

New Light On Some Old Stories.

By Laurie Sutton.

During the years when I was advertising regularly in "Exchange & Mart" between ten to fifteen years ago I accumulated some early Hamilton material along with the Gems and Magnets that I was primarily seeking. I have only recently read most of these early stories, and as a result I am able to add a little more detail to the Hamilton records even at this stage, when we might have thought that there was little likelihood of new information coming to light.

In the first place, I have discovered a previously unidentified story in the "Boys' Herald". The title is "In Honour Bound". The school is Castlehurst (unlisted among the Hamilton schools in "The Men Behind Boys' Fiction"). The year is 1906 - almost certainly November, as a forthcoming Christmas Double Number is announced; my copy comprises only the inner pages of the paper, so I cannot check serial number or exact date - an advertisement, and datings on illustrations confirm the year as 1906. The author of "In Honour Bound" is unnamed, being described merely as "By a New Author", but the story, both in theme, style, and characterisation, is pure Hamilton.

The familiar plot of "In Honour Bound" features Dallas Fane, of the Upper Fifth At Castlehurst, a weak-willed lad in debt to George Gadd, the bookie. Dallas turns for help to his elder cousin, Arnold Fane, as he usually does, and Arnold agrees to meet Gadd. The interview does no good, as Arnold strikes Gadd after being taunted. To make things worse, Arnold is seen in Gadd's company by the school captain, O'Neil. Dallas blames Arnold for making things worse (in the style of Dicky Nugent to Frank, Reggie Manners to Harry, etc.). Gadd tells Dallas that if he doesn't settle by Saturday the Head will be informed on Monday. Dallas takes £7 from his Form-master's desk to pay Gadd. As a result of O'Neil having seen Arnold with Gadd, Arnold is suspected, then condemned and sentenced to expulsion. He tackles Dallas, who refused to own up. However, the Head sends for Gadd, to ask him if he has received money from a Castlehurst boy. Gadd says it was Fane, but the Head says there are two boys of that name - does he mean Arnold? Seeing the chance to avenge Arnold's blow, Gadd says that it was he. Shortly afterwards, some boys are gathered at the locked door of Dallas's study; Dallas is delirious, moaning and muttering his guilty thoughts, which betray him. He spends a period in the school sanitorium, and the Head, out of pity, and the feeling that Dallas's recovery might otherwise be jeopardised, allows him to stay at Castlehurst.

By a truly remarkable coincidence, the next Hamiltonia that I read following my early Hamilton stories was S.O.L. 131, "The Moonlight Footballers" (reprint of

Magnets 292-3, 1913) in which a reference is made to a footpad by the name of Jem GADD (not exactly the most common of surnames) in recent stories - I have traced those stories to Magnets 282 and 283.

An extremely rare collectors' item and little-known story is "Football Fortune" (Boys' Friend Library No. 36, 1908). The story would appear to have been specially written for the B.F.L. and "The Men Behind Boys' Fiction" gives this as its only source. The story is utterly unlike any of the Hamilton school stories, and, were it not for the naming of the author, only a few character names would give indication that it came from his pen. The familiar names are Nugent, Arthur Lovell, Col. Darrell, Dr. Manners, Detective Ferrers and Loamshire county.

