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A Live Paper Of The '20's--With A Word On Its
Companions *Pluck* and *The Rocket*

By HERBERT LECKENBY

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By F. ADDINGTON SYMONDS

Founder and First Editor



: : AN AMATEUR MAGAZINE : :

THE CHAMPION

A Live Paper Of The '20's---With A Word On Its
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By HERBERT LECKENBY

IF MY LOT in life had been different and fortune had led me to the editorial chair of a boys' paper I believe, given the task of producing a new one, my finished article would have been very much on the lines of *The Champion*, which first saw the light of day on the 28th of January, 1922. For if that paper had been on sale during my school-days it would have been a veritable feast of literature and an eternal joy to me.

Commenting on *The Champion* recently Mr. Wm. H. Gander wrote that he thought a devotee of the old *Boys' Friend* who had obtained a run of the first hundred *Champions* would find in them much to gladden his heart, or words to that effect. Well, it happens that some time ago I did obtain almost such a run and that is exactly the effect it had upon me. And with good reason, for in *The Champion* there was much to remind me of that first favourite of my youth. Making allowances for change in make-up it was as if the old "Green 'un" had been born again and the spirit of Hamilton Edwards had returned

to the realms in which he had once ruled. I have a copy of No. 1 before me now—let us have a look at it!

The size was somewhat new for an Amalgamated Press boys' paper, a compromise between *The Boys' Friend* and *The Magnet*, about $11\frac{1}{2}$ by $8\frac{3}{4}$ inches. The cover was white, printed in red and blue; frankly, rather an undistinguished example of colour printing. The large illustration was drawn by Fred Bennett. There were 28 pages, including the cover. Most of the inside front cover was occupied by "Champion Chat." This was written in vigorous, confidential style. I have it on the best authority that the editor was Mr. F. Addington Symonds. He was an indefatigable, dynamic character, who believed in whetting the appetites of his readers regarding future attractions, boosting the authors and the artists, inviting questions, and generally making the readers feel they really played a part in the destinies of the paper. Later he wrote stories under the name of Earle Danesford.

On page 3 there started the

first serial, "The Bell of Santadino," by Eric W. Townsend, described as the greatest adventure serial ever written. It was illustrated by Fred Bennett, an old hand, of course. Next, another serial, "Sons of Steel," by Allan Blair, a dear and familiar name to those who had known the *Friend* of yester-year. The drawings were by Harry Lane, of whom the same can be said.

Then, "The Outcast of St. Basil's," by Henry St. John—needless to say; pictures by R. J. Macdonald. Well, didn't I say there was much of *The Boys' Friend* about *The Champion*? More than twenty years earlier the first St. Basil's story had appeared in the former, and hundreds of Macdonald's drawings had adorned its pages.

Following, we find what was to become a real feature of *The Champion*—the complete story supplement. This ran to eight pages and the story was claimed to be fifteen thousand words in length. It was printed in small, almost too small, type. In the first issue the story was of football, "Paid to Lose," and bore still another familiar name, that of Arthur S. Hardy. The artist was, I think, new, Frank R. Grey.

After the supplement came the first of a series of detective stories—"Curtis Carr, the Flying

Detective," by Geoffrey Rayle; artist, another old-timer, Fred Holmes. Then a fourth serial, "Foul Play," by Ernest Scott, pictured by L. Gunnis.

Thus, the paper carried four serials, a long complete, and a short story of a series, which was exactly what *The Boys' Friend* offered in its, to me, halcyon days. And of the men who contributed, we find reappearing Allan Blair, Henry St. John, A. S. Hardy, R. J. Macdonald, Harry Lane, Fred Bennett, and Fred Holmes.

In addition, there were articles on football, "success talks," and "How to make a table gramophone." This, too, is interesting. Over each title heading there was a real "boost" to the story, several sentences in length; each column had a crisp sentence at the head bearing on the story below, and there were footlines to every page. In short, every inch of space was used to effect, giving the whole paper a vigorous lively appearance.

