

# GOLDEN HOURS

PRODUCED IN AUSTRALIA  
EVERY NOW AND THEN



*Adelington Leonard*

## EDITORIAL

It is a year since the last issue - I wouldn't have thought it would ever be that long between numbers but 1963 certainly tricked me. I'm hoping this year will be kinder to my leisure time.

It has been a very full year for the old boys book collectors. It saw the ending of Sexton Blake, and the birth of another attempt to make a success of reprinting in a modern paper some of the old school stories. The St. Franks stories failed; also those of Rookwood. It seems, in view of the cessation of the Modern Blake, and also the vintage stories, that in no manner can these stories survive. The choice and presentation of some of the prewar school stories has left much to be desired and there is always the excuse that they are, after all, old stories belonging to another day. Regarding choice however, it would be easy for the editor to consult some Collectors Digest contributors who could advise on the best of Charles Hamilton and thus give the scheme its best chance of success and, at least, do justice to the writings of Charles Hamilton. But, the failure also of the Sexton Blake Library presents the opposite case. Well presented with modern stories and new authors and illustrators should have, in theory, ensured continued life. The readers, although clinging with affection to the past, were of the modern world and made every effort to live in it. So it is difficult to be too hopeful of the success of any attempt to make the old characters live in a current periodical.

As much new information, if not more, was revealed in 1963 as in any other year. Herculean tasks were accomplished in catalogue form and there seems to be plenty more work for researchers to do. The only things that are getting scarce are the books themselves.

SYD. SMYTH, CLOVELLY, N.S.W.

V.E. COLBY, 8 HERESFORD AVE. BEVERLY HILLS. N.S.W. AUSTRALIA.

WANTED - Nelson Lee Library Original series 11, 16, 19, 23, 27, 31, 32, 33, 38, 39, 49, 53, 54, 64, 133, 141.

Nelson Lee Library 1st new series 188, 189.

Thrillers 278, 279, 343, 359, 360, 361, 365, 369, 371, 372, 379, 381, 382, 383, 386, 442, 443, 485.

Union Jacks 1d series, 1/2d series etc. Nos. 80, 100, 113, 124, 126, 310, 358, 486, 493, 496, 504, 512, 532, 533, 536, 551, 560, 564, 565, 617, 618, 652, 666, 672, 687, 690, 704, 723, 763, 856.

Union Jack 1/2d series Nos. 194, 250, 261, 283, 285, 299, 336, 344, 356, 360, 361, 365, 366, 367, 370, 371, 373, 375, 400, 411, 420.

B.F.L. 1st series 105, 229, 429, 433, 749.

B.F.L. 2nd series 136, 515.

Particularly want B.F.L. 1st 749 "Corinth for the Cup" by John Wheway.

(Cont. on Page: 110)

# THE U.J. COVER-BOOK

Ring in the change from OLD to NEW.

Ring out the hackneyed RED and BLUE

IF this isn't just the kind of book review you expected, it's because it isn't just an ordinary book. We are not intent on boosting its circulation, and if it sells at all the limit of its sale will be one. But even that is unlikely.

Actually, this book is a rarity. In fact, it's literally unique; the only one of its kind in existence. Moreover, there can never be more than this solitary specimen, never to be duplicated or added to.

It is a complete collection, in volume form, of ninety-three UNION JACK cover-proofs, hand-pulled from the original copper master plates and chosen from the best of the 1926-7 period for their specially successful exposition of the new U.J. experiment of using more striking combinations of colour than the routine Red and Blue till then traditional.

At the time mentioned, UNION JACK launched a simple but novel notion. As an idea it was quite pretentious and unaccompanied by ballyhoo, but it turned out to be far more effective than it first appeared, especially when viewed in the mass as it is in this collection. When its merits at last became self-evident Sexton Blake's Own Paper could claim also to be The Paper with the Distinctive Covers. UNION JACK indeed became almost as famous for its 'fronts' as it already was for its stories. They certainly had their part in fortifying Blake's name.

Of course, this wasn't due solely to the new colours, but rather to clever artists. But the novel colours did help a lot, and in addition there was what came to be known as the non-human cover, of which more presently.

At this point a brief excursion into technicalities might be enlightening, for the benefit of CBC collectors unacquainted with the printer's craft, in order to convey the finer points of these rare proofs as contrasted with their counterparts with which everybody is familiar, the run-of-the-press issues.

The normal, on-sale covers of such a paper are not - contrary to most readers' impression - printed from the first reproduction made from the artist's original painting. Nor, for that matter, are copies printed from the type-matter first set. Making the flat metal colour plates is only the initial step. It is the result of the second which is seen by the buyer, and that version is printed from curved castings made from the flat master plates. These are curved for the reason that they have to be fitted to the rollers of the rotary machine which prints them at speed - and the letterpress too - both sides of the pages at one operation.

This curving process is achieved, by the way, by making a soft papier maché impression - a matrix, 'mat' or flong - from the flat plates under pressure and afterwards bending it to the required curve in a shaped mould, which is then filled with type-metal. The resulting casting is known as a stereo, and from these castings the entire paper, pictures and letterpress, is printed on the giant rotaries.

The difference between printing from a casting revolving at speed on a power-driven rotary, and printing slowly by hand from the virgin flat master-plates, is quite evident when the two results are seen side by side, though naturally the difference is unrecognized by the normal reader for the lack of any opportunity of comparison.

The proving of a pair of colour plates by hand is a matter of meticulous preparation and careful placing of the plates in order to obtain a true reproduction of the original painting. Also, a superior grade of paper can be used, and printed on one side only. By this unhurried method, with the advantages of sharp-etched metal and the hand-rolling of full-strength brilliant ink in superimposed colours, it is possible in suitable cases to obtain a 3-colour effect though in actuality only two colours are used.

Conversely, in the machined version the inks run thinner and the colours have a somewhat washy look. The fine lines and delicate tones have already lost a little of the hard definition and sharpness of the master plates by the time they are transferred to the softer type-metal stereo, and when hundreds of thousands of impressions have been made at the end of a long run must have lost more. The wear and tear is normally unnoticeable, but nevertheless it's there. Also, because of the rotary's speed and other factors, the two colour plates can at times lose the exact precision of their placing and the resulting print be 'out of register' and more or less blurred.