Only the first couple of the 120 pages have a school setting, and Blackdale College is unusual in that it is set in an industrial area, close to the mill town of Blackfield. The story is concerned exclusively with adult characters, and includes rivalry in love, a company share swindle, and two attempted murders. The hero, Pat Clare, has to leave Blackdale after his father (a mill-owner) has been ruined in the company swindle by Abel Darrell, also a mill-owner. Mr. Clare and Pat are unaware of Darrell's involvement in the swindle, and while Mr. Clare goes into a private mental home following a breakdown, Pat works for a time in Darrell's mill. He is forced out by the enmity of one Glyn Elmhurst, who was in league with Darrell over the swindle and now has a hold over him, which he used in an attempt to gain the unwilling hand of Darrell's daughter, Madge. Madge, in fact, loves Pat Clare, but his newly impoverished state comes between them. A further aspirant for Madge's affection is Pat's cousin, Phil Nugent, who regards Pat with jealousy and something close to hatred, although at times affecting cordiality and even friendship. After leaving the mill, Pat signs professional forms for Blackfield United, managed by Col. Darrell (brother of Abel). After early setbacks engineered by Elmhurst and Nugent, Clare settles in as a prolific goalscorer, and finds the net of such teams as Bolton, Leicester, and Bradford. Clare finally recovers his fortunes after he rescues Elmhurst from the blazing mill after Abel Darrell, goaded by Elmhurst's blackmail, has knocked him on the head and left him in the burning mill after firing it. Nugent is reconciled to Pat on realising that he has been Elmhurst's catspaw. Abel Darrell confesses to the swindle, and Mr. Clare's fortunes (and health) are restored. There is no further obstacle between Pat and Madge. Pat and Nugent prepare to go to Oxford after Pat has fulfilled his season with Blackfield United.

Also quite rare are the Trapps, Holmes "Vanguard" issues, which contain the mysterious featuring of a Billy Bunter by a writer named H. Philpott Wright at the same time that Charles Hamilton was writing for Vanguard. I can only confirm what is already an accepted fact - that Wright was certainly not Hamilton.

A fascinating feature of the Vanguard is the list of earlier titles given in some issues. They include the familiar sounding "Billy Bunter's Hamper" by Philpott Wright, but a title that arouses my curiosity is "Darrell Yorke: Detective" - by Arthur St. John. Now, apart from the fact that Hamilton's full name was Charles St. John Hamilton, and that Darrell was used at St. Jim's and in "Football Fortune", the name Yorke was a regular bit-part name given by Hamilton from time to time to the captain of lesser-known schools such as Abbotsford, St. Jude's, Redclyffe that

visited Greyfriars or St. Jim's for sporting fixtures; a quick glance at my records reveals that Yorke was the Redclyffe junior captain in Magnet 253. I should be very interested to read one of the Darrell Yorke tales.

The Vanguard's that I possess include the regular crop of familiar names. In Vanguard 19 (10-9-07) we have at Northcote school Arthur Courtney (Sixth Form), Hilton (school captain), Clive Russell, Mr. Lamb (Fourth master), and Mr. Joliffe (Blue Lion landlord). The plot: Arthur Courtney has been persuaded from the path of a gay dog through his cousin in the Fourth, Clive Russell. George Mulberry, a Sixth Form cad, plots with Mr. Joliffe to get Courtney back to his shady ways. They inform Courtney of a betting coup in which a substituted horse will win at high odds, and Courtney succumbs and gets into debt. Russell and his friend, Frank Melton, intercept a note from Mulberry to Joliffe revealing the plot, and Courtney returns to the paths of righteousness.

Vanguard 31 (3-12-07) features St. Freda's, and the hero is Frank Clavering of the Fourth, this being the only familiar name in a story of high drama which, like "Football Fortune", features an attempted murder. The plot: Clavering has his fees at St. Freda's paid by a London lawyer on behalf of his father, Herbert Clavering, who is abroad in mysterious circumstances to Frank. In reality he is farming in Australia under an assumed name, being on the run after being framed and falsely accused over a robbery - actually committed by Mr. Bishop (now Frank's Form master) in association with a rascally Italian, Carlo Cellini. Herbert Clavering has returned to England, now a rich man, with the intention of proving his innocence through a detective. He arranges a rendezvous with Frank near the school during the holidays (Frank has stayed on at the school with his chum, Dan Morgan, who has volunteered his company). Also at the school are Mr. Bishop and Cellini (who is forcing Bishop to shelter him while he is being hunted). Mr. Bishop, knowing that Cellini will betray him if caught, gets the Italian drunk on Christmas Eve, with the intention of pushing him to his death down an old disused well. As he takes the bound Cellini towards the well, Bishop is confronted by Herbert Clavering, Frank and Morgan. Cellini confesses to his crime, and all ends well for Frank and his father.

