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IN THIS NUMBER—

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Writers

The
"Thri'penny" Libraries

A QUITE RARE STORY WEEKLY

The EMPIRE Library

By C. F. F. R.

EARLY in the year 1910 a paper for boys and girls was launched with an intended special appeal to "Colonial" readers.* The paper was therefore called the "Empire" Library, and was "printed and published by the Proprietors at 23, Bouverie Street, London, England." Who the publishers were we are not told directly but it is to be inferred that the Amalgamated Press was responsible for the new paper inasmuch as that firm's other publications were advertised extensively in the "Empire" and the serials in this paper were reprinted in the A. P. "Boys' Friend 3d. Library."

The publishing date of No. 1, Volume 1, was Saturday, February 19, 1910. It consisted of 20 pages, of which four were cover

pages and 16 numbered pages. The cover pages were red and and printed black, the inside pages white. It sold for a half-penny and came out once a week.

The contents were a serial and a main story, similar to the "Gem" and "Magnet" Libraries. The main stories at first were about Rylcombe Grammar School and were written by Prosper Howard. This school was located at Rylcombe, Sussex, near St. Jim's, the famous fiction school featured in the "Gem" Library (see "S.P.C." No. 2, April-June, 1941). The two schools were rivals in both the "Gem" and the "Empire" but in the latter, naturally, it was the Grammar School that came out on top, in the former it was St. Jim's.

The first Rylcombe Grammar

* Nowadays, of course, the appeal would be made to "Dominion" boys and girls; but I may add to this that the word "colonial," so often used by die-hard Britons when referring to any part of the British Empire outside the Mother Country, is again coming into vogue—this time being used by the Dominion peoples themselves as a term to be proud of, rather than in the semi-derogatory sense as it was previously used.—C.F.F.R.

School story was called "Gordon Gay's Company," and dealt with a new boy from Australia whose antics became his name and who proceeded to liven up the "dull old place," as he put it, by forming a brand new junior school theatrical company. This company formed the basis for many of the earlier school stories in the new Library and paved the way for Gordon Gay to take over the junior captaincy of the school from the Headmaster's son, Frank Monk.

On page ii of the cover of No. 1 was a full page ad. showing the complete front cover of No. 106 of the "Magnet" Library. This Library was fully dealt with in "S.P.C." No. 2. Many similar "Magnet" ads. were used in the earlier numbers. On page 1 proper the Editor sent greetings to all sorts and daughters of the Empire, and in this issue a world-wide postcard exchange was instituted to "form a link between all readers who owe kinship to the Mother country."

In No. 3 two more Cornstalks arrived at the school; at least two more Australians, for it is not mentioned that they came from any particular State in the Commonwealth. The name "Cornstalk," often erroneously applied to all Australians, refers, I believe, only to natives of New South Wales. They were the

brothers Wootton; and so was born the company of "The Three Wallabies."

The serial running at the beginning was called "The Mystery Man"—"a thrilling tale of London's lights and shadows," by Lawrence Miller. Issue No. 3 boasted one illustration by the well-known "Gem" Library artist R. J. Macdonald, and the next seven or eight were illustrated by the equally well-known "Magnet" Library artist C. H. Chapman.

The school story in No. 15 was entitled "Empire Day at Rylcombe" and was a really topical story for the new paper. The Grammar School, St. Jim's and the "Magnet" school Greyfriars competed for a rifle-shooting trophy. Who won it? Need I answer? The "Empire" was the Grammar School paper!

In the next issue the Editor promised his readers "something special" and soon we find the school story cut out and a series of stories dealing with the adventures of a young clerk in London business life started. Jack Rhodes gets the limelight with a bang! But Gordon Gay pops back in No. 17 for a single act, then Jack again in No. 18 for several weeks. A new serial, a school story, started in this number, written by Charles Hamilton, who originated the

St. Jim's tales in "Pluck" Library in 1906. He called the serial "The Rivals of St. Kit's," and this and his "The Rivals of St. Wode's" in the second "Empire" series were very well-loved stories in their day.

