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# Bernard Heldmann and the *Union Jack*, 1880–83: The Making of a Professional Author

MINNA VUOHELAINEN

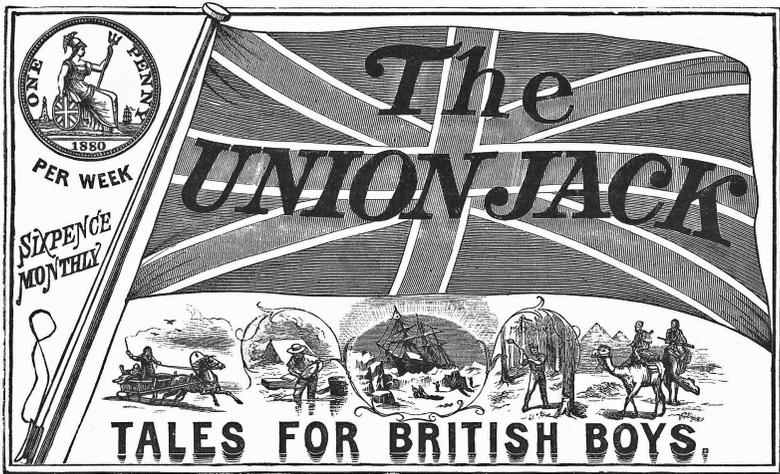
In autumn 1882, juvenile fiction specialist Sampson Low issued a handsome one-volume naval adventure, *The Mutiny on Board the Ship "Leander."* Its young author, Bernard Heldmann, sought to establish his credentials and further the book's success by dedicating the story to G. A. Henty, a favourite boys' author of the period. "My dear Henty,—" Heldmann wrote, "I am already very greatly in your debt; and by accepting the Dedication of this little story you will place [me] under a still further obligation."<sup>1</sup> Heldmann's popular story, which owed a great deal to *Robinson Crusoe*, had been serialised in Henty's boys' paper, the *Union Jack*, between April and September 1882. The young author became a regular contributor to the publication shortly after Henty assumed its editorship in May 1880 and rapidly gained influence, first serving as a trusted supplier of school stories and then gradually widening his repertoire to include adventure tales. At the time of writing his dedication to Henty, Heldmann had reached the pinnacle of his career with the *Union Jack* and was confidently looking forward to further opportunities. Indeed, in October 1882, when the weekly launched its short-lived new series, Heldmann was promoted to the position of co-editor.

Heldmann's career prospects as a boys' author were closely linked to the expansion in the market for juvenile publications following the 1870 Education Act. The last quarter of the nineteenth century witnessed a proliferation of publishing for boys,<sup>2</sup> perhaps best exemplified in the emergence of the extremely popular *Boy's Own Paper* in January 1879.<sup>3</sup> As Ackland noted in 1894, this "astonishing growth in juvenile works" was particularly dramatic in the first years of the 1880s<sup>4</sup> when juvenile literature came to account for nearly a fifth of all publishing activity and library borrowings.<sup>5</sup> In this essay, I examine a little-known agent operating within this

burgeoning market: the quality boys' weekly *Union Jack* (1880–83), which was established as a wholesome rival to the *Boy's Own Paper*. The weekly's imperialistic message was presented primarily through well-illustrated quality fiction aimed at mature boys and ambitious young men rather than the mixed family audience targeted by religious publications such as the *Boy's Own Paper*. I also explore how Richard Bernard Heldmann's (1857–1915) apprenticeship on the staff of the *Union Jack*, both as a regular contributor and as co-editor in 1882–83, prepared him for a successful pseudonymous career as “Richard Marsh,” a “universal literary provider” of adult genre fiction<sup>6</sup> who published seventy-six volumes of fiction as well as hundreds of short stories for the adult market between 1888 and 1915.<sup>7</sup> Heldmann's development as a boys' author, I argue, paved the way for Marsh's subsequent success as a writer of Gothic and crime stories for the adult market. Heldmann's early journalistic career was instrumental in facilitating his later development as a professional author by providing him with an acute understanding of the periodicals market, the niche marketing of genre fiction, the production of serial and short stories, and the uses of formula fiction. Yet at the same time Heldmann's work increasingly challenged 1880s debates on “healthy” juvenile fiction by introducing elements of emotionality, homoeroticism, crime, and horror, most notably in his final serial, “A Couple of Scamps” (1882–83). Heldmann's apparent popularity and business sense also contrasted in intriguing ways with the emotional and religious elements central to his fiction. His work for the *Union Jack* challenges current scholarly consensus that turn-of-the-century boys' literature altogether shunned emotional topics and the depiction of close male relationships: indeed, Heldmann's fiction undermined the late nineteenth-century drive for “pure” or “healthy” juvenile fiction.

**“Stirring, healthy tales”: W. H. G. Kingston,  
G. A. Henty, and the *Union Jack***

Published by Griffith & Farran (1880–81), Cecil Brooks (1881), and Sampson Low (1881–83), the *Union Jack* first appeared in January 1880, a year after the founding of the *Boy's Own Paper*, which it resembled in appearance and price (figure 1). The weekly penny issues, formatted in sixteen double-columned pages, contained good-quality black-and-white engravings, while the masthead, featuring the Union Jack flag, appeared above an action-packed front-page illustration designed to capture the attention of consumers. Initially edited by W. H. G. Kingston, a favourite boys' author,<sup>8</sup> the magazine passed in May 1880 to G. A. Henty, who used it as a platform to establish himself as a leading writer of boys' fiction.<sup>9</sup> The weekly was at the time considered a potentially serious competitor to the *Boy's Own Paper*. In December 1881, for example, the *Times* singled out



Vol. I.—No. 1.]

Edited by W. H. G. KINGSTON.

[Jan. 1, 1880.

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**PADDY FINN;**

OR, THE EXPLOITS AND ADVENTURES OF AN IRISH MIDSHIPMAN, AFLOAT AND ASHORE.

BY THE EDITOR.

CHAPTER I.—THE HOME OF MY ANCESTORS.

"THE top of the morning to you, Terence," cried the major, looking down upon me from the window of his bed-room.



"HIS SWORD FLASHED IN THE SUNLIGHT." (See, p. 5)

I was standing in front of the castle of Ballinahone—the seat of the O'Finnahans, my ancestors—on the banks of the beautiful Shannon; enjoying the fresh air of the early morning.

"Send Larry up, will you, with a jug of warm water for shaving; and, while I think of it, tell Biddy to brew me a cup of hot coffee. It will be some time before breakfast is ready, and my hand isn't as steady as it once was till I've put something into my inside."

The old house had not been provided with bells for summon-

Figure 1. The first issue of the *Union Jack* appeared under Kingston's editorship on January 1, 1880. The front page is characteristically action packed.

the *Union Jack* for praise in its review of the year's boys' annuals, referring to it as "very good" and "very 'jolly'" with "good, stirring, healthy tales of life and action."<sup>10</sup> The review particularly commended Heldmann's "two capital stories of schoolboy life, 'Rawdon School' and 'Dorrincourt,' in the former of which is a description of a cricket match worthy to rival that immortal scene when Rugby played the Marylebone Club in the pages of *Tom Brown*."<sup>11</sup>

The most fiction-focused of the quality boys' weeklies of the early 1880s, the *Union Jack* employed aggressive niche-marketing strategies in its attempt to distinguish itself from its competitors as a "healthy" educational periodical promoting imperialist, masculine, and British values. As Henty explained, Kingston "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."<sup>12</sup> In an editorial statement, Kingston reiterated the weekly's specialised focus: "We 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."<sup>13</sup> After assuming the weekly's editorship in May 1880, Henty similarly emphasised that "bright, stirring" fiction would be the focus of the *Union Jack* since this was the magazine's chosen niche in a market containing "formidable competitors," none of which "occup[ie]d exactly the ground which the *Union Jack* ha[d] taken up, as a paper for active, healthy lads of from twelve to eighteen years of age, and not for children."<sup>14</sup>

In keeping with this stated mission, the *Union Jack* published serial and short fiction by leading boys' authors. Contributions were largely signed and more substantial in length than was usual in the juvenile press. A typical issue contained a historical military story, usually by Henty; an adventure story by Kingston, George Manville Fenn, or Jules Verne; and a school story by Heldmann or Ascott R. Hope.<sup>15</sup> These were supplemented by a correspondence column, articles of interest to young male readers, and Archibald McNeill's regular feature on the "*Union Jack* Field Club," a society aimed at improving readers' knowledge of the natural world. A creed of imperialism, manliness, and "healthiness" permeated the magazine. "A work of fiction is a work of recreation," an anonymous editorial explained.<sup>16</sup> "Of one thing must one be careful," it continued, "that the recreation is healthy recreation, that the book over which one pores is a right, and a true, and a pure one."<sup>17</sup> Boys, the "future rulers of the land; the future statesmen, pastors, preachers, merchant princes," were expected to learn manly lessons from the *Union Jack*.<sup>18</sup> The magazine warned them to be "self-reliant," "fearless of danger," "courteous and polite," and "cheerful and obliging."<sup>19</sup> "If the perusal of the tales in this magazine ha[s] done

anything towards forming such characters,” Henty concluded, “I shall feel indeed that my labour has not been in vain.”<sup>20</sup> At a time of intense debate over juvenile reading, the *Union Jack*’s stirring stories glorified the ideal boy and supported a creed of British imperialism and power.

### “Really working very hard”: On the Staff of the *Union Jack*

In spite of its aggressive branding as a fiction paper, the *Union Jack* was not a financial success. The 15,000 issues printed weekly<sup>21</sup> compared poorly with the circulation of 57,000 achieved by the *Boy’s Own Paper*.<sup>22</sup> Henty’s response to these financial difficulties was to announce that the fourth volume of the *Union Jack* would start a new series co-edited by Bernard Heldmann. “My dear lads,” began Henty in an August 1882 editorial address,

I am glad to tell you that on the 1<sup>st</sup> October a New Series of the *UNION JACK* will be commenced.

Great changes will be made. The magazine will be increased in size, will be printed on much better paper, and will be improved in every way.

While the stories will be as good as heretofore, the scope of the paper will be enlarged. Distinguished soldiers and sailors, travellers, special correspondents, the leading athletes of the day, and many others, will give sketches of interesting scenes in which they have taken part. A host of the best authors and artists have promised to help us, and the attractions of the paper will be vastly increased.

