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Title:

“Tales and Adventures”: G.A. Henty’s *Union Jack* and the Competitive World of Publishing for Boys in the 1880s

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Summary

In the competitive publishing environment of the late nineteenth century, writers and magazines had to distinguish themselves carefully from potential rivals. This article examines how G.A. Henty’s quality boys’ weekly, *Union Jack* (1880-83), attempted to secure a niche in the juvenile publishing market by deliberately distinguishing itself from other papers as a literary, imperialist and “healthy” publication. The article explores the design and marketing techniques of the magazine, its status as a fiction paper, the high calibre of its contributors, and its aggressive rhetoric in targeting an exclusively masculine audience. It argues that while *Union Jack* was marketed as a niche publication, it eventually failed to distinguish itself sufficiently to survive in an extremely competitive environment.

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“Tales and Adventures”: G.A. Henty’s *Union Jack* and the Competitive World of Publishing for Boys in the 1880s

I: “A power in the land”: the rise of the boys’ paper

The last quarter of the nineteenth century witnessed a proliferation of publishing for boys. This “astonishing growth in juvenile works” was particularly dramatic in the first years of the 1880s (Ackland, 1894: 417),¹ when a general increase in popular publishing was triggered by the provision of basic education to all, the advance of new and cheaper printing techniques, the abolition of the so-called taxes on knowledge, and the new ease of distribution occasioned by the expanding railway system and the ubiquitous newsagents’ stalls which accompanied it (Springhall, 1994; Bristow, 1991; Reynolds, 1990; Dunae, 1989; Drotner, 1988; Cox, 1982; Quayle, 1973). As literacy rates rose and publishers strove to supply young readers’ demands for “a good, long read” (Cox, 1982: 15), juvenile publishing came to account for nearly a fifth of all publishing activity and library borrowings (Bristow, 1991).² By the 1880s, juvenile fiction had come to include a number of genres, most notably adventure stories, historical narratives, school stories and domestic tales, and the narrative conventions deployed in it were being firmly established (Musgrave, 1985). The child, and particularly the boy, had arrived as a serious consumer (Reynolds, 1990). “The British boy is becoming a power in the land,” wrote S. Dacre Clarke in the *Boys’ Champion Paper*, “and must be treated with proper respect” (Clarke, 1885: 16).

The new status and variety of boys’ publishing were perhaps best exemplified in the growth of the juvenile press, and especially in the emergence of the extremely popular *Boy’s Own Paper*, henceforth referred to as *BOP*, in January 1879

¹ Ackland (1894) states that while 238 new juvenile fiction titles appeared in 1875-79, the corresponding figure for 1880-84 was 605.

² Drawing on Dunae’s work, Bristow (1991) claims that juvenile publishing accounted for some 19% of all publishing featured in the *Publisher’s Circular* of 1882. Bristow also states that juvenile fiction accounted for 18.36% of library borrowings in 1892-93.

(Reynolds, 1990; Drotner, 1988, Cox, 1982; Morison, 1960). Launched by the Religious Tract Society, *BOP* was an attempt to offer inexpensive, inoffensive and “healthy” reading to an increasingly literate juvenile market. Cleverly imitating the exciting contents and striking illustrations of existing popular penny publications, particularly Edwin J. Brett’s extremely successful magazines,³ *BOP* relinquished the standard small-size format of the earlier religious press and disguised its proprietorship by giving its address as the office of *Leisure Hour*, an established “family journal of instruction, and recreation” (Cox, 1982: 16). Under the editorship of the commercially-minded G.A. Hutchison and the Society’s general editor James Macaulay, *BOP* became a publication where the “dividing line between lively fiction, lightly disguising its instructive nature, and adventurous fact, was never very strong” (Cox, 1982: 53). A combination of fiction, articles of practical interest and miscellaneous lighter features, *BOP* offered its readers moral advice, practical instruction, admirable role models and exciting, well-printed stories written in good English (Reynolds, 1990). The editorial policy proved effective as the paper’s circulation quickly reached an impressive 57,000 weekly and 90,000 monthly copies. Since several readers were believed to peruse each copy, the actual readership was estimated as being three times higher (Cox, 1982).

