

Squire Haggard's Journal

Introduction

by MICHAEL GREEN

Squire Haggard was conceived when I was a young reporter on the Northampton Chronicle and Echo in 1943. Our weekly companion paper The Northampton Mercury and Herald boasted the oldest complete files in Europe, going back to 1720, and once a week it was my job to descend into the basement where they were kept, and make an extract for the feature '700 Years Ago'. The old files were fascinating and frequently the chief reporter would have to send someone down to dig me out and return me to work. The thing that struck me was how dismal the old news was. It consisted largely of lists of deaths from such outlandish diseases as 'griping of the guts', news of disasters at home and abroad, executions and outbreaks of Plague. But then, in 1743 news was brought regularly from London to Northampton by a man on horseback with a couple of pistols stuffed in his boots as a protection against highwaymen.

The eighteenth century was the great age of the diarist, and I read many of the best-known, from Boswell's various volumes to Parson Woodforde, Fanny Burney, William Hickey and George Hilton, the impecunious and bibulous Westmoreland squire. And of course Pepys, from an earlier age. What struck me was their fascination with food (dinner was usually described in great detail and many of the dishes were rather strange by modern standards). Death and illness were also subject to close scrutiny. There seemed a compulsion to record sexual adventures in high-flown language which contrasted with the sordid realities, such as Boswell's romance with a girl who gave him the pox. And there was an obsession with small sums of money.

Squire Haggard (under another name) first saw the light as a spoof eighteenth-century diary in the Northampton paper between 1948 and 1950. In the early sixties I was making occasional outside contributions to the Peter Simple column in the Daily Telegraph and resurrected him under the new name of Haggard and almost immediately the Squire made his TV debut in the BBC

programme Grub Street³. dramatisation of fictional characters from Fleet Street columns, such as that of Beachcomber in the Express. Squire Haggard's Journal appeared in book form in 1975 and fifteen years later Eric Chappell (of Rising Damp fame) adapted him for two series by Yorkshire TV, starring Keith Barron and Sam Kelly. Almost simultaneously he returned to the Daily Telegraph, this time appearing in his own column, and continued there for several years.

And still the old boy won't lie down, after 50 years receiving new life with this revised version of the original book, in which I have incorporated some new material and excised some of the old. I'm grateful to his fans for keeping the flame alive. Indeed in the late seventies there was a Squire Haggard Society at Cambridge University and I was elected President. It folded rather suddenly, probably as a result of trying to imitate the Squire's unfortunate social habits too closely.

Squire Haggard wrote his Journal by the method used by many great diarists such as Boswell. That is, he did not necessarily write up each day's events immediately, but made notes and wrote at leisure later. This accounts for the fact that he can describe in detail days when he could not possibly have been able to write his Journal, such as when he was 'on the run'. A peculiarity is that Haggard sometimes breaks off the story at midnight, no matter what the state of the narrative, and resumes the incident in the next day's entry.

The spelling has largely been modernised, except for one or two more felicitous archaisms such as 'chirurgion' for surgeon. Contractions have been left as they were, except where the meaning would have been in doubt.

The Journal was discovered hidden in the Muniment Room of Haggard Hall. Some of the manuscript was indecipherable through mildew, and the stains of wine and candle-grease. In some parts, especially those describing amorous adventures. Haggard had actually salivated all over the Journal while writing, causing the ink to run. This has caused some gaps. Others are caused by the fact that Haggard did not bother to write up his Journal every day; while I, as Editor,

have removed some entries in the interests of brevity.

M.G.

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Chapter One Haggard at Home

Sept. 16, 1777: Rain. Amos Bindweed d. from Putrefaction of the Tripes. Jas. Soaper hanged for stealg. a nail. Recvd. from Thos. Gadgrind the sum of £0. 1. 4d., the farthg. being bad. Shot unusually large poacher in a.m. In p.m. recvd. a bill for £3. 5s. 6d. in respect of some pigs bt. off Jeremiah Rhubarb, which all had the swine fever, so I did not pay him.

Because of the wet weather my Rheumaticks are so bad I was unable to have my usual whore yesterday. As she insists on payment in advance my servant Grunge had her instead, rather than waste threepence. This distressed me not a little as it was my favourite. Perverted Polly of Lower Sodomire.

