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--In This Issue--

*The Amalgamated Press In
Its Heyday*

By HERBERT LECKENBY

*Different Papers: But The
Same Name!*



: : AN AMATEUR MAGAZINE : :

THE AMALGAMATED PRESS IN ITS HEYDAY

Being Chapter Two Of "Memories Of Old Boys' Papers"

Chapter One of these rambling jottings ("S.P.C." No. 14) was devoted to the way the old journals affected me personally in the days when I was very young. It may be some of you who read it have had similar experiences. Although there will be nothing authentic about what I further write, as I shall be relying almost entirely on memory, I shall endeavour to say something about the stories, the artists, the authors and the various names under which they wrote, and anything else I can think of at random that may be of some interest to any other "old-timers" who have the patience to read what I have set down.—H. L.

I HAVE NO inside knowledge of that great publishing firm, The Amalgamated Press, Limited, but in my opinion it reached the heights of its career during the first ten years of the century. Maybe I am prejudiced in thinking thus, for those were the years when I simply revelled in the numerous periodicals turned out by the presses of Carmelite House and later Fleetway House. But whether this is a fact or not I am sure it will be agreed they were great years. Quite apart from the numerous women's papers and the comics, consider the papers which we "old boys" were, and are, mainly interested in.

When the Twentieth Century dawned *The Boys' Friend*, *Marvel*,

Pluck, and *Union Jack*, all priced at a modest halfpenny, were already flourishing. This is proved by the fact that, commencing with *The Boys' Friend*, they were all within a few years doubled in price and size. At frequent intervals they were joined by others. *The Boys' Realm* and *Boys' Herald* came along as companions to the B.F. Later came the *Gem* and *Magnet* Libraries, featuring the eternal schoolboys Tom Merry and Harry Wharton respectively. Everyone knows that the stories of St. Jim's and Greyfriars were destined to carry on for over thirty years until Hitler put them into cold storage.

There were others too numerous to mention, and in addition the Libraries such as

By HERBERT LECKENBY

the *Boys' Friend Library*. They were apparently so successful that at one time as many as five were issued monthly.

DURING this time the position of the A. P. would appear to have been almost impregnable, for though numerous rivals were launched, very few, if any, were successful for long. This despite the fact that some of them came from houses of repute, such as Newnes' and Pearson's. There was, for instance, *The Boys' Leader*, published by Pearson's. This started its career about the same time as *The Boys' Herald* and was also printed on white paper. It ran some excellent stories and at least two of the A. P. star authors, Maxwell Scott and Sidney Drew, wrote regularly for it. Others were Henry T. Johnson, Stacey Blake, and Herbert Wentworth. Yet, after a run of about two years it was merged with *The Big Budget*, and in 1909 that once-popular paper died too.

Others that come to mind were *The Boy's Best*, *Boy's World*, and *New Boy's Paper*. I have also a faint recollection of an attempt to produce a paper in colours with a title something like *Boy's Coloured Pictorial*. This had a very short life. There was also another, *Boys Of Our Empire*, not to be confused with the Brett publication. This was of a type

similar to the *B. O. P.* I know my father even approved of it. Once again, its life was a short one. And there were others whose names I cannot recall.

A new paper from the presses of the A. P. had one great advantage. It could be advertised in a score of papers from the same home at little cost. But there was one other factor: they were sponsored by that genius, that greatest of all boys' editors, Hamilton Edwards. It is said that when he parted company with the Amalgamated Press he was worth a fortune. I should say it was very likely, for Lord Northcliffe had no use for men who did not get results, but paid well those who did.

The editors of most boys' papers were shadowy, anonymous individuals who wrote a column but were never more than just "Your Editor." Hamilton Edwards went about it in a different way. He believed in advertising himself. Every week in at least three of his journals a sketch of himself, drawn from a photograph by one of his best artists, G. M. Dodshon, adorned the top of his page of chat. He offered fatherly advice to his youthful readers; he religiously condemned smoking, drinking, and the use of bad language by boys and youths. One boy, complaining that his father would

not allow him to read *The Boys' Herald* on Sundays, was told "Your father is quite right. Surely six days are sufficient to do your reading of my papers. You must obey your father." No parent reading that would disagree with Hamilton Edwards. Unfortunately my father never read his Chat. Whether all the letters he answered were genuine only he could have said, of course.

One has an idea that Hamilton Edwards, away from his editorial chair, was a somewhat different individual from the straight-laced gentleman he there represented himself to be. I formed the opinion, I don't quite know why, that he was perhaps a rather difficult man to get on with. I may be wrong; and the advice he proffered was certainly good advice for the youth of the day. Besides his activities as editor of his many papers he found time to write several serials for them. My views on these will appear in another chapter.