Although *BOP* was by no means the first boys’ weekly, its success quickly confirmed the commercial potential of boys’ publishing. Juvenile magazines, especially boys’ papers, began to proliferate, and there were at least a dozen in simultaneous circulation in the early 1880s.⁴ This new section of the press began

³ Edwin J. Brett’s (1828-1895) first weekly penny dreadful for boys, *Boys of England*, dated from 1866, while its popular Jack Harkaway series started in 1871, boosting sales to 250,000 weekly copies (James, 1973). The paper was followed by a series of other successful publications of the same nature. Brett pointed out the debt *BOP* owed him to a reader whose parents objected to his publications: “Let your parents impartially compare the *Boys of England* with the two rivals recently started under the powerful influence of the religious portion of the community, and they will find that they have taken the *Boys of England* and our other publications for their model” ([Brett], 1879: 272). On Brett and penny dreadfuls, see Springhall, 1994; Springhall, 1990; Drotner, 1988; Dunae, 1979; Anglo, 1977; Haining, 1975; Turner, [1948] 1975).

⁴ Dunae (1989) offers the tentative estimate that between twelve and fifteen boys’ periodicals of any standing were being published simultaneously in the first half of the 1880s. In their attempts to corner a niche of the market, the papers varied a good deal in tone from the highly religious to the slightly lurid, but their format was often similar to that adopted by *BOP* and Brett’s various publications. Simultaneously, the smaller format of earlier religious publications began to look dated.

to attract an increasing number of writers, spawning a veritable industry which Patrick Dunae (1989) terms “New Grub Street for Boys”. Many of these writers were hacks, but for professional writers of such standing and productivity as G.A. Henty, the rewards could be tangible: under his exclusive contract to Blackie, Henty was in 1887 earning upwards of £300 p.a. for any new work, topped up with substantial royalties from existing material. A professional writer working at Henty’s high speed of some 6000 words per day could earn a comfortable living as an author of books for boys, especially if he could imitate Henty’s annual sales, which in the 1890s were upwards of 150,000 copies (Dunae, 1989).⁵ This income could be supplemented with editorial duties, as Henty did by assuming the editorship of the revived *Beeton’s Boy’s Own Magazine* in the late 1880s. Furthermore, a popular author of books for boys could command some critical acclaim and respect amongst a wider audience, too: an important aspect of late nineteenth-century juvenile publishing was its appeal to a dual readership of boys and men alike (Reynolds, 1990).⁶

II: “Tales and adventures”: defining a niche for *Union Jack*

The emergence of *Union Jack* should be seen in the context of a growing market for boys’ magazines. The first issue of *Union Jack* appeared on 1 January 1880, under the veteran editorship of W.H.G. Kingston, a favourite boys’ author.⁷ The

⁵ Not every writer was as lucky: A.R. Hope Moncrieff, who as Ascott R. Hope built an impressive career as a boys’ author, complained bitterly about the harsh life and paltry rewards which authors of juvenile fiction regularly met with. Estimating his average earnings at 100 guineas p.a., Moncrieff stated that “most books bring their author next to no profit, unless in the experience of loss” (1914: 164), emphasising that “religious societies have been noted for mean and unjust dealings with the authors whom they employ to their profit” (1914: 213).

⁶ It is worth noting that many girls enjoyed boys’ fiction because of the greater freedom it allowed for the reader’s imagination.

⁷ William Henry Giles Kingston (1814-80) was considered the leading boys’ author from 1850 to 1880. Best remembered for *Peter the Whaler* (1851) and *The Three Midshipmen* (1873), Kingston also edited several magazines, *Union Jack* being the last. Kingston was known for his religious and imperialistic outlook. Thompson (1996: 154, 158) observes that Kingston’s “religious zeal is often evident in his enthusiastic attitude toward the maintenance and expansion of the British Empire and in his belief that the British had an innate racial superiority to any other people.” Associated with boys’ fiction, Kingston “played a crucial role in creating and promulgating the cult of idealised British masculinity that formed so central a part of mid- to late-nineteenth-century literature for boys. [...] Kingston was one of the first authors for children to target one sex

