STORY PAPER COLLECTOR

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YOUNG MEN OF GREAT BRITAIN

A Journal of Amusing and Instructive Literature:
COMPANION TO THE "BOYS OF ENGLAND."

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THE NIGHT-GUARD;
OR, THE SECRET OF THE FIVE MASKS.

CHAPTER I.

"Who goes there?"

Sharply the words rang out on the clear air of the moonlit, frosty night, as the guard, pacing to and fro, opposite the western gate of the Palace at Whitehall, challenged what seemed at first a shadow.

The western gate was buried in deep shade, for the moonlight that streamed over the river and the eastern side of the building only served to

No. 1, Re-issue Series, *Young Men of Great Britain*, Nov. 4, 1874

WHO'S WHO

No. 12: RALPH CUMMINGS

THE OWNER of one of the best collections of dime and nickel novels, Ralph F. Cummings was brought up on the family dairy farm near Fisherville, Massachusetts. While at school Ralph, in response to a dare, climbed a telegraph pole and touched a wire, awakening a few minutes later to find himself in the branches of a nearby cherry tree. It was while convalescing from this mishap that he was introduced to the wonderful world of adventure to be found between the covers of "dime novels": some were loaned to him by admiring pals.

Ralph fell in love with these novels and every copy he could lay his hands on was eagerly read and then hoarded away. First his room became filled with them, then they overflowed into two adjoining rooms, and latterly into two nearby buildings. Some years ago Ralph figured he had about 25,000 dime and nickel novels, plus thousands of other items, including British "penny dreadfuls."

In the mid-'twenties Ralph was one of a group of novel collectors who organized the Happy Hours Brotherhood, with Ralph P. Smith as president and himself as vice-president. *Happy Hours Magazine* was published by Mr. Smith as the club's official organ. In 1930 Ralph Cummings became president of the club and founded *Dime Novel Roundup* as the official publication. He has continued to hold the post, and the magazine had arrived at No. 209 in February of 1950.

Ralph claims to be able to locate in his large collection any particular copy of a novel in a few minutes, but this ability did not prevent him from, on one occasion, mislaying in May a letter that contained a money order and finding it the following December.

When dime and nickel novels were at the height of their popularity in the United States, older folk looked at them with scorn; if a boy went wrong, his reading of novels was the reason. Ralph thinks this was a mistake. "I have," says he, "run across thousands of men and women who read dime novels when they were youngsters. Many of them are famous in business and professions today, and not one of them was harmed mentally by dime novels."

Ralph, who is known to his friends as "Reckless Ralph," no longer reads his novels, but on occasion, being a bachelor, he spends a most enjoyable evening buried in "Gypsy Blair." It still makes his hair stand on end.

—W. H. G.

The Story Paper Collector

Articles of Interest to Collectors of British Boys' Periodicals of the Past

No. 38 APRIL, 1950 Vol. 2

DIME NOVEL PIRATES AND RIVERMEN

By WALTER PANNELL

As a boy, the writer was an avid, if not discriminating, reader of all the material relating to the Mississippi River, its pirates and its rivermen, that appeared in the dime novels and boys' publications of that day. So, when a vacation trip privileged me to visit the scenes of many of the adventures that had come to me via the printed page, I decided to view the storied locale in as reminiscent a manner as possible.

Accordingly, I traded my bus seat at Baton Rouge for a deck seat on a river excursion boat, making its return cruise to New Orleans, the "Crescent City," which had played such an important role in my storied adventures and seemed to be the destination of most of the pirates and rivermen whose escapades I had followed through many chapters.

Baton Rouge is now the northern limit of deep water navigation on the Mississippi, but if one has the time and the capital one can still take a summer excursion from as far north as Cincinnati on the Ohio River, the tributary that extends its finger across the continent into the mountains of Pennsylvania. However, most of the up-river traffic is confined to the slow-moving barges loaded with bulky goods.

The day of the meandering passenger boat is long past, and one has to get in close to New Orleans if one wants to take a short trip, and then has to take an excursion boat on which there is no sleeping accommodation—but who wants to sleep on such a trip? In my mind, anyone who has seen the lower Mississippi from any vantage point other than the top deck of a river boat has never seen it. Although it brought back to my mind many of the scenes I had visited in the printed pages of

the boys' books of yesteryear, the boat I was on was a far cry from the ones my heroes traveled to New Orleans — no ornate staterooms and no gilded ball-rooms. A jazz band furnished the music for the all-night dancers, while a row of slot-machines, on which was conspicuously displayed a sign that read, "These Machines For Amusement Only," took the place of the gambling rooms of the river boats I had read about.