For two years at least the paper carried on very much on the same lines. Many fine serials appeared. With No. 7 there started "The War of Revenge," by Leslie Beresford, a story of a conflict with Germany in 1962! Mr. Beresford was optimistic—Hitler did not wait as long as

that. A little later there appeared "Strongbow of the Circus," by Martin Shaw. This story, under the title of "Young Strongbow," had appeared in *The Boys' Realm* years before. Some of the original drawings by A. H. Clarke appeared with it.

I HAVE mentioned *The Champion* associations with *The Boys' Friend*, but now came a link with another old paper, *The Big Budget*, for several contributors to that production of Pearson's made their reappearance, including Arthur Brooke, Stacey Blake, Raymond Lee, Carass Yorke (really Arthur Brooke), and Sidney Drew. The latter, however, was a regular contributor to *The Boys' Friend* also.

Henry St. John wrote another school story, whilst Henry T. Johnson—another old-timer of both the B. F. and B. B.—came along with several long completes in that quaint melodramatic style of his. Other familiar hands among the artists were H. M. Lewis, T. W. Holmes, and Leonard Shields. Newer ones who put in a lot of work were J. H. Valda and Arthur Jones. A praiseworthy feature, by the way, was that alongside the name of the author appeared also that of the artist, an example that might well have been followed by other editors.

During those two years a

school serial was always running; otherwise, a feature was made of what the editor called "off the trail" stories. These included stories with titles like "Rivals for Atlantis," by Arthur Brooke, "Sinister Island," by Sidney and Francis Warwick, "Zara of the Earth Men," by Earle Danesford, and "The Scarlet Anchor," by Stephen Hood. *The Champion* had its own special picturesque detectives, such as Panther Grayle, the "Modern Methods" Detective, and Curtis Carr, the Flying Detective.

That *The Champion* was a success about this time is proved by the fact that on October 28th, 1922, a companion paper, *Pluck*, came on the scene. It was the same size and, except that for a time its pages were pink, it was practically identical with *The Champion*. Then, on the 14th of February, 1923, the two became a trio with the advent of *The Rocket*. This was slightly larger in page size, otherwise it was again on the same lines.

It was soon apparent, however, that *Pluck* was not doing too well. Broadcasting at that time was making rapid strides and there was an attempt to cash in on the new wonder, for stories and articles dealing almost entirely with it were introduced, but apparently did not prove a success for they

were soon dropped. I do not know the details but I think I am right in saying that both *Pluck* and *The Rocket* had comparatively short lives.

TO RETURN to *The Champion*, but a very different *Champion*, for I now jump ahead eight years, to No. 546, July 16th, 1932. I know not when the change took place following those first one hundred copies—but what a change! The cover was similar, otherwise the paper was unrecognizable. The lively "Chat" page had been reduced to a mere half-column, and gone were the snappy headings and footlines. All the authors had gone and were replaced by names almost all unknown to me—Donald Dare, Jack Maxwell, Douglas Dundee, Edwin Dale. Changes must be expected in eight years, but this seemed to be drastic, to say the least. Gone, too, were the old artists and the new ones were nowhere mentioned by

name. The stories—well, I don't know what to say about them. They reminded me of those film serials of the silent days, telling of the adventures of Elmo Lincoln and Pearl White. One story, one of a series, tells of the deeds of one "Slogger the Logger." It's a fantastic sort of yarn with a cricket atmosphere, and we are told of "The Six-Hit that blew up a Lumber Camp Dam." Glancing through this effort I think of those grand, thrilling stories of the king of games written by Richard Randolph, and I sigh for the days that are gone.

In justification of that change I suppose it can be said that *The Champion* is very much the same today, if a little thinner, when most other boys' papers have vanished. It would appear, too, that I should not have made, after all, a very successful editor—nevertheless, I am unrepentant.