ailing Kingston, who at sixty-six was “a very old man for his age” (Cox, 1982: 40), was quickly succeeded in May by the *Standard's* famous war correspondent G.A. Henty. A younger man in his late forties, Henty was only establishing his reputation as an author of books for boys when he took over the editorship of *Union Jack*.⁸ In his energetic attempts to reform the paper, Henty further changed the editorial pattern in October 1882 by promoting his twenty-five-year-old editorial assistant Bernard Heldmann to joint editorship.⁹ The work of these well-known editors was supported by quality publishers. *Union Jack* was at first brought out by Griffith and Farran, an established commercial publisher of religious and juvenile literature, and home to authors such as W.H.G. Kingston, G.A. Henty, Ascott R. Hope and George Manville Fenn, all of whom indeed featured in the pages of the new publication. It soon changed hands, however, first in February 1881 to the little-known publishing house of Cecil Brooks and four months later in June to Sampson Low. Known for its commercial juvenile literature and narratives of travel and exploration, Sampson Low boasted Kingston, Henty, Fenn, Louisa May Alcott and Jules Verne among its authors. *Union Jack*, thus, had the viable commercial backing deemed essential to the success of juvenile periodicals.

The publishing team behind *Union Jack* were undoubtedly aware of the commercial potential of the expanding juvenile market, confirmed by the successful launch of *BOP* in the previous year; the format of *Union Jack* was certainly influenced by that adopted by *BOP*. Like its famous rival, *Union Jack* was available on a weekly, a monthly and an annual basis. The subscriptions were preferably

specifically, thus initiating a gender-based segregation of children's literature.” See also Quayle (1973); Kingsford (1947).

⁸ George Alfred Henty (1832-1902) grew from a weak youngster to the strong war correspondent of the *Standard*. His first boys' book, *Out on the Pampas* (1871), was quickly followed by *The Young Franc-Tireurs* (1872). When his health broke down from too much travel in 1876, he began to concentrate on boys' fiction, becoming a new favourite after the death of Kingston, whose attitudes he largely shared. Ranson (1994: 123, 131) argues that “more than any other writer of his time, Henty was instrumental in the creation, promotion, and upholding of the age's values and beliefs. Indeed, his whole life may be seen as a living out of the Victorian values of manliness and tenacity and the relentless capacity for exploration and acquisition that characterized the period of British imperial history between 1830 and 1900. [...] His novels did not so much propagandize for this [imperial] destiny as simply celebrate it.” See also Arnold (1980); Quayle (1973); Fenn (1907).

⁹ On Bernard Heldmann (1857-1915), see Taylor (2000) and Taylor (1997).

administered through local newsagents but could also be placed directly with the publisher at the additional cost of postage. The weekly issues, priced at one penny each, contained sixteen quarto pages (approximately 20 x 28 cm) of small but clear print in two columns, as opposed to *BOP*'s three, and appeared at the end of each month as a monthly issue, priced at sixpence. The monthly issues, covered in heavy paper, were supplemented by an additional plate, engraving or photograph and were better-suited for eventual binding than the less substantial weekly issues, hence their relatively higher price. Some readers purchased both, the weekly issues for immediate reading and the monthly ones for eventual binding. Advertisements were printed on the covers of the monthly issues only and never took up space within the body of the text. In keeping with the demands of the lucrative Christmas market,¹⁰ the stories always finished with the annual volume.¹¹ Each new volume was started at the beginning of October, in order to allow for the preparation of the handsomely bound Christmas annuals, advertised as ideal Christmas presents at 7s.6d. The journal was thus tailored to reflect the rhythms of the market.

If in its overall appearance and publication pattern *Union Jack* resembled *BOP*, in its use of illustration, its attempts at reader bonding, its supply of fiction, and its exercise of rhetoric to target specific readers it was different. To start with illustration, *Union Jack* used pictorial material to attract readers but also to build a profile as a quality paper. As Springhall (1994: 572) observes, "A successful serial attracted readers by its title, eye-catching front page engravings, and general reputation, until buying and reading it became a matter of habit, often formalized in a regular order to the local newsagent." *Union Jack* kept looking for the best picture format to catch the boy reader's eye in the newsagents' stalls which accounted for most of the distribution: in the first volume, it followed the example set by *BOP* by

¹⁰ According to Eliot (1994), from the 1860s to the 1910s 30-40% of annual book publications took place between October and December. Eliot situates the height of the Christmas boom from the 1870s to the 1890s, when 35-40% of all publishing occurred during the final quarter of the year.