For dinner ate a rook pie and some pigs' cheek, together with a pease puddg. My portion of the puddg. appeared to be bad so I gave what remained to my wife Tib and was forced to expunge the taste with a quart of claret, item: To purgatives, £0.0.2d .

Sept. 17: Hail. Thos. Hogwash garrotted by footpads. Jas. Soaper found to be innocent. My wife Tib turned green in the night and was confined to bed in a.m. Grunge apologised for the pease puddg. He says it should not have been served as it was some they kept for cleang. the silver.

Percvg a low fellow skulking near the Hall in a.m. I demanded his business and he replied, 'Affairs of the Law' and handed me some writs for debt, among which was one from my Physickan, Dr. Bone, claimg. half a guinea for attendg. the birth of my son Roderick, now twenty-one. I kicked the miserable creature into the lake and sent

him on his way with a charge from my fowlg.-piece. I then amused myself by pinng. the writs to a tree and expectoratg. upon them.

To town in p.m. to discuss matters with my Lawyer, whereupon the followg. dialogue ensued, viz:

Self: It is time to set my affairs in order. I am so beset with debt I do not know which way to turn.

Lawyer: You owe me £3.4.6d for makg. a new will in the old King's time and that was nigh twenty years ago.

Self: Is that all you have to say?

Lawyer: You must spend less.

Self: Shall I mortgage the Hall.

Lawyer: It is mortgaged already. You tried to mortgage it twice.

Self: Damn you, what shall I do.

Lawyer: Shut the door as you go out and pay my clerk £1. 6s.8d.

At this I damned him for a cantg. Attorney and poured a bott. of ink over his head. Departed and kicked an elderly Quaker in the street to relieve my feelings.

On return to the Hall, called Grunge and the housekeeper, Mrs. Runcible, and informed them their wages would be delayed due to the poor state of my affairs. At this they broke into loud mirth not havg. been paid this year in any case. I then sat down to list my assets and debts by the Double Entry system and this resulted in the conclusion that debts exceeded assets by £995.1s.2d

When I had finished, the sight of all these debts stretched out like a whore in bed overwhelmed me so much I was forced to consume a small pail of claret to restore myself, which I did so satisfactorily that when I came to add the figures up again I appeared to have a surplus of sevl. thousand pounds. But further calculation confirmed my state was hopeless and I was obliged to restore some Animation with a

bottle of port. This so invigorated the Vital Powers that I asked Grunge to send me up a girl from the village. But he returned sayg. none would come as they had not been paid for sevl. weeks and then only less than they can obtain from the soldiers, except the Militia, who only pay twopence.

Sept. 20: Fog. Wm. Woodbine d. from The Noxious Effluents. Thos. Hogwash buried. Jas. Soaper dug up and removed to Consecrated Ground. Evicted Lane Bob in a.m. recvg. a blow from his stick which well-nigh deprived me of what is left of my manhood, item: Repairing breeches £0.0.5d Recvd. bill from Lawyer for a penny for ink which I poured over him.

The Rector approached the Hall in a.m. but thinking he had come snivellg. again about my attempt to enclose his Glebe I fired a duck gun over his head and had the satisfaction of seeg. him jump sevl. feet in the air. Notwithstandg. he gained the porch and shouted that tomorrow I was to distribute the Haggard Dole to those villagers who are eligible and in default I was liable to be fined a shillg. a day until it was handed out.

Editor's Note: The Haggard Dole was a very ancient charity, commuted in the 19th century. It was founded by Sir Tirwit Haggard in 1208, ostensibly as a thanksgivg. for a safe return from the Crusades, but accordg. to local tradition to mark his being cured of a particularly virulent form of pox which he had contracted in Palestine. By its terms a shillg. and a farthg. were to be distributed to all 'worthy women of the village. The Rector was correct about the fine for non-payment, which would have been levied by the Consistory Court.

Soon after the Rector left there was a loud noise from the Park and a Gothick Ruin, erected by Capability Brown a few years ago, collapsed. Fortunately, he is still owed 1,000 gns. Dined at an inn upon a mutton puddg., but the inside of this being bad I was constrained to eat round the edge. I called the landlord and rammed his face in the remainder, damned him for a cheatg. dog, to which he made no reply, his face being in the puddg.