EDITOR'S NOTE—While this article was on its way to Canada another reader of *The Story Paper Collector*, Mr. Harry Dowler, quite unaware that it had been written, got in touch with Mr. F. Addington Symonds, with whom he had business relations. S. P. C. was mentioned and Mr. Addington Symonds, who was the first Editor of *The Champion*, very kindly volunteered to write an article himself. He promptly did so, and his contribution, a most interesting one, appears elsewhere in this issue. The two articles coming so closely together form a remarkable coincidence.

The Story Of THE CHAMPION

By F. ADDINGTON SYMONDS

Founder and First Editor

THE CHAMPION was an attempt to fulfil a school-boy ideal.

From the age of eight, while living with my parents in Cape Town, I took a lively interest in all the boys' papers I could buy, borrow or scrounge, including some which, on account of their titles—*Marvel*, *True Blue*, *Deadwood Dick*, etc.—I was forbidden to read but contrived nevertheless to smuggle in. My chief favourites were *The Big Budget* and *The Boys' Leader*, and, although I also read *The Boys' Friend*, *Realm*, and *Herald*, I preferred the first-named because they seemed to me to be more intimate and friendly. Indeed, I wrote to the Editor of these papers, Mr. Arthur Brooke, when I was well under ten years old and received a long and enthusiastic reply; and from that day to this I have kept faithfully in touch with him—indeed it was only a week or so ago that we had lunch together! We met in person for the first time long after both his papers had closed down and when I came to London at the age of twenty-two.

The outstanding characteristic of Arthur Brooke's papers was their strong "personal touch" which was a real link between editor, contributors, and readers. Something of the same kind was attempted by Hamilton Edwards in his group of papers, but one got the impression that this was stereotyped, that the editorial chats were not actually written by the editor, that the editor's signature at the foot was little more than a rubber stamp.

It was this "personal touch" which was the first and most important part of my ideal in starting *The Champion*. I wanted to establish a real bond between editor, contributor, and readers, to write all the editorial chats myself, to answer every single letter myself and to sign it with my own hand. I am glad to say that I realized all these dreams, save only one: the volume of readers' correspondence soon became so immense that it was a physical impossibility for one man to deal with them, though I continued to handle the most important and interesting. From No. 1 of *The Champion* to No.

130, which was the last to appear under my editorship, I was personally responsible for every word of "Champion Chat"; and from start to finish I selected authors and artists, discussed serials and complete stories and their illustrations, and prepared layouts, etc., myself. This, of course, applies only to *The Champion*. Though I naturally took a direct hand in its companion journals I was compelled to leave most, if not all, of the detail work to a large staff.

THE SECOND PART of my "ideal" in creating *The Champion* was the bringing into operation of a policy based on what I might call "perpetual surprise." I was convinced that, to hold the interest and enthusiasm of my readers, I must be constantly springing surprises and dramatizing them. New stories, new ideas—"Something New—Always Something New"—as my (or rather Mr. Brooke's original) slogan stated it.

I freely admit that I "borrowed" much from the old *Big Budget* in the way of editorial policy. Indeed, I aimed, in one sense, at re-creating that fine old boys' paper and deliberately hunted out as many of its old contributors as I could find—authors like Sidney Drew, Stacey Blake, Henry T. Johnson; artists such as Fred Holmes, T. W.

Holmes, Harry Lane, and so on. I even duplicated some of the more famous titles associated with B. B. fiction—"Vultures of the Line," "Black Diamonds," etc.—and as far as possible got the original authors to write the stuff, though the material itself was, of course, all new. Certain equally famous characters were also revived—Stacey Blake's Moreton Stowe, Carras Yorke's Ghost Hunter, etc. I wanted to re-introduce the great Graydon Garth, but it was felt that this might be running too close to the margin, so I myself created Royston Drake, who, by the way, first appeared in a serial I wrote for my own school magazine in far-away Rhodesia!

I was specially honoured by the fact that I was able to obtain the services of Mr. Arthur Brooke himself, who wrote many splendid stories for *The Champion* and, from the start, took a keen personal interest in its progress.

