

THE STORY PAPER COLLECTOR

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Goodbye, Sexton Blake! : 1

"SEXTON BLAKE IS DEAD!" blazed the posters advertising *The Union Jack* at one time during the last few years of that paper's run. Probably the regular readers were greatly relieved to learn, in due course, that it was a publicity stunt to gain new readers. Soon Sexton Blake resumed his adventures as of old to the delight of the faithful band who read the stories about him.

There is nothing as sensational as this in the very last issue of *The Sexton Blake Library* which was published in June of this year, in which Blake is honourably retired to spend his time lazing on the sun-drenched beaches—still a young man, but who could possibly have earned retirement more than he?

When I first discovered Sexton Blake by reading a tattered copy of *The Sexton Blake Library* I had found while on patrol in the Burmese jungle during the

second World War, I think that I could not in my wildest dreams have visualised how this great detective would feature so much in my leisure moments when I was back in England. Advised by my doctors to take up some sort of hobby, I thought I would study and compile data and history relating to the fictional detective who lived in Baker Street, a stone's-throw from my own home.

Since then, it would be like an Authors' and Artists' Who's Who to name all the personalities I have met who have had a part behind the scenes in the preparation of the stories of Sexton Blake. Perhaps some day they may be chronicled in book form. . . .

Visits with H. W. Twyman, the former Editor of *The Union Jack*, and delightful long talks in the garden with him. . . .

Meeting the son of Harry Blythe, creator of Sexton Blake, down on the coast. . . .

Talks with John Hunter at the Wine Lodge, Worthing. . . .

Hunting down original Eric Parker drawings left in an attic

of an old house on the Essex marshes. . .

With jovial Eric himself, and an adventure in no less a place than Baker Street. . .

Regular Friday night meetings with all the band of modern Blake authors, and the friendships I have made with Jack Trevor Story, Arthur Kent, Wilfred McNeilly, Stephen Francis, and practically every recent author of Blake stories. . .

And last but by no means least, the Editor of *The Sexton Blake Library*, W. Howard Baker. Without his efforts the *Library* would have finished years ago, and to him I owe a great deal of gratitude, not only for his kindness at all times in introducing me to various personalities, but also for becoming a close friend.

GOODBYE, SEXTON BLAKE! Your adventures will no longer be recorded. May you enjoy your well-earned retirement. I am sure I echo the thoughts of many thousands when I say thanks a million for the happy hours you have given us.

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A PARTY WAS HELD in Fleet Street on June 14th to bid Sexton Blake farewell. All the modern Blake authors and artists were present, amongst them Eric Parker. At the gathering there were on

display copies of the first issues of *The Sexton Blake Library*, all three series, *The Union Jack*, and *Detective Weekly*, each one a milestone in the history of the great detective.

—W. O. G. LOFTS

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SEXTON BLAKE LIBRARY

1st Series:

Number 1, *The Yellow Tiger*, September, 1915—Number 382, May, 1925.

2nd Series:

Number 1, June, 1925—Number 744, October, 1940.

3rd Series:

Number 1, November, 1940—Number 526, *The Last Tiger*, June, 1963.

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Goodbye, Sexton Blake! : 2

I DO NOT REMEMBER when I first heard of Sexton Blake. Perhaps it was about the time that I first heard of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy: one of my schoolmates imitating him in 1910. I did not become acquainted with *The Union Jack* until much later, but I met Blake in serials in *The Boys' Journal* in its closing months in 1914.

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THE LOWER BRANCHES

By TOM HOPPERTON

THE INDICATION that Frank Richards was not above taking a hint came in the opening incident of the first Tom Merry story. Tom's being sent to school in a velvet suit by his guardian, Miss Fawcett, is a re-work of Tim Turn-down's misfortunes in Harcourt Burrage's long-famous *Charlie and Tim at Scarum School*.

Tim was an agreeable dumping, very like Richards' Plum Tumpton and sharing his ludicrous belief in his own (imaginary) prowess as a fighting man. Just as Miss Priscilla had Tom in the Little Lord Fauntleroy suit which was both outdated and too young for his years, so Tim's uncle-guardian stuffed him into a "skeleton suit," out of place on both these counts and unsuited to his girth into the bargain. (The skeleton suit, much featured in the original illustrations to early Dickens, is probably most familiar now in pictures of *Simple Simon* and similar nursery rhymes. It was without benefit of belt or gallusses and

consisted of skin-fitting trousers buttoning direct to a tucked-in tight jacket.

The Making of Harry Wharton set an indelible mark on the structure of *The Magnet*. Tom Merry's suit was imported as a humorous throw-away of no bearing on anything except the immediate story. *The Gem*, in fact, did not assume its real and final shape until Tom got rid of the velvet suit for the last time by working it off on Figgins.

