

RACING TO WIN

BY

FRED SHAW

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FRED SHAW

“The Book of the Gurnays”

—★—

With a foreword by
S. W. E. Bishop of Weybridge

—★—

IN ADDITION TO TELLING THE STORY
OF FRED SHAW'S PIGEON RACING
CAREER THIS BOOK ALSO PAYS TRIBUTE
TO THE GENIUS OF RENIER GURNAY,
THE CREATOR OF THE GURNAY STRAIN.

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FOREWORD

I HAD been flying pigeons for only two or three years in a little country hamlet by the time Fred Shaw's Gurnays began their dazzling careers in the Manchester Flying Club's races, but the reverberations of his breath-taking victories penetrated even into the quiet backwater where I resided, stunning novice and old hand alike. Our first reaction to this relentless revolutionary's onslaught on the Lancashire stronghold was one of dazed bewilderment. When we heard that Mr. Shaw raced cocks only, treating them as inmates of a bachelor establishment in which the opposite sex made only fleeting visits during the racing season, our sensibilities were shocked to the core. We reacted as ordinary Englishmen react when confronted with something new, something "new-fangled", something quite unconventional and contrary to our custom; we repelled the system, cold-shouldered it, assured ourselves by falling back on conventional phrases, such as "It can't last" and "It's only a flash-in-the-pan". Well it did last and it was no flash-in-the-pan. Fred Shaw went through the hot competition of England's Premier Club like a sickle through corn, cutting down the giants and overturning all our preconceived notions of how pigeons should be raced. And the marvel of it all was that he smashed competition into little pieces and set up racing records that have been unbeaten in a quarter of a century, with only a mere handful of yearlings and late-breds, even up to 529 miles! I wonder how many other fanciers would have fancied their chances of winning a Marennes race (529 miles) with four yearlings against such wizards as Arthur Billinge, Stow Bros., S. P. Griffiths and others of equal fame and stature? In those days the story of the all-conquering Gurnays read like a chapter out of Jules Verne or H. G. Wells—as unreal as a fantasy in fairyland, although it was happening in our very midst.

Mr. Fred Shaw, who is a good friend of mine, will forgive me, I know, if I refer to him as a greater fancier than Renier Gurnay. In his modesty he looks to Gurnay as his teacher and on himself as the willing pupil. He accepts no credit for himself, but lays it all at the door of the Gurnays and Renier Gurnay. But I know Fred Shaw and not a little about his abilities and his remarkable brain. Gurnay will always be respected as a great Belgian

fancier who gave his name to a strain and won a lot of money in pools and doublages. But a few sums in simple arithmetic show that if the same financial rewards had been available to Fred Shaw, Renier Gurnay's £125,000 of prize and pool money would have been doubled by the former.

The least I can say about Fred Shaw is that he enriched our sport by his importations by his brilliant and advanced racing methods and through the gift of his startling but lovable personality. I never knew a man I could like more and who was as ready and willing to lend his support to schemes which had as their object the general enhancement of our national sport. In my opinion, his genius as a pigeon racer is equalled only by his genius as a writer, as this book will testify and as his contributions to the world's leading pigeon journal, *Pigeon Racing News and Gazette*, have confirmed on numerous occasions.

In conclusion, a word to the pigeon racing novice. If you are looking for an example by way of an Ace Flyer of Pigeons, someone on whom to model your own career with a view to reaching the dizzy heights of pigeon racing stardom, study this book and try to emulate the great Fred Shaw. You could do much worse than this—you could not do better. Here, between the covers of this literary masterpiece, reside both the story and the wisdom of one of the greatest pigeon fanciers the world has ever known, the incomparable Fred Shaw