But if Hamilton Edwards boosted himself, he also boosted his authors. If a new "Nelson Lee" was about to appear, it was being written by "that greatest of all detective story writers, Maxwell Scott." Or, "In three weeks' time a magnificent new school story by famous Henry St. John." Or again, "Brilliant

David Goodwin is at work on a new story—the best he has ever written." And so on. And, as I have said, he was able to advertise them in many different papers.

Some years after the period about which I am speaking Mr. H. A. Hinton became editor of *The Boys' Friend* and others of the group. He had a nice friendly style, but perhaps had not the personality of Hamilton Edwards. After Mr. Hinton left the editors became anonymous.

I WOULD LIKE to say something on the question of the "penny dreadful," which was a burning question in the late Victorian and early Edwardian days. Mr. Alfred Harmsworth (later Lord Northcliffe) and Mr. Hamilton Edwards declared that their papers were established to kill the "penny dreadful." Now, what constituted a "penny dreadful" or a "blood and thunder"? Where was the dividing line between a "blood" and a non-"blood"? The *Halfpenny Marvel* always bore a slogan "To counteract the evil influence of the penny dreadful," or words to that effect. But I must confess that it would be difficult to distinguish between some of its stories and those of, say, the *Aldine Cheerful Library*. Mr. Wm. H. Gander, in an interesting article on *The Boys' Friend* in

his enterprising little journal, *The Story Paper Collector*, says on this subject: "Mr. Edwards from the first denounced the 'penny dreadful' but I am told some of Mr. Edwards' writers also contributed to those same 'penny dreadfuls.' Maybe their writings became purified when Mr. Edwards used them."

I repeat, what was a "penny dreadful"? *The Boys' Own Paper* was, of course, always above suspicion. But there was room for only one B. O. P. Now, what about *Chums*? In its imposing annual edition it was very popular as a Christmas present and went into hundreds of homes into which *The Marvel* or even *The Boys' Friend* was never allowed to enter. But what could be more bloodthirsty than the exciting pirate yarns of S. Walkey with their hair-raising illustrations by Paul Hardy? And, of course, at one time Maxwell Scott wrote for it stories of a detective identical with Nelson Lee, if not so famous. So where are we? And if the *Robin Hood Libraries*, with their coloured covers, issued by Aldine's, were "bloods," how is it the stories of the same hero of Sherwood Forest, written by Morton Pike for *The Boys' Friend* and *The Boys' Herald*, were not? One could give further examples.

But when all was said and

done, when one thinks it over, "penny dreadfuls" or not, wasn't there too much fuss about it in those days? Were those papers so harmful, had they really as bad an influence on the growing youth as was made out they had? Honestly, I think not, on the average youth, at any rate. They certainly never made me break into a till, or run away to sea. Consider: in practically all the stories in *The Marvel*, *The Boys' Friend*, *Boys Of The Empire*, Aldine's *O'er Land & Sea*, virtue was triumphant and the villain met with his deserts in the end. In the school stories, although the boys played tricks on the masters no boys would dare to do in real life, the heroes were always fine, honest, clean-living boys whilst the characters who smoked and were acquainted with low "bookies" were known as "bounders" and "outsiders." Sometimes the principal character made the "outsider" see the error of his ways. Well, what was wrong with that? And if there were murders in the detective stories so there were in the pages of the daily press.

And what about the modern thrillers which are to be found on every respectable bookstall and in every library? Browsing over a catalogue in a certain public library some time ago I discovered nearly two hundred

titles beginning with the word "murder." If I could have added those with the word in some other part of the title, and also those containing the word "death"—"Death of a Libertine," "Death at the Bathing Pool," and so on—the total would have been a formidable one. Are these novels, with their vivid dust-covers, "bloods"? I should say they outdo, many of them, the "penny dreadfuls" we were condemned for reading in the days of our youth, and I should think they make the sedate librarians of yesteryear turn in their graves if they know the sort of books that now adorn the shelves they once knew. Some of the gangster stuff I have seen—well, it would be an insult to the *Halfpenny Marvel* to place them side by side, for in them the villain is often glorified and the woman of easy virtue is looked upon with a tolerant eye.

HOWEVER, to return to the first decade of the century. Thinking back, one is struck by the number of characters which were created by A. P. authors and which were destined to become world-famous, some of them household words for generations. I shall speak about some of them more fully later, and here just touch upon them briefly.

