any story paper. Many of these stories, ordinary detective tales with Sexton Blake given as the hero. Our new serial will be a genuine record of this King of Detectives." Now what did he mean by that, I wonder, seeing Blake only appeared in the Harmsworth papers? (H.L.)

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