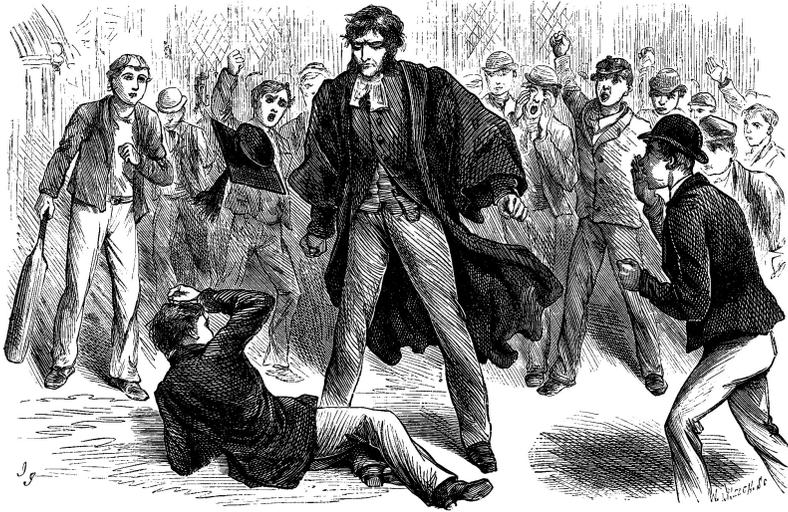
As the changes contemplated will vastly add to the editorial work, and the demands upon my time are already very great, MR BERNARD HELDMANN will join me in the task, and will bring to it a fund of new life and vigour.<sup>23</sup>

By the time of his promotion to co-editor, Bernard Heldmann had already built an impressive career with the paper given that he was just twenty-five years old. Little is known about Heldmann’s early life, but his decision to embrace journalism was probably born out of necessity as much as personal interest. While his grandson Robert Aickman states that Heldmann had been expelled from Eton and Oxford “owing to incidents with women,” it is more likely that young Bernard was educated at home by his father, a London schoolmaster.<sup>24</sup> Nonetheless, he may have turned to journalism as a semi-intellectual career on the borders of respectable society, which, as Davis points out, was considered a “path to relative prosperity and possible celebrity.”<sup>25</sup> Heldmann’s 1883 novel *Daintree* hints that a literary career may have been more than just a bare necessity. The novel tells the story of the *Freeman* (as opposed to *Heldmann*) family, whose youngest son Oliver is a “dreamer” with the “divine gift of poetry.”<sup>26</sup> Although “incapable of self-control” and “like quicksilver, never still,” Oliver is

“ambitious” and “seemed to have not the slightest doubt in his own mind, nor would he hesitate to tell you so, that his future was to be great, and grand, and glorious, and he was to make it so.”<sup>27</sup> Oliver aims “to take high place among the great, [. . .] win name and fame,” and “hand down his name to future generations as one which they should love and cherish.”<sup>28</sup> In Oliver, Heldmann portrays a young man with distinctly literary, though as yet undefined, ambitions whose temperament makes it impossible for him to fit into his native farming community. Simultaneously critical and sympathetic, the portrait of Oliver may reveal Heldmann’s own ambitions and doubts about his decision to embark upon a literary career and thus may be seen as a pensive self-portrait.

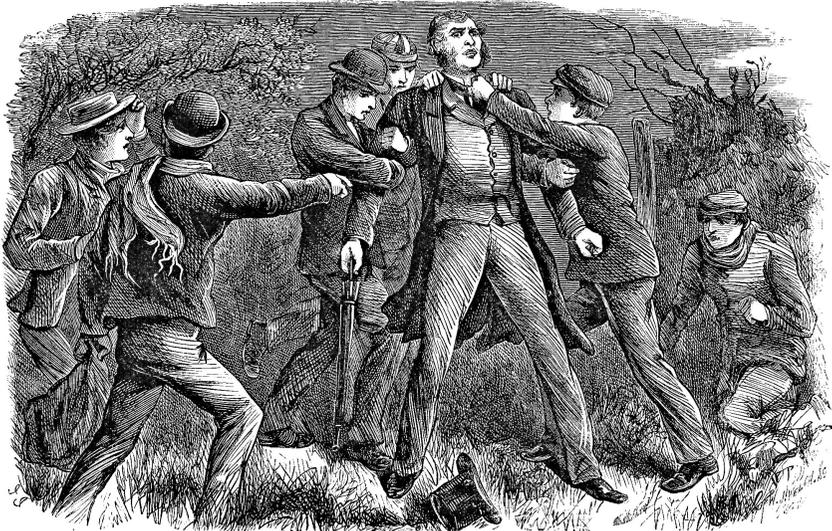
Heldmann’s first known story, the short adventure “A Whale Hunt,” appeared in Strahan’s juvenile monthly *Peep-Show: A Magazine for the Young of All Ages* in November 1879. A number of short stories and short serials followed in 1880: “What Happened to John Wilson: A Tale of School Life” and “Hilton *versus* Leetown: The Story of a Cricket Match” were published in Cassell’s *Little Folks: A Magazine for the Young* in April and September, respectively; the three-part serial “A Memorable Affair at Belton School” was published in the Sunday School Union’s *Young England* in October; and the moralistic tale “To Be Left till Called for” was published in Cassell’s devotional periodical the *Quiver* in November.<sup>29</sup> Apart from these contributions, which he may have sold before establishing a connection with the *Union Jack*, Heldmann seems to have written exclusively for Henty’s weekly during 1880–83 with one exception: the appearance in September 1881 of “The Boulogne Sand Hills” in the *Graphic*—his only known publication in a periodical predominantly aimed at adults. His stories began appearing in the *Union Jack* soon after Henty assumed his editorship, which suggests there may have been some previous connection between the two men, possibly through the Savage Club or sporting circles. Heldmann’s contributions to the last third of the first volume of the *Union Jack* were prodigious for an author at the beginning of his career, which suggests that he was earning a living from his writing. The first story attributed to Heldmann published in the paper was “Farnborough Grange, and the Boys There,” which was serialised in five issues beginning in August 1880 (figures 2 and 3). In September, Heldmann continued his efforts by contributing “In the Lion’s Jaws,” a short piece about schoolboy pranks in a menagerie, and by compiling a collection of four sets of reminiscences of public-school life, “Eton Forty Years Ago.” September further saw the publication of “A Memorable Night: A Story of Modern Highwaymen,” a short anonymous piece that anticipated Heldmann’s later novel-length serial, “A Couple of Scamps.”<sup>30</sup>

These early publications established Heldmann’s standard repertoire of sentimental school stories, adventure tales, and schoolboy-prank narra-



GEORGE WENT DOWN LIKE AN OX THAT IS FELLED (A. 534).

Figure 2. "George went down like an ox that is felled," illustration for Heldmann's "Farnborough Grange, and the Boys There," *Union Jack* 1, no. 34 (August 19, 1880): 536. Temperamental boys come into conflict with authority in Heldmann's first short school serial for the *Union Jack*.



A NUMBER OF FIGURES SPRANG UP FROM BEHIND THE HEDGE AND DRAGGED HIM DOWN TO THE GROUND (A. 551).

Figure 3. "A number of figures sprang up from behind the hedge and dragged him down to the ground," illustration for Heldmann's "Farnborough Grange, and the Boys There," *Union Jack* 1, no. 35 (August 26, 1880): 552. The serial's characteristic theme of generational conflict reaches a violent climax.

tives. His school stories seemed to meet with the greatest success given that at the start of the second volume of the *Union Jack* he progressed from short pieces to novel-length tales, satisfying readers' requests for school stories on the model of Talbot Baines Reed's successful Parkhurst features in the *Boy's Own Paper*. Reed's first long school story, "The Adventures of a Three-Guinea Watch," appeared concurrently with Heldmann's first novel-length contribution, "Rawdon School," which started in the second volume of the *Union Jack* and concluded at the end of December 1881. At the story's conclusion, Henty comforted his readers that he had "arranged with Mr Heldmann for a new story," and Heldmann's second novel-length serial, "Dorrincourt," ran in the magazine from the beginning of April to the end of September 1881 (figures 4, 5, and 6).<sup>31</sup> Both were subsequently published in volume form in 1881 by the religious publishing house James Nisbet. Following the formula established in *Tom Brown's School-Days* (1857), "Rawdon School" and "Dorrincourt" highlighted relationships between boys who struggled through various trials and tribulations largely caused by a lack of understanding on the part of their guardians and teachers. Eventually the boys succeed in winning the admiration and acceptance of their peers and mentors.

The third volume of the *Union Jack* occasioned something of a departure in Heldmann's work by broadening his repertoire. Fewer of his writings appeared in the third volume, perhaps suggesting that he was assuming more editorial responsibility or that he was spending a great deal of time writing longer or (for him) generically unusual works. Heldmann's first contribution to the third volume was "Social Spirits: A Tale of Belton School," which appeared in four weekly instalments beginning in late February 1882 and dealt with schoolboys' unhealthy drinking habits in a somewhat racy manner (figure 7). "Social Spirits" was shortly followed by "The Mutiny on Board the Ship 'Leander,'" which started at the beginning of April 1882, concluded in mid-September, and was later reissued in a handsome edition by Sampson Low. This maritime story clearly resembled Henty's work in tone and content, suggesting that Heldmann may have been paying his mentor a compliment when composing the serial. However, Heldmann also may have sensed that there was more of a demand for adventure fiction than for school stories, which suffered from a chronic lack of plausible plot developments. "The Mutiny on Board the Ship 'Leander'" was well suited to the *Union Jack* and featured an exhausting number of adventures guaranteed to make the boy reader feel he had received his money's worth. Nationalistic in outlook, the story abounded with comments extolling the virtues of "England, the stronghold of the happy and the free" and celebrating the bravery of the "true-born British tar."<sup>32</sup> In the last issue of the volume, Heldmann published "A Fortune at a Find," a story of gold-mining, crime, and romance in Australia, which

# THE UNION JACK

ONE PENNY WEEKLY.  
SIXPENCE MONTHLY.

Vol. II.—No. 86.]

Edited by G. A. HENTY.

[August 18, 1881.

**DORRINCOURT.**

THE STORY OF A TERM THERE.

By BERNARD HELDMANN.

Author of "Rawdon School," "A Memorable Affair at Beldon School,"  
"What Happened to John Wilson," &c., &c.

(Continued from p. 708.)

CHAP. XX.—GEOFFREY HAZLEMERE IMPROVING THE OCCASION.

BOLLINGTON lost no time in showing that he did not consider  
his office a sinecure; president he seemed resolved to be in

fact as well as name, and very soon his coadjutors found out that he by no means intended his position to be an ornamental one alone. In that enthusiastic way in which he was apt to take up all new ideas which caught his fancy, he took up the idea of this society; if the ardour of its members was warm before, it was burning now. It was evident that Mr. President Bollington meant to reach by leaps and bounds the goal which they approached with cautious steps before.

The fact of his having accepted this new dignity was meant to be kept private; indeed, the whole society was meant in



A PAINFUL CONFESSION.

Figure 4. "A painful confession," illustration for Heldmann's "Dorrincourt: The Story of a Term There," *Union Jack* 2, no. 86 (August 18, 1881): 721. A typical pair of boys in a Heldmann story.

# THE UNION JACK

ONE PENNY WEEKLY.  
SIXPENCE MONTHLY.

Vol. II.—No. 89.]

Edited by G. A. HENTY.

[September 8, 1881.

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**DORRINCOURT.**

THE STORY OF A TERM THERE.

BY BERNARD HELDMANN,

Author of "Rawdon School," "A Memorable Affair at Beldon School,"

"What Happened to John Wilson," &amp;c., &amp;c.