These imperfections, inevitable in the kind of fast rotary printing with which we are concerned, are avoided when proofs are 'pulled' by hand. There the inks retain their pristine brilliance, registration is faultless, and pictorial detail sharp and clean. In short, the hand-pulled proof is a very different job from that produced from 'on the run'.

At the time when the improved scheme planned for UNION JACK was in preparation the general practice for all the Amalgamated Press publications with that same 2-colour system was to use Red and Blue as those two colours, the red being a somewhat crimson hue and the Blue a dark shade impregnated with metal powder and known as Bronze Blue. This combination gave fairly satisfactory results as regards average representation and had become standardised - traditional and almost sacrosanct, in fact.

UNION JACK's inspired but simple idea was to use other colours, or combinations of colours, to enhance effectiveness in several ways at once. Appropriate colouring emphasised the picture's subject matter and/or the story's title; achieved a certain eye-catching quality; and singled out the paper on the bookstall from its surrounding Red & Blue neighbours .... all desirable assets in a paper designed to get itself sold.

This policy was followed even though it meant no more than the subtlety of using a vermilion red instead of crimson, or a light blue instead of the usual dark.

So a new editorial technique dawned. Now, cover pictures were to be designed in conjunction with the story, with all these assets in mind. Whenever possible they were to be more than mere incident illustrations culled from the story, but symbolic of the whole story or its title, and in natural colours at that. The weekly picture-conference with the artist became a routine U.J. fixture.

In due time their cover-paintings, going through the printing works, became plates and colour-proofs. Two of each proof eventually came, via the printer's messenger, to the editorial desk, and later back went one of those proofs with its due O.K. or comment. Its duplicate remained with the editor for reference or record.

When need to retain their copy remained no longer the printers destroyed their copy. Meantime, in the editorial office, the duplicates accumulated; it was useful from time to time to review them and see how the new cover policy was working out. Hence it happened eventually that it was possible to select about a hundred of the best and assemble them into an impressive book. There was no thought then that this book contained the only surviving record of UNION JACK's finest art at its peak period; that there was no counterpart of it, or ever could be; or that sometime in the future it would possess a rarity value in its own right.

But now, a quarter of a century later, time has cured that oversight ... and so we come to this review of the U.J. Cover-Book, a venerable relic of the dead past whose carefully treasured contents have become even more unique than the original pictures from which its plates were made, for the artists' actual paintings, alas, are all vanished long ago.

But back to the beginning! The artists entered into the new scheme with alacrity, co-operating eagerly - maybe glad of a change from the old, old problem of getting every imaginable effect from the perpetual Red & Blue. They found that designing a cover with the same care that the author had to design his story-plot was somehow stimulating. At times the cart even got before the horse and they had the extra stimulus of evolving the cover before a word of the story itself was written.

Notably outstanding and brilliant in rising to the challenge of the moment was - need it be said? - the superlative Eric Robert Parker.

E.R.P., by far the most accomplished artist and finest delineator of Sexton Blake in all the previous 32 years of UNION JACK history, was as properly evaluated by the younger readers of the 1920's as he still is by Old Boys' Book collectors. It is a heartening fact that a person doesn't need to wait for maturer years, or to have the specialist education of an art critic, to recognise such merit as his.

His pre-eminence, both in line and colour, was and is self-evident. It stands out against the distractions of a printed page and, in the case of his covers, even against the imperfections of high-speed printing, diluted colours and competing letterpress.

To leaf one's way through this book is to receive a sort of revelation about Eric Parker's work. One sees it in the mass with a new, sharpened appreciation.

His sure, confident, economical handling of whatever subject was required; his faultless drawing and instinct for dramatic effect; his character delineation; his feeling for atmosphere and vivid action and unhackneyed pictorial composition; the remarkable accuracy and correctness of detail of anything he depicted ... every aspect of his work was masterly.

But we mustn't be prematurely tempted into a panegyric of Eric's work. That deserves a place all to itself later on. All that need be said at the moment is that, in this book of 93 classic examples of the new cover policy, 68 are deservedly his. And they represent the peak of his achievement in U.J.

His runner-up was likewise commendably excellent, but in a different direction - as this book with its unexpected effect of a fresh eye also makes plain. The No.2 man was J.H. (Jimmy) Valda, the non-human specialist, on exhibition here with 11 variegated examples.

In addition to the colour scheme reform that improved Sexton Blake's Own Paper, a supplementary idea had been born - the inanimate, non-human cover. These had designs which depicted, not human beings in the routine situations that will persist in cropping up in detective stories such as people pointing guns at each other, or being otherwise lethally unpleasant, but representations of inanimate, non-human objects.

These were of a kind unusual in the company of detective stories, and intriguing on the 'front' of a Sexton Blake yarn accordingly. They were shown close-up and solo, and had titles to match. As a rule their colouring was as natural, aptly avoiding the standardised Red & Blue.

Long-memored U.J. fans will recall some of them - a willow-pattern china plate; a photographic negative; a Roman mosaic; a piece of crumpled paper; a Victorian sampler such as little girls of that era were set to stitching at the peril of their young eyesight, but with theoretical benefit to their moral principles on account of the pious texts they dutifully wove into the design.

Jimmy Valda realistically rendered most of such offbeat cover subjects. And, if he got half a chance, he came up with a sub-speciality of his own - shuddersome conjurings-up of the macabre, the grotesque, the primitive-repulsive. He had an engaging taste in freaks and horrors, had Jimmy.

Do you remember the Gnomid, (No. 1362, 1927)? His picture was of - well, a creature. It was undecipherable except that it had a non-existent chin and outside talons, and one shrinks from computing the number of impressionable young readers whom that cover picture of it must have kept awake when they ought to have been refreshingly asleep; how many nightmares it must have triggered off, or how many parents it set running to the bedsides of their young, alarmed by piteous cries in the small hours.