Sept. 2T. At five o'clock the women gathered in the churchyard for distribution of the Dole, the shillg. and a farthg. which every woman in the parish (exceptg. Prudence Peascod, who is a witch), receives from my hand. Prudence Peascod endeavoured to attend in disguise but was recognised by her pointed ears and ducked in the pond. One

female present was not known to me, a wench called Betty Bouncer, lately come to the village. The sight of her delicious white bubbies so excited my Amorous Propensities that I pressed her hand as I gave her the money and asked if she would like a greater gift than a mere shillg., viz: the opportunity to become a Lady of Quality.

She replied, 'To achieve such a prize I would do anything Your Lordship might require/ so I whispered in her ear to come to my room at 10.30 that eveng. when she would receive her prize.

The thought of enjoyg. the girl's favours threw me into such agitation that I was hardly able to hold a quart of Madeira to my lips at supper, after which I immediately retired to my chamber to await my entry into the Tournament of Love. I had given instructions for the girl to be admitted instantly, and at 10.30 there was a knock on the door and a figure entered in hood and cloak. Seeg. my beautiful prize within my grasp I was seized with such Amorous Fervour that I begged her to delay not an instant but to throw off her garments and conjoin with me immediately.

'I will not forget my promise to make you a Lady of Quality,' I cried.'You shall be my wife in all but name and shall have sixpence as well for being a good girl tonight!'

At this the figure threw back her hood to reveal the features of my wife. Seizg. a warmg.-pan she began to screech and belabour me with such vigour that I was forced to flee from the room in my nightshirt and take refuge in the outside privy, where I spent the night. item: To repairg. Gothick Ruin 1£1.2.6d. item: To repairg. door of privy, £0.11.4d.

N.B. The wench did not arrive in any case.

Sept. 22'. Jem Hornpipe drowned when he fell into the brook; he would have lived but being drunk he fell asleep and was carried away. They found only his hat.

Sept. 23: Gales. The Coroner has sat upon Jem Hornpipe's hat and declared it was not enough to return a verdict on; Jas. Soaper dug up by anatomists. This was feared, as his ears were of different sizes, which much interested sevl. doctors.

Sept. 24. Rain. No mortalities published today as the Parish Clerk himself died from

divers diseases, the least of which were The Green Emissions and A General Constriction of the Pipes, although some say he was poisoned by Blind Billy, whom he caused to be put into the stocks for poking him in the eye with his stick.

Observed Crippled John near Long Bottom in a.m. and knowing he was searching for conies I shot away his crutch with my fowling-piece, and was much amused at his efforts to escape, which he did with astonishing celerity. While pursuing him I discovered an amazing sight, viz: five score gypsies and tinkers were encamped in Long Bottom. I demanded what they wanted and they answered insolently that they had come to make festival and it was none of my business.

'This will teach you whose business it is!' I cried and raised my weapon, but a fellow seized the barrel and snatched it from me, so I was forced to flee, being peppered in the back by my own bullets, which I made Grunge dig out in the evening for further use.

Sept. 25: Wind. Tertius Hogbinder hanged. Saw the Constable in a.m. about the gypsies but he says he can do nothing; I must seek an injunction at law. Ate some ox-brains and chaps at dinner with tatties; drank three botts. of Madeira and one of Canary. Lacking amusement I asked Grunge to stand still while I threw fruit at him.

'If you use me so barbarously,' he said, 'I shall not tell you how to get rid of the gypsies.'

'Do that' I cried, 'and you shall name your own price!'

Sept. 27: Hail. Parish Clerk buried. Blind Billy danced around making vulgar signs as the coffin was lowered. He then unbuttoned his breeches and made water into the grave with unerring accuracy despite his infirmity; he is now in the stocks again.

Afterwards, to Long Bottom to see Grunge's Stratagem. I observed him to wander into the camp with a cowl over his head like a beggar. Then he drew back the cowl to reveal a face covered in red spots and began to howl, 'Will no one take pity on me.^^'

They asked if he was ill. 'Aye,' he replied. 'I have spots all over my body and a swelling in the armpit and fear it is the Tokens of the Plague, for this field is notorious for pestilential vapours which arise from the soil. But they do say the remedy is to lick

a gypsy's face, which is why I am come among you good people that I might lick somebody's face and be cured.'