Some idea of the grandeur of the river boats of a half-century ago may be gained from a knowledge of the fact that the word "stateroom," now in general use on practically all vessels, originated on the Mississippi River. Captain Harry Shreve, for whom was named Shreveport, Louisiana, introduced the names of the states of the Union for the passenger rooms on his river boats, and from these ornate quarters the word "stateroom" came into general use.

AT THE river wharf the excursion boat disgorged its cargo of pleasure-seekers, who departed in search of places of revelry. But I did not accompany them, as I was on another quest totally unrelated to theirs. I was looking for the rendezvous of pirates, but pirates long dead, except in the pages of old books. From a nearby newsstall I bought a little book which showed me how to find Pirate's Alley, up which the pirates used to enter the city from their craft flying the Jolly Roger. Between the Cabildo, the old Spanish government house, and a church, Pirate's Alley leads one into the storied section of New Orleans — the Vieux Carre, or Old Square, which still retains the French names of its streets.

The little book also tells one where to find the location of the blacksmith's shop where Pierre and Jean LaFitte used to fashion useful articles of iron before they took to pirating and became story-book material. Vincent Nolte wrote of this period of the history of New Orleans that it "was not only a nest of pirates, but the resort for every description of schemers and scamps, against whom nearly every other community was closed."

However, this unenviable reputation did not keep New Orleans from becoming the scene of some of the most romantic adventures in my story-book fiction. Perhaps it would have been otherwise had I been there at the time, but that did not deter me from spending an enjoyable day re-living the scenes and activities of some of the stirring stories I had read.

At that time New Orleans already had a heritage of Spanish and French origin. Both nations

wanted to possess the city that was located in the strategic position near the mouth of the Mississippi River — at the end of river navigation and the beginning of deep sea navigation. The little band of Louisianians, headed by Lefreniere, who protested to the French Crown against the cession of Louisiana to Spain, were denounced by the French Governor as a "set of reprobates, infected with the rebellious spirit of republicanism."

The new country of the United States also developed a desire for ownership of the mouth of the Mississippi River, adding to the competition that was only ended by its purchase by Thomas Jefferson in what was probably the biggest real estate deal ever made, for it resulted in the adding of the whole Mississippi valley to the growing domain of the United States.

It was probably this three-cornered rivalry that added zest to the story-books I read in my boyhood days, and no doubt it added zest to life in New Orleans at that time. New Orleans was the most cosmopolitan town on the American continent, and the story writers did not lack the resourcefulness to take advantage of it. Stories of pirating on the high seas and on the river, stories of rivalry between republicans and French Royalists — all adventures of the first magnitude — no doubt fired the imagination of many another young American reading the novels written about that stirring period, some of them fanciful fiction, but all being influenced in a great degree by the international situation, which was as explosive then as it is now.

The New Orleans tourist guide still shows the house that was designed for the occupation of Napoleon, who was, however, destined never to see it. I have recently read a supposedly factual account of how one of Napoleon's generals, escaping after the Battle of Waterloo, spent his last days in Louisiana as a school teacher. So the stories written as fiction may have been lived in real life by others for obvious reasons unknown.

The writers of our boys' books of half a century or more ago drew on real localities and real names and events with reckless abandon. Why use fictitious names and events when there was a world full of adventure to draw on? The reader of today's juvenile literature will have a hard time finding the scenes he read about in his youth among the fictitious names of peoples and places "whose resemblance to real persons or places is wholly coincidental."

THE GREYFRIARS GALLERY

Reviewed by WM. H. GANDER :: *Part Eight*

James Hobson, Captain of the Greyfriars Shell, "is not a front-rank character. Sometimes we do not hear of him for quite a long time. But then he comes in again, to play his part . . and we are quite pleased to renew his acquaintance." So we read in Number 51 of The Greyfriars Gallery (*Magnet* No. 515, December 22nd, 1917). Hobson used to be very friendly with Horace Coker, when the latter was in the Shell, but when the great Horace got (in some mysterious manner) his remove to the Fifth he "affected to regard his erstwhile chum as a mere kid." Hobson is not that; in fact, a rather burly fellow, he has a heavy hand with lower school boys, though he'd be amazed if anyone told him that he came close to being a bully at times.

Most of Frank Richards' Greyfriars characters became to us like people we actually knew, they "rang true." But to me at least one that fell short of this was Reginald Coker, the frail but brilliant younger brother of the slightly dense but self-satisfied Horace. Maybe the fault lies with me, but Reggie Coker never appealed as did half a hundred other "Friars." Perhaps other readers felt the same; perhaps Frank Richards did, too, for Reggie has not been heard of for many years. Coker minor is the subject of Gallery Number 52 in *Magnet* No. 516. Coker major, being in the Fifth Form, was not happy when his minor arrived at Greyfriars and was placed in the Sixth, but eventually he "came around."