Frank Richards evidently only paid indirect attention to most of his contemporaries. St. Jim's became a floating school in 1908 on the *S. S. Condor*, but it seems probable that it was the success of Duncan Storm's *The Boys of the "Bombay Castle"* series that decided him to up anchor with *The Benbow* and despatch that ancient hulk to sea with the boys of St. Winifred's—a trip about which the insurance company would have been caustic in real life. It is quite a testimonial to the ability of Henry St. John and David Goodwin,

then, that one keeps coming across evidence that he had read them with some care.

Tim Courtfield was the "second-lead" in the early St. Basil's stories and like Lantham affords an example of how the name of a person re-appears in Richards as the name of a place. There are quite a number of names held in common, and the duplication can be set down as coincidence. When both name and function turn up again together the coincidence becomes somewhat strained. The St. Basil's local chief of police was Inspector Grimes. We learn in the early weeks of *The Magnet* that when Marjorie Hazeldene was kidnapped by gypsies the head serang at Courtfield Police Station was Inspector Snope. Snope suddenly disappeared (and with a name like that I don't blame him) and his place was taken by—yes—Inspector Grimes.

GOODWIN's *The Terror of the Remove* had Taffy Wynne antedating Jimmy Silver by a dozen years in stealing the Fifth Form coach and driving to the school in style on opening day. A new master, Mr. Wollaston Lambe, is naturally nicknamed the Woolly Lamb by his pupils, and is suspected of being a burglar. Practically at the close of *The Magnet* another Mr. Lamb

appears, also nicknamed Woolly and also suspected of being a cracksman. St. John's early *The Scholarship Boy* featured Dick Brooke in what is now the familiar struggle against snobbery and oppression. When Richards came to introduce a scholarship boy at St. Jim's was it by some odd chance that his name happened to be Dick Brooke?

There is one name which he certainly did not take from St. John, and of which I was reminded by Mr. Lofts' article, *Was Frank Richards a Snob?* Master Richards in *The Shame of St. Basil's* was a sadistic snob and a leading persecutor of a charity boy. But Goodwin's tough, monocled dandy in the St. Corton tales was another Mornington, and one can extend the dossier of names and themes almost indefinitely.

The last we need consider is particularly valuable. In *The Cad of St. Corton's* and *Smythe the Cortonian* Goodwin employed Mr. Fotheringay-Smythe, a blatant vulgarian, self-made, newly-rich and totally unscrupulous, who gets the Headmaster in his power by lending him money and whose dissipated son Dudley in consequence cannot be expelled. These are the characters and situations which Frank Richards reproduced in detail fourteen years later for the arrival

of Herbert Vernon-Smith at Greyfriars.

As Smythe was over sixteen and in the Shell, his champagne-swilling, gay-doggery, and sullen defiance of all restraint were rather more credible in him than in the Removite. It was here that Richards ran into one of the snags inevitable with his system. To give the readers the maximum chance to identify themselves with characters, it was necessary to have the leads in the Fourth Form. It was also necessary — unavoidable, rather — for Richards to run the entire gamut of school plots. His characters were drawn larger than life to begin with. When he came to the rorty brigade, he began to strain the innocent trust of his readers. The others could use Fifth and Sixth-formers when they wanted to tell stories of dissipation, and the ages passed muster. Similar scenes when the culprit was a member of the Lower Fourth began to make the eyebrows twitch and, while it is a tribute to Richards' ability that he made it as passable as he did, the pub-haunting of Dicky Nugent and other sprats of the Second and Third was just plain ridiculous.

Dudley Fotheringay-Smythe and Herbert Vernon-Smith were both what the early Tom Merry would have called "unmitigated

blackguards." They were too outrageous for any school to tolerate them for long and something had to be done with them. Goodwin did with Smythe what he did with several similar characters, none of whom progressed beyond the Fotheringay-Smythe prototype: he expelled him. The Greyfriars characters were not so expendable. The Bounder began to play games, even if for the worst of reasons, and was gradually removed to this side of blackguardism. He ended as a hard cynical exponent of the creed that the master is the natural enemy of the boy and that the weaker party need not be too scrupulous in how he carries on the warfare. A periodic craving for excitement led to outbreaks of gambling and pubbing, and he became a more complex and convincing character than any Goodwin managed to achieve.

The father had to move with the son. Mr. Vernon-Smith had his vulgarity, crudity, and near-dishonesty refined away, leaving a tough, self-made millionaire who was not unlikable and difficult to fault in character.

THIS IS THE essential superiority of Richards. He began with well-worn material: he borrowed freely from predecessors and contemporaries, and

the end was to justify the means. There were hosts of fat boys, but Bunter was inimitable. There was an army of silly-ass swells, but woven into Gussy was a dignified simplicity and integrity which set him apart.

To curtail the list, have a look at the Giddy Goats of Rookwood. The Smart Set in such schools generally consisted of an undifferentiated herd of foppish snobs devoted to dress, billiards, and backing losers. None of the Goats was of any particular importance, but Richards carefully elaborated subtle differences until he had eight or nine portraits of varying rascality, fatuity, and mendacity which could not be confused.