With which he stuck out his tongue to a great length and leaped upon the gypsies, who fled with cries of, 'The Plague! He has the Tokens! Let him not lick you!' And soon every single one had run away, leaving the field deserted except for Grunge cleaning his face with a handkerchief

'Well done. Grunge!' I ejaculated, 'you have saved the Hall from despoliation by those vagabonds. I said name your own price, but I shall give you what is beyond price, and that is the gratitude of an English gentleman. And, should you wish more, you shall have an extra piece of coal for your fire this very night.'

He gave no thanks for my generosity but instead replied, 'That is funny, but these spots will not come off Could it really be the Plague.^ Oh sir, let me lick your face and cure myself He then flung himself at me and I was forced to climb a tree to escape. Nor could I get rid of him except by throwing down a guinea so he could see a doctor. The rogue took it and went away shouting, 'I feel better already.'

Sept. 28: Rain. Wm. Turnover d. from the Emetick Spasms. An unusual occurrence happened as I passed down the High St. this morning, viz: as I passed the shop of Mr. Spoke, the wheelwright and coachbuilder, I percvd. him standg. outside the premises in the doorway. Since I owe him £0.0s.4d for repairs to my chaise three years ago I greeted him cordially but he made no reply.

This lack of civility from one whom Providence had ordained should serve others vexed me considerably and poking him with my stick I animadverted as follows, viz: 'Sir, when a gentln. takes the trouble to bid you good day, you might at least have the civility to acknowledge it. Instead you are merely standg. there, sticking your tongue out at me.'

I then realised the miserable mechanick was not standg. but hanging from the end of a rope attached to the bracket of the sign over the shop. Help was summoned and the wretched individual cut down, after which he revived and confessed he had tried to do away with himself because of the fall in trade occasioned by the Agricultural Depression, which has meant the gentry are purchasing no new carriages.

Thus are we all ruined by the fall in Commerce; my own debts weigh heavily upon me. My spirits were so depressed that I inadvertently put a penny in Blind Billy's hand as he stood begging. I tried to take it back but his fingers had closed on it with immense strength.

Sept. 29: Hail. Jas. Weevil whipped at the tail of the hangman's cart for statg. that The Archbishop of York was an old Sodomite. The Coroner has sat on Wm. Turnover but fell asleep before he could return a verdict. Charity Barker died from the Mange.

Ate a dish of lung with some chitterlings and a plum puddg. for dinner; also a pie but I know not what was in it except it had a beak. Grunge came to me after the meal, behavg. v strangely, tip-toeing into the room and whispering and tapping his nose. I implored him to speak up and he hissed furtively in my ear that Mr. Moonshine was outside.

'Mr. Moonshine, the smuggler!' I ejaculated. 'I must see him at once.' I went instantly to the front door where a man stood shrouded in a cloak. 'On the cart behind me, sir,' he said, 'is a small barrel of French brandy which fell off the stern of a schooner in Lyme Bay. You may have the same cheap.' Within seconds the transaction was complete and I hastened inside rolling my treasure before me and gloating over the delights to come.

Sept. 30: Drizzle. Grunge, who at times has a Philosophick turn, does not approve of my smuggled brand V barrel. 'One day, sir,' he said, 'there will be no barriers to trade and the smugglers will be out of business. I foresee a time, perhaps in about 223 years, when all Europe will be one; when trade will pass unhindered between all States without the imposition of excise and men will sail to Calais and return laden with as much French wine as they can carry. Yet no Revenue Officer will hinder them.'

At this my face grew stern and I spake harshly. 'Let me never hear such sentiments again in this house!' I cried. 'Mark my words, the day this country allies itself to those mincing pederasts, papists and dancing-masters in Europe will see the end of all we value. Our golden sovereigns will be replaced by groschen or livres\ our roast beef supplanted by fricassees; our lives subject to the whim of envious French officials. I would pay double, aye treble, for brandy rather than see that happen.'

Decided to sample my brandy at dinner. I was just pouring myself a glass when

Grunge rushed into the room exhibitg. tokens of the deepest agitation. 'Sir,' he cried, 'we are lost! The Excise men have arrested Mr. Moonshine and are approaching the house in search of smuggled brandy. They will be here in half-an-hour. There is no escape - they will search everywhere. We must pour it into the pond.'