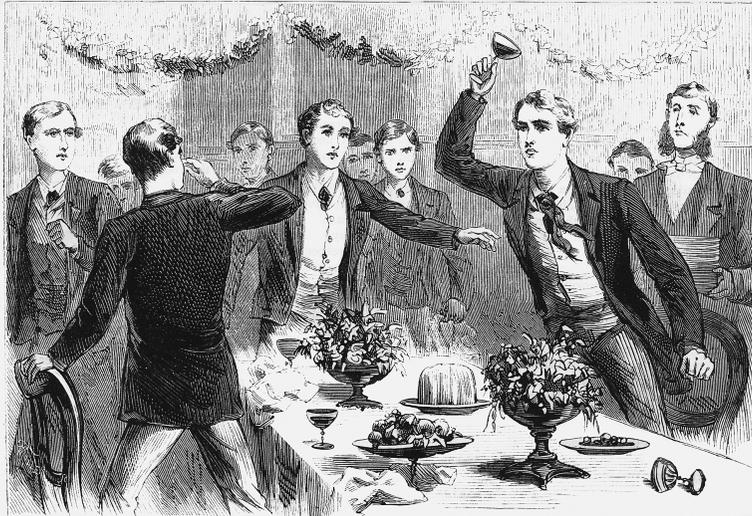
(Continued from p. 756)

## CHAPTER XXII.—AFTER THE MATCH WAS OVER—THE CONSPIRATORS' LAST MEETING.

BOLTINGTON'S high spirits were remarked by all. At the dinner which took place before their visitors started to return,

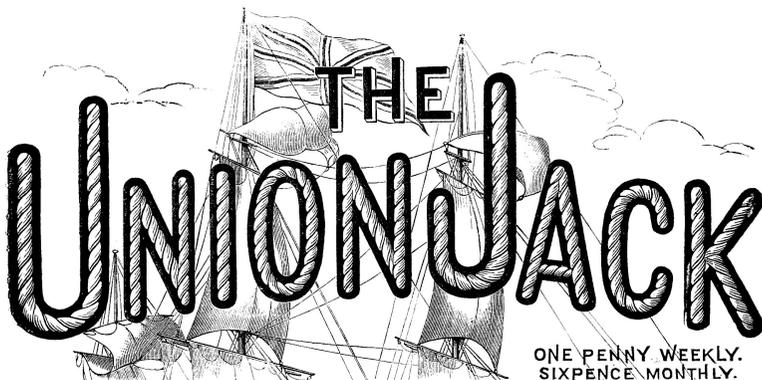
he was the life and soul of the whole party. It was an uproarious meal; his humour seemed to be infectious; a livelier gathering was seldom seen. He led the laugh, and his voice was heard above all others. His end of the table he kept in a perpetual roar, the din was edifying. Frantic efforts, in which they succeeded to a marvel, were made to eat, and talk, and laugh at once.

But those present who were best acquainted with Boltington's peculiarities were not too pleased to see the mood that he was in. There was a recklessness in his demeanour, a wild air of



BOLTINGTON FLUNG THE CONTENTS OF THE GLASS IN HENDERSON'S FACE.

Figure 5. "Boltington flung the contents of the glass in Henderson's face," illustration for Heldmann's "Dorrincourt: The Story of a Term There," *Union Jack* 2, no. 89 (September 8, 1881): 769. The misunderstood and unruly protagonist loses his temper.



THE  
UNION JACK

ONE PENNY WEEKLY.  
SIXPENCE MONTHLY.

Vol. II.—No. 90.]

Edited by G. A. HENTY.

[September 15, 1881.

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**DORRINCOURT.**

THE STORY OF A TERM THERE.

BY BERNARD HELDMANN,

Author of "Rawdon School," "A Memorable Affair at Beldon School,"  
"What Happened to John Wilson," &c., &c.

(Continued from p. 773.)

CHAPTER XXIV.—BOLTINGTON PROVES FALSE.

"DYING!" repeated Boltington, paying no heed to the prostrate

Tiny, and leaving him to pick himself and the table up as best he could; "who told you so?"

"Mr. Selden, as he came in just now. I knew he had been sent for from the farm, and I watched for his return; and when he came I asked him how Tom was, and he said that he was nearer Heaven than he or I."

"He said so, did he?" asked Boltington, with passionate bitterness. "That would be true in any case. Dead or alive, he is near, while we are far away. Where is my hat?"

He caught up one which lay upon the floor; it was his mortar-



DOCTOR GRAHAM DISCOVERS BOLTINGTON.

Figure 6. "Doctor Graham discovers Boltington," illustration for Heldmann's "Dorrincourt: The Story of a Term There," *Union Jack* 2, no. 90 (September 15, 1881): 785. Bitter tears fall amid natural elements.

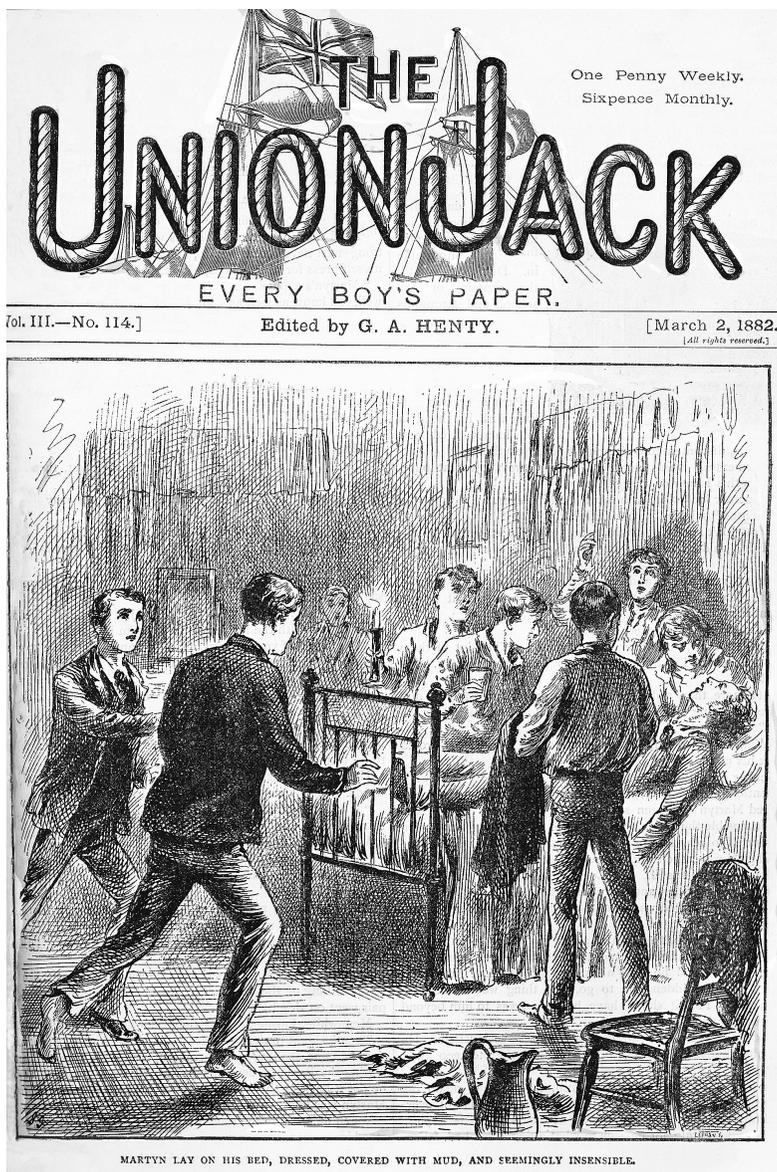


Figure 7. “Martyn lay on his bed, dressed, covered with mud, and seemingly insensible,” illustration for Heldmann’s “Social Spirits: A Tale of Belton School,” *Union Jack* 3, no. 114 (March 2, 1882): 337. An illustration of the effects of drink.

took up half the issue and was probably designed to fill up space cheaply at the end of the volume; nevertheless, its inclusion indicates that Heldmann had become a trusted contributor and could produce material quickly—a prerequisite for success in journalism.

### “A Ladder to Literature”: Lessons and Constraints

In *The Pen and the Book*, an 1899 guide to aspiring authors, Walter Besant observes that a “large number of living writers have begun with journalism in one or other of its branches: and journalism during the last fifty years has proved a handmaid or a ladder to literature.”<sup>33</sup> Bernard Heldmann’s years on the staff of the *Union Jack* allowed him to improve his writing and editorial skills dramatically. To an extent, this development was natural for a young writer in a good situation, but it also showed his aptitude both for journalism and for the production of commercial popular literature. Heldmann rapidly progressed from short- to novel-length school stories and then to adventure, achieving popularity among the *Union Jack*’s readers.

Heldmann’s development can be seen as indicative of the increasing professionalisation of writing at the turn of the century. Possibly barred from a professional career by his youthful misbehaviour, Heldmann quickly learnt to supply different kinds of material at different lengths to fill the space required. He demonstrated an ability to create suspense within short instalments, which would later function as single chapters of a volume-form novel. Each chapter generally started with a resolution and ended with a crisis which was then resolved at the beginning of the next chapter, keeping the audience in a constant state of suspense. One of Heldmann’s successful ploys was the creation and re-use of certain key settings and characters, a common practice at the time. For example, “Rawdon School” featured a cricket match between Rawdon and Dorrincourt, while in a later serial Dorrincourt returned the compliment by inviting Rawdon to a match along with characters from the earlier story. Similarly, the Belton School setting linked *The Belton Scholarship*, an 1882 novel, to the short serials “A Memorable Affair at Belton School,” published in *Young England* in 1880, and “Social Spirits: A Tale of Belton School,” published in the *Union Jack* in 1882. By using a familiar name, Heldmann incorporated references to his earlier stories in the hope that readers who liked them would be drawn to tales involving the same characters and locations. Familiarity, he wagered, would create pleasure and a sense of ownership.

Heldmann’s tendency to write for target audiences further testifies to his ability to market his own work. The fiction he published outside of the *Union Jack*—including such school-prize novels as *Expelled* (1882) and his most successful novel, *The Belton Scholarship* (1882)—was of a more religious and emotional nature than the fiction he wrote for Henty’s weekly.<sup>34</sup>

Since Heldmann produced one type of material for the *Union Jack* and another type for religious publishers, he was clearly aware of the needs of different audiences and chose his publishing venues accordingly. In keeping with its niche market and the demands of the aggressive masculinity of the day, the *Union Jack* avoided publishing stories that were considered excessively emotional or religious. School stories in the *Union Jack* were instead focused on sports and adventures, building on the athletic tradition of *Tom Brown's School-Days* and Talbot Baines Reed's stories. However, there was also a thriving market for Sunday-school and school-prize literature such as *The Belton Scholarship*, which was expected to reflect the religious and moralistic tradition of Frederic W. Farrar's work. Heldmann was quick to exploit both markets to increase his income.