I would hazard the opinion that up to 1907 Goodwin was capable of better work than Richards and in the main achieved it. Whether he would under similar circumstances have developed as fully as his rival is now unknowable, and it is unlikely that his health would ever have permitted him to work with Richards' speed and intensity. But for that special exception, however, I feel that David Goodwin was at the head of the A. P. school writers and that he sprang there almost at the first attempt.

He needed no breaking-in process. His first story, *Barred*, set

the precedent for merit, for introducing St. Simeon's, and for what was to become his favourite type of story—the working lad who by saving the life of a millionaire, by winning a purse in a prize fight big enough to pay his fees, by scholarship, or by some other less likely means, arrives at a public school to battle his way through it.

THIS WAS a harmless incitement to fantasy aimed at and succeeding in popularity among those who could imagine themselves in similar circumstances. David Benedictus demonstrated last year in *The Fourth of June* that there can be no long-term profit in depicting the career of a grubby, unathletic, and unattractive scholarship boy with no asset save brains, a fact of which the earlier David was acutely aware nearly seventy years ago. Consciously or unconsciously, Goodwin imported into the boys' papers the formula that kept the A. P. women's weeklies afloat, and he weighted the scales heavily in favour of his cock Cinderellas.

They immediately struck up lifelong friendships with the most influential aristocrats in the school, and they were ferocious fighting men of a calibre to make George Emmett gnaw his beard. Tom Holt, the hero of

The Sneak of St. Simeon's and its sequels, won £300 fighting at bantamweight against a professional lightweight and when cash began to run short he collected another £100 by knocking out an eighteen-stone circus pug with the "Holt jolt." This secret punch, an uppercut to the Adam's apple, offers a mystifying study in angles. Try it some time with a boxing glove on—preferably on a victim with a flat chest and no jaw.

Goodwin's heroes were never grubby. They all studied the advice column in the current *Boy's Own Paper* and their passion for cold baths must have been highly gratifying to Dr. Gordon Stables. This mania about being "well-tubbed" was peculiar to Goodwin: the others took washing for granted and it only received a sort of negative emphasis through remarks about inky fags and Bunter's insalubrious habits. Thanks to Goodwin I began to grasp that the cold-bath fetish is probably a gigantic swindle engineered by the public schools to save the cost of heating hundreds of warm baths every day.

If Goodwin ever wrote a bad story I have yet to encounter it. The nearest he gets to being tedious is in *The School Republic*, where the Headmaster is caught trying to burgle the school safe

(not as silly in the telling as may appear here) and a variety of war-time circumstances deprive Carholme College of its entire staff, leaving the boys to carry on as an earlier Schoolboy Soviet, although the dictatorship was emphatically not that of the proletariat. Even in this, his poorest effort, Goodwin can still show points to the best work of some writers whom, as we have all studied tact and judgment under Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, we can agree to leave unnamed.

THERE WAS NOT a great deal to choose between St. John and Goodwin, the latter scoring in slightly better characterisation and tighter-knit plotting, a more disciplined approach which comes out strongly in the humour. St. John could be far the funnier, but much of this was irrelevant gagging: Goodwin was hardly capable of wild hilarity and had to rely on situation comedy which was satisfactory enough and generally arose out of audacious and ingenious japing.

In one respect they both had a wider range than Frank Richards. If some *locum tenens* like Mr. Brander provoked a rebellion there was never any question that the status, much less the very existence, of Greyfriars was imperilled. Both St.

Basil's and St. Simeon's were rocked to the foundations on occasion and the heroes of the Fourth manfully and successfully tackled the job of restoring the lost prestige and security of the establishment.

One such story presents quite the most startling of Goodwin's monetary peculiarities. George Orwell was perturbed by the effect on working-class readers of Gussy's fivers. D'Arcy, however, was a mere pauper by the side of some of Goodwin's plutocrats. Money then bought about four times what it does today, so Fotheringay-Smythe had no reason to be dissatisfied with the £100 he invariably toted round. Fat Phillips in *The School Republic* had to make ends

meet with £18 a week pocket money. Dwarfing them all is the hero of *Forester of St. Osyth's*, who makes a string-free gift of £53,000 to buy out a villainous mortgage-holder and restore the shattered fortunes of his alma mater. This touching example of devotion to the dear old school must make us all bow our heads in admiration—or possibly, if we lack the necessary nobility of fibre, anguish.

Poor Goodwin was rushing all this out for about 15/- a thousand words, so there was perhaps an element of personal fantasy in this airy disposal of wealth. But there is one thing very certain: neither the reader nor the Amalgamated Press ever had better value for fifteen bob.

Part Three Will Appear In Number 85

MONTHLY PARTS

IN *Pluck Library* Number 588, February 5th, 1916, C. Peters, of Wolverhampton, offered for sale Numbers 48 to 72 of *The Boys' Journal* in six monthly numbers—or parts as they really were—24 weekly issues. We have always thought that there were no monthly parts after the sixth one, which would include Numbers 20 to 24.

Now we are wondering, was the practice of issuing parts continued until the paper's end?