With few exceptions, including one or two Grammar School yarns, Alfred Barnett's "Jack Rhodes" stories were featured almost to the end of the first series. Gordon Gay came back in No. 32; and then the Editor tried out on his patient readers sea, football and detective stories in rapid succession. Circulation was evidently dropping and a change had to be made. "Panther" Grayle, detective, seemed the best bet and author Jack Lancaster had the honor of closing down the first series in No. 36, dated October 22nd, 1910, and of front-paging No. 1 of the new "Empire" Enlarged Library.

The new series was the same price and consisted of 8 pages, each twice the size of the first series pages—the cover pages being numbered and included in the eight. This series was paged consecutively right through, similar to the famous "Boys' Friend" (see "S.P.C." No. 1) and totalled 232 pages in all. In one sense the paper was definitely enlarged—the size of page; in another the claim was not quite so accurate,

for the space content was actually cut by four (small) cover pages, the equivalent of two of the big pages.

All the pages were white, printed in black. No. 1, Vol. 1 (New Series), contained five stories, of which three were serials—"The Rivals of St. Kit's," continued from the old series, an adventure story by F. St. Mars, and a new school story, "Cousin Ethel's Schooldays"—"a tale of Tom Merry's chum," by Martin Clifford, author of the Tom Merry-St. Jim's stories in the "Gem." The subtitle is misleading; I don't think Tom was specially singled out by Ethel. Figgins of the New House at St. Jim's was always her greatest admirer and I think his feelings were returned. Perhaps "Tom Merry & Co.'s chum" would have been better." This famous story was reprinted twice, once in the "Boys' Friend 3d. Library," and again in the "Gem" about 1915. It is interesting to note that Cousin Ethel—she is the cousin of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, of St. Jim's—was going to school again nineteen years later in the "Gem," to a school called Spalding, near Wayland, the big town not far from St. Jim's. Quite a lass!

Issue No. 5 was a "Grand Christmas Double Number," priced at one penny, with sixteen

pages. A complete Boy Scout story by Andrew Gray was published, and "Algy" contributed his weekly humorous sketch of P. C. Dewdrop & Co. as usual. There were one and a half pages of advertisements, the back page being a complete adv. for the miscellaneous gift articles of Messrs. Pain Bros., "the presents house," of Hastings, England.

Among the artists contributing were T. W. Holmes and Warwick Reynolds, the latter's illustrations unsigned but unmistakable; the front page of No. 6 was almost wholly taken up by a picture by this renowned black-and-white artist, Reynolds. These are the earliest illustrations I have ever seen by Reynolds, in a publication of the Amalgamated Press. From No. 6 on there was a fair amount of his work in this volume.

Gordon Gay & Co. reappeared in No. 9 with a short complete one-page story. Seventeen of these were published in the new series. Little more than sketches, they did not contain much story interest. "The Rivals of St. Wode's" commenced in No. 11 and was as popular as the first Hamilton serial. P. Haywood, an artist often associated with the Owen Conquest stories of Rookwood School, illustrated the first instalment and others. "Panther" Grayle's sleuthing was

still going strong and presumably must have been a drawing card. Each adventure of his was a complete story. No. 15 saw the first instalment of "The Dark Lantern" (no author given), described as "A tale of Charles Peace, showing the baneful influence of bad companionship on a young boy, and the result of weakness of character, coupled with a clever but distorted mind."

"The Scapegrace of the Regiment" (also no author), a fine serial of army life, was now in the running, accompanied by some first-class drawings of Warwick Reynolds. The latter inaugurated a new cover-top design in No. 21 showing the figure of Britannia between a British schoolboy and a boy in a scout's hat. He also contributed a magnificent half-page illustration for the Charles Peace serial. Here are the title words: "Before the red-hot iron bar could be brought Charlie Peace darted into the cage, and faced the infuriated lioness as she crouched, snarling, over the motionless body of the girl tamer." Not often do boys' papers get the services of one such as Warwick Reynolds.