Now we come to William Stott, who is a member of a trio of dubious reputation, the others being Harold Skinner and Sidney James Snoop. Being birds of a feather it is fitting that they should "study" together. Stott is Number 53, *Magnet* No. 517, and the best we can find said of him is that he "is less spiteful and cunning than Skinner, and less utterly mean and worthless than Snoop." Not a good recommendation! Stott is a Greyfriars "old-timer," being first met in *Magnet* No. 35.

Algernon James Capper, master of the Upper Fourth, was chosen for Number 54 of the Gallery. Mr. Capper, naturally, does not come much into the

stories and so it might be sufficient to quote briefly: "Not a bad sort, on the whole, the master of the Upper Fourth."

In beginning his article on Mr. Capper the writer of the Gallery pointed out that when the series began there was no intention of carrying it on so long, but it had made a big hit and so had been extended. Most of the more prominent characters had now appeared in it. However, the feature would be continued unless many of the readers wanted it concluded. Apparently not many did, for the end was a long way off. But as was suggested, the remainder would be of less importance, and evidence of this was forthcoming the next week, when Number 55 of the Gallery was shared by George Adalbert Gatty and Edwin Myers (*Magnet* No. 519), both of the Second Form. These two are "decent youngsters and staunch chums," we are told.

When the feminine influence is felt in Greyfriars circles, it is often supplied by the girls of Cliff House School, which is situated, one gathers, over towards the village of Pegg. The Greyfriars Gallery had already featured some of those girls; for Number 56, *Magnet* No. 520, it is the headmistress of the school, Miss Penelope Primrose, who has the spotlight. Nothing needs to be said of C. H. Chapman's portrait of her, except that it seems to fit the first half of her surname: prim. "The headmistress of Cliff House School is quite a good sort," we are told, "though, from the point of view of her own charges and the boys of Greyfriars and Highcliffe, she may at times seem just a little bit absurd. . . . But she is a good sort—no possible doubt about that!"

Part 9 Will Appear in the Next Issue

Back Issues of *S. P. C.* Required

—by E. C. Carter, Telephone Acc'ts, G.P.O., Sydney, N.S.W., Australia: Nos. 4, 6 to 14, 25.

—by J. W. Martin, 239 Bright St., San Francisco, Calif., U.S.A.: Nos. 9, 10.

—by A. J. Southway, P.O. Box 3, Beaconsfield, Cape Province, South Africa: Nos. 7, 9, 10.

—by the Editor: Any before No. 32.

MORE ABOUT J. HARKAWAY

FOLLOWING the publication of *Story Paper Collector* No. 35, in which was an extract from a letter from Raymond L. Caldwell regarding the un-published Jack Harkaway story mentioned in E. S. Turner's book, "Boys Will Be Boys," I received a copy of Street & Smith's *Round the World Library* No. 34, published in April, 1926. In it is a list of titles in this Library and No. 26, issued in December of 1925, is "Jack Harkaway's Secret of Wealth."

This title was sufficiently like that mentioned by Mr. Caldwell and that referred to in Mr. Turner's book to prompt me to write Mr. Caldwell about it. Extracts from his reply follow:

"I have been trying to check up on the stories. Here are my findings: my copy *is* a publisher's proof and I find the story *was* printed as a serial—in Leslie's *Boy's and Girl's Weekly*, No. 491, March 18th, to No. 503, June 10th, 1876, titled 'Jack Harkaway and the Secret of Wealth; or, The Mystery of the Island in the Lake,' a sequel to 'Red Dog, Blue Horse and Ghost-that-Lies in-the-Wood,' being Part V of 'Jack Harkaway in America.'

"In the latter part of 1873 Leslie induced Hemyng to come to America and write solely for him, hiring him away from Brett. This caused somewhat of a controversy between Brett and Leslie. I believe a rather interesting article could be written here if someone had access to all the files and the time to do a little research work on them."

In another letter Mr. Caldwell refers to an article, "More About Jack Harkaway," by J. P. Quaine, in Joseph Parks' *Vanity Fair* No. 27, November, 1926. In this article, or more correctly letter, Mr. Quaine wrote, after referring to the Harkaway stories as issued by Brett in *Boys of England*:

"With regard to the tales alleged to be written especially for the Emmett journals, they were only reprints of the Leslie series. . . Even the illustrations which appeared in the Emmett journals were from American blocks. . . Besides, the titles advertised by Frank Leslie are the same as those in the Hogarth House [Emmett] list. Only one of the American series did not appear. I understand my friend Ono has this in proof sheets."

"The above," comments Mr. Caldwell, "apparently explains the story of the proof sheets as told by Mr. Turner in his book."