Harmsworth/A.P. did not follow the practice of issuing their weekly boys' papers in monthly parts, as did the earlier publishers. *The Boys' Journal* is the only one of their papers that we know of which was handled in this way, apart from *Chums*, and it was issued in monthly parts from its start, decades before it came to Fleetway House.

WHERE CHARLES HAMILTON WENT TO SCHOOL

By W. O. G. LOFTS

SINCE THE DEATH of Charles Hamilton on Christmas Eve of 1961 there has been much speculation amongst his admirers on the mystery of his early life, and especially as to what school this great writer attended as a boy. It has been generally agreed by the majority of "Frank Richards" enthusiasts that his Autobiography (published first in 1952 and republished in a Memorial Edition in 1962) was most disappointing. Starting his "life" at the age of seventeen, he completely omitted facts about his early days and family background; his story was, in fact, in the main a recital of his adventures, mostly abroad. Consequently it was of little interest to those readers who wanted to know more about the great man himself.

Mrs. Una Hamilton Wright, niece of the late Charles Hamilton, threw some light on his background in the Memorial Number of *The Collectors' Digest* when she wrote a delightfully informative article giving facts which could only have been known to those near and dear to

him. This article served only to whet the appetites of his many admirers, however, and in view of this and the lack of information in his Autobiography I decided, in early 1962, to undertake considerable research into Charles Hamilton's early life. This was done not only to give to his readers facts they wanted most of all to know, but to offer a personal tribute to a writer who gave so much pleasure to millions. This tribute was to take the form of a Biography.

Despite the fact that I was able to discover a great deal concerning "Frank Richards" early life—including the school he attended as a boy—I was still handicapped in that I knew nothing of his intimate life. This, of course, could only be known to such close relatives as his sister, Mrs. Una Harrison, and his niece, Mrs. Una Hamilton Wright.

It was my great pleasure, however, to meet several times Mrs. Una Harrison. Now aged 81 she is the last living member of a family of eight brothers and sisters. I found her a most

charming and cultured lady, as all can testify who met her when she graciously attended a London Old Boys' Book Club meeting at the home of Eric Fayne, Editor of *The Collectors' Digest*. A most talented musician, Mrs. Harrison studied at the Royal School of Music and passed with honours every examination she entered, before becoming a governess and Teacher of Music. She married the well-known composer and musician, Percy Harrison, who collaborated with "Frank Richards" in the song *On the Ball*.

ON SEVERAL OCCASIONS I have met Mrs. Una Hamilton Wright, and I have found her a delightful conversationalist, with a great interest in anything relating to "Uncle Charlie," as she affectionately called him. She, too, feels that some kind of memorial work should be written about the man who was so dear to her. The general outcome, therefore, is that Mrs. Hamilton Wright has decided to write a Biography of Charles Hamilton—and who could possibly be more fitted to do so? Apart from knowing him intimately she possesses photographs and heirlooms which are inaccessible to anyone outside the family. I was pleased to hand over all the results of my

researches and in general co-operate with her in every way possible.

In view, however, of the fact that it will be some time before the Biography appears (one must appreciate the fact that Mrs. Wright has two young children to look after), and taking into account the avid interest still shown in Charles Hamilton's early days, it was decided that I should release some part of the information I had collected: i.e., which school he actually attended.

According to my research Charles Hamilton, when very young, attended for a short time the Ealing British School, which was next door to where he lived in Lancaster Road, High Street, Ealing. Incidentally, this building is still standing and, after several changes of name and severe bombing in World War II, is now used as a furniture workshop.

Later, he attended Thorn House School, Ealing, the prospectus for which reads:

THORN HOUSE SCHOOL,
EALING.

(Private School for Young Gentlemen.)

H. P. GREAVES, ESQ.

Principal.

French, German, Latin, Greek,
and English Taught.

*Teacher of Modern Languages,
Dr. G. Von Cronenthall.*

*Upper and Lower Classical and
Modern Sides.*

*The Lower School consists of the
Upper and Lower First, and Upper
and Lower Second Forms.*

Fees:

Day Scholars — £3.3.0 per term.

Upper School — £5.5.0 per term.

The keen student of Charles Hamilton's writings will see that this school was very much like Rookwood. It possibly confirms the belief that he put more care

and detail into Rookwood than into any other of his fictional schools.

IN CLOSING I would like to say, in view of a statement in *The Collectors' Digest* by William H. Gill to the effect that Charles Hamilton went to a school in Berkshire, that Mr. Hamilton's relatives have never heard of this particular "Charles Hamilton." It is possible that Mr. Gill is confusing him with the famous *Magnet* artist, Mr. C. H. Chapman, who attended Reading Grammar School in Berkshire.

A Pleasing Paper: Boys' World

THE YEAR 1963 was started off well by Longacre Press, of London, when they introduced a bright new sixpenny weekly, *Boys' World*. The new paper is a colourful collection of nicely balanced reading matter and picture-features. Old *Magnet* and *Gem* readers should favour *The Boys of Castleford School*, a very well-drawn effort. It is far more appealing, I think, than most picture-strip stories. It

is to be hoped that modern youngsters will give *Boys' World* their support.