¹¹ Arguably a sign of good editing: in Brett's publications, for example, the stories carried on from one volume to the next, and the volumes would, thus, not have made good self-contained presents. It could be claimed that *Union Jack* was designed to be bound and reread because of this editorial neatness.

displaying a large engraving with some text on the first page, while the second volume introduced full-page illustrations in the middle of the volume. From the third volume, the weekly cover was increasingly taken wholly by the illustration, while the fourth volume saw the size and number of the illustrations in decline as the paper ran into financial difficulty. The large front-page illustrations, especially, were designed to capture the reader's imagination, displaying the most dramatic scenes from the stories featured.

The overall good quality of the illustrations was part of Henty's editorial policy and aimed to establish *Union Jack's* superiority as a boys' paper. Henty promised "to have the journal well printed upon good paper, and to give illustrations by good artists, admirably engraved". He added that he would "not treat [his] readers as children to be bribed to accept flimsy paper and coarse engravings by the occasional distribution of a cheap picture" ([Henty], 1880b: 432). Accordingly, the illustrations were not as numerous as in *BOP*, but they were larger, more artistic, and perhaps aimed at an older audience, as Henty hastened to explain to a reader who preferred the pictorial material in the rival paper:

I can only assure you that in the opinion of artists and other good judges, there is not the slightest comparison between the two, Mr [Horace] Petherick's work especially being by far the finest artistic work ever put into a magazine of the kind, and quite equal to anything in the *Illustrated or Graphic* ([Henty], 1881: 272).

With these retorts, Henty was claiming a quality status for his paper. Nevertheless, the importance attached to the illustrations reflects new journalistic concerns over attracting barely literate readers (Anderson, 1994).¹² Indeed, the correspondence columns testify that many readers' spelling, grammar and handwriting left much to be desired. Thus, while Henty was at pains to highlight the superiority of the illustrations in *Union Jack*, in fact pictorial material was also designed to appeal to non-literary qualities in the paper's readers.

¹² Consider Bourdieu's argument that cultural needs are produced by people's social origin, upbringing and education (Bourdieu, 1979).

Union Jack's new journalistic influences were also apparent in its use of bonding devices attempting to build a rapport between the paper and its subscribers. Like *BOP*, *Union Jack* printed a weekly correspondence column, where the editor hoped to build a personal relationship, based on useful advice and positive role modelling, with his readers. It is, however, Archibald McNeill's chatty series on the 'Union Jack Field Club' for young naturalists that stands out as of particular interest. With its own membership certificates and badges, the club appears to have achieved great popularity and many thousands of members, fulfilling its purpose of bonding readers to the paper as well as to each other.¹³ McNeill's regular feature on the observation of nature, on birds' eggs, bug collections and the preparation and arrangement of dried flowers inspired several regional branches across the country with their own libraries, collections and even publications, which would also have attracted new subscribers to the paper. Later on, the feature came to include regular space for correspondence of all kinds, competitions and, in the final volume, puzzles and jokes, attempting to include all readers regardless of whether they were interested in nature. McNeill's chatty style and careful answers to the readers' questions, including some of an obviously confidential nature, appear to have found favour with his audience, thus fulfilling the commercial purpose of the series as a bonding mechanism.

The most important marketing technique adopted by *Union Jack* was, however, its aggressive promotion of its status as a fiction paper. "[W]e wish to devote our space to tales and adventures, and we should be depriving our readers of what they expect were we to introduce other subjects", explained Kingston to a reader eager for the kind of miscellaneous subject matter that was to be found in *BOP* ([Kingston], 1880: 112). The anonymous critic of *The Times*, reviewing a number of

¹³ The club does not appear to have been widely imitated in other contemporary boys' weeklies, though similar schemes existed in the newspaper press. The parallels that I have been able to locate appear in the religious press: the 'Help-One-Another Society' in *Winsome Words*, 'Aunt Judy's Work Society' in *Aunt Judy's Magazine* and the 'Order of Merit' in the study of Scriptures in *Our Boys and Girls* were all directed towards both sexes. The *Union Jack* Field Club was, by contrast, much more clearly geared towards entertainment and imperialism than such philanthropic or devotional juvenile societies.

boys' annuals available at Christmas 1881, acknowledged the literary quality of the magazine:

Prominent among [this year's annuals] is the second volume of the *Union Jack* [...] certainly, it is a very good and a very "jolly" one. [...] The stories are good, stirring, healthy tales of life and action, full of all manner of wonderful perils and "hair-breadth 'scapes", wherein courage and honesty invariably come forth the victors; and others of more domestic matter, but equally sound and cheering. [...] A number of shorter stories and a just proportion of more serious, but neither dull nor pedantic, matter make up a volume in which he would be a strange boy indeed who could find nothing to his fancy (1881: 3).