Yet as much as Heldmann sought niche markets for his work, channelling his most "manly" stories into the *Union Jack*, he also strategically departed from the journal's implicit generic expectations. His work for the *Union Jack* sometimes defied what scholars have assumed to be the "manly" tone of turn-of-the-century boys' fiction. While emotional and religious references are more commonly found in his work outside the *Union Jack*, his fiction for Henty's weekly, particularly the school stories, contains emotive and devotional elements out of keeping with the current scholarly understanding of the late-century boys' market. Much recent scholarly writing on juvenile fiction has focused on the interplay between New Imperialism and the more aggressive notion of masculinity it encouraged in the late nineteenth century, when educational and imperial aims converged to produce a demand for "healthy" fiction devoid of emotion.<sup>35</sup> Bristow, Nelson, and Reynolds all argue that late Victorian publishing for boys witnessed a shift away from mid-century ideals of emotional Christian manliness,<sup>36</sup> celebrating "muscle and morality [. . .] over intelligence and inspiration"<sup>37</sup> and implicitly excluding women and girls as authors and readers.<sup>38</sup> Boys were encouraged to explore, challenge, and master their surroundings, reflecting the changing international climate favouring aggression, competitiveness, and patriotism.<sup>39</sup>

Some of Heldmann's boys' stories, including his school stories for the *Union Jack*, defy these scholarly assumptions and can instead be situated on what Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick terms a "continuum between homosocial and homosexual."<sup>40</sup> The boarding-school setting, of course, necessitates a sharing of living space in a homosocial, all-male environment where boys are frequently brought into physical contact with one another, for example on the sports field. Similarly, the corrective nature of juvenile fiction requires the stories to carry some moral message, for instance the imperative to choose one's friends carefully. However, Heldmann's fiction, including stories written for the "manly" *Union Jack*, sometimes introduces religious, romantic, and implicitly homoerotic themes. Heldmann's

fictional boys, whether in a *Union Jack* serial or a religious novel, are misunderstood rascals whose paths are strewn with generational conflict, temptation, regret, punishment, prayers, and tears. They cultivate intimate relationships with each other that resemble romantic friendships, often kissing, crying, and embracing. While some reviewers failed to notice the protagonists' seeming effeminacy or the close parallels to Farrar's mid-century homoerotic tales of school life, others seemed to be aware of these affinities. The *Academy's* naïve review of the volume-form edition of the *Union Jack* serial *Dorrincourt* claimed, "Boys will relish the story of a term at *Dorrincourt* School. The author writes in a manly and healthy tone, and his book is of the right kind to put into the hands of schoolboys."<sup>41</sup> The critic of the *Athenaeum* was shrewder, noting that "some incidents in the book remind one of Canon Farrar's *Eric*; the present story, however, has less literary merit than that work."<sup>42</sup> *The Athenaeum's* reference to Farrar may be read as a covert endorsement of, or warning against, the homoerotic undertones of the two novels. Yet on the surface, the review seems to object more to the author's lack of literary merit than to the serial's homoerotic subtext.

By the 1880s, concerns over schoolboys' purity were linked to anxieties over public-school homosexuality. School stories were perceived as a vehicle for promoting acceptable forms of athletic and competitive masculinity and male bonding among juvenile readers. Yet the nature of Heldmann's fiction and the "feminine" characteristics of his protagonists, even in the "healthy," "manly" *Union Jack*, appear to contradict the notion that emotions were seen as entirely unacceptable in the harder imperialistic atmosphere of the turn of the century. If Henty was willing to publish Heldmann's stories in his magazine and eventually to promote him to the position of co-editor, the content of the stories must have been deemed appropriate. This conflict between the implicit homoeroticism of Heldmann's writing and his apparent popularity with readers of the 1880s suggests a greater complexity in contemporary reading tastes than is commonly assumed. By focusing on volume-form fiction by a limited number of canonical writers, much recent scholarship has inadvertently misrepresented the 1880s juvenile market. It is, of course, possible that Heldmann's religious novels—the volumes published by Nisbet, for example—were bought as Sunday-school prizes and may have reflected neither the concerns of the secular population nor the tastes of the intended boy readers themselves. However, even Heldmann's more adventurous work in the *Union Jack* contains implicitly homoerotic undertones and yet appears to have been popular with the paper's secular and youthful readership. It was apparently also acceptable to Henty, who is often cited as a leading promoter of the harsher masculine ideals of the period. It must, therefore, be concluded that emotional school stories, such as those written by Heldmann, were not as out of step with popular tastes amongst juvenile readers as many critics have assumed.

### “Every Boy’s Paper”: Editing the New Series

By the end of the third volume of the *Union Jack*, then, Heldmann had contributed at least seventy-eight instalments to 144 issues of the paper. Such a rate of production must have made him one of the most trusted contributors to the magazine. It is logical to assume that Henty was willing to promote him to co-editor as an economical way of securing the services of a favourite author. The fourth volume of the *Union Jack*, the first of the new series, saw the weekly embark on a populist course designed to attract new readers. A “new departure in literature for boys will be taken,” the editors boasted,

THE UNION JACK will be  
 The best Paper for Boys  
 The most complete Paper for Boys  
 The most interesting Paper for Boys  
 Will contain the best Stories for Boys  
 The best Articles for Boys  
 The best Pictures for Boys  
 The best Answers to Boys  
 The best Fun for Boys  
 It will be the best Paper for Boys ever published.<sup>43</sup>

Heldmann’s commercial touch can be felt in the aggressive marketing of the new series, which unfortunately was a failure: the *Union Jack* closed at the end of September 1883 “because it did not pay.”<sup>44</sup> It is possible that the weekly was doomed to failure from the start. Its appearance a year after the *Boy’s Own Paper*, which it resembled, may have meant that too many potential readers had already begun to identify with the rival publication and the majority of the public preferred more populist papers such as Edwin J. Brett’s weeklies. Clearly, Heldmann’s achievements as an editor did not match his success as an author.

The reasons for this failure become clear when analysing issues in the new series, which convey a sense of indecision. While the *Union Jack* had originally prided itself on its exclusiveness, it now termed itself “Every Boy’s Paper.” In an effort to attract more readers, the editors attempted—in vain—to please “Every Boy.” The number of features in each issue was doubled to approximately ten short items, and the paper came to resemble the early *Boy’s Own Paper*—which, interestingly, was by this time moving towards a less fragmented format with longer fictional features. Reflecting Henty’s statement that “Tales of Adventure will still be the leading feature of the *Union Jack*, but we feel that a greater amount of variety is desirable,” the paper began to publish a range of non-fiction features alongside

quality fiction by Henty, Fenn, Hope, Heldmann, Robert Ballantyne, and Captain Mayne Reid.<sup>45</sup> These serials increasingly focused on adventure and humour instead of school stories, resulting in more suspenseful plotting. The editors' increased willingness to make concessions to the readers and encourage further subscriber bonding was also evident in the introduction of McNeill's "'Our Own' Page," "'Our Own'—and Other People's Fun," and "'Our Own' Post Office," which replaced his earlier "*Union Jack* Field Club" articles and took up the back page of the weekly issue (figure 8). Similarly designed to encourage reader bonding was the introduction of anonymous editorials that addressed topics deemed to be of interest or moral benefit to boys. These leaders started with the new series and ended in January 1883, and it is likely that Heldmann had some responsibility for them given that they adopted his style, expressed his characteristic sympathy towards boys, addressed his usual fictional topics, and ended when his editorship came to grief. In a nod to reader requests, the monthly full-page colour inserts assumed a humorous narrative and serial format, and readers were encouraged to collect the entire series. The new series also introduced a special Christmas number, *Old England's Flag*, a one-off publication of sixty pages which came out at the beginning of December and featured a dozen seasonal stories by regular contributors as well as McNeill's Christmas feature, "'Our Own' Christmas Page," "'Our Own' Christmas Puzzles," and "'Our Own' Christmas Jokes."

The new commercial stance of the *Union Jack* was accompanied by an unprecedented eagerness to quote any praise given to the paper by readers or reviewers, a standard advertising device associated with the New Journalism. McNeill was at pains to point out that his correspondents strongly approved of the recent changes, emphasising how one reader was "full of praise for the *Union Jack*, and specially pays a lot of pretty compliments to [Heldmann's serial] 'A Couple of Scamps'" and noting that another offered "kindly remarks."<sup>46</sup> The paper also began to boast about its contributors: "Mr Heldmann, I am sure, will thank you for the kind manner in which you speak of him. I can tell you—as a little secret, you know, and only between yourself and myself—that he is really working very hard for the *Union Jack* at the present."<sup>47</sup> This aggressive marketing strategy was in direct contrast to the discreet arrogance of the previous volumes and was arguably influenced by Heldmann since Henty had previously objected to overt self-praise.

### Exit: "A Couple of Scamps"

A close reading of "A Couple of Scamps," the last story Heldmann is known to have written for any boys' paper, illustrates many of his key stylistic devices and thematic concerns but also suggests that while the *Union*

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THE UNION JACK.

"OUR OWN" PAGE.

BY ARCHIBALD MCNEILL.

This week we want something for a little change. I've no fine preachments on hand, or anything like them. I don't wish this fine bright morning to talk about "Grip," or "Money," or "Through," or "Trading at school," or anything of the kind. I am going to make to-day's "Our Own Page" lively and light, and so we will all listen by way of a start to

THE BICYCLER'S LAY.

"Our airy feet, with well-known flight, Swift on the twinklings of a wire, Run up the hills that heaven is sight, And leave the walking world to tire. O'er the earth, ye booted ones, Contented kick your native dust. While old bicyclers and their sons Light-footed tread the wisest they trust."

But poetry is not sufficiently satisfying. Here, what do you say to an American tale of an odd bicycle race between a man and a

YELLOW DOG.

I can't say that I wrote it myself, but it is none the worse for that. Perhaps some people would think much the better. And this was how it happened. Captain Hardriver, the hero of the story, was mounting his iron-steed one day, when a yellow dog bounded up before him with a deprecating wag of its tail, and started off with a defiant "no, you don't catch me" which made the gallant captain determine to race the dog or die in the attempt. Dog ran on, captain followed, the letter having, before he mounted, put a few pebbles in his pocket. But hard as the bicycle went, faster scuttled the dog, until Captain Hardriver determined to put on steam and pass the canine runner at the risk of running his bicycle into bits. But now to take up the captain's own words—

"Seeing by that that I was in earnest, the dog apparently made up his mind that he would show me how easy it was for him to quit my company. He straightened out his tail, laid back his ears, collected his short, crooked legs in a bundle, and uncoiled himself. In a minute he was twenty rods ahead, a spurt of drifting dust in the road; in two minutes he was thirty rods ahead; in three minutes forty rods, and beginning to get dim in the dust-cloud. But the wind was blowing briskly behind me, the road was fair. I felt fresh, and I made the pedals play at racing speed.