Cliveden school in the "Boys' Herald" (1907) introduced another Bunter (the school porter and gardener). Cliveden's familiar names include Dick Neville, Price, Greene, Gatty, Trimble, Fish, Lincoln G. Poindexter, Insp. Snoop, Blaine, Mr. Isaacs (second-hand-clothes dealer), Kidd (bookie), Twigg (Green Man landlord), Cuffy. The Cliveden tales are in fairly short episodes, mostly inconsequential japing on the lines of the early rivalry between the St. Jim's Co's.

The story of St. Kit's apparently commenced as a serial in Pluck in January 1907, and must have run for just about the whole of that year. Remarkably, it was reprinted in a 120-page Boys' Friend Library early in 1908, only months after it ended in Pluck. I have only four of the 1907 Plucks in which St. Kit's was serialised, but they prove that the B.F.L. was heavily abridged, as three of my Plucks have large chunks cut out, while the other is omitted altogether. The story must be one of the longest continuous stories on one plot and theme that Charles Hamilton ever wrote, for practically everything directly relates to the story of how Squire Rupert Lacy, of Lynwood, and his brother Eldred, a Sixth Former at St. Kit's, attempt to

disgrace the school captain, Arthur Talbot, and to drive him from St. Kit's. The only junior school involvement lies in the support for the Sixth Form rivals by two factions led by Pat Nugent (supporting Talbot) and Trimble. As in "Football Fortune" and St. Freda's, there is an attempted murder, and, for good measure, the death of Squire Lacy. An extremely complicated plot finally reveals that Talbot, who had been looked after by the Head of St. Kit's (Dr. Kent) from infancy at the request of a friend is, in reality, a Lacy - cousin to Rupert and Eldred - and the rightful heir to the title and estate of Lynwood. The name Talbot was, in fact, Arthur Talbot's mother's maiden name.

Incidentally, the St. Kit's porter is named Josling. Familiar Hamilton names in the story are Brooke, Greene, Cleever, Cobb, Blane, North, Rake, and Manners.

Not exactly early Hamilton, a new St. Kit's came on the scene in 1921, with the launching of H. A. Hinton's weekly paper, "School and Sport". The story of Hinton's break with the A.P. and the over-ambitious venture of "School and Sport" has already been told more than once. It has also been revealed how Charles Hamilton was persuaded to take on the role of star author on the strength of his long association with Hinton, and how Hamilton waited for payment for his work with no better result than that of Bunter awaiting his postal order, until he finally abandoned the project. Bill Lofts has revealed that the stories were written by E. R. Home Gall after Hamilton dropped them, but I am able to add to this information from the possession of the first 24 copies of "School and Sport". I do not think the actual number of Hamilton stories has previously been listed, but I can now state that he wrote the first eight stories, and the first six chapters of the ninth, when the substitute author took over just as a typical Hamilton rebellion series was developing; the whole idea fizzled out like a damp squib, and all subsequent stories were very much sub-standard. I can also reveal that not all the substitute stories were by E. R. Home Gall, as those in issues numbered 20, and 22-24 were by an entirely different writer - I am, of course, unable to determine the author of my missing copies, 25-28. I am also unable to state whether Home Gall was the first or the second of the substitute authors, not having any other examples of his work in my possession.