One notes that the cover labels 'The Gnomid' as Gilbert Chester's masterpiece; the picture-concept of this unfortunate sub-human monstrosity was certainly Jimmy Valda's masterpiece too.

However, nightmares or not, it featured as the eye-catcher on about the most memorable of any U.J. cover in that line - a case of 'once seen, never forgotten'. Jimmy enjoyed doing it, too. Nobody ever asked him to. He brought the fearsome thing into the office one day as an unsolicited essay in home-made horror, done just for the laughs. But it was too good to waste and Gilbert Chester was at once rounded up for a story to account for it. This he did with marked adroitness; hence the screams in the night.

'The Green Imps' (G.F.Teed, No.1262) was another Valda venture into the department of the damned, though in this case Teed's story-concept antedated Valda's version of the Imps.

One interesting thing about the cover, though, is that the colours used were an unusual combination of light blue and orange. The artist's skillful handling of the subject demonstrated to a nicety how a 2-colour reproduction can be made to look like a 3-colour job, or full colour as it is sometimes known. A tree is shown in the picture, and though there was no yellow to tint the blue, the tree's foliage appears green in the print, and its trunk brown. The same gratifying phenomenon occurs also in sundry other cover pictures, for example 'The Temple of Many Visions', (G.H.Teed, No.1225), which achieves a clean purplish background tint.

With due regard to the desires of the statistically minded, here is how ringing the colour changes worked out in the 93 representative issues selected for the collection. (The dominant or basic colour is named first).

		(Red	23	covers
<u>Bronze</u>	and	(Yellow	1	-
<u>BLUE</u>		(Orange	26	-
		(Green	1	-
<u>Light</u>	and	(Orange	1	-
<u>BLUE</u>		(Lt.Red	1	-
		(Red	9	-
		(Blue	2	-
<u>BLACK</u>	and	(Yellow	6	-
		(Orange	12	-
		(Green	11	-

As to the artists represented in the Cover-Book, it may be said that Eric Parker's well-merited score of 63 is worthily backed up by the work of the following:

Kenneth Brookes	(4 covers)
F.F. Harnack	(1 - )
Arthur Jones	(1 - )
J.H. Valda	(11 - )
H.W. Twyman	(2 - )

(2 photographs also appear; also 4 pictures by other artists, hitherto untraced.)

The authors of the Blake stories which have been so fortunately distinguished by their cover designers naturally include all the star names. ('Naturally' because not only because they were featured more often, but their more ingenious themes and ideas were more apt to stimulate outstanding covers.) However, this is at least one book review in which authors take a back seat, so they need not be unduly stressed in this instance, except to say there are fifteen of them in all, with the cosmopolitan G.H. Teed leading the pack with 22 titles. His exotic settings gave Eric Parker the urge to produce some of his finest work.

The U.J. Cover Book is a volume that any Sexton Blake enthusiast would ponder over and explore with delight for hours, fascinated by the new vision its brilliant, mint-condition proofs gave him and thrilled as they recalled well-remembered stories of the past. It provides a quite new approach to Blake-appreciation, and one follows a wandering train of thought very pleasantly in all directions.

It is well that it has been equipped with all necessary aids to study: a fully researched table of contents giving titles, authors, U.J. issue-numbers and plate-numbers in the volume itself, and in addition indices grouping and locating the colour combinations; the authors (with cross-reference title-lists) and the artists.

What a pity this book cannot have been reproduced in quantity for the benefit of the many!

But what a collector's piece, if over there was one!

End.

V. E. COLEY, 8 HERESFORD AVE. BEVERLY HILLS. N.S.W. AUSTRALIA.

WANTED

Prairie Library 13, 14, 45, 56.

Aldine Buffalo Hill Library all numbers in very good condition.

Aldine Robin Hood Library all numbers in very good condition.

Clubs before 1919.

(Continued on Page:112)

# GOLDEN DAYS AT THE FLEETWAY HOUSE

by F. ADDINGTON SYMONDS

It is with a very special pleasure that I respond to your Editor's request for some reminiscences of the days when I was in charge of The Champion and its Companion Journals at the Fleetway House. Such memories are still very vivid, despite the fact that nearly forty years have passed since I resigned the editorship.

I think that the keynote of those times was undoubtedly enthusiasm. We were all so keen on our job, so caught up in the excitement of it; and, above all, so proudly conscious of the very real and personal friendship which existed from the outset between ourselves and our readers. Those were the days when a weekly paper was something more than a collection of printed sheets - when it was something that lived and found its place in the hearts of its readers. The bond between Editor and reader was very real and very inspiring.

We tried to convey something of that warmth, that enthusiasm, in all that we printed and sent out to our readers. We tried to make them feel as excited as we were - for example, when we discovered a new writer or artist, or hit upon a new idea for a serial or a complete story. And I, myself, was always conscious of a kind of spirit of dedication if only because, as I have said elsewhere at various times, The Champion was modelled on the old Big Budget, which was my own favourite paper as a boy. And it was an occasion for particular satisfaction and pride that I was able to include among my most popular contributors Mr. Arthur Brooke, who had previously been the Editor of The Big Budget and with whom I struck up a friendship as a boy reader which continued all down the years to the day of his death, during the last world war.

Those of you who still remember The Champion will not need to be reminded of the titles of some of our serials - "Black Diamonds", "Vultures of the Line", "That Terrible Tern" - which repeated those of stories which had appeared, by the same authors, in the old E.S. Indeed, one of the most thrilling moments of my editorial life was when I found that I could call upon so many of those old writers and artists and ask them to recreate, as it were, the spirit of the Big Budget in the pages of The Champion. I recall, especially, my first meeting with Mr. Stacey Blake, one of the Big Budget's stalwarts, and his quite genuine surprise when I asked him to write a serial for me under the old title of "Black Diamonds". He stared at me in some astonishment and said, "Well, I never in my life expected to be remembered like this - and after all this time!"