It is no exaggeration to say that *The Champion* was a magnificent success. From its first number its circulation rose rapidly to a peak which, I believe, had never previously been equalled by any other paper of its kind. And this despite the fact that it was faced by a rapidly increasing opposition—both friendly (i.e., from similar papers issued by

the same firm) and otherwise (i.e., papers published by other firms). At one time there were as many as forty-eight of these papers battling in the field together. But *The Champion* stood the test magnificently. Even when I resigned it was still "topping the bill"; and today it is among the very, very few survivors of the present war, though of course it is now a very different paper from what it was—so different that nothing of its former character remains beyond the title.

ITS COMPANION journals—*Pluck*, *The Rocket*, *Young Britain*—were the almost inevitable products of its own success. They were floated while *The Champion* was at its peak. *The Champion Annual* was also added for much the same reason. If there was any similarity in any of these companion journals to the parent paper, it was due rather to the subconscious "natural" touch of the common editor; actually, I made no conscious attempt to copy *The Champion* and indeed tried to make the others distinct from it. But an editor's personality is indivisible and it was inevitable that something of the same "atmosphere" should surround them all. None of these additional papers ever attained the stupendous popularity of *The Champion*. Two of the three weeklies, indeed, were

already "dead dogs," being resuscitations—one under its own title—of papers already on their last legs. *Pluck* aimed at a policy of radio and sport chiefly. *The Rocket* was frankly for younger readers and much more sensational in tone than the others. *Young Britain* was, admittedly, a hotch-potch, having no defined policy, and it fell between two—indeed many!—stools. I took it over when it was already staggering and I'm afraid I did little more than steady it just before its final irrevocable plunge. *The Rocket* alone survived to the very last day of my editorship of *The Champion*, and it was closed down almost immediately afterwards.

WE HAVE nothing like any of these papers on the British market today; nor, indeed, had we for some years prior to the outbreak of the present war. The "personal touch" has had to give way to the indifferent blundering paw of mass-production; the old happy and gay relationship between editor, contributors, and readers, has vanished entirely, perhaps never to return. It would be hypocritical for me to say that I welcome the change or to deny that, whether it is "old-fashioned" or not, the friendly, enthusiastic atmosphere of such papers as the old *Big Budget* is

the only real atmosphere, in my opinion. Boys are always boys, no matter in what age they live; their imaginations are fired by the same things and they live in their own world of make-believe which, to them, is as real as, if not more real than, that around them. The great characters in a boys' story—the Graydon Garths, the Sexton Blakes, the

Moreton Stowes—are something more than printed names; and still more “alive” are their creators, whether by brush or pen. To get back to that belief and to produce papers based on that fine old faith, is not to be old-fashioned, unless it is old-fashioned to say that life is life wherever it may be lived.

THE BAKER STREET IRREGULARS

THERE IS a group of fifty Manhattan litterateurs, says *LIFE* (May 1st, 1944) who carefully cultivate the myth of Sherlock Holmes' reality. They call themselves the Baker Street Irregulars, after the street urchins frequently employed by Holmes to unearth clues. To cultivate the myth they produce Holmes memorabilia such as false teeth, the deerstalker he wore, and a book on bee culture, “by Sherlock Holmes.” They write learned papers on his ancestry and such; and they even insist that Holmes, now ninety years of age, is still alive and well, living in retirement on his Sussex bee farm.

All this is very interesting, but it prompts one to ask why a few of the millions of folks who have been avid readers of the exploits of that other famous resident of Baker Street, Sexton

Blake, haven't got together to form a rival group of, say, Baker Street Inconsistents? They could make it their business to prove the actuality of *their* favourite detective by producing his well-smoked pipe, or the tobacco ashes therefrom, or maybe the tea-leaves from his cup, or even a volume from the Baker Street Index, that depository of criminal knowledge, or rather knowledge of criminals, upon the compiling of which Blake's assistant Tinker has spent so much time. Surely they aren't going to let a few Holmes fans get ahead of them?