In "Shoulder to Shoulder" by the Editor readers were promised a new tale of Tom Merry & Co. by Martin Clifford, "Tom Merry's Island." This never materialised

The "Thri'penny" Libraries

By W. H. G.

THESE pocket-sized paper-covered story-books have been very popular with the reading public both in Great Britain and overseas for many years. A series that continued publication until quite recently dates back to 1906—it is the "Boys' Friend Library." It was commenced mainly to reprint in book form the more popular serials that had appeared in the weekly "Boys' Friend," "Boys' Realm,"

and "Boys' Herald," and other papers; though some original stories were included.

The first two titles, issued probably in June, 1906, were: No. 1, "Jack, Sam & Pete's Adventures in Africa," No. 2, "Jack, Sam & Pete's Treasure Hunt." Of the next four numbers, two also featured the famous trio, whose adventures in the weekly "Marvel" Library had skyrocketed that paper to the heights of popular-

The EMPIRE Library (concluded from previous page)

in the "Empire" but, judging from the description he gave it, it was almost certainly run in the "Gem" when Tom Merry & Co. visited the South Seas in Nos. 173-175 of that paper, published May-June, 1911.

In No. 21 we also find the 47th list of the Postcard Exchange which was started in No. 1 of the first series. By this time comics had crept in to occupy the whole back page and from No. 23 on it was a losing battle for the brave little paper.

There was a drawing by Briscoe, another A. P. artist (who had somehow managed to survive the years), for a new football serial in No. 27 called

"Crocked,"—"a tale of the Blue Crusaders," by A. S. Hardy. In later years, around 1930, there were other football yarns about the Blue Crusaders; e.g., in the "Magnet" No. 1183, "Boss of the Blues" (no author given) is advertised for the "Boys' Friend 4d. Library." I wonder if any of the same characters appear.

The stories and serials for the most part now all had a sporting flavor preparatory to switching readers to another paper—if possible. And so with No. 28, Vol. 1 New Series, dated May 6th, 1911, the little paper gave its last gasp and buried its identity in the mysteries of the "Boys' Realm Football and Sports Library."

ity; one featured Nelson Lee, for many years a fiction-detective rivalling Sexton Blake; and another was "The Boys of St. Basil's," by Henry St. John—this had been a very popular serial in the weekly "Boys' Friend" in the late '90's.

The "B.F. Library" was published regularly through the years, a varying number being issued each month at different periods—two, three, four, five a month, and then back to four—until midway through 1940, when paper shortage brought about its suspension.

During the last few months of its run the title was gradually changed to the "Knockout" and the "Bullseye" Libraries, "Boys' Friend" being dropped, thus severing a link with 1895, when the paper from which the Library took its name was founded.

Another popular series is the "Sexton Blake Library;" started in 1915, it has been going strong ever since, and has been devoted entirely to the exploits of that great fiction-detective, Sexton Blake, his assistant Tinker, and a host of more or less important supporting characters, good, bad and indifferent—including the bloodhound, Pedro.

During its earlier years the "Boys' Friend Library" just about covered the entire range of story-

telling for boys and young men, school, sport, detective and adventure tales being included. As other "Libraries" were started that specialized in one type of story—"S. B. Library," "School-boys' Own Library" (in 1925), "Football & Sports Library"—so the stories in the "B. F. Library" became to a large extent of the general adventure type.

Issued by the same publishers have been other series—"Champion Library" and the "Thriller Library." The "Sexton Blake Library" is the only one still issued. It started a new series in 1925, and a second new series this year.

It should be explained that "Thri'penny" refers to the price at which the "Libraries" were originally published—three pence (6c), but for many years now they have cost more—those still issued selling in Great Britain at six pence (12c).

Page size of the "Libraries" has been held at $5\frac{1}{2} \times 7$ inches—but about twenty years ago some issues of the "B. F. Library," at least, were produced with the measurements reversed, so that the pages were 7 inches wide by $5\frac{1}{2}$ deep. The number of pages have varied from a high of 120 to a low of 64, plus covers.