There were two great detec-

tives, Sexton Blake and Nelson Lee. In the 'nineties odd stories had appeared in *The Union Jack*, *Pluck*, and perhaps *The Marvel*, but it was only after the new century dawned that they appeared regularly. Mr. H. Dowler, in an interesting contribution to *The Story Paper Collector*, pointed out a difference between these two famous figures of fiction. Whereas Nelson Lee, for many years at any rate, was the sole "copyright" of Maxwell Scott, dozens of authors were commissioned to write about the man from Baker Street. Also in Baker Street, by the way, was the home of another great detective, Sherlock Holmes. I don't know how far apart their consulting rooms were supposed to be, but Mrs. Bardell would answer the door to far more clients than ever appeared at the rooms of Conan Doyle's creation.

Then we had Jack, Sam, and Pete. Mr. S. Clarke Hook was responsible for these world-wanderers. Here again odd stories had appeared in the *Halfpenny Marvel*, but when that paper attained the dignity of a penny journal in 1904 they appeared every week for years.

In 1907 Tom Merry went to school at Clavering for a short time and then on to St. Jim's. When the second world war broke out over thirty-two years

later he was still there. In the interval he had taken part in hundreds of football and cricket matches, and fought a thousand fights, been expelled or nearly expelled on numerous occasions, and travelled all over the world, in the process becoming the hero of millions of boys. And not long after Tom Merry went to St. Jim's Harry Wharton went to Greyfriars. He, too, stayed for over thirty years, rivaling Tom in popularity. But there was one youth who became even more world-famous. For years and years any boy who happened to be well above the average in weight was sure to be nick-named Billy Bunter, after the fat boy of the Remove Form at Greyfriars.

Then there was Tom Sayers, Arthur S. Hardy's boxing champion, stories of whom ran in *The Marvel* along with Jack, Sam, and Pete for years. There were others, popular favourites for a time, if not so well-known as those I have mentioned: Fouckes of the Blue Crusaders; Coockey Scrubbs and his 'ambone; and Hawkshaw the Detective.

Apart from those mentioned above who were still on the scene when war broke out where were there any others? The papers for boys of 1939 and those which linger still do not appear to create characters, and the authors who write the stories,

even when their names do appear, do so only as a line of type.

WHEN *The Boys' Friend*, *The Boys' Realm*, and *The Boys' Herald* settled down to run in harness they did so for the first three years or so on very similar lines. At periods the *Friend* appeared to have the best selection of stories, sometimes the *Realm* seemed to lead, and just occasionally the *Herald* would be on top for a short time. The usual make-up of all three was four serials, a long complete covering about four pages, and a shorter story, often one of a series, covering a page and a half. The serials always offered a splendid variety—a school story, a detective, one historical, and another of a boy's ups and downs at work. Whatever the selection a school story was never absent. After a few years, however, *The Boys' Realm* went in almost entirely for sport, especially football, soccer football. *The Boys' Herald* later also changed its policy, devoting a good deal of space to the Boy Scout movement and hobbies. *The Boys' Friend*, however, went serenely on, very little changed, right up to the outbreak of the first great war.

A similar thing happened with the other three companions, *Union Jack*, *Marvel*, and *Pluck*. As halfpenny papers a story that appeared in the *U. J.* might just

as easily have been in one of the others. Not long after they were increased to a penny, however, they became individual. *The Union Jack* was devoted almost entirely to stories of Sexton Blake, a policy which was carried on uninterrupted for over twenty-five years. *The Marvel* adopted Jack, Sam, and Pete, and at a later date these characters were joined by Tom Sayers. *Pluck*, the youngest of the three, had not quite such a settled policy. S. Clarke Hook contributed a series on the lines of Jack, Sam, and Pete for the first issues. The comrades in this instance numbered five, but they did not seem to catch on like his famous three. Later, his son, H. Clarke Hook, wrote a school series, *Specs & Co.* Some of these were quite good. Later still, Detective Will Spearling had quite a long run. When war broke out in 1914 *Pluck* was running short stories adapted from the films of the day. It was suspended for the duration in 1916 and when it was re-issued it was in a very different form.

IN 1906 an important event took place—the launching of *The Boys' Friend Library*. It was to prove one of the most successful ventures of the enterprising Amalgamated Press. The first two were issued singly, both Jack, Sam, and Pete stories. Nos.