"After going a couple of miles I noticed that the dust cloud didn't seem to be quite so far ahead as it was. The dog probably thought he had by that time convinced me of the folly of trying to catch him. Gradually I gained more and more. He was only thirty rods ahead; then twenty; then ten; then five. I let out another yell and another pebble, by way of encouraging the cur. He responded with a yelp and a spurt which made his short legs scatter all around him like a shower of Bologna sausages, and the dust rose like smoke from the chimney of a locomotive. Again he went ahead—ten rods, fifteen, twenty, twenty-five—but he couldn't quit make it thirty. Then, after a mile or so, I began to gain again slowly—twenty rods—fifteen—ten—five. I could now see that the scamp was growing distressed. His tongue was out; he looked tired all over; the eye which he flung back over his shoulder didn't leer derisively any longer. I wonder why he didn't turn out and leap the fence at the roadside; then I guessed that he was a city cur, strayed out into the country, and he was probably making for home.

"After a little I gained on him again, and this time almost ran upon him before he could put on a spurt. But I gave another wild yell, and pretended to throw my hat at him, when he yelped and distributed himself along the highway, but only for a few rods before I began to catch him again. And now his tongue was hanging out so that it nearly tripped him up by getting tangled round his fore legs; and I could no longer see him into a spurt. He barely kept ahead of the wheel, which several times actually touched his tail. In fact, for the last mile before we reached the city, I could have reached out and dropped a pebble upon him if I had had any pebbles left. When we arrived there he ran into the yard and

buried himself in the water of the horse-trough, while I dismounted and looked at my watch. I had made that five miles, over not the best road for racing, in eighteen minutes forty seconds, as nearly as I could time myself."

I wonder what that "dawg" thinks now.

"OUR OWN"—AND OTHER PEOPLE'S FUN.

HOW HE FELL.—A BICYCLE SONG.

I. Why ride the men of the bicy-cle Under that gasp and yell? Because there is plenty of shade, you see, Under the garden wall. One rider's wheel struck a little stone, And into the air went his backbone, And the "bike" lay down, but the man was thrown Over the garden wall.

Chorus. Over the garden wall, We never take headers at all, But can't let 'em never forget The time my wheel a cobblestone met And landed me where the grass was wet, Over the garden wall.

II. They picked me up from the hard, cold ground, And the fall extent of my damages found. As slowly from the earth I rose, They brushed a bushel of dirt from my clothes, And placed a cork in my weeping nose. Over the garden wall.

Chorus. Over the handi-bar Or steel like a shooting star, My pants were rent, my handle bent; As over the fence like a streak I went; And here I sit on my head there was quite a dent, Over the garden wall.

III. Now, all you 'cyclers had better keep 'Way from the garden wall; Or you'll get headers—will make you weep— And a hearse we will have to call. When you see a place with cherries inside, Round by the gate you had better ride, And not go in on the plan I tried, Over the garden wall.

Chorus. Over the garden wall, Is the quickest way of all; But you can bet 'will make you sweat, When once you let your little wheel get The bulge on you where the grass is wet, Over the garden wall.

The Wheelman.

"Bulled Eggs" is the name just adopted by a football club, the signifying how impossible it is to beat them. There are few eminent men who have not said that their success in life was largely owing to their mother's teachings, and who are able to honor her. The following is one of the many illustrations of this truth: The mother of John Quincy Adams said in a letter to him, written when he was only twelve years of age, "I would rather see you laid in your grave than grow up a profane and graceless boy." Not long before the death of Mr. Adams, a gentleman said to him, "I have found out who made you. What do you mean?" asked Mr. Adams. The gentleman replied, "I have been reading the published letters of your mother." "If," this gentleman relates, "I had spoken this dear name to some little boy who had been for weeks away from his mother, his eyes could not have flashed more brightly than did the eyes of that venerable old man when he pronounced the name of his mother. He stood up in his peculiar manner, and exclaimed, 'Yes, sir; all that is good in me is due to my mother.'"

AN EXTRAORDINARY ADVERTISEMENT.—The following requirement is set in a Berlin journal: "Wanted, a person capable of building flea-carriages, and accustomed to harnessing fleas to them." Artemus Ward started in California with an announcement that he would lecture on the "The Babes in the Wood." He said he preferred this title to that of "My Seven Grandmothers." Nobody knows why, for there was, of course, to be all little in the lecture about babes, in or out of the wood, as about seven or any other number of grandmothers. "The Babes in the Wood" was never written down; a few sentences only have survived of a performance which was destined to revolutionize the comic lecturing of the age. "The Babes" seem only to have been alluded to twice—that is, at the beginning, when the lecturer gravely announced "The Babes" as his subject, and then, after a rambling stretch of irrelevant witticisms, which lasted from an hour to an hour and a half, he concluded with, "I now have a new subject—"The Babes in the Wood." Then, taking out his watch, his countenance would suddenly change—surprise, followed by great perplexity. At last, recovering his former composure, and facing the difficulty as best he could, he continued: "But I find I have exceeded my subject—"The Babes in the Wood." Then, as far as I know, they were very good babes; they were as good as ordinary babes." "My dear Polly, I am surprised at your taste in wearing another woman's hair on your head," said Mr. Smith to his wife. "My dear Joe, I am equally astonished that you persist in wearing another sheep's wool on your back."

"OUR OWN" POST OFFICE.

ANSWERS TO CORRESPONDENTS.—All communications intended for this column should be addressed—"Correspondence, Union Jack," 188, Fleet Street, E. C. Replies will be given as soon as possible, but owing to the number of queries received, it is impossible to say in what number they may be expected to appear. Under no circumstances can replies be sent by post. Correspondents are requested to write legibly, and on one side of the paper only.

P. P.—Don't hesitate to accept the appointment. JANETTE JEBBERG.—Your non de plume is touching. If you will make it a little longer next time you shall have the whole of "Our Own" Page to yourself. (1) No. (2) Price 3d. (3) About once a year.

PICTURES.—The best picture magazine I know is the *Illustrated*, published at 608, Washington Street, Boston, Mass. U. S. A., price 7c a number, postage extra. TOWNSEND.—They are going to appear. CORALINE.—Better look through the index.

GRESHAM (South Lambeth).—It has not appeared, and the publishers I don't know, I regret to say. JACK BROWNE.—About two guineas, I think. I can't recommend any maker, however, specially. TOM JONES.—Give up the notion, and give it up at once. If I had ten such notions grow in my head at your age, I should have stood up before a looking-glass and given myself pepper and salt for it. TRES-BIEN.—Certainly laugh. You don't know that the knowledge will not come in handy.

STRATFORD (Berlin).—Banks is your note. Try and get a few German boys to take in the U. J. I believe that English is really first-class in your note, but you couldn't give them better reading than that to be found in our pages.

SCIENCE (Darlington).—Yes, the majority of people in China believe that a comet is sent by heaven to warn the Emperor that there are misdeeds to be done, or that where in his dominions, and that if the evil is not checked and the wicked officers dismissed, famine, pestilence, and flood will speedily overtake the land. The superstition is believed by the learned as well as the illiterate.

CALCUTTA RESIDENT.—The number of miles of railway completed in India is 985. The total amount of money expended up to 31st March, 1884, was 124,500,381 (East Indian, 31,699,776; Guaranteed, 67,329,776; State, 24,470,829). Native States.—The total amount of net receipts were 6,924,744. The average return upon the expended capital was 52 per cent, against 46 1/2 in the previous year. The number of passengers increased from 28 millions in 1882 to 328 millions in 1884. OLD BODYS.—Buy a shilling and a half of K. B. It will tell you all you want to know. Routledge & Co. publish a very good one.

ANTWERP (Oxford St.).—The following was originally issued fifty-two years ago:—"Liverpool and Manchester Railway. Time of departure both from Liverpool and Manchester: First-class, fare 5s. 7 1/2 a m., 4 p. m., 4.30 p. m. Second-class, fare 3s. 6d., 8 a. m., 2.30 p. m. For the convenience of merchants and others, the first-class evening train of carriages does not leave Manchester on Tuesdays and Saturdays until 5.30 p. m. The journey is usually accomplished by the first-class carriages under two hours, in addition to the above trains it is intended shortly to add three or four more departures daily. The company have commenced carrying goods of all kinds on the railway—January, 1831."

ENGLISH WORTH.—The following is a list of English worths in England and Wales, according to the return of the Registrar-General, certified, recorded, and on the register on the 30th September, 1884, an increase of 712 in the year.

NAVY: MINTON (Hammersmith).—There are altogether thirty-one Regent yacht clubs besides many other sailing clubs, round the coast of Great Britain, numbering between them about three thousand yachts, owned by over two thousand gentlemen. The yachts vary in size from a few tons up to four hundred in sailing yachts, and to seven hundred and fifty in steam vessels. Her Majesty's yachts, *Victoria* and *Albert* and *Gisborne*, are vessels of 2345 and 1024 tons respectively. The Prince of Wales's yacht, the *Albatross*, is 216 tons. About 7000, has been given as prize-money during the past season, the largest winter being the forty-ton cutter *Amosca*, owned by J. D. Heddister, Esq., which won over 12000, the largest amount ever won by any yacht during one season, GONG HUNTER.—No fewer than 1252 wolves were killed in France last year by persons who claimed the Government reward for slaying those animals. The wolves slain by amateur hunters are not included in this return.

JOES (St. Peter's, Ramsgate).—I am afraid there is no market for the silk in the quantities you name. The hank you send me is excellent in point of quality. You might try a doll-maker's; there is one left-hand side going up from Waterloo Bridge Station to the Strand—and ascertain if he will purchase for the purpose of making dolls' hair.

DUTCHMAN.—Holland exports annually as much as 120,000,000 lbs of butter and 21,000,000 lbs of cheese. SHOW S. SINGHAR.—Tell me first what you intended divine" of the sixteenth century preached or held a spiritual charge.

NOTICE.

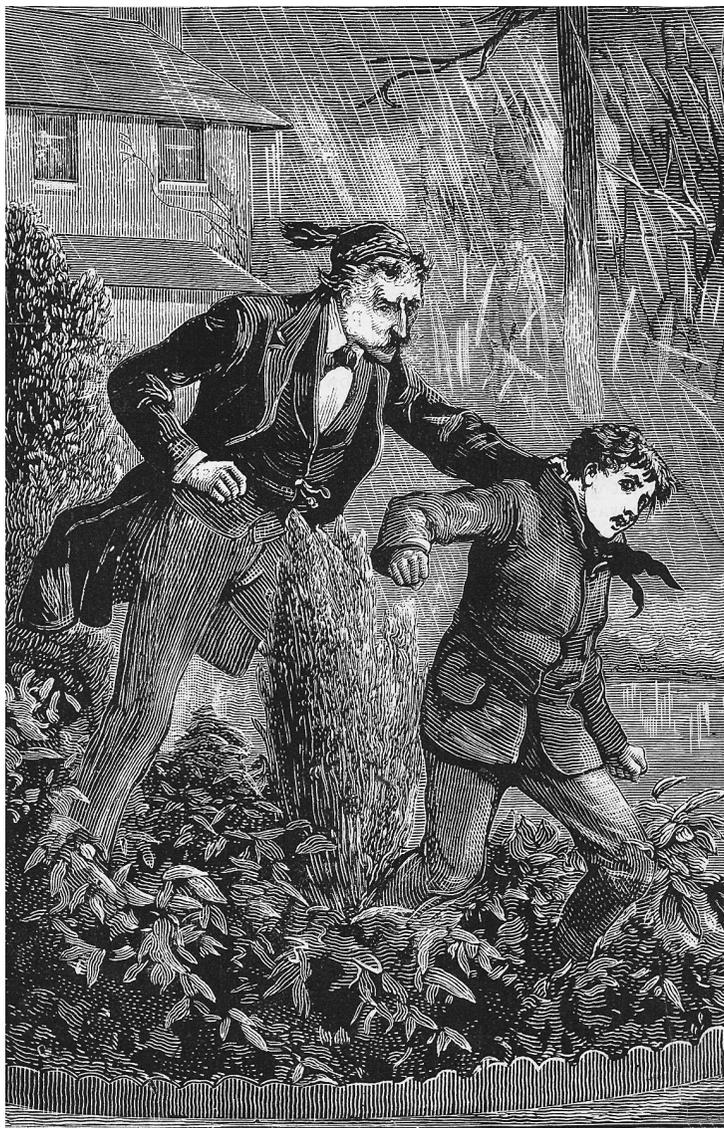
MR. HELDMAN has ceased to be connected in any way with the UNION JACK.