There is no doubt that Charles Hamilton did all he could for Hinton, and his "School and Sport" stories were of a high quality. The stories centre round Harry Nameless, who had been found on the beach at South Cove after a wreck, and taken in and brought up by Jack Straw, a sailorman. Taught by a Mr. Carew (a St. Kit's old boy) Harry wins the Foundation Scholarship to St. Kit's. On his way to the school he dives into the river to rescue a St. Kit's junior, St. Leger, from drowning. The junior captain, Vernon Compton, makes an enemy of Harry, and tries to wreck his friendship with St. Leger. St. Leger's father comes to St. Kit's, intending to see Harry, whom he regards as an unsuitable companion for his son. On the way to the school, Mr. St. Leger is rescued by Harry from an attack by a tramp, and the friendship of the boys is then approved. St. Leger's uncle, Col. Lovell visits St. Kit's, and swears that he has seen Harry somewhere before; he assumes that it must have been through his work as a magistrate, and he makes efforts to get Harry out of St. Kit's. St. Leger takes Col. Lovell to visit Jack Straw at South Cove, with

the result that Harry Nameless is proved to be Col. Lovell's own son.

Familiar names in the "School and Sport" St. Kit's are, Lumley, Tracy, Durance, Bootles, Price, Myers, Rake, Scott, Elliott.

The Hamilton stories in "School and Sport" were reprinted in the S.O.L. over a long period of time, in numbers 64, 70, 136, 188 (1927-1933). The obvious thing would have been to publish them in quick succession, as they featured an unfamiliar school, in order that the same readers would become familiar with the characters. I do not possess the S.O.L's, but from the titles there were evidently only two weekly instalments to one S.O.L. taken from "School and Sport". Presumably the last S.O.L., entitled "Up the Rebels", must have included a conclusion by a sub writer, unless Charles Hamilton provided a genuine ending in 1933.

EDITORIAL COMMENT

I find Mr. Sutton's final paragraph a little confusing. The four S.O.L's he mentions were reprints of serials which featured in the Boys' Friend in 1924-5. Half of these serials had appeared in Hinton's short-lived paper "School & Sport".

The Nameless Schoolboy story received minor re-writing - I would have thought by Hamilton himself - for the Boys' Friend. Harry Lovell became Harry Wilmot, which was due, no doubt, to the prominent Lovell in the Rookwood tales in the Friend. Rather surprising is the presence of Hilton and Price in the Fifth Form, though, in the early twenties, their namesakes at Greyfriars had not become the stars they were to become later.

A question to which, all these years later, there is no answer, is whether the powers at the Amalgamated Press knew that they were publishing serials which had already appeared in a defunct rival paper.

Hamilton's possible reasons for writing for Hinton's paper were discussed in a Let's Be Controversial article "The Strange Case of Bunter's Baby" in the C.D. of June 1970. In post-war years, Hamilton made no secret of the fact that Hinton never paid for the stories which he, Hamilton, wrote for "School & Sport". Hamilton always assured us that he never bothered about money, so, perhaps, Hinton's non-payment did not worry him. If, however, as Mr. Sutton says, Hamilton left Hinton high and dry in the middle of a serial, it would have seemed to be mildly shabby treatment and took the gloss off the friendliness of the start. As Hinton had done a certain amount of sub-writing himself, it is not clear why he should engage another sub to finish off Hamilton's story.

Mr. Sutton speaks of the high quality of the writing in Hamilton's "School & Sport" work, and it certainly shows the normal Hamilton competence. All the same, the themes were a bit hackneyed, even in the early twenties. The Nameless Schoolboy who found his father was a re-run of the theme of "The Boy Without a Name". The rest, in the Boys' Friend and the S.O.L., were on rivalry for the captaincy, in which Wilmot emerged victorious, and a barring-out when the old Head was replaced by a martinet named Carker. They were published under Frank Richards' name, and I never had reason to think that any part was other than by Hamilton himself.

In conclusion, "Football Fortune" was not specially written for the Boys' Friend Library. It appeared as a serial in the Boys' Realm in 1905, and, according to editor Edwards, it was very popular. The reprint in the Boys' Friend Library was considerably cut.

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"Always a Knight" still wanted. Greetings to all.

MAURICE KING, 18 BARTON ROAD, SLOUGH. 'PHONE 43950.