When The Champion was first launched, I was given a small, bare office and a staff of one - a small boy to run errands. Within a few months, that office was extended to two and the staff to four. Soon after that, it grew till it consisted of a suite of offices, with an editorial staff of some 14 people, including two girls, one of whom was my personal secretary. And what a busy hive of industry it was! The days seemed to flash by, as days do when one is engaged on work that one loves - days that echoed to the clatter of typewriters, the jingling of telephone bells, the hum of voices ...

Sometimes, too, we had visitors - readers who called to see us and to say some very kind things about us to ourselves! (No, we had scarcely any critics!). I well remember my deep regret in having to disappoint one small boy reader who called with his mother expecting to find the Editor all dressed up in cowboy costume! And the letters...! Every morning we found at least 250 of them awaiting our attention --- and, believe it or not, every single one of them was answered personally by the Editor, - assisted, of course, by his always tireless young secretary!

Great, golden days! Days that no longer exist anywhere, except in the memories of those who lived through them - and those who still recall the pleasure which The Champion and its associated journals gave them. We live now in a very different age, one which no doubt has its excitements and its compensations, but seems to me to lack completely that spirit of adventure, of wonder and of high excitement which was the great gift of our youth and remains as being among our most cherished recollections. To those of you who are reading this and were among our readers at that unforgettable time, I say "Thank you", again and again, for your support then and for your very touching remembrance now. It is good to feel that one lives on in the hearts of one's old friends, all of whom are so real, even though we have not met personally. The old Champion is dead; but so long as there exist those who cherish its memory, its spirit must and will live on. Maybe, too, by comparison with the youth of today, we are the lucky ones!

End.

V. E. COLEY. 8 BERESFORD AVE. EVERLY HILLS. N.S.W. AUSTRALIA.

WANTED:

Pluck 555. Boys Journal 63 and on to end of Blake serial.  
Rockets and early Champions.  
Boys Realm 18 to 29 inclusive.

Penry Pictorial 428, 429, 522, 524, 525, 530, 531, 532, 533, also any higher than 756 containing Blake stories.

End.

# THE TRIUMPH IN THE 1930's

by ALBERT WATKINS

One of the most successful A.P. publications for boys was The Triumph. Starting in 1924 it ran for 814 issues until it became a war casualty in 1940, by which time it had incorporated the Gem. Out in Australia and New Zealand it was extremely popular with its bright blue & yellow cover, identical to the Magnet though, in its dying days, it saw several colour changes, including a swing to the rival red & blue. Perhaps this was to remind readers that a St. Jims story was contained therein. However, The Triumph was well able to stand on its own feet and catered for a wide variety of tastes.

For the purpose of having a closer look at it I have selected the year 1930 - one of its vintage years. Even in those hey-days of boys' publications, editors had circulation worries. Early in that year the editor was asking readers to obtain new subscribers, and shortly after was able to announce that one boy in Australia had gone out and got 18 new readers; a boy in Scotland 12; a boy in the South of England 9 and so on, and everyone was urged to keep on with the good work. How dearly would Mr. Howard Baker, editor of the Sexton Blake, value a rallying round of this kind.

The year was ushered in well for the Triumph when the first issue contained a free album for a series of 46 drawings and photos of the Great War which were included in the next few numbers.

If a poll had been taken at the time for the most popular type of story, it would probably have been headed by "Great War", for the paper was never without one during the year. When one serial finished, another started immediately.

Strangely enough, there was no school story published that year, though just about every other subject was covered. Was there enough in the Magnet, Gem and Nelson Lee? Or was the school story on its way out in 1930? Boys were always invited to write to the Editor and tell him the type of story they wanted. So it seems that there could not have been many requests for the school yarn.

The contents of the paper varied between 5 and 6 stories, with always 3 serials. So the serial was presumably slightly more popular than the complete story.

The output of Mr. E.R. Home-Gall in his dual roles of Rupert Hall and Edwin Dale was the leading contributor and he nearly always had one serial going, plus a complete yarn, which was usually a mystery story. A very versatile writer was Mr. Home-Gall.

Other serials were well-handled by Cecil Fanshaw (his best, "Sea Wolves"), John Ascott ("The £50,000 Record Breakers"), Douglas Dundee ("Hunters of the Iron Outlaw"), Herbert Macrae ("Flying Furies"), Dick Shaw ("The Racing Rocket"), Jack Stirling ("Win or Smash Samson"), and Donald Dane ("The Round-the-Word Race Stars").

These were all later to be reprinted in the Champion Library. There is no doubt that these were a fine team of writers.

Victor Nelson wrote a series of boxing yarns a subject he was well versed in and Donald Dane featured a popular character in "Scoop Martin", news reporter of the "Daily Clarion".

In lighter vein were "Souvenir Sam" (Peter Lang) and "Salesman Sid" (Will Gibbons). These series of complete stories usually had an average run of 18 weeks.

The stories were all well illustrated and generously too and this added greatly to their appeal.

The Xmas Number for 1930 contained extra topical features including an article on Xmas on the Western Front in 1914 and a complete story by John Ascott, "The Six-Gun Santa Claus".

Thus was ushered out a successful year.

The Triumph of 1930 generally did not waste too much space on advertising. Usually there was only a half-page on the back.

The best buy seemed to be a box camera post free for 1/10d with a money back guarantee. Plenty of cycles were to be had for 2/6d down and a dozen football jerseys - any colour, cost 15/6d. Cures were offered for blushing, stammering and a red nose for the receipt of a 2d. stamp. Then there were the free postage stamps. How I wish I had put a few of those away along with some copies of the Triumph!

In 1930, the Australian Cricket team under W.M. Woodfull was touring England and, for a few weeks, the Triumph splashed on a full page ad. sponsored by B.D.V. cigarettes. It featured a good photo of the team and stated that B.D.V. cigarettes had been supplied to the team for the duration of the tour. For 30 B.D.V. cigarette coupons one could obtain the personal autograph of any player; 40 coupons gave you an autographed postcard photo of your favourite, whilst for 300 coupons a 12" x 10" photo of the team, personally signed by each player, could be had.

The Australians are reported to have said of the cigarettes "Well worth signing for!"

Yes, it is nice to delve into the past and most things that were freely available then seem doubly desirable today.