3 and 4 came out together, one being another Jack, Sam, and Pete yarn, and the other "Birds of Prey," by Maxwell Scott, perhaps his finest Nelson Lee story. For a long time two were issued monthly, then three, later four, and even, at one time, five. At first they consisted of 144 pages, later falling to 120. During the war the price was increased from 3d. to 4d. and, due to paper shortage—never as acute as in the present war—the pages were reduced to 64. Much smaller type was used, however, the stories being almost as long as before. Many of the stories were re-published serials, usually abridged, which in some cases spoil the continuity. Long after the dear old *Boys' Friend* had ceased to exist the name was retained for the Libraries. Among the hundreds of stories issued there were very many splendid ones.

I will mention one other paper, though there were many more, issued during this period—*The Penny Popular*. This consisted, at first, of three complete stories weekly, stories of Jack, Sam, and Pere, Sexton Blake, and Tom Merry. These were reprints, I believe very much abridged. It appears to have been successful for quite a time, and copies of the paper are sought after by collectors today.

Different Papers: But The Same Name!

THERE have been times when a publisher of boys' papers, desiring to launch a new one, seems to have been stumped for an original name, and so has chosen one already used in the past, perhaps by another publishing house, sometimes by itself. The Amalgamated Press has used the title *Wonder* on several occasions, usually, but not always, for comic papers; *Pluck and Fun and Fiction* twice—*The Boys' Realm* finished its run in 1928 with the sub-title of *Fun and Fiction* and was replaced by a paper of that name.

Others were *The Boy's Journal* and *The Boys' Leader*, though I understand the earlier paper of the latter name was in the original an American weekly, the British edition being printed from plates sent over. No doubt there were others.

Two of which I have been reminded recently are *The Boys' Herald* and *The Boys' Friend*. Papers of similar names were published many years before the two that are best-known to present-day collectors.

The following information is from two articles contributed to Mr. J. Parks' amateur magazine

Vanity Fair by Frank Jay in 1918; it may be of sufficient interest to warrant printing it here.

According to Mr. Jay's article in No. 8 of *V. F.*, April, 1918, titled "The Boys' Herald," a paper of this name was published by John Dicks, 313 Strand, London. No. 1, Vol. 1, was dated Saturday, January 6th, 1877. It ran to one hundred numbers, the last being dated November 30th, 1878. Mr. Jay's write-up of this paper runs to three pages, but it will be sufficient to quote the following:

"It was a well got up and conducted paper of the usual 16 quarto pages, containing serial tales, essays, natural history, miscellaneous games, and literature, sketches, poetry, and a big feature was its columns of games of magic, puzzles and riddles, comic column, chess, draughts, all of which were profusely illustrated."

The reference to *The Boy's Friend* is more brief, it being but one of many papers mentioned in Mr. Jay's article, "The Origin and Development of Boys' Periodicals and Literature," in *Vanity Fair* No. 10, dated August, 1918. From it we learn only that *The*

Boy's Friend was a monthly magazine issued in 1864-67, and ran to three volumes and eight numbers of the fourth volume. However, an article, "The Golden Age of English Boys' Literature," edited by Wm. J. Benners, in *Dime Novel Roundup* No. 15, March, 1932, contains a more detailed reference to this *Boy's Friend*. Here is the way it reads:

"*The Boy's Friend*, another illustrated monthly, published by

Henry Lea, of Fleet Street, price 3d., appeared in June, 1864, but, although it commenced well with stories by Percy B. St. John and W. Stevens Hayward, after a fluctuating existence it ceased publication with the eighth number of the fourth volume in 1867. It had, after the tenth monthly number, been published by Houlston and Wright, and in 1865 was increased to fourpence and published by H. G. Clarke."

—W. H. G.

SOME CURIOUS THINGS WERE DONE BY EDITORS IN THE OLD DAYS

Says HENRY STEELE

Who Gives an Instance in These Verses

An editor long years ago
To Paris on a trip did go.
He bought some illustration
blocks—
I think it must have been
Charles Fox.

Dumas' works they'd illustrated,
"Three Musketeers," so it is
stated.

An author to him Fox did
beckon,
"You're just the chap for this,
I reckon.

"Use up these blocks, you know,
And write a story with some
'go'—
Fit it all in neat and nice

And I won't growl about
the price."

The author started on it, willing,
And wrote a narrative quite
thrilling;
He fitted in the pictures neat,
The way they suited was a
treat.

The captions they were neatly
changed
To suit the story, as arranged.
The pictures proved a decent
"draw"—

They were by Philippotaux.
I'll name the tale, it's only fair,
The story was "The Im-
prisoned Heir."