Interestingly, the same reviewer had fewer kind words to offer to *BOP*, sarcastically remarking that

this [annual] is of a more miscellaneous nature, being historical, scientific, comical, critical, political, even in a way devotional, as various in its range, indeed, as, according to Polonius, were the actors who came so opportunely to Elsinore (1881: 3).

The anonymous reviewer has identified the crucial difference between *Union Jack* and its main rival in the quality boys' market, *BOP*: the prevalence and high quality of fiction in the former in comparison to the latter.

The fiction in *Union Jack* catered for different tastes. A typical issue consisted of four or five features, at least three of which were serial novels and one at most non-fiction. The serials would typically include an imperial or maritime adventure; a historical military tale, often accompanied by painstaking logistical detail, even maps of battles; and a school story (Morison, 1960). The serial stories were, of course, designed to promote regular circulation figures and encourage subscriptions. In comparison to the early *BOP*,¹⁴ the instalments in *Union Jack* were clearly longer, as there were fewer features in each issue, and therefore arguably demanded a more mature outlook on the readers' part. This pretence to

¹⁴ The appearance of the *BOP*, however, gradually changed from the somewhat messy look of the first volume to a more organised publication with fewer features and longer instalments.

literary quality was, however, also a potential weakness because the longer instalments in *Union Jack* carried a higher risk of failure for the magazine: since each instalment took up a sizeable chunk of the weekly issue, it was imperative that each story should maintain the readers' interest. If one story failed to please, it was quite possible that a boy consumer careful of his weekly penny might try another publication.

Union Jack tried to guard against such eventualities by using the high profile of its editors, firstly Kingston and secondly Henty, to secure the services of an impressive host of contributors, including most favourite boys' authors of the time: Jules Verne, R.M. Ballantyne, Ascott R. Hope and Captain Mayne Reed all featured in the publication,¹⁵ as well as the editors Kingston and Henty, whose contribution of old and new fiction, editorial columns and heroic accounts of his own adventures firmly established his reputation as the boys' new favourite, a status he would retain until his death in 1902. The work of these well-known authors was supplemented by a host of regular, less-known contributors, who often made their names in the pages of *Union Jack*. Among these, Henty's friend and biographer George Manville Fenn contributed novel-length adventure tales, similarly establishing his name. Bernard Heldmann gradually became a regular contributor of school stories, gaining important experience before metamorphosing in the 1890s into the bestselling popular novelist Richard Marsh.¹⁶ In contrast to the marked anonymity of other boys' papers of the time, most material in *Union Jack* was signed. As was the case with the later *BOP* (Reynolds, 1990), the authors were frequently identified as experts in their fields, be it as writers, military or

¹⁵ Interestingly, most juvenile authors wrote for several publications, perhaps reflecting the relatively modest financial rewards they could expect; some were hacks, while others worked on a freelance basis. Hope, for example, published prolifically across the market, altering his style as necessary, while Kingston wrote for *BOP* even after the launch of *Union Jack*. As the fees would undoubtedly have influenced writers, bigger publications were in a better position to secure work by favourite authors. Henty, for example, complained about the high cost of a coveted Verne story, which then failed to please his readers. However, as a paper run by a writer rather than by a company, *Union Jack* may have appealed to potential contributors. Religious societies were notoriously ruthless in their dealings with authors.