There is, of course a consideration in their case that need not worry the Irregulars: Sherlock Holmes seems to have been inactive, even if still living, since 1927, when he made his final appearance in *The Strand Magazine* for April, whereas Sexton Blake is

still busy rounding up the law-breaker and evil-doer in two adventures each month in *The Sexton Blake Library*. Without doubt he would object strongly

if the Inconsistent sent scouts to his Baker Street home looking for a chance to snaffle his shaving brush or one of Pedro's dog-biscuits. —W. H. G.

THE DREAM



By Henry Steele

Sitting in his study, Jones,
 His lack of old boys' books
 bemoans;
 For years he's sought with luck
 infernal
 For a volume of *Boy's Champion Journal*.
 He's hunted high, he's hunted
 low,
 To any trouble and expense
 he'd go;
 One thing was certain and
 conclusive,
 That volume rare was most
 elusive.
 He sits in his armchair and
 ponders,
 Will it ever come his way? he
 wonders.
 While walking down the street
 one day
 He spots a bookshop o'er the
 way—
 A quaint old-fashioned kind of
 shop,
 But something about it makes
 him stop,
 For in the sun's declining rays
 It has a look of by-gone days.
 He goes to have another look—

Away his breath it almost took!
 For there, to his immense
 surprise,
 A heap of old boys' journals lies.
 There was "Turnpike Dick" and
 Viles' "Black Bess,"
 And lots of books you'd never
 guess:
Boys of England and oh! how odd!
 Numbers 1 and 2 of "Sweeny
 Todd";
Boys of the Empire and "Tyburn
 Dick"—
 He rubbed his eyes—was this
 a trick?
Boy's Comic Journal and *Boy's
 Leisure*—
 To gaze upon them was a
 pleasure.
 At last, with eager gaze excited,
The Boy's Champion Journal he
 sighted.
 In sheer delight he waved his
 "topper"—
 But o'er the mat he came a
 cropper!
 Down he went, and with a
 scream
 Woke up to find 'twas but a
 dream!

: S. P. Comment :

THIS ISSUE is a notable one in that, for the first time, it contains a contribution specially written for S. P. C. by one who has had actual experience in the editing of some of the papers in which we are interested:

Mr. F. Addington Symonds. We are indeed honoured to now number among our contributors

the founder and first editor of a paper which, even if published later than when many of us were buying and reading boys' literature, contained much to appeal to those who have fond memories of *The Boys' Friend*, *The Big Budget*, and other papers of the 1900-1912 period. Perhaps Mr. Leckenby will suggest that his contribution should have occupied second place in our pages, but it was thought best to print the two articles in the order in which they were received because the one in some ways takes the form of an answer to the other.



NOTES ON THE PRINTING OF S. P. C.

Our little magazine is printed, one page at a time, taking longer than you might suspect, on a 6½x10 inch Chandler & Price Pilot hand printing press of uncertain age. The body type is American Type Founders 8-pt. Goudy Old Style with Goudy Italic. Article headings in this issue are in 18-point Monotype Goudy Old Style and A. T. F. Goudy Italic. Title on front page is 18-point Gallia (Monotype). Other sizes and faces are 10-point A. T. F. Goudy Old Style and Goudy Italic, 8- and 10-point Cheltenham Bold (Monotype), and various face sizes of 6- and 12-point and one face size of 18-point A. T. F. Copperplate Gothic. Every word printed in every issue was hand-set. Of this issue 213 copies are being printed. The total number of impressions required to print these copies will be 2769, including one extra run for the front page. The paper is Vellour Book English Finish 120-lb. The production of an issue is usually spread through four to eight weeks.



AND LASTLY—There is on hand a small accumulation of items which it is hoped will be largely used in the next issue, and which will, it is also hoped, make up for the comparative slimness of Nos. 18 and 19.—W. H. G.

British Bloods and Journals For Sale

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

John Medcraft,

64 Woodlands Road, Ilford,
Essex, England.

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

BRITISH BOYS' PAPERS WANTED

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