—O. W. WADHAM

Lower Hutt, New Zealand.

THE LONGACRE PRESS juvenile publications, *Eagle*, *Boys' World*, *Girl*, and *Robin*, have been transferred to Odhams Press, both being divisions of the *Daily Mirror* group. We learned of this too late to mention it in the *Boys' World* item on page 154 of *The Story Paper Collector* Number 83.



ROBIN HOOD AND HIS MERRY MEN

By JACK OVERHILL

I FIRST READ of the adventures of Robin Hood and his Merry Men in a small, paper-covered book at school. The story was one dear to the heart of a small boy in the years before the first World War: Robin, the rightful Earl of Huntingdon—a small town only sixteen miles from Cambridge where I lived—robbed of his inheritance and outlawed, fleeing to the greenwood and becoming the leader of a band of stouthearted men who, with long bow and broad arrow, fought to free themselves from the Norman yoke. Their battle-cry was “Sweet Liberty or Death” and like a true Saxon I was ready to shout it as I lined up with them against the tyrant invaders trying to enslave them.

The book had black-and-white illustrations: Robin Hood's meeting with Little John on the narrow bridge on which they fought with quarter-staffs rather than give way to each other; Friar Tuck carrying Robin Hood on his back across a stream in which he dropped him; Alan a Dale in distress over a fair lady;

the Sheriff of Nottingham tied back to front on a horse because of his trickery and villainy; the storming by the outlaws of a Norman castle. And over all reigned the charm of sweet Maid Marian who, in a magical way, hallowed the lives of those to whom she was Queen.

After reading the book I couldn't have enough of Robin Hood. I went to Coe Fen and Sheep's Green near my home to cut sticks from the trees to fashion into bows and arrows and to play at the satisfying pastime of killing Norman knights. And the more I killed, if only in imagination, the merrier. The only drawback was that I didn't wear clothes of Lincoln green. How heartily I wished I did!

Books about Robin Hood were what I wanted. Paying a penny fee to join the Public Library, I got hold of a catalogue and began to search through it for them. Alas, titles were no guide. *Under the Greenwood Tree* turned out to be a love story for grown-ups; so did many others that I thought dealt with the hero of Sherwood Forest. And

there were tales of other outlaws that had so little in common with him that I soon lost interest in them.

At last, I came across a bulky volume called *The Life and Adventures of Robin Hood*. The book was a deep disappointment. It told me about things that I didn't want to know: Maid Marian's eventually going in a nunnery and the death of Robin Hood through the treachery of an abbess—an old and ugly one according to an illustration. The gloom that descended on me! In a vague way I had felt that Robin Hood was still alive and to learn that he had been done to death in so cruel a manner was shattering.

SOMEHOW, I shut the book out of my mind and once more Robin Hood became alive and vital, eating venison and drinking nut-brown ale in woods and glades and merrymaking with his companions. Again he was a stout champion of King Richard the Lionheart fighting in the Holy Land, an enemy of base Prince John, a terror to the Norman foe, the defender of right, the dispenser of justice, the friend of the poor and needy.

It was then I looked in the shop window of old "Dobbie" Loker, the newsagent, and saw

hanging from a clip attached to a line a penny copy of *The Robin Hood Library* called *Robin Hood and the Wrestler*. Eight-and-a-half inches long and five-and-a-half inches wide, it had an attractive cover of the moon shining down on the waters of a moat surrounding the walls of a castle. Out of a castle window leaned a ginger-moustached Norman knight in armour and red cloak, swinging a battle-axe over his shoulder at Robin Hood, hanging, sword in hand, from a rope on level with his enemy. Clad in Lincoln green, skin boots up to his calves, gay feather in hat, horn slung over one shoulder, dagger at his belt, the Outlaw of Sherwood looked the picture of daring. Underneath were the words: "Sir Brian delivered a slashing blow with his battle-axe."

A penny was a lot to spend in those days but I was quick to buy the book. Never had I read a more thrilling story. In speech and action the characters simply diffused the air of the middle ages. Knights and outlaws and men-at-arms were all alive. And, happily, so was Robin Hood at the end of the story.

The book had 32 pages and on the last one were advertised ten other issues of *The Robin Hood Library*. I only succeeded in obtaining Numbers 5, 9, and

10, but later I got Numbers 12, 13, and 14. All had fine coloured covers and the author, or authors, never named, always achieved the difficult task of creating the atmosphere of the period as I imagined it.

The numbers and names of the fourteen issues of *The Robin Hood Library* were:

- 1—The Great Fight in Sherwood Forest.
- 2—The Dungeons of Despair.
- 3—The Red Fox of Tirlstone.
- 4—From the Jaws of Death.
- 5—For Richard and the Right.
- 6—In Desperate Plight.
- 7—The Demon of the Forest.
- 8—Sons of the Brave.
- 9—Robin Hood and the Wrestler.
- 10—The Branded Arrow.
- 11—In the Lion's Mouth.
- 12—The Knight of the Forest.
- 13—Outlaw of the Fens.
- 14—The Witch of Epping.