'Pour it away.^' I cried. 'Never shall it be said a Haggard poured away a drop of such precious fluid. There is only thing to be done and that is for us to drink the barrel before they arrive.'

So we set to with a will and I know not what the Excise men said as it was two days before I regained my wits and Grunge lay insensible for 24 hours. ITEM: The

Curative Powders, £0.0s.2d

Oct. 2: Rain. Elijah Doghouse d. from the Manifold Eruptions. Awoke late and immediately rang for Grunge but there was a terrible wailg. from the corridor and he burst into the room shouting and sobbing as if distracted with grief

'What's the matter.^' I cried and he replied: 'Matter enough! The worst news since they raised the tax on gin. Slaving Sally, the favourite whore at Lower Sodomire, has died from exhaustion as a result of plying her trade too freely at the Yeomanry Ball!'

On receipt of these Dread Tidings a paroxysm of distress smote me and for a moment I could not articulate. At length I ejaculated, 'What happened.^' and Grunge, between sobs, told me that when Perverted Polly, another whore at Lower Sodomire, was stricken with a fever, Sally generously offered to oblige her customers as well as her own.

Alas, the effort proved too much and she succumbed peacefully, blessg. all her clients and returning any money taken in advance. 'She died like a true Christian,' declared Grunge, 'in the service of others,' to which I cried, 'Amen!'

Oct. 3: Fog. Feeble Frederick d. from a surfeit of apple puddg. His wife threw it at him, killg. him instantly. The dreadful news about Sally has struck me to the heart. Many the time I have sent for her when life was unbearable.

I wept as I remembered her habit of bitg. each penny she recvd. to make sure it was

good. She had other habits too, which I shall not set down. She had no faults except a tendency to smear her armpits with garlic against the Plague.

When the first paroxysm of grief was over I determined she should have a fitting memorial and prepared the followg. funeral tribute, viz:

Elegy on the death of a whore who died doing her duty

Ye gods of Love! ye gods of War! look down

On one whom Love has cruelly o'erthrown.

Have mercy on this simple little whore

Who fell a soldier in the Paphian's War.

She died the noblest death that one could will

Serving mankind with all her subtle skill.

The warriors of Mars with her made free,

Number Five Troop, the Loamshire Yeomanry.

Alas, her favours were too freely given!

Her mortal frame succumbed, by Cupid riven.

Yet even dying spake she genVously:

'I'm sorry, lads, but I'll return your fee.'

For little Sal, ring out no mournful chimes.

She lives elsewhere in heaven's happier climes!

Where clients pay their money on the nail

And pox and clap are but a fairy tale.

When the poem was finished I shed a tear on the page and carried it to the Rector to read it at her funeral but the cantg. hypocrite declined and said it was blasphemous and I would do better to fall to my prayers. 'Then I shall read it myself at her obsequies,' I shouted.

Oct. 5: Took my Elegy to the funeral of Sally; a huge crowd of three thousand souls, all men, attended, exhibiting tokens of the deepest sorrow. Many appeared to be in the last stages of disease but gallantly limped behind the cortege or were carried on litters, moang. and beatg. their breasts. The Band of The Yeomanry played mournful airs.

The only discordant note was struck by sevl. wives who tried to spit upon the bier. As the coffin was lowered I cried, 'Silence!' and started to read aloud the poem. Alas, after the first verse I slipped on the wet earth and fell into the grave. The gravediggers, however, were tenants of mine and the dogs pretended they did not see me. So they lustily filled in the trench and I was half-buried before I could clamber out. item: Clean raiment, £0.4s.2d.

N.B. I shall send my ode to The Gentlemans Magazine.

Oct. 6: Jas. Hosepipe d. from The Stone. It fell off a high wall and hit him on the head. Plague raging in Constantinople. Signs of the Stagnation in Commerce everywhere. The Intelligencer says the popping of champagne corks in 'Change Alley has been replaced by the banging of pistols as stockjobbers shoot themselves or are shot by their clients. How thankful I am that my own money is invested safely in a company for Buildg. A Tunnel Under the Irish Sea.