British Bloods and Journals

For Sale—Black Bess, Blue-skin, Charles Peace the Burglar, Sailor Crusoe, Nell Gwynne, Charley Wag the New Jack Sheppard, Black Mask, Jack Sheppard, Broad Arrow Jack, Outlaws of Epping Forest, Dick Turpin (Miles), Adrift on the Spanish Main, Frank Fearless, Boys of England, Young Men of Great Britain, Tom Wildrake's Schooldays, Lady Godiva, Island School, Merry Wives of London, Boys of the Empire, complete coloured issue, and hundreds more. Exchanges **willingly considered; similar wanted.**

John Medcraft,

64 Woodlands Road, Ilford,
Essex, England.

Reckless Ralph's**DIME NOVEL ROUND-UP**

A monthly magazine devoted to the collecting, preservation and literature of the old-time dime and nickel novels, libraries and popular story papers of the days when you were a youngster; 8 pages full of fine articles and write-ups. Price 5d. (stamps) a copy, or will accept 4s. worth of "bloods" for one year's sub.

Ralph F. Cummings

Dept. S. P. C., Fisherville, Mass.
U. S. A.

**BRITISH BOYS' PAPERS
WANTED**

Gem Library—Nos. 3, 5, 6, 10, 11, first or 1/2d. series. New series Nos. 11, 13, 15-57, 59-61, 63-65, 67, 70, 72-188, 190-193, 195, 197-208, 214, 217-374, 375 (with supplement), 376-383, 403, 407 (with suppl.), 452, 454, 458, 510, 603, 620, 621, 623-627, 629, 631, 635-637, 639-641, 643-654, 136-698.

Magnet Library—Various numbers between 451 and 612.

Boys' Friend Library—All issues by Martin Clifford (except Cedar Creek), Prosper Howard Frank Richards, Owen Conquest, also No. 393, by Rich. Randolph.

Holiday Annual—Years 1920 to 1924.

Chuckles (Comic Paper)—Any issues with stories of Ferrers Locke, and stories by Frank Richards and Prosper Howard. Also (and especially) the two issues with which were presented models of St. Jim's and Greyfriars, together with models.

Nelson Lee Lib'y—No. 24 of last (4th) series. (Aug. 5, 1933)

Empire Library—Nos. 8, 13, 14, 20, 21, 26 of first series; or complete series in one lot.

Triumph—Nos. 812 and 814.

Pluck Library—years 1906-7, Nos. 106-122.

C. F. F. RICKARD

2026 West 41st Ave., Vancouver
B. C., Canada.

WANTED : FOR SALE

Wanted—English Comics, years 1892-1906. Harris, Caynton, Llanrhos Road, Penrhyn Bay, Llandudno, Wales.

Wanted—Magnets and Gems, 1907-33; also Boys' Friend Libraries with stories by Frank Richards and Martin Clifford. Shaw, 6 Colney Hatch Lane, London, N. 10.

Wanted—Aldine 1d. Dick Turpins, early issues of Magnet, Gem, Penny Popular, and Comic Papers, particularly Chuckles. Also interested in old volumes containing coloured plates of wildflowers, butterflies, birds or fishes. Alfred Horsey, 60 Salcombe Rd., Walthamstow, London, E. 17, England.

WANTED

The Following Story Papers

"Magnet Library"—List of numbers required supplied on request.

"Boys' Friend" (New Series)—List supplied on request.

"Greyfriars Herald" (New Series, 1919-22) later "Boys' Herald"—Nos. 9, 30 to 36, 38 to 43, 46 to the end.

"Empire Library"—1st series.

WM. H. GANDER

Transcona, Manitoba, Canada

Magnets—pre-1930, wanted, any numbers. Corbett, 49 Glyn Farm Road, Quinton, Birmingham, England.

Wanted—Plucks with St. Jim's stories; red-covered Magnets. E. Fayne, The Modern School, Grove Road, Surbiton, Surrey, England.

Wanted—1d. Boys' Friend, Realm, Big Budget, Boys' Leaders, 1/2d. Sports Library, early 1d. Nelson Lee Library.—H. Dowler, 86 Hamilton Road, Manchester, 13.

Wanted—Joseph Parks' "Collector's Miscellany" for 1935-6: Nos. 14 to 17. Also earlier issues and "Vanity Fair." Ralph F. Cummings, Box 75, Fisherville, Mass., U.S.A.

"The Collector's Miscellany"
—A small 8 to 12 page paper about old boys' books, toy theatres, type specimens, etc. Copy free from J. A. Birkbeck, 52 Craigie Avenue, Dundee, Scotland.

Wanted—Magnets, any age or quantity, also Gems, and any other publications with stories by Frank Richards, Martin Clifford and Charles Hamilton. C. Hanson, 30 St. Margaret's Road, Wanstead Park, London, E.12.