My devotion to Robin Hood then showed itself in the purchase for sixpence each (a small fortune!) of two empty, ornamental sweet tins with portraits of Robin Hood, Maid Marian, Little John, and Friar Tuck on their four sides. Holding nicknacks, the tins stood one on each side of the kitchen mantelpiece for years.

A FEW MONTHS after the end of the first World War the Aldine Publishing Company said they were publishing a new issue of *The Robin Hood Library*. I looked eagerly forward to it and on a pouring wet day in June I bought the first number. It turned out to be even more wet than the weather. The book was three-halfpence and the same size as *The Nelson Lee Library*, and it had a smudgy, dark-blue cover-picture that was a poor introduction to life in the greenwood. The story was comic opera. Subsequent stories were the same. The characters "snarled," "barked," and "growled" on every page. Robin Hood *grinned* and said things like "Look at 'em for yourself, then." A major character in the stories was a little man called Thom Cure All, a rather pathetic figure who somehow reminded me of Jack All Alone, the boy tramp, in *Funny Wonder*. Phrases like "Well, may I be jiggered" had nothing medieval about them. Neither had jingles like:

*Dinky hoop a billy hoo!
Ogly bosh gee rolly poo!
Snorky porky ikey grum!
Wally prig, no pilly pum!*

The place for them was a kids' comic!

After a time, the weekly numbers were reduced to twice monthly and the price was increased to twopence. The covers were brighter, but the drawings were crude; so were the stories. I bought the books as a duty till finally I gave them up.

Morton Pike was a writer of Robin Hood stories. *Robin Hood*

and *His Merry Men* (Number 458) and *King of the Woodland* (Number 543) were published in *The Boys' Friend Library*. (Robin Hood was dressed completely in red in the cover picture of *King of the Woodland*!) Good in their way, they didn't come up to the old Aldines.

They were Robin Hood stories!

GOODBYE, SEXTON BLAKE!

(Continued from Page 158)

I encountered him again in *Pluck Library* in 1915 and 1916. When *Pluck* was closed down in March of 1916 and its "With Which is Amalgamated . . ." line was transferred after a brief stay on the front page of *The Boys' Realm* to that of *The Union Jack*, I made a short contact with *The Union Jack* which was soon lost.

Not until 1928 did I know it and Sexton Blake again: taking over the newsagency in Transcona with which I was to be associated until 1962, *The Union Jack* and *The Sexton Blake Library* were among the magazines I sold. I handled *The S. B. L.* until I closed the shop last year. It did not sell very largely—there is too much competition from U. S. magazines here. The women's

Libraries sold better with us.

Did I read *The S. B. L.*? I did, but only in recent years, so I am not qualified to give an opinion as to how well the "new look" stories compare with the older ones. I liked many of them.

Now *The Sexton Blake Library* is gone and with it Sexton Blake. He joins Sherlock Holmes in honourable retirement. Perhaps Blake will be visiting Holmes—a very venerable Holmes, to be sure—among the latter's beehives on the Sussex Downs.

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WHEN I WROTE the foregoing reminiscence of Sexton Blake and me, I was under the impression that Blake was retiring, or was being retired, from active detecting. It seems that I was wrong, for in his *Personal Message* on cover page iv of the final issue of *The Sexton Blake Library* he states that "It's over now," referring to the chronicling of

his cases, adding that "We can get on with the job of fighting crime without having to stop and think: 'Now how's this going to look in print?'"

Speaking for myself, I would rather stay in Hawaii, where the end of *The Last Tiger* (S. B. L. Number 526) found Sexton Blake, Tinker (alias Edward Carter), Marion Lang, and Paula Dane, and let someone else look after the criminals.

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THANKS TO BILL LOFTS and the Atlantic Air Mail, I had a copy of Number 526 on Monday, June 17th, only two or three days after publication. Blake's *Personal Message* is signed, in

type, SEXTON T. BLAKE, followed by P. S. Hah—*That middle initial was something I always managed to keep to myself.* In the small blank space beside the printed signature and above the P. S. is a written-in-ink signature, Sexton T. Blake.

An autographed copy! Autographed by Sexton Blake! I will admit that I had a small suspicion that the signature might have been written by a stand-in, but I have resolutely pushed it aside and intend to believe that Sexton Blake actually signed my copy.

(I am sharing the blame for adding an "e" to Harry Blyth's name on page 157: Bill Loft and I both missed it when reading the proof.) —W. H. G.

A MAGNET MEMORY

THE ILLUSTRATOR of *The Outsider* in Number 1458 of *The Magnet*, January 25th, 1936, paid little heed to the author's descriptions. In the first chapter Harry Wharton, "a coat on over his football rig," tries to drag new boy Eric Wilmot to football practice. The other members of the Famous Five, all ready for the footer field, come to Wharton's aid. The struggle is pictured on page 5 with all the characters in their full school

dress, even to collars and ties.