Oct. 7: Eli Bilgewater d. from The Gravel. This a.m. shot a most interestg. poacher, one of the most unusual I have ever fired upon. A great, black-bearded fellow, he seemed impervious to my first charge of birdshot and led me a merry dance up hill and down dale before I finally cornered him in Long Meadow.

I was so pleased with the chase I told him I would pay him a shillg. if he would offer himself as a target again, there being a dearth of hares and rabbits this year. He said I was a fine old English gentln. and it would be a pleasure to be shot by me but he

regretted business called him elsewhere. With which he fled.

Oct. 8: Gales. The sexton got drunk and fell into a newly-dug grave today. As he lay insensible, he was stolen by two body-snatchers and sold to an anatomist.

In a.m. called servants together and told them we must economise due to the Depression in Trade, which has caused rents to dwindle to almost nothing. 'No more of those expensive dishes,' I cried. 'Simple, cheap fare is the rule from now on. I shall set an example by not having a whore this week.'

At dinner Grunge brought in a strange dish which gave off a revolting smell. 'What is it?' I ejaculated, and he replied, 'It is a stew made from the intestines and bladder of a sheep, sir. Very cheap and nourishing. I obtained the ingredients gratis from the slaughterhouse where they give them away to the poor.'

He then poured a strange, colourless liquid into my glass and when I animadverted, 'Is it not a little early for spirits?' he said, 'It is water, sir.'

Oct. 9: Slept ill due to my dinner. Awoke from a nightmare to find Grunge standing by the bed holding a newspaper.

I asked what he wanted and he replied, 'Sir, you are a ruined man. The price of stocks has collapsed.'

'I know, you fool,' I cried. 'I suppose you are going to say my ten million South Sea shares are worthless? I knew that well enough.'

'No sir,' he said. 'It is your 20,000 shares in a Company for Building a Tunnel Under the Irish Sea. They are now worth only three halfpence.' 'Each?' I asked and he said, 'No, altogether.'

I asked Grunge what I should do and he said it was customary under these circumstances for a gentleman to take his own life. He had assisted several former employers to hang themselves and he would be happy to assist me; indeed, he had a special rope in his room which he kept for such melancholy occasions or if preferred a silver pistol, suitable for use by the gentry.

However, I told him I preferred to drink myself to death and intended to start immediately, therefore let him bring in the port, with which I set to with a will and damnation to all the rogues on 'Change.

Oct. 10: Hail. Ebenezer Cartwheel d. from the Windy Convulsions. Bart. Wheeler hanged. His last words were, 'May you all rot.' There is much talk of the homeless mendicants which plague the land. In London some of them have taken to sewing loops of cloth in the backs of their coats. They then hang themselves up on the spikes of the railings in front of houses and sleep vertically.

Sevl. large houses in Pall Mall have been affected. Lord Chesterfield, on returning home in the early hours recently, found half-a-dozen nomads hanging on his railings and played a tune on their heads with his stick. He reported the men's skulls gave off a bass note while the women and children had a higher tone.

Oct. 11: Rain. Fredk. Seedcake hanged for stealing a lamb. His last words were, 'Glug'.

In a.m. was much disturbed to see some mendicants occupyg. a grave in the churchyard. The Rector says that when he rang the bells this morning five dropped out of the belfry.

Oct. 13: Thunderstorms. Prudence Barnwell died from Gout in the Spleen.

Passing through the Park in a.m. I saw an old man sheltering under a tree, drenched by the storm. I approached and after hitting him over the head with the cudgel I use on poachers said, 'Away, idle Whig-voting homeless mendicant and seek work or I shall set the dogs upon you!'

He looked me in the eye and replied thus, viz: 'So, Haggard, you do not recognise the starving man who stole a shilling from you at the Fair twenty years ago. I went to London and made my fortune but never forgot the crime; I swore on The Good Book to repay you ten thousandfold. Today I came to keep my oath and give you £500.'

With a cry of dismay I fell on my knees and began brushing water from his breeches but he went on: 'And this is the welcome I receive! No money shall you have, vile Haggard, it shall all be given to the homeless people, who suffer as I once did.'

With which he turned and strode away to town where shortly afterwards I heard the merry shouts of mendicants as he distributed his fortune.....