Figure 8. Archibald McNeill, "Our Own Page," *Union Jack*, n.s., 1, no. 36 (June 5, 1883): 576. This is a typical example of McNeill's regular back page. It also contains a notice announcing Heldman's departure from the bottom right-hand corner.

*Jack* had provided him with an excellent training ground, ultimately his strengths were better suited to other forms of genre fiction. The serial, a novel-length reworking of the anonymous 1880 short story "A Memorable Night," commenced with the new series of the magazine on October 3, 1882, and proceeded in weekly instalments. The serial initially alternated as the lead story with Percy B. St. John's "Sweet Flower; Or, Redskins and Palefaces," eventually losing its flagship status to Captain Mayne Reid's "The Vee-Boers: A Tale of Adventure in Southern Africa" and Louis Bousenard's "The White Tiger," both adventure stories set in exotic locations. The story was illustrated by Gordon Browne, son of Hablot K. Browne ("Phiz"), who had illustrated many of Dickens's works.

"A Couple of Scamps" focuses on the close relationship between two motherless, misunderstood boys, Fred and Jack, who are expelled from school, beaten by their fathers, and placed under house arrest. The boys are united by their fear of their aggressive and powerful fathers and by the absence of viable maternal figures (figure 9). The only female at the beginning of the story is Jack's sympathetic but blind sister Char, whose disability implies that she is unable to *see* how difficult it is to be a high-spirited young man. Because the boys do not share living quarters, their relationship is not as intimate as in Heldmann's school stories; nevertheless, the bond between them is both close and exclusive due to their lack of other male friends, the triangulation of their friendship through Char, and the somewhat domestic tone of their conversation, which frequently centres on their physical wants.<sup>48</sup> Fred, the more capricious and spirited of the two, is clearly the leader, while Jack, "rather broader across the shoulders, and perhaps a little inclined to stoutness," cuts a somewhat comical figure as a naïve boy misled by Fred's stronger personality.<sup>49</sup> Both boys have been influenced by books of the wrong kind, admiring "highwaymen and pirate kings" as well as "heroes in the rolls of crime" and "in the 'Newgate Calendar.'"<sup>50</sup> They decide to leave home and become modern highwaymen, but their escape is not particularly successful, and they soon find themselves cold, hungry, wet, and frightened, without food, money, or shelter. The boys' constant physical discomfort unites them from the very beginning of the story (figure 10).

By January 1883, the plot of "A Couple of Scamps" began to diverge from the usual formula for stories published in the *Union Jack* by introducing Gothic and criminal elements. After furnishing themselves with the manly accoutrements of a rusty gun and two old horses, the immature boys set out into the night "to revive the glories of the past," only to fall in with real criminals, "Honest" Barker and Cut-Throat Billy.<sup>51</sup> Barker is characterised by his twisted frame, which makes him but half a man: "One of his legs was lame and the other was the shape of half a circle; his body was powerful but awkward; one of his arms was long, the other was cut



MR. THOMPSON GRASPED HIM BY THE COLLAR.

Figure 9. Gordon Browne, "Mr. Thompson grasped him by the collar," illustration for Heldmann's "A Couple of Scamps," *Union Jack*, n.s., 1, no. 1 (October 3, 1882): 1. Heldmann's key theme of generational conflict is established from the start of his final serial.



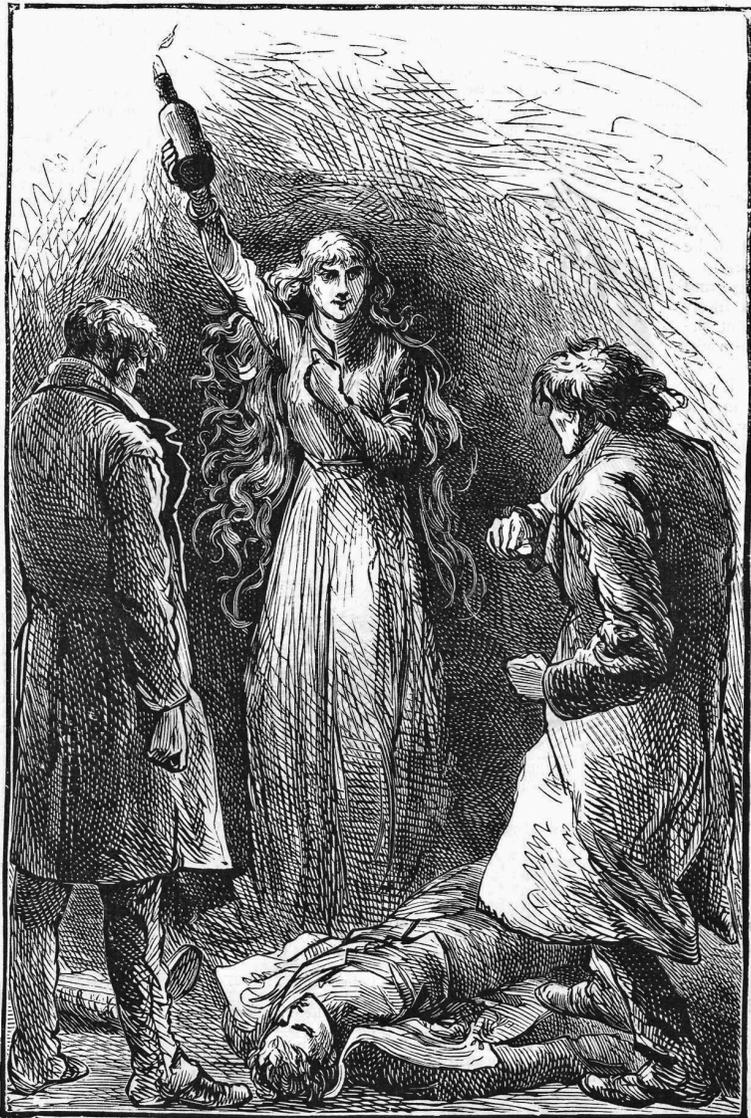
WITH SOME DIFFICULTY THOMPSON LIT ANOTHER MATCH.

Figure 10. Gordon Browne, "With some difficulty Thompson lit another match," illustration for Heldmann's "A Couple of Scamps," *Union Jack*, n.s., 1 no. 9 (November 28, 1882): 129. The boys find themselves cold, hungry, and homeless on Christmas Eve.

short at the elbow; he carried his head forward on his chest as though he endeavoured with the one eye which was apparently all that was left to him to see as far as possible ahead.”<sup>52</sup> Billy, in comparison, is a “figure strange and horrible! as if taken from some horrid nightmare, or from some fearful picture of forgotten crime,” who “seem[s] to glide along the ground—to steal onward as the serpent steals.”<sup>53</sup> The narrator’s curious conclusion that “surely it was a man, surely the pure form of womanhood was never yet debased by such a shape” hints at the intimate connection between Barker and Billy.<sup>54</sup> On the one hand, their implied intimacy stands in stark contrast to Fred and Jack’s more innocent relationship, yet on the other hand, it seems to indicate the direction the boys’ careers might take if they continue on their current path.

Barker and Billy kidnap the now-unconscious boys, taking them to the “chamber of disastrous crime,” described in strikingly physical language as a “darkened place, situated in the bowels of the earth.”<sup>55</sup> The robbers’ den is presided over by an unnamed female of great beauty, “a vision, a dream, a fancy of the night, a bright conception of the poet’s brain, an ideal of the painter’s art.”<sup>56</sup> This criminal femme fatale, who mirrors Char’s role in the serial’s juvenile triangle, anticipates Ayesha and her underground empire in H. Rider Haggard’s *She* (1886–87) (figure 11). While such criminal visions of the night would be typical of Marsh’s later work, they were strangely out of place in the *Union Jack*. A clear indication that something out of the ordinary had caused Heldmann to supply such unsuitable material appeared in the magazine on February 27, 1883, in the form of a brief, unobtrusive notice announcing that “in consequence of the sudden indisposition of the author, the publication of ‘A Couple of Scamps’ is unavoidably postponed.”<sup>57</sup> While that week’s issue did not contain an instalment of the story, it was immediately resumed the following week and continued to appear as normal. However, the illustrations were discontinued after March 20 as the story developed a nightmarish intensity with plot elements seemingly unconnected to previous instalments of the serial.<sup>58</sup>

Fred and Jack’s journey now assumed the shape of a liminal rite of passage. After a prolonged spell of unconsciousness, the boys come to their senses in the robbers’ den clad in angelic white nightgowns. They soon realise, however, that they have not been reborn in some paradise, and Jack, the more moral of the two, decides to escape rather than risk an initiation into the criminals’ way of life. In an apocalyptic passage, the robbers’ aptly named bulldog Satan sets off after the hapless boy: “Alas! for Brown! for the lad is failing! But Satan—he does not fail; he keeps on and on, slow and steady; like fate, he swerves neither to right nor left, but follows sure—stern and sure. The lad is failing; he totters; his strength is almost spent. [. . .] The thing is done; the chase is over; Satan has him by the skirt!”<sup>59</sup> Heldmann imbues the robbers’ den with the imagery of hell: the robbers dwell underground in the dark, their movements are serpent-like, and their victims are held tight by Satan (figure 12).



This new-comer, this woman, this quieter of noisy scenes, held in her hand a candle.  
(See chap. xix.)

Figure 11. Gordon Browne, "This new-comer, this woman, this quieter of noisy scenes, held in her hand a candle," illustration for Heldmann's "A Couple of Scamps," *Union Jack*, n.s., 1 no. 23 (March 6, 1883): 367. After their escape from home, the now-unconscious boys are kidnapped by a group of criminals.