In that issue of *The Magnet* is the first announcement of "something unusual, but extra good, in free gifts—watch for further particulars."

Can any reader recall what those unusual, and extra good, gifts proved to be?

—O. W. WADHAM

§ *The "free gifts" were "magic spectacles" and "pictures that come to life": pictures printed in two colours and two-colour spectacles that gave a stereoscopic effect to the pictures.*

School and Playground Stories: The First All-School-Story Weekly?

By ALBERT WATKIN

ONE OF THE EARLIEST of the weekly school-story magazines, if it was not the first, was *School and Playground Stories*, a Charles Fox publication. There appears to be little known about it today.

Mr. W. O. G. Lofts in his list of *100 Years of Boys' Weeklies* in the 1953 *Collectors' Digest Annual* was only able to state that it started in 1898. In his supplementary list in the 1954 *Annual* he added that it ran for 32 issues.

School and Playground was a halfpenny paper of 16 pages slightly larger than *Magnet* size, with a good illustration on the cover and usually two more in the centre pages.

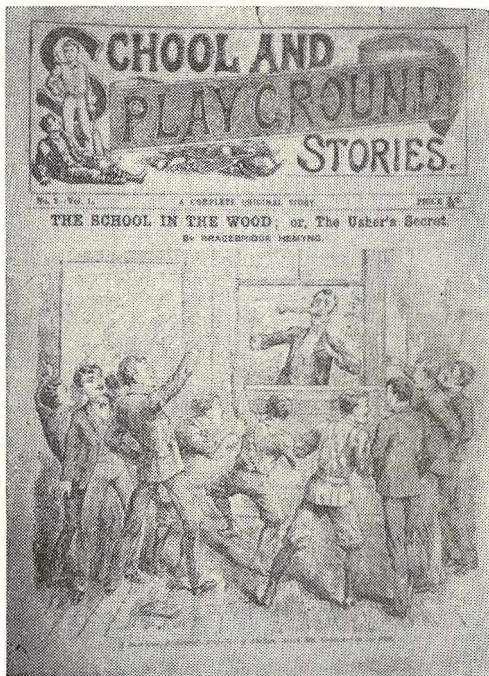
I have in my possession copies of several of the earlier issues, all of which were written by Bracebridge Hemming. It could be presumed that he wrote the rest of the stories also. Each story is about a different school, and this could be one of the reasons for the paper's short life. Not many years later Charles Hamilton was to demonstrate that sticking to one

school and building up a tradition paid lavish dividends.

Most of the stories are set in a period of at least 30 years before the publication date of 1898, which makes me wonder if the date given in the *Digest* list is wrong, or perhaps they are reprints from an earlier period. The magazine is numbered but there are no dates.

THE STORY in issue Number 1 is *The School in the Wood* which, as the title implies, is about a school situated in Darksome Wood, near Keswick. It is described as being suitable for unruly boys requiring strict discipline. One notable piece of school equipment is a bloodhound which is used to track down boys who run away.

The assistant master is bribed to murder one of the pupils and he does his utmost to do so. Perhaps the highlight of the story is a barring-out. The barring-out seems to have been a popular theme in school stories in any age. Bullying is rife and the boys drink cider and wine freely, in fact by the jugful.



*School and
Playground
Stories*
Number 1

Published
by
Charles Fox

1898

Story Number 2 is *Billy the Bluecoat Boy*, a tale of a school in London where the boys wear blue coats down to their knees. Here the bullies are outside the school as well as in it. After several adventures the hero and his friend are cast away on a

desert island and then finish up at Coolgardie in Australia where gold has just been discovered. Shades of Jack Harkaway!

Our history books tell us that gold was discovered in Coolgardie in 1892, so that year could be set as the time of this tale.

*School and
Playground
Stories*
Number 2



IF THE FIRST TWO stories suffer from being behind the times, then Number 3, *The Travelling School*, fairly jumps into the future. When Dr. Dubby, L.L.D., finds that during the summer vacation of his school, near Kingston, he will have four

pupils left on his hands who need extra cramming for the Civil Service examination, he goes to the Motor Car Manufacturing Company and orders them to construct a caravan with sleeping accommodation for six persons, the beds to shut

up in the sides during the daytime, leaving a clear space for forms and tables, the front part to be fitted up as a kitchen.

The route followed winds down the Thames from Kingston to Oxford and takes in the Henley Regatta. The assistant master, who is also the Headmaster's son and very unpopular, accompanies them. Features of the story are a jewel robbery and a love interest, while the villain of the piece is a well-to-do resident of Surbiton.

Number 4, *His Friend and His Foe*, is about St. Aspeth's, a first class school perched on a hill overlooking a prosperous town in the eastern counties. Here, by way of change, the assistant master bribes an outsider to murder a pupil who has insulted him.

The assistant master, or to give him his correct term, the usher, always plays a prominent part in the stories and is usually the arch-villain. However, the days of this one—Shanden Puttick—are numbered. He is an escaped convict and a secret drunkard, and a detective has been on his trail for some time.