¹⁶ These men are indicative of the new generation which was taking over in journalism. Although Henty and Fenn had both published before, their reputations were only consolidated in the 1880s. Heldmann learnt his trade with *Union Jack*. On Fenn, see Quayle (1973).

professional men, or scientists, and Henty emphasised that while “the main object of all the tales will be to entertain, lads may rely upon the information conveyed in them being trustworthy and genuine” ([Henty], 1880a: 384). By attaching their signatures and credentials to their contributions, the authors appeared to vouch for their words.¹⁷

Peter Sinnema (1998) has written about the way in which the press constructs its own character through the conscious selection of a target audience. *Union Jack's* choice of focus was designed to secure it a potential niche on the expanding market, reflecting the emergence of adult fiction papers such as *Cornhill Magazine* and *Belgravia* in the 1860s and anticipating the popularity of such magazines as *Strand*, *Idler* and *Windsor* in the 1890s.¹⁸ Henty was not ashamed of such niche marketing, explaining that Kingston, as the founder of *Union Jack*, had

felt that none of the existing publications were quite suited to boys, and that a magazine devoted entirely to stirring, healthy tales would not only give more amusement, but do more to give a good tone to its readers, than any combination of instruction with social tales ([Henty], 1880c: 560).

Henty further explained that he was

well aware that there are formidable competitors, but he does not think that any of them occupy exactly the ground which the *Union Jack* has taken up, as a paper for active, healthy lads of from twelve to eighteen years of age, and not for children ([Henty], 1880a: 384).

By emphasising its literary quality and defining its dual readership as consisting of manly boys and of men, *Union Jack* laid claim to literary standards above its competitors, making concessions neither to younger boys nor to female readers of any age. Henty's retorts to hapless correspondents showing an interest in coloured illustrations or an excessive concern with their skin tone were distinctly

¹⁷ However, the *Union Jack* also signalled that its writers were not hacks by this policy: allowing authors to sign their work indicated that they were of some standing.

¹⁸ *Union Jack* was certainly one of the most fiction-based of the quality juvenile publications of the early 1880s. Most upmarket juvenile magazines contained other material besides fiction, while Brett's fiction-centred publications failed to command the same literary status as *Union Jack* due to their anonymity.

unsympathetic, labelling such concerns as naïve and girlish. The advertisements printed on the wrappers of the monthly issues were similarly dominated by objects of interest to masculine readers, such as stamps, chemistry and model kits, telescopes and various games, while the sewing machines, furniture and cooking utensils advertised in other contemporary juvenile publications such as *Young England* and even *BOP* were conspicuous by their absence. By such aggressive exclusiveness, *Union Jack* aimed to corner a share of the market and secure the support of a particular type of reader.

III: “Forming characters”: *Union Jack* and “healthy” juvenile literature

The upsurge in juvenile publishing was accompanied by the idea that literature could be used to support the existing social system, creating model citizens through the inculcation of “correct” social values at an impressionable age (Reynolds, 1990). The idea of corrective fiction, though quite established by the 1880s, was lent new urgency by the emergence of an increasingly literate juvenile market benefiting from unprecedented ease of access to cheap literature. “The schoolmaster, for the last generation or two, has been busy turning out by the million scholars who have learned to read without much knowledge of what is worth reading”, opined A.R. Hope Moncrieff, better known as Ascott R. Hope, “Such a public has its tastes [...]; it needs pictures and advertisements, the more blatant the better, to attract its curiosity. Its curiosity is much for mean things” (1914: 277-78). Whereas early nineteenth-century penny bloods had mainly catered for an adult readership, the penny dreadfuls of the mid- to late-nineteenth-century were increasingly aimed at the juvenile market (Haining, 1975; Turner, [1948] 1975). Labelling these publications as “poison for the minds of girls and boys”, James Greenwood argued that

for a shameful length of time [the writer of penny dreadfuls] has dared to bring his wares to the public market openly and unblushingly [...] [I]t is not a little curious that the lynx-eyed guardians of public morality have not ere this joined hands to catch and crush him” ([1874]/ 1975: 359, 366).

The rhetoric of these contemporary critics clearly mirrors the censorship debates of the 1880s. They argued that the solution lay in the provision of alternative “healthy” fiction that promoted patriotic and masculine values of athleticism, exploration, and mastery of the physical environment. “It has been found that where really able and interesting literature is to be had, there is much less disposition to prey upon garbage”, wrote children’s author Charlotte M. Yonge (1823 - 1901), arguing that boys should be “beguiled by wholesome adventure”:

Boys especially should not have childish tales with weak morality or “washy” piety; but should have heroism and nobleness kept before their eyes; and learn to despise all that is untruthful or cowardly and to respect womanhood. True manhood needs, above all earthly qualities, to be impressed on them. (Yonge, [1887]: 5-6).