Figure 12. Gordon Browne, "She beheld the dog grasp the lad by the tail of his night-shirt," illustration for Heldmann's "A Couple of Scamps," *Union Jack*, n.s., 1, no. 25 (March 20, 1883), 399. A futile effort to escape from Satan.

The nameless woman now proceeds to finalise the boys' corruption by telling them her tale, an intense, violent story that anticipates Richard Marsh's Gothic fiction and most likely frightened the *Union Jack's* juvenile readers. The femme fatale's mockery of a bedside story proceeds in three parts which build to a damning condemnation of boys' fiction. The first part of the narrative, the story of a dysfunctional family, comments on the "blood and thunder" of penny-dreadful literature. "Tragedy," the woman asserts, "has always been the companion of my people."<sup>60</sup> In direct contrast to the boys' hatred of their severe but well-meaning fathers, she idealises her father, a homicidal bigamist who appears to have murdered and dismembered her mother. She was subsequently found "in three pieces; one piece was in the chimney of her bedroom, another was in the garden of a neighbour, the third was in a baker's oven, the fourth was missing, and has never been found unto this day."<sup>61</sup> The narrative's subtle black humour, surely lost on Heldmann's youthful readers, suggests that Heldmann, in breach of the *Union Jack's* stated generic parameters, had been studying and enjoying the penny dreadfuls previously condemned by the magazine.

A week later, the second part of the narrative continues its commentary on the possible impact of contemporary printed matter, now focusing on books for boys. Completely reversing her earlier narrative, the woman proceeds to describe a maritime adventure with an abundance of shipwrecks, sharks, and desert islands. The rapid succession of incredible incidents, miraculous rescues, and unexpected plot twists pokes fun at the standard plotlines of boys' books, including those written by Henty. As the woman explains, "If you have read any of those soul-inspiring books for boys with which our noble literature abounds, you know perfectly well that there was nothing for which we experienced the slightest want which we did not immediately obtain."<sup>62</sup> Heldmann's cruel parody of the genre which had earned him his living during the past three years suggests that he may have grown tired of narrating innocent but incredible tales for a juvenile audience. The narrative establishes the woman as a victim of the implausible plotlines of boys' books, offering meta-commentary on the misleading messages and covert brainwashing carried out by boys' authors like Heldmann himself.

Most interesting of all, however, is the third and final part of the narrative, which incorporates references to penny dreadfuls, the Bible, and contemporary theories of heredity. The location shifts again, now to London's notorious Seven Dials, a slum setting typical of Marsh's fiction but not Heldmann's. The woman tells the boys about a violent scene she witnessed between three men representing three generations of a family, all "villains of the deepest dye" with crime "stamped upon their countenances as the sun upon the sky."<sup>63</sup> The youngest man displays pride over a violent crime, represented by a bloody stain on his hand, until his father explains that

this “famous stain” cannot be “wash[ed] away.”<sup>64</sup> In disbelief, the young man attempts to remove the stain, only to find that it remains “exactly as before, save that it seemed brighter and plainer to be seen [. . .] outside the soap, upon the top of it, and star[ing] him in the face [. . .] till it became wet blood, and all the soap grew bloody, and, falling, crimsoned the water too.”<sup>65</sup> Desperate to remove the stain, the young man gives the narrative an unexpected twist in what is arguably the first Gothic trope of the author’s career:

In a paroxysm he seized a chopper from beside him on the floor and laying his hand upon the iron bowl, with a single blow with the chopper, he severed it just at the wrist, so that nothing but the stump remained. But though his hand was gone the stain still stayed, for there it was upon his arm above the wrist; and again he seized the chopper, and struck off his arm just at the elbow, and immediately there was the stain upon his arm still higher up. And with a cry so bitter that none so bitter ever yet was heard before, with his left hand he seized what of the arm remained, and, wrenching it from the socket, flung it on the floor, and instantly there was the stain upon his shoulder blade.<sup>66</sup>

While Heldmann’s narrative clearly evokes the mark of Cain, it also comments on the contemporary perception of crime as a physically distinctive and immediately recognisable stamp which cannot be hidden and brands the criminal forever: “Some stains there are, and the stain of blood is one, which shall never be taken from the person of him on whom it shall be found.”<sup>67</sup>

Since the young man is following in the footsteps of previous generations, the narrative also recalls contemporary debates over the heredity of criminality and congenital diseases such as syphilis: “It is the way with stains; one has it, and, though not willingly, he gives it unto others, so that many have it in the end.”<sup>68</sup> In Heldmann’s story, the stain, intriguingly, spreads in reverse order from the son to the father, as the young man “waved his hand round his head, and in so doing, some of the blood thrown off his hand went into the faces of his grandsire and his father” who subsequently accuse him of “stain[ing]” them and disgracing the family.<sup>69</sup> Encouraged by the grandfather, the three men agree that it would be unbearable to live with such a burden and decide to commit suicide. In a shocking development, the two younger men take “skewers and [run] them through their bodies, through and through, so that they [come] out the other side, and immediately they [fall] dead.”<sup>70</sup> The oldest man, by contrast, does “not harm himself at all,” laughs at the sight of his dead offspring, “washe[s] the stain from off his face” without trouble, and, in a startling confirmation of the theme of generational conflict running through the serial, concludes that “there are no fools like the young.”<sup>71</sup>

The rambling narrative is disrupted when pursuers close in on the robbers. In a typical Marsh feature, the nameless woman produces a vial containing poisonous gas and drops it at a critical moment, leaving readers in suspense as to the fate of the heroes. This suspense was to prove rather more long lasting than expected: with the fall of the vial, the serialisation of “A Couple of Scamps” was suddenly suspended. No explanation was given and no conclusion promised for three and a half months. Heldmann’s name continued to appear with Henty’s on the front page until June 5, 1883, when it was sternly announced that “Mr Heldmann has ceased to be connected in any way with the *Union Jack*” (see figure 8).<sup>72</sup> From that issue, Henty’s name alone appeared on the masthead. Neither Heldmann nor “A Couple of Scamps” was referenced in any way until July 24, 1883, when McNeill finally broke the silence by briefly informing two anxious readers that “‘A Couple of Scamps’ will either be finished in this number or the next. The closing lines are in print.”<sup>73</sup>

“A Couple of Scamps” was concluded on July 31, 1883, in a lengthy single chapter which saw the boys “crushed and helpless” at the prospect of court proceedings, regretful of the “ridicule” and “shame” they would have to face because “their heads had been turned with vicious reading”: “They had been dazzled by the fictitious glare thrown by the cheap literature of the slums over the daring deeds of scoundrels, and of their coarse, vulgar, brutal, matter-of-fact life they had never dreamt. They knew better now.”<sup>74</sup> In a conventional conclusion, the newly-matured Fred explains to the father he can finally face that “when a fellow makes an ass of himself he must pay for it.”<sup>75</sup> While the boys’ punishment takes the shape of the break-up of their friendship, their bond is secured in a less dangerous form by Jack’s later marriage to the blind Char, who promises to make a sufficiently unquestioning wife when the two scamps get together in future years.

In keeping with the conventions of juvenile fiction, Heldmann supplied his readers with a narrative of initiation into adulthood that was for him, as well as them, a difficult and dreaded passage. Heldmann’s treatment of the coming-of-age narrative is apocalyptic in the finality of its endings and beginnings. Starting with the comfort of domestic well-being and full bellies, the boys experience the physical deprivations of hunger, pain, and loss of consciousness and undergo physical trials such as jumps, falls, and flights, which become increasingly demanding in the course of the narrative. The robbers’ underground den functions as a liminal space, a grave or a hell which the boys must brave and eventually escape if they are to find peace and comfort in a mature masculinity. Billy and Barker’s close bond represents a model of deviant masculinity yet offers an attractive counter-world that contrasts with the boys’ domestic and scholarly lives. Embedded within the narrative, Heldmann’s meta-commentary on boys’

fiction suggests that the process of reaching maturity may be hindered rather than helped by juvenile reading material: indeed, the boys' progress towards maturity is consistently threatened by the expectations raised by popular fiction. The conventional ending, while a convenient way of wrapping up the story speedily, deliberately calls attention to its own artificiality through its overtly conciliatory and predictable register and thus foregrounds Heldmann's scathing meta-narrative on publishing for boys. However, the boys' eventual acceptance of the justice of their punishment also references Heldmann's departure from the *Union Jack*.

### A Metamorphosis: From Bernard Heldmann to "Richard Marsh"

Though apparently popular with readers and certainly long enough for a novel, "A Couple of Scamps" was never published in volume form; its author soon disappeared from the public eye only to reinvent himself as "Richard Marsh" in 1888. This metamorphosis was necessary since, for reasons which remain unclear, Heldmann had in spring 1883, at the time of his flagging contributions to and eventual dismissal from the *Union Jack*, taken to a life of fraud, making a living on cheques issued against a defunct bank account.<sup>76</sup> Soon he was "wanted at various parts of the kingdom for various frauds" committed under false names but always in the guise of a "well-to-do gentleman," often a military man on leave from India.<sup>77</sup> He was finally captured at Tenby, South Wales, in February 1884 and tried at the West Kent Quarter Sessions on April 9 where he was sentenced to eighteen months' hard labour for obtaining board and lodgings under false pretences.<sup>78</sup> He served his sentence in full at Maidstone Jail where he was considered well-educated and identified himself as a journalist. After his release on October 8, 1885, no new material was published under the name "Bernard Heldmann" although his novels continued to be reissued into the twentieth century.<sup>79</sup>

In 1888, Heldmann re-entered the literary market under the pseudonym "Richard Marsh" and reinvented himself as an author of genre fiction for adults. Marsh viewed himself as a professional author, identifying himself as such on census returns and his children's birth certificates<sup>80</sup> and serving as an active member of the Society of Authors.<sup>81</sup> As I have argued elsewhere, Marsh's mature career demonstrates established habits of professional diligence that were initially fostered during his apprenticeship on the staff of the *Union Jack* in the early 1880s.<sup>82</sup> Like Heldmann, Marsh used recurring characters as a means of engaging readers, particularly in the *Strand* short story series featuring Sam Briggs, a comic lower-middle-class clerk (1904–15), and Judith Lee, a lip-reading female detective and ju-jitsu enthusiast (1911–16). His prolific rates of production were made possible

by workmanlike composing practices that enabled him to write to a pre-determined length and meet strict deadlines, a prerequisite to a successful career as a popular author.<sup>83</sup>

At the start of his second career, Marsh showed an awareness of the need to build networks within the publishing industry and to target niche audiences through different kinds of genre fiction. He published short and serial fiction in almost all the weekly and monthly periodicals active in the 1890s before establishing a regular working relationship with the *Strand Magazine*.<sup>84</sup> In addition, he issued his volume-form fiction through sixteen publishers, all with slightly different generic specialisms. Crucially, he would never again rely exclusively on the backing of a “solitary, potentially fickle, niche audience,” instead building wide-ranging contacts within the publishing industry and reaching out to the largest possible audience through both periodical and book publication.<sup>85</sup> Working with a range of periodicals and publishers removed the straightjacket of having to cater to the needs of a narrow audience. Unlike Heldmann, all of whose work was aimed at boy readers, Marsh was able to issue work aimed at different audiences through different media.