STORY NUMBER 5 is *Billy Button's Blunders*, Number 6 is *The Rebel of the School*, and Number 7 is *The Woes of Dr. Bumps*. It is said that to be a schoolmaster one must have the

patience and forbearance of a saint and be prepared to train a lot of imps. But Alderton Hall, the school of Dr. Socrates Bumps, is framed on quite different lines.

"For," said he, "as animals can only be trained by kindness so it is with boys. You cannot drive an obstinate boy with a cartwhip, but you can lead him with a thread into an orchard full of ripe apples." Dr. Bumps conceives a grand idea and sets it forth in a gilt-edged prospectus.

Here is an earthly paradise for boys. Tarts and other delicacies—so says the prospectus—are to be given to promising boys between lessons, the table is to be spread on a lavish scale on all occasions, and last but not least from a boy's point of view, the cane and the birch are to be consigned to the limbo of barbarous times. Strange to say, when Dr. Bumps throws open the great oak doors of Alderton Hall there are only six boys sent to walk through them.

In this case six boys do not warrant an assistant master, but there is a footman/butler provided. Called *Elegant Chipps* by the boys, and *Mr. Turkey Legs* by the cook, owing to his habit of stuffing his stockings, he is the victim of many jokes and pranks by the boys. Dr. Bumps comes in for his fair share, too.

The real villain is a knife-carrying gipsy who meets his match in one of the pupils who is very adept with his fists. This is a very hilarious tale. Liquor plays a prominent part in the downfall of the scheme. Chippo drinks far too much, and Dr. Bumps cannot hold what little he does drink. Eventually the school is reformed on old lines and pupils begin to flock to the lovely old place even though the cane is used again.

Story Number 10 is *The Boys of Thrashemwell College*, a tale of three chums who had attended a day school but had played truant so often that they are sent by their parents to Thrashemwell College in the hope of having a little sense of discipline instilled in them.

The Headmaster is the Rev. Obadiah Birch and the usher—until dismissed by the Head—is Jeremiah Sneak. This is an average tale of feuds, fights, and

bullies at a school of about thirty pupils, all of whom are nicknamed after animals. It also features a fat boy who is overfond of tuck. The boys are in the habit of reading *Young Briton*, a paper which ran from 1869 to 1877.

PRINTED IN LARGE and clear type with fast-paced stories, these magazines are very easy to read. They carry little in the way of advertisements, except for one of a monster shilling volume of *Tom Torment*, another of Hemyng's successes. There is an announcement that *Spring-Heeled Jack* will be published shortly in a 24-page edition with a coloured wrapper.

* *

¶ The writer of this article, Albert Watkin, lives in New Zealand. He supplied the two photographs from which the halftone plates were made by the Western Engraving Bureau, St. James, Manitoba.

More About S. B. L.

THIS NOTE is written on July 12th, and I have just received some more copies of *Sexton Blake Library* Number 526. In the meantime—since writing about it (pages 171 and 172)—I have been wondering if the

Sexton T. Blake signature on cover page iv of the first copy to arrive here actually had been printed, not written. The signature does not appear on these later copies, so that I have been strengthened in my determination to believe that it was written by Sexton Blake!

*

THE WRITER OF *The End of an Era* in the *June Collectors' Digest* is right when, referring to S.B.L., he says: "In our opinion, this ending was inevitable, the system of distribution being what it is." The "sale-or-return" system is necessary to keep magazines on display. Without adequate display in the shops most magazines, instead of holding to their previous sales figures or improving on them, will be sure to lose readers.

ONE FINAL NOTE with which I fully agree, and which also is from the *June C.D.*: "All will feel sympathy with Mr. W. Howard Baker, the S.B.L. Editor, at this time, for he has worked so hard to keep Sexton Blake in the shops." —W. H. G.

Leslie McFarlane Was 1st Hardy Boys Author

LESLIE MCFARLANE is Canada's only fulltime television play-

wright. . . . Author McFarlane was also, over 17 years, the first Franklin W. Dixon, the pen-name for the stratospherically popular "Hardy Boys" series. His 19 Hardy books, aimed at the 10 to 16 age group, have sold an estimated 12,000,000 copies and make him easily Canada's best-selling author of all time.

—David Cobb, in *Toronto Daily Star*.

Upon reading the article that is quoted from above, Al Fick (*The Hardy Boys Mystery Stories* in S.P.C. Number 82) commented: "This is the first definite information I have learned. Somehow it seems appropriate that this popular series was penned by a Canadian author. This fact puts the stories a step nearer to the original source of the best in boys' reading: England. It would be interesting to learn if Leslie McFarlane might have been influenced by the very story papers and authors which loom so large in every issue of *The Story Paper Collector*."

I Wish to Purchase . . .

- S. P. C. Numbers 2 to 9, 11, 15.
- Tom Langley, 340 Baldwins Lane, Birmingham 28, England.
- Gem Numbers 799, 804 to 808, 810, 812.—T. W. Porter, 1 Timbertree Road, Old Hill, Cradley Heath, Staffs, England.

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