Yonge’s message is clear: although books for boys must be entertaining to keep up the readers’ interest, they must also be carefully ideologically constructed so as to offer the right kind of role models and values.

Union Jack took a stance in this debate. A creed of fearless imperialism and wholesome manliness permeated its editorial statements, fiction and factual features alike.¹⁹ “A work of fiction is a work of recreation”, an anonymous editorial column explained, “Of one thing must one be careful, that the recreation is healthy recreation, that the book over which one pores is a right, and a true, and a pure one” (1883: 265). Boys, “the future rulers of the land; the future statesmen, pastors, preachers, merchant princes” (Anon, 1882a: 9), could learn a manly lesson from *Union Jack*, or “be armed and strengthened in the struggle before [them] by the lesson [Henty] taught in the pages of the *Union Jack*, that, come what may, lads should be true, honourable, manly and brave under all circumstances” (Henty, 1883: 832). The rhetoric of these exhortations was frequently unmistakably warlike:

Strive to be true. Strive to be pure. Strive to leave the world better than you found it. Have some object in your life; some prize, and strive till it is yours.

¹⁹ This stance was made more explicit in the final volume of *Union Jack* as the paper was struggling for survival, and must have been considered popular with readers.

Let no one beat you in the strife; or if one does, then strive on till you have won back what he gained. Never be discouraged. Let your trust be in God; and in the right fight on – fight ever – and, if needful, fighting die (Anon, 1882b: 57).

It cannot be doubted that such rhetoric was intended directly to influence young readers. Indeed, Henty confessed that “if the perusal of the tales in this magazine have done anything towards forming such characters, I shall feel indeed that my labour has not been in vain” (1881: 192).

As these quotations suggest, *Union Jack* aimed to offer “healthy”, stirring reading which glorified the ideal boy and supported a creed of British Imperialism and power in keeping with the increasingly aggressive international and imperialist atmosphere of the period. The fictional boys featured in the pages of the magazine frequently played a decisive role in safeguarding the Empire in preparation for an imperial future. Patriotic and religious, though seldom overtly jingoistic, many of the fictional features directly addressed the demands of the Empire by instilling a boyish belief in the imperial mission. “Dulce et decorum est pro patriâ mori” (Henty, 1880b: 332), believe Henty’s heroes, “as good specimens of tall, well-made, sunburnt Anglo-Saxons as one would wish to see” (Henty, 1880a: 10), in his flagship story ‘Times of Peril’ in the first volume of the magazine. “[S]ome of the bravest things that ever were done, have been done by Englishmen” (‘One Who Went Through It’, 1880b: 213), boast the heroes of ‘With Fire and Sword’, another story from the first volume of *Union Jack*, explaining that “[t]he Englishman's love of dangerous adventure for its own sake is the one thing which people of other nations cannot comprehend’ (1880a: 24). Through its stories, *Union Jack* sold the imperial creed to an enthusiastic readership only too eager to receive it by drawing them into the thick of the action. That the stories filled their ideological purpose was obvious from the number of correspondents enquiring about entering the army, the navy and the civil service, typically concerned that they would not qualify due to their age, height or social status. Thus, *Union Jack* used the current climate of New Imperialism and concerns over “pure” literature to secure a niche as a “healthy” but

exciting fiction paper. However, while the paper claimed to provide manly fiction for mature boys, it could be argued that this rhetoric was flawed because fiction surely was still entertainment rather than education, let alone the experience.

When compared to its contemporaries, *Union Jack* does convey an impression of good quality. Yet the 15-30,000 issues printed weekly ([Henty], 1889: iv; [Henty], 1880d: 624) compared badly with the figures of 57,000 achieved by *BOP*. It is possible that *Union Jack* was doomed to failure from the start: its appearance a year after *BOP*, which it resembled in appearance, may have meant that too many of its potential readers had already begun to identify with the rival publication, while the majority of the public preferred more populist papers such as Edwin J. Brett's weeklies. Henty's efforts to distinguish his paper from its competitors had failed when *Union Jack* closed at the end of September 1883. Arguably, Henty's attempts to construct a distinct "character" for the paper through the use of illustration, the selection of content and contributors, concerted targeting of particular readers, and the rhetorical effort to address the current climate of opinion were insufficient under the extremely competitive conditions which governed the market for boys' papers in the 1880s.

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