End.

FRANK VERNON LAY always has a great variety of old boys books available. Send your list of wants to Frank at - 52 Oakleigh Gardens, Whetstone, London. N.20.

# A HALF-HOUR WITH CHARLES HAMILTON

by G. R. SAMWAYS

Although I spent many happy years working in the MAGNET office, I met the immortal Charles Hamilton but once, and was in his company for the space of only half-an-hour. A brief encounter, yet I was more fortunate than the other junior "subs" on the staff, not one of whom had ever set eyes upon the creator of Billy Bunter.

Charles Hamilton was an almost mythical personage — much talked of, indeed — but nobody working in the general office of the companion papers had the faintest conception of what the man was like. Only the Editor, H.A.Hinton, and the chief sub-editor, C.M.Down, had ever seen Hamilton in the flesh — and those rare meetings had taken place in the early dawn of the MAGNET and GEM's history.

Contrary to the widely held belief among writers in collectors' magazines, Charles Hamilton had only the slenderest link with the editorial staff of the papers for which he wrote. His appearances at the Fleetway House were "like angel visits, few and far between." He was as ignorant of the MAGNET's administrative team as they were of the great genius whose stories passed through their hands. It is true to say that the MAGNET staff and the MAGNET author lived in two entirely different worlds. Charles Hamilton's MAGNET and GEM yarns, in their immaculate typescript, were addressed to the Editor with the briefest of covering notes, and that was that. Hamilton knew little and cared less about the inner workings of the papers. He scarcely ever alluded, in speech or in writing, to the MAGNET staff; and when he did so, much later on, it was in terms of amused contempt. "The Menagerie", he called us — though the reason for that ironic definition has never been revealed. (I do not take Hamilton's gibe too seriously; maybe the great man was merely indulging in good-humoured banter.)

On Press Nights, after we had "put the papers to bed," as Hinton described it, the time-honoured custom was to adjourn to the hostelry next door to the Fleetway House for well-earned refreshment. I have seen it stated that Charles Hamilton was of our convivial company. He most certainly was not, for as I have shown, he was aloof from our activities, and had not the least interest in them.

One writer has expressed surprise that Charles Hamilton, in his autobiography, gave no vivid pen-pictures of the members of the MAGNET staff. What I have just written will explain the omission.

At the time of which I am writing, Maurice Down was absent from the office (owing, I think, to his delayed demobilisation after the First World War) and I was temporarily installed in his place in the Editor's sanctum — Room 59, on the third floor of the Fleetway House.

When Editor Hinton told me that he was expecting Charles Hamilton to call, I was all agog with excitement.

Had not "Frank Richards" ever been my favourite author? Had I not revelled, as a schoolboy, in the halfpenny numbers of the MAGNET -- proscribed by the Headmaster as "pernicious trash", yet smuggled into the school by various subterfuges? It was my daily custom to give private readings from the "red" MAGNETS to a dozen or so youngsters who shared my schoolboy enthusiasm for Harry Wharton & Co. and Frank Richards.

The outer window sill of the school band-room, overlooking the boy's gardens, was the venue of these illicit readings; and for one golden hour every day we were transported from the barrack-like grimness of our own school to the cloistered antiquity and congenial atmosphere of Greyfriars.

I had conceived a mental image of the author of those glorious yarns, and now I was to meet him in the flesh. Would the great man prove to be much as I had envisaged him, or was there a disappointment in store for his most ardent admirer?

It was mid-afternoon, I remember, when a brown-uniformed messenger girl tapped on the door of Room 59, opened it in response to Hinton's call, and announced:

"Mr. Hamilton, sir!"

Hinton sprang to his feet, and greeted the distinguished visitor with the greatest cordiality. He relieved him of hat and coat, and piloted him to the large comfortable armchair reserved for callers.

I made a movement to rise, thinking that my presence at the forthcoming discussion might not be welcome.

"All right, Sawways, you needn't go," said Hinton.

"This concerns you, indirectly."

He briefly introduced me to the famous visitor. A box of cigars was produced, and the Editor and his star author plunged into their business. It related, so far as I can recall fifty years after the event, to the launching of a new periodical, for which a series of Hamilton stories was needed to give the precious infant a good start in life.

My recollection of Charles Hamilton is hazy, though I had ample opportunity to study him. He would at that time have been in his early forties, and at the peak of his powers. I confess I was disappointed in my idol. He seemed quite an ordinary and nondescript little man -- an almost colourless personality -- though it is but fair to say that most men would have appeared ordinary and nondescript and colourless beside Herbert Alan Hinton, a man of magnificent physique, and handsome as a Greek god. In the overpowering presence of this Olympian, lesser mortals seemed visibly to shrink and Charles Hamilton was no exception.

Yet, although the physical giant might dwarf and dominate the little man in the armchair, that little man was undoubtedly the intellectual giant, and as such he commanded my attention and respect.

I hung upon his every word; but as the conversation was confined to "shop", I cannot be a Boswell and place on record any profound or witty utterances of the Greyfriars creator. He addressed me once or twice, it is true, but I think we were each a little nervous of the other; and the entrance of the office-boy with a tray of tea provided a welcome diversion.

Charles Hamilton stayed very little longer. A cordial handshake with Hinton, a brief nod to me, and the great man was gone.

That was the first and last occasion on which I met the Grand Master of all school story writers. He went back to his flat in Hampstead Garden Suburb, where he had settled for a brief phase in his nomadic life; and Fleet Street and Farringdon Street seldom, if ever, saw him again.

Charles Hamilton remained as enigmatic a person as ever to my colleagues on the MAGNET staff; for when they pressed me for a detailed description of him, I could say little to satisfy their curiosity. For Hamilton at forty was both unassertive and unimpressive. He had made no more impact upon me than I had made upon him. In later life, when he mellowed into the familiar legendary figure in the skull-cap, and smoking his favourite briar, he seemed a much more human and lovable personality.

Since the true identity of "Frank Richards" had been revealed to the world, Hamilton broke down the barriers of reserve which had screened him so long, making him something of a mystery man, and had formed a wide circle of friends and correspondents of all ages. Some of his letters make very entertaining reading — though he still could not resist having an occasional dig at "The Menagerie".