As Franco Moretti notes, most genres have the approximate lifespan of a generation.<sup>86</sup> During his brief career in the 1880s, Heldmann had already begun to move away from the school story and towards adventure, and, in his final serial, he began to focus on crime and Gothic fiction. Marsh went on to publish prolifically in a range of genres, including Gothic, crime, and romantic fiction as well as the sensational thriller, the comic story and, towards the end of his life, spy and war fiction. Many of these genres are, of course, formulaic, providing the author with “models of writing,” pre-existing conventions which facilitated the speedy production of copy.<sup>87</sup> Marsh, like Heldmann, wrote formula fiction, but he worked with a much broader generic range, attaining his greatest success in 1897 with the Gothic-invasion narrative *The Beetle: A Mystery* and making his living out of sensational thrillers with criminal plotlines.

In the only interview he ever gave, published posthumously in the *Strand Magazine* in November 1915, Marsh recalls how he “broke into print.” As the “merest child,” he claims, he “rewrote” the story of Robinson Crusoe and succeeded in getting it published “in several instalments” in a boys’ paper.<sup>88</sup> He states that he could not “remember the name of the publication,” though he “did not like the look of it.”<sup>89</sup> In addition, he could not “recall ever having read the story itself” even though he remembered that the “editor altered the title—and I dare say other things as well” until the story “had nothing to do with Robinson Crusoe.”<sup>90</sup> When “The Mutiny on Board the Ship ‘Leander,’” a rewriting of Defoe’s classic text, appeared in the *Union Jack* in 1882, Bernard Heldmann was twenty-five years old and

thus not the “merest child.” It is likely that he remembered the name of the magazine and its editor very well indeed though it is perhaps understandable that he chose not to discuss his past in public. Though published more than thirty years after Heldmann’s ignominious departure from Henty’s weekly, the interview nonetheless suggests that at the end of a successful second career, Marsh was aware that his early years on the staff of the *Union Jack* had served him well as an apprenticeship for the work of a professional writer.

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## NOTES

1. Heldmann, dedication, *The Mutiny on Board the Ship “Leander,”* n.p.
2. On the juvenile publishing boom, see Reynolds, *Girls Only?*; Bristow, *Empire Boys*; Cox, *Take a Cold Tub, Sir!*; Drotner, *English Children and their Magazines*, 113–49; Dunae, “New Grub Street for Boys”; Quayle, *Boys’ Stories* and *The Collector’s Book of Children’s Books*.
3. On the *Boy’s Own Paper*, see Cox, *Take a Cold Tub, Sir!*; Morison, *Talbot Baines Reed*; Reynolds, *Girls Only?*; Drotner, *English Children and their Magazines*, 123–24; North and Nelson, *Waterloo Directory*, 2:412–15.
4. Ackland, “Elementary Education and the Decay of Literature,” 417. Ackland states that 238 new juvenile fiction titles appeared from 1875 to 1879 and 605 titles from 1880 to 1884.
5. Bristow, *Empire Boys*, 15. Drawing on Dunae’s work, Bristow claims that juvenile publishing accounted for some 19 percent of all publishing in 1882. Bristow also notes that juvenile fiction accounted for 18.36 percent of library borrowings in 1892–93.
6. Aickman, *The Attempted Rescue*, 11.
7. For discussion of the *Union Jack* and Bernard Heldmann, see Taylor, “G. A. Henty, Richard Marsh and Bernard Heldmann”; Vuohelainen, “Tales and Adventures”; Kirkpatrick, *The Three Lives of Bernard Heldmann*. On Marsh, see Vuohelainen, introduction to *The Goddess*, vii–xvii, and “Contributing to Most Things.”
8. 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, the *Union Jack* being the last. Kingston was known for his religious and imperialistic outlook. According to Thompson, “His 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.” Thompson further notes that 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 specifically, thus initiating a gender-based segregation of children's literature." Thompson, "William Henry Giles Kingston," 154, 158. See also Kingsford, *The Life, Work and Influence of William Henry Giles Kingston*, and Quayle, *Boys' Stories*, 65–77.
9. George Alfred Henty (1832–1902) grew from a weak youngster to the famous 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 notes that "perhaps 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." Ranson, "G. A. Henty," 123, 131. See also Arnold, *Held Fast for England*; Fenn, *George Alfred Henty*; and Quayle, *Boys' Stories*, 101–7.
  10. "Christmas Books," 3.
  11. *Ibid.*
  12. [Henty], "Death of Mr W. H. G. Kingston," 560.
  13. [Kingston], "Editor's Box," 112.
  14. Henty, "To the Readers of the *Union Jack*," 289; [Henty], "Editor's Box," 384.
  15. Morison, *Talbot Baines Reed*, 21.
  16. "Books for Boys," 265.
  17. *Ibid.*
  18. "To Boys," 9.
  19. [Kingston], "Paddy Finn," 44.
  20. Henty, "Christmas Greeting," 192.
  21. [Henty], "Editor's Box," 624. Later, Henty put the circulation at 30,000. "Answers to Correspondents," iv.
  22. Cox, *Take a Cold Tub, Sir!*, 76. The figures supplied are from June 1884.
  23. Henty, "To My Readers," 720.
  24. Aickman, *Attempted Rescue*, 11. The 1871 England census shows young Bernard residing at home, where he may have been tutored by his father (RG10/64/21/35/62/338), *Census Returns of England and Wales*, National Archives, Kew.
  25. Davis, "Journalism and Victorian Fiction," 202. In his introduction to Gissing's *New Grub Street*, John Goode writes about the irony of "men who

become writers precisely because they wish to escape the mediocrity of commerce, only to discover that they can only survive by commerce.” Goode, introduction to *New Grub Street*, xvii. The statement could just as easily be applied to Heldmann.

26. Heldmann, *Daintree*, 39.
27. *Ibid.*, 41, 45, 49.
28. *Ibid.*, 74.
29. I am indebted to Graeme Pedlingham for locating “A Whale Hunt” and “What Happened to John Wilson.”
30. “In the Lion’s Jaws,” “A Memorable Night,” and “A Fortune at a Find,” published in the third volume of the *Union Jack*, were later republished by “Richard Marsh” in *The Drama of the Telephone* (Digby, Long: London, 1911), thus securely identifying Heldmann and Marsh as the same person.
31. [Henty], “Notice,” 196.
32. Heldmann, “Mutiny,” 597, 421.
33. Besant, *The Pen and the Book*, 52.
34. Taylor, “G. A. Henty, Richard Marsh and Bernard Heldmann,” 11.
35. See, for example, Reynolds, *Girls Only?*; Bristow, *Empire Boys*; Nelson, *Boys Will Be Girls* and “Sex and the Single Boy.”
36. Bristow, *Empire Boys*; Nelson, *Boys Will Be Girls*, 74, and “Sex and the Single Boy,” 525, 542; Reynolds, *Girls Only?*, 56–57.
37. Reynolds, *Girls Only?*, 59.
38. See Tuchman with Fortin, *Edging Women Out*; Cadogan and Craig, *You’re a Brick, Angela!*; Showalter, *Sexual Anarchy*, 76–104.
39. Bristow, *Empire Boys*, 20–21, 41; Reynolds, *Girls Only?*, 37, 51, 59.
40. Sedgwick, *Between Men*, 1.
41. Smith, “New Novels,” 362.
42. “Christmas Books,” 665.
43. “The *Union Jack*: Every Boy’s Paper,” 832.
44. Henty, “Answers to Correspondents,” iv.
45. Henty, “Preface,” n.p.
46. McNeill, “‘Our Own’ Post Office,” 240.
47. *Ibid.*, 80.
48. Sedgwick, *Between Men*, 21.
49. Heldmann, “A Couple of Scamps,” 2.
50. *Ibid.*, 2, 61.
51. *Ibid.*, 191.
52. *Ibid.*, 238.
53. *Ibid.*, 247.
54. *Ibid.*
55. *Ibid.*, 303, 302.
56. *Ibid.*, 302.
57. “Notice,” 349. This was unprecedented for the previously reliable and prolific Heldmann.

58. Heldmann had clearly not planned the story to its conclusion when he began to serialise it or else abandoned his original plan. Though he certainly set out to teach the boys a lesson, the conclusion which follows cannot have been what he had had in mind. I do not, however, mean to suggest that Heldmann planned his serials in great detail before he began issuing them; it is much more likely that he wrote at high speed and not much in advance of deadlines. However, his other serials do at least make sense and reach logical conclusions.
59. Heldmann, "A Couple of Scamps," 367.
60. *Ibid.*, 382.
61. *Ibid.*, 383.
62. *Ibid.*, 399.
63. *Ibid.*, 413.
64. *Ibid.*
65. *Ibid.*
66. *Ibid.*, 414.
67. *Ibid.*
68. *Ibid.*
69. *Ibid.*, 413–14.
70. *Ibid.*, 414.
71. *Ibid.*
72. "Notice," 576.
73. McNeill, "'Our Own' Post Office," 688.
74. Heldmann, "A Couple of Scamps," 694.
75. *Ibid.*, 695.
76. See James Callum, "Callum James's Literary Detective Agency, Case #1: Why Was Richard Marsh?," *Front Free Endpaper* (blog), November 30, 2009, <http://callumjames.blogspot.com/2009/11/callum-james-literary-detective-agency.html>. See also Kirkpatrick, *The Three Lives of Bernard Heldmann*; Vuohelainen, *Victorian Fiction Research Guide* and introduction to *The Goddess*, xi–xvii.
77. "Capture of a Forger at Tenby," 4.
78. *West Kent Quarter Sessions, 72; Home Office: Criminal Registers, County of Kent*, 284.
79. *Maidstone Prison Nominal Roll*, November 1883–November 1884, no. 2100, "Hildmann, Bernard" (*sic*).
80. Birth certificates, Madge Heldmann (August 5, 1891. Worth, East Grinstead, Sussex. September 1891, 2b, 156/134), Conrad Heldmann (October 12, 1892. Worth, East Grinstead, Sussex. December 1892, 2b, 143/301) and Bertram Max Heldmann (January 9, 1895. Worth, East Grinstead, Surrey. March 1895, 2b, 155/118). *Birth, Marriage and Death Certificates*, General Register Office (England and Wales): 1891 Census (RG12/835/105/16/61), 1901 Census (RG13/906/3/51/24/166). *Census Returns of England and Wales*, National Archives, Kew.

81. See reports of annual meetings of the society: "Annual Dinner," 16-18, 163-64, 192, 260. See also "Books Published by Members," 108-9.
82. Vuohelainen, "Contributing to Most Things," 405.
83. *Ibid.*, 413-16.
84. *Ibid.*, 405-9.
85. *Ibid.*, 411.
86. Moretti, *Graphs, Maps, Trees*, 20-21.
87. Frow, *Genre*, 69.
88. Marsh, "How I 'Broke into Print,'" 573.
89. *Ibid.*
90. *Ibid.*

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