—W. H. G.

"THE RIVALS OF ROOKWOOD!" By OWEN CONQUEST.

No. 1 of a Magnificent Series of Long Complete Tales dealing with Public School Life.

PUBLISHED EVERY MONDAY.

THE BOYS' FRIEND 1d.

TALES TO TELL

TALES TO TELL

JIMMY SILVER'S JOY-RIDE TO ROOKWOOD!

No. 715, *The Boys' Friend*, February 20th, 1915: in this issue was the first Rookwood story

[Facing page 176.

The Boys' Friend

Number 715 of the New Series

THE ISSUE of *The Boys' Friend* dated February 20th, 1915, marked a turning-point in the career of the old "Green 'un": in it appeared the first story of Rookwood School, written by Owen Conquest, otherwise Charles Hamilton. It is probable that the paper had been slipping a little in public favor before it was placed under the control of H. A. Hinton at this time. Mr. Hinton made a wise move in calling on Owen Conquest to begin the Rookwood series. Under the new regime new life was injected into *The B. F.* and it ran for almost thirteen years longer. No. 715 is also noteworthy in that it was the issue in which the old front page title block, used except for rare occasions since No. 1 of the halfpenny series, was permanently dropped. The style of lettering used until 1926 was adopted a few weeks later, following four "bumper" numbers.

ADVENTURE IN ZULULAND

By HENRY ADAMS PUCKRIN

IN THE REALMS of literature, authors have often left a well-trodden path for pastures new, with results pleasing to themselves and to their readers. This applies particularly to Bertram Mitford, who the writer thinks is entitled to more of the limelight than he has had hitherto.

Bertram Mitford produced excellent, well-written stories of adventure for boys of all ages, and this gives him a right to a place in the pages of this magazine. In his own particular line he has not so far, in the writer's opinion, been equalled. He can best be described as a man of extensive knowledge of men and affairs, mingled with a streak of not unkindly cynicism regarding them. These qualities, combined with excellent narrative and descriptive powers and a capacity for producing hair-raising situations, will be a sufficient introduction for any who care to read on.

The author of some fifty tales of adventure in Zululand in the period 1879-1906, Mr. Mitford had a thorough mastery of his subject and did not in any way poach on the preserves of Sir H. Rider Haggard. Each covered the ground from an entirely different standpoint and this alone, the writer thinks, causes Mr. Mitford to rank equally with his brother-author. While Rider Haggard dealt with the superstitious and metaphysical aspects of Zulu life and customs, these were scarcely touched by Mr. Mitford. Robust adventure with a vein of the love element are found in his stories, which delighted all who read them.

Bertram Mitford was an ex-Public school man, and his death in 1914 seemed to be the signal for extinguishing his claims to remembrance. But it is hoped that this brief article will prevent his works from being entirely forgotten. One of his best works was "The Gun Runner," which included a splendid description of the battle of Isandlwhana and the subsequent encounter at Rorke's Drift. Written without bias, and a tribute to the courage and endurance of the British forces under terrible odds, it was a story that could be read time and time again.

Another rousing story, written in the first person and narrated by a former Zulu chief reduced to a wagon driver, enthralled the writer, as did also its sequel,

"The White Shield." Mr. Mitford's capacity for putting himself in the place of the narrator is fully shown in these two well-written stories.

His last work dealt with the abortive and quickly-suppressed rising in 1906, which was led by Dinizula, a descendant of the great Chaka, founder of the Zulu dynasty. Another story, "The Curse of Clement Waynfleete," had a more commonplace theme of frustrated love, but it was an introduction to better things.

To describe all Mr. Mitford's works would make this article too long, so we will pass on to those which are best known. One of these was "The Sign of the Spider," in which his powers of descriptive writing reached their greatest height. The well-meaning but frustrated hero of this story, driven to despair by financial worry, joined a band of ruthless slave-dealers. He salved his conscience by offering himself as a blood sacrifice to atone for the mistake of a comrade who had unwittingly offended against the tribal laws of the Zulu impi, which captured them after a desperate and magnificently described battle. Offered up to the titulary deity of the tribe, an enormous spider, his escape from this monster forms the theme of this really fine story.

Another story that is too good to be left undescribed was "The Luck of Gerard Ridgely," which was strictly a juvenile tale. Leaving his shifty and scoundrelly uncle and being adopted by the genial up-country trader, John Dawes, Gerard had his fill of adventure and a goodly portion of battle, murder, and sudden death before his return to civilization.

These few instances out of many will, it is hoped, be a pleasing introduction to readers fortunate enough to come across any of Bertram Mitford's books. Whether they are read today or not, they have at least done something to prevent his memory from fading away "like a tale that is told."

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