Before me as I write is a photostat reproduction of Charles Hamilton's last sheet of typescript — the opening paragraphs of a Bunter Book which was destined, alas, to remain a fragment. It is a sad relic; yet what more fitting time for Charles Hamilton's transition to the World of Spirit than on Christmas Eve, the joyous magic of which had so often lent enchantment to his stories?

Some writers have lamented that the news of Charles Hamilton's passing spoilt their Christmas. But who would have wished him to struggle on against blindness, increasing infirmities, and the weariness of the weight of years? Here was no sombre tragedy, but rather a timely and a merciful deliverance. He is at peace.

"Content thee howsoever, whose days are done,  
There lies not any troublous thing before,  
Nor sight nor sound to war against thee more,  
For whom all winds are quiet as the sun,  
All waters as the shore."

End.

## FACTS and FIGURES

### W.O.G. LOFTS

#### The End of Sexton Blake.

##### Diary

1944 I find Sexton Blake for the very first time. A ragged copy of the S.B.L. in a 'basher' (hut) in occupied Japanese territory in war-ridden Burmese Jungle.

1946 Back in England I become an avid Blake reader, and seek all the back numbers I can get because, simply, I can read two novels in one evening and the two issues per month are completely inadequate.

1952 I join the Collectors Digest Organisation, and Old Boys Book Club.

1963 During the last ten years it would read like an authors and artists Whose Who to list all the personalities I have met, and Sexton Blake almost became part of my life, and his passing is like losing a close friend. I don't think the majority of O.B.B.C. members could ever realise how closely I was connected with the New Look Blake, and, indeed, many of the present day authors have become personal friends. It would be almost impossible to convey just what the great personal friendship of the editor W.Howard-Baker has meant to me. It has also enabled me to meet many people connected in other fields which has been to my great advantage.

Readers who may fear (perhapst) that the editor is now out of a job, will learn to their great relief, that this fine editor is now in charge of a new series of Libraries dealing with War and Crime entitled ColourBacks.

#### The School of Charles Hamilton.

Jack Bellfield in the last issue of the Golden Hours - is still seeking details of the school that 'Frank Richards' attended. I can tell him and other enthusiasts that this will be recorded with other data in the October issue of Bill Gander's splendid paper "THE STORY PAPER COLLECTOR" Until a few years ago - some of the characteristics of William George Bunter and, in the main of Horace James Coker, could be identified by persons (still living) close to Charles Hamilton; though it is generally admitted, even by his own family, that he kept his early life almost like a state secret.

### Man Finches Bottom.

I was most interested in Vic Colby's data about this hard-cover novel written by Jack Trevor Story. In fact Percy Paynter, the comic editor, was based on a great friend of mine named Basil Reynolds - a nephew of Warwick Reynolds - the famous GEM artist.

Pride of my bookcase is a copy of this book inscribed by Jack for the data I gave him about the old time comics and general conversation about them, that probably inspired him to write the story. There has been no development as yet about the story being in film production - though readers of Jack Trevor Story will be interested to hear that one of his greatest film success's and a great hit in England was 'I've Now - Pay Later' dealing with the hire-purchase system in its lowest form.

### The St. Jim's Terriers.

Who wrote the above GEM story No.63 in 1909? By official records it was undoubtedly Charles Hamilton, where it introduced the weird snakes of Clifton Dane and was the very first story where Glyn the St. Jim's Inventor was mentioned. It is perfectly true that the story falls a long way from the genuine Martin Clifford standard; but much rewriting and revision was done to many of these early stories, which may have had a lot to do with its poorness and belief that another hand had penned it.

Clifton Dane had, of course, made his initial appearance in GEM No.57 entitled 'The Feud of The Fourth' - but the authorship of this is unknown at present, though it is strongly believed to have been the work of a writer other than Charles Hamilton.

### The 200th Collectors Digest.

When Herbert Leckenby died a few years ago, like many others, I thought that this would be the end of our hobby in general, but how glad I am to be proved wrong. Even the most hardened critic would be the first to admit that Eric Payne has done a splendid job in keeping the C.D. going, and with due respect to Herbert, its presentation has improved tremendously.

It is true that many people are critical of the short stories that appear now and then and take the view that this is not the place for them. Especially as substitute writing of St. Jim's stories has been the main attacking controversial theme of many of the leading experts. But one must give due praise however to Eric for trying to do the impossible job of pleasing everybody.

August C.D. No.2001

Many thanks Eric for your good work, and you can rest assured always of plenty of articles from my pen.

End.

## ERNIE CARTER'S

### COLUMN

#### From Here, There and Everywhere

##### L. Charles Douthwaite.

I was very interested in Victor Colby's article on S.S. Gordon which appeared in the January issue of the C.D. and I then thought of another writer who also wrote of the Frozen Worth. Although he contributed only four stories for the Sexton Blake Library in the early days of the Thriller he was a regular writer.

A Yorkshireman by birth, L.C. Douthwaite was educated at Trent College but quickly experienced the call of far off Lands, like S.S. Gordon, and set off to the North of Canada where he prospected for gold in the Hudson Bay area.

Douthwaite held a long war record joining up with the 2nd Field Troop Canadian Engineers in October 1914 and he was transferred to the 1st Canadian Pioneers a year later. He was fighting in France and Belgium throughout 1916 and 1917.

To look at he was very similar in appearance to the late Stanton Hope.

One of his most famous characters in the hard cover books was Corporal Warden of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police.

Douthwaite passed away in the early 1940's about the same time as Robert Murray, Gwyn Evans and Ludbrook Black.

L. Charles Douthwaite could always be classed with such adventure story writers as Stanton Hope, Frank Shaw, S.S. Gordon (who is a brother of Frank Shaw), Eric Townsend and others.

##### Billy Bunter Lantern Slides.

Send for sample slide price 8d. and particulars now to obtain further slides of Greyfriars School.

A. Crisp,  
51 Stourbridge Road,  
Kidderminster.

This ad. appeared in the Champion on December 29, 1923. Does any collector recall these slides? Rally around you Hamilton fans and see how good your memory is.

That reminds me of an issue of Greyfriars characters on cigarette cards made many years ago. Has any collector these in his possession today. I believe they are very rare and costly.

I would be very pleased to get any information on these two unusual branches of Hamiltonia.

### The Passing of Sexton Blake.

Although we are only up to the March copies of the Sexton Blake Library here in Australia it was with much regret I read in the June C.D. of the winding up of the Library. I could not let this opportunity pass without paying tribute to the very last of the Old Boys Papers.

I imagine more lengthy tributes will be paid later. It is to me like something that has gone which will never be replaced. Here in Australia I looked forward to picking up the monthly copies. Not every story appealed to me, in fact sometimes they irritated me. But I realized this was the last link with the glorious years of Old Boys' Papers. Now the chain has been broken. Sympathy to Howard Baker who saved it I believe more than once. I think it could have been saved if it was advertised and displayed more. A little more attractive appearance perhaps.

I have a strange feeling that the publishers did not want it to live. Well, anyway a run of 48 years is something to be proud of -

Vale, Sexton Blake Library -

1915 - 1963

Last of the grand old papers.

### J.W. Wheway.

One of the youngest writers on the A.P. staff in the early twenties was John W. Wheway. He was a very keen worker having a prolific output of stories mostly on football. Perhaps some collectors recall some of his famous football stories which appeared in the Champion and later reprinted in the Boys Friend Library; "The Black Buccaneer", "Paupers of the League", "The Luck Against Him" and many others. For a while Wheway shared the position of second in command with Alfred Edgar on the Champion. I believe he also wrote for the School Friend taking over when Hamilton left off. He shared the stories with L.E. Ransome.

No wonder this author was so talented for he was editor of an amateur magazine at the age of twelve. Whilst serving in the trenches in the First World War he brought out a magazine entitled "The Periodical Recorder" which was a very amusing little book and which did a great deal towards cheering the hearts of his comrades.

For a time he held the position of sub-editorship on "Pluck"

Wheway also wrote a few stories on Sexton Blake.

Addington Symonds paid this tribute to him. -

"A genial quick-witted fellow, he was one of our most valued and expert helpers and always immensely enthusiastic"

Today I believe John W. Wheway is still on the staff of Fleetway Publications. Perhaps Bill Lofts could kindly give me more particulars on the position he holds today.

End.

## COMMENTS

The New Format Sexton Blake Library.

The long-awaited new format S.B.L. has arrived ending months of speculation as to the date of its advent, and the nature of its form. The first of these was No.513, December 1962.

There had been claims that the new format would be similar to that of the Argosy Magazine. Visions of nice large easy to read print, good long stories in chunky pocket book form filled the mind. Yes, the foreign issues were mostly like this, and if the Scandinavians could do it, so could the publishers in the country of Blake's origin.

So dreams were dreamed, but were followed by doubts. The new format should cost about 2/6 per copy, English currency, and we who cared, had no qualms at all in paying this or more for the privilege of having Blake in better form. However, enquiry elicited the fact that no change in price would occur! How then, could the S.B.L. be made to pay for itself?

Well, now we know. The bubble has burst, and our expectations ended. The changes? Three-eighths of an inch longer, five eighths of an inch narrower, but identical in thickness and number of pages!

The chief difference in cover design is the permanent inclusion of Geoffrey Toone's portrait, and a footnote giving a quotation from a famous person. The 1st and 2nd featured quotations from prominent ex Scotland Yard men, while the 3rd and 4th had Agatha Christie and Leslie Charteris doing the honours.

I think the last named feature is a really excellent one, and would certainly do much towards encouraging people to buy, as noted persons such as those mentioned, would be far too jealous of their reputations to recommend anything other than the best.

The featuring of Geoffrey Toone's portrait on the cover of each new format issue, is another matter. So Geoffrey Toone played the part of Sexton Blake in a film, but the film was apparently quite a minor affair, and certainly did not have what it takes to reach Australian theatres. I can't help thinking that continual identification of the S.B.L. with a little-known, and relatively unimportant film, would do the S.B.L. more harm than good. Surely the S.B.L. with its amazing traditions, stretching seventy years in the past, has a more substantial claim to fame?

We who are no longer young, deplore the retention, in the new format, of the fine print that made the reading of the S.B.L. literally, a headache. Would-be middle-aged purchasers would surely eschew to buy and read, when a casual inspection revealed the microscopic type.

Here we have the S.B.L. in a format designed to set it apart from previous juvenile associations, yet persisting with print with which the average adult reader would be hard pressed to cope.

Instead of the previous two-columned pages, the print now runs unbroken across the page, reminiscent of the S.E.L. at the end of World War II.

Well there it is. Not a bad little paper for a bob (English), but not what we had been led to expect or had chosen to hope for. Ah! What might have been, what might have been!

S.E.L. 513 "The Man Who Killed Me" by Arthur Maclean.

At least two readers known to me, independently identified this first new format story as a reprint.

I thought it would be of interest to dig out the original story, and compare the two versions. The original was found to be S.E.L. 3rd series 398 January, 1958. Unquestionably the same story, the author in each case was given as Arthur Maclean. However, there were many variations in story detail as the following comparison will show.

S.E.L. 398 "Redhead for Danger" became S.E.L.513 "The Man Who Killed Me". The victim, red-headed, German Eva Kasterman, became blonde Swede Helga Lindstrom. An upstairs flatlet in the building where the victim resided cost Tinker £3. in S.E.L. 398, and seven guineas in S.E.L. 513. (shocking increase in cost of living in England since 1958 apparently!)

Eva was stabbed to death, and lay in the pool of black, coagulating blood (with hovering fly waiting to settle) beloved of the early New Order S.E.L.'s. Helga, on the other hand, was merely strangled, and made a clean, if unlovely, corpse.

The original motive for murder was the theft of a silver cup, thought to be the Holy Grail. However, moving with the times, the motive in the later version was a series of tape recordings containing highly confidential conference decisions with respect to the entry of England into the Common Market! That's bringing things up-to-date with a vengeance!