The "Libraries" may not be collected as much as the story weeklies, but collected they are.

Some Former Boys' Writers

IN the days that are past I knew several men who had much to do with the establishment and subsequent prosperity of the A. P. boys' journals. Some few reminiscences may be of interest.

Henry St. John (really Henry St. John Cooper . . .) was a very good pal of mine. S. Clarke Hook, of "Jack, Sam and Pete" fame; Sidney Drew; Ernest Brindle, the war correspondent; Beverley Kent—this was not his real name—who claimed to have introduced Pedro into the "Sexton Blake" stories, though that claim was contested; Reginald Wray (another pen-name)—these are names I recall vividly.

Harcourt Burrage I never met. I put him first of all, though in my day he had shot his bolt. A great man at his job, Burrage! His "Ching-Ching" stories cannot be beaten, and "Tom Tartar" ranks high. He was no mere sensationalist, either.

Sidney Drew came nearest him

in his own line. Both gave the boys thrilling adventure and humour of the "custard-pie" type. Drew's school stories of Calcroft were fine value, and so were the later yarns in which the Chinese prince who figured in them shared the perils of Ferrers Lord and his associates. Gan-Waga, the Eskimo, and the comic sailors

played much the same parts as Samson, the negro, Bill Grunt, and Eddard Cutten in the "Ching Ching" series. Yet there was no plagiarism.

A very competent workman was Drew. I

remember commissioning him for a Ferrers Lord serial and telling him that I wanted him to bring in a new character, a fine fellow, who was to die heroically at the finish. He did it—and did it well.

"Jack, Sam and Pete" sent the circulation of the "Marvel" bounding upwards. The Editor of that paper had not anticipated anything of the sort; but he tried to make the most of it. At least

This article—"by a former Amalgamated Press Editor"—is condensed from "The Collector's Miscellany," Issue No. 11, for May-June, 1931.

twice—I believe thrice—in other papers Clarke Hook was assigned to the creation of another set of characters. I remember Ra (a Japanese), Rob, and Rupert; particulars of the others elude me.* Nothing came of them.

I have never quite understood why the "Jack, Sam and Pete" stories should have such a vogue. Jack and Sam were mere lay figures. One was an Englishman, one an American; but it was only by their names one kept this in mind. Pete was a big, good-natured negro, whose chief occupation in life seemed to be to turn bad characters over his knee and spank the seats of their trousers!

Clarke Hook loved his work. He would willingly write all day, and half the night too. But he only wrote; it seems to me he never read anything! He was absolutely ignorant of the flora and fauna of the regions of the earth, or of conditions of life in other countries. I can remember Jack, Sam and Pete coming upon a pub. in an African jungle. One of my colleagues asked me if I could tell him of any books that

* "Dan, Bob, and Darkey," in "Boys' Friend," 1914-5.—W.H.G.

FOR SALE—"Back Numbers" of "Sexton Blake Library"—2 for 15c., plus postage.—Wm. H. Gander, Transcona.

would help for Australian local colour. I enquired for what he wanted them, and he replied for the use of Clarke Hook.

"Don't worry," I said; "if Clarke Hook wants lions there, or giraffes in Siberia, he'll put 'em there—he has done worse before!"

(Concluded in next issue)

BRITISH BOYS' BOOKS AND PAPERS WANTED

By C. F. F. RICKARD,
1512 First Street West, Calgary,
Alberta, Canada.

**Chuckles, Popular, Dread-
nought, Greyfriars Herald**
—any issues.

Gem Library—½d. Series—Nos.
1-25, year 1907.
New Series,— Nos. 1-300;
442-777; 1588-1611.

Magnet Library—Nos. 1-777.
Penny Popular— Nos. 1-25;
222-286; 1st Series; any
issues of 2nd Series.

Nelson Lee Library— Nos.
24 and 25 of the final series.

Schoolboys Own Library—
Any numbers written by
Martin Clifford and Owen
Conquest up to No. 200.