And so the twin stories went on, running parallel to the very end, when the murderer of the first story ran himself through with his swordstick, whereas his opposite number of the second story merely shot himself to death.

Both these stories were excellent. The first one, however, because of the short-lived magazine section appearing in the S.E.L. in those days, occupied only 53 pages, whereas the newer version consisted of 62 pages of a much smaller print. The later, and longer version, thus gave Mr. Maclean greater scope for characterisation, description and fuller story treatment of a novel that was well worth amplifying and reprinting.

S.E.L. 514 "A Corpse for Christmas" by W.A. Hallinger.

Stately Homes of England, Rustic Villages of England and the Dockland Areas of the River Thames have always provided ideal backdrops for Sexton Blake stories.

The story under review therefore invited success in featuring Dedleigh Abbey of Sussex, home of the Duke and Duchess of Derwentwater. To secure that success beyond doubt, it featured not only a Xmas gathering at the aforesaid stately home, but a gathering that consisted of some remarkably interesting people.

The Duke and Duchess, we are told, would engage in virtually any form of illegality because of their perpetual penury, robbing, forging and swindling with impunity.

Sexton Blake cherished an odd fondness for them, perhaps from his knowledge of their sheer incompetence as crooks. All along the line they had failed in whatever criminal enterprise they had undertaken, and though they were completely amoral, they had a wide-eyed ingenuousness in their lack of morals which was almost engaging.

The Duke himself had found that the world looked a great deal more palatable when viewed through a faint fuzz of alcohol. Sharp edges softened. Hard realities smoothed into acceptable half-truths. To him it was a very happy discovery.

A great fire of yule logs blazed in the cavernous chimney of their ancestral home. Holly and mistletoe festooned the portraits of past Derwentwaters on panelled walls, suits of armour, spears, swords and clubs were likewise decorated.

The guests began to assemble.

Jeremy Tuft, thin-faced, weedy, with slightly bulging eyes, mouth with a cynical knowing sneer. A writer, whose best paid work was never published, for as a result of his ability to spy, pry and snoop, stories would emerge which would be offered to, and purchased by, the object of this triple-barrelled attention, but certainly not for publication.

Paunchy, balding Horace J. Middlemerch with the pouched face of a bloodhound, was a film producer. He arrived with green-eyed, red-headed film starlet Norma Day. This girlie stuck to Middlemarch like a leech, determined to get right through to him, and hence to the film part she wanted so desperately.

Try as he certainly did, a baffled Tinker failed completely to divert her from her single-minded purpose.

Anthony Quidley was the Duke's solicitor. A thin stoop-shouldered individual in his fifties, with a nose as sharp as a dagger, and a tongue to match. Dressed in an old-fashioned suit of funereal black, this dried up old stick was completely devoid of humour, but had a great partiality for Creme-de-Menthe.

Humphrey Ragout was a complete contrast, an insurance broker, he was a jolly, fat, red-faced, booming life-of-the-party sort of man.

Vernon Miles, film actor with the sinister bulge in his brief case, and the vast Sebastian Eades, publisher of the works of new off-beat authors, completed the list.

However, one must not forget Blenkins the Butler with the penchant for taking super-speed pictures of the quaint doings among the guests for paid newspaper publication.

The slaying of one guest by the dagger of an ancient suit of armour, and another by smutting him in the outside kitchen oven with sufficient dry cleaning fluid to make it a lethal chamber, was most appropriate. The presence of the guest in the oven was eventually revealed when the stove was once more in use and Sexton Blake was made to emulate a Bisto Kid in following the characteristic roasting smell.

Damaging information in Jeremy Tuft's latest manuscript was behind all the trouble, and the murderer thought himself safe when he destroyed the author and all copies of the manuscript.

It did not occur to him that the whole thing was recorded in instantly readable form on the long carbon-polyethelene tape in the electric typewriter. But Sexton Blake was aware of the possibility, and took full advantage of it.

I loved the closing scenes of this book. Justice had triumphed, and church bells were pealing far off, faint, yet very clear in the cold night. Their sound held all the promise of Xmas. Snow had begun to fall again, a soft, gentle, Xmas snow.

Blake stood at the window and watched it come down, and with the sound of the distant church bells, and the sight of the soft falling snowflakes, a kind of peace entered his heart. There would be Xmas still. Xmas Eve stretched ahead, then Xmas Day. Fires would crackle, chestnuts pop, carols would be sung. There would be games and jollity and a super abundance to eat. The promise of Xmas would be fulfilled.

Sexton Blake turned away from the window, and the light of hope was in his eyes again.

End.

#### MR. TWYMAN ANSWERS MR. LOFTS.

I note that W.O.G.Lofts delicately accuses me in his 'Facts and Figures' of conveying the wrong impression about Bessie Hunter in the SCHOOL FRIEND - and about the entire paper in general, for that matter - when I quoted a remark by Reginald Eves, its first Editor, in my article on Hedley O'Mant (p.40, No.5 GOLDEN HOURS).

The substance of my quote was that Bessie B. proved to be markedly less popular with his girl readers of the SCHOOL FRIEND than her brother William George was with the boys who read the MAGNET, and that Reg. Eves finally realised that what was wrong was her fatness. He had failed to recognise in the first place girlhood's built-in preference for slimness, he explained, and had committed a psychological error. His girl readers dreaded even the thought of Bunterish girth.

Blithely dropping the Bessie Hunter subject without having further discussed it, Mr. Loft thereupon indulgently goes on to remedy the wrong impression he claimed I was giving by asserting firmly how Charles Hamilton was ordered to cease writing for the SCHOOL FRIEND on the ground that his extra work was robbing the MAGNET, etc. of prior commitments.

Maybe I'm a bit daller than I thought I was, but I just can't see what the one subject has to do with the other. All I can do is to assert in my turn that the incidental mention of Bessie Hunter's obesity was made to me personally by Reginald Eves himself, and is not the result of any third-party historical hearsay. — H.W.Twyman.