Triumph—Nos. 812 and 814.

“The Collector’s Miscellany”

It was with pleasure that we recently received, from its new place of publication, Dundee, Scotland, copies of No. 1 of the Fourth Series of “The Collector’s Miscellany,” which we have missed since its last appearance about two years ago. This issue, while smaller than formerly, as becomes a war-time edition, is still a very praiseworthy effort, and we wish the new publisher, Mr. J. A. Birkbeck, every success.

The name of Mr. Joseph Parks, founder and for many years publisher of the magazine, appears on the front page as the editor.

Letters from old friends of the “C. M.” will, we feel sure, be a very welcome encouragement to Mr. Birkbeck to “carry on” as well as he can under present war conditions. His address is: 52 Craigie Avenue, Dundee, Scotland.

WHEN DID THEY START --- AND STOP?

It has been suggested that a list of the various boys’ papers issued in England during the past forty years or so, with dates of the first and last numbers, and the total number issued, would be of use and interest.

There is probably little doubt about this; but the problem would be to gather together the necessary information about the

many papers that have come and gone in this period. Not many persons, even collectors of long standing, would know these particulars about all of them.

If those who are interested in this suggestion will send along the data concerning the papers they are acquainted with, I will endeavor to make up a start-and-stop list that would be included in some future issue.—W.H.G.

UNION JACK, MARVEL, & PLUCK LIBRARIES

These three weeklies, published in Britain in past years, would form the subject of an interesting article, if written by someone acquainted with them. Who will

volunteer? The editor, while perhaps able to do something with the “U. J.,” could not cope with the “Pluck” and the “Marvel” Libraries.

: : NOTES : :

The place of honor in this issue is given to the excellent article on the comparatively little remembered "Empire" Library, which flourished briefly in 1910-11, being the third member of the group of which the "Gem" was the original member and the "Magnet" the second.

It is particularly pleasing to me to be able to present this article, as I have a soft spot in my heart for this paper, even if I did part with an incomplete set that unexpectedly came into my possession a couple of years ago. Maybe I'll get a complete set some day. Anyway, I'm hoping! The "Empire" was the first paper to catch my youthful fancy, and well do I remember buying up back issues from the local news-agent—one copy every time I had a halfpenny to spare—in an effort to complete my set. I never did complete it, and had left England before the paper had run its course.

In No. 4 I hope to present another article by the same contributor, dealing with the artists who illustrated the favorite papers of our youth.

☞ ☞ ☞

The situation regarding collecting of the old story papers in

Great Britain is summed up in the following extract from a recent letter from a prominent English collector:

" . . . There is little activity in this country nowadays although a few of us manage to keep the embers alight. I anticipated that books (i.e.: "penny dreadfuls," story papers, etc.) would be plentiful and easily obtained . . . but I soon reversed this view. Papers are smaller and fewer, less people buy and advertise therein and contact is lost. I hope that the majority . . . are too busy to bother for then we may hope that many old books will survive but I fear that an incalculable number will meet their end in the pulping plant ere hostilities cease."

☞ ☞ ☞

And that's all for this time.

—W.H.G.

FOR SALE!
BLACKWOOD'S Mag.—
Volume XCI, Jan.-June, 1862.
Price . . . \$1.00

WM. H. GANDER
Transcona, Manitoba, Canada

WANTED

TO COMPLETE MY COLLECTION
OF THE FOLLOWING BRITISH
STORY PAPERS

"Magnet" Library

ABOUT 200 SCATTERED NUM-
BERS BETWEEN Nos. 1 AND 1400

"Boys' Friend" [NEW SERIES]

SOME 600 NUMBERS BETWEEN
1 & 838, AND BETWEEN 1120 & 1378

¶ This is the large page, green paper, story week-
ly, not the small page "Boys' Friend Library"

Am also interested in the GEM Library, the POPULAR,
the EMPIRE Library, and GREYFRIARS HERALD



ALL LETTERS ANSWERED—LISTS SUPPLIED
ON REQUEST



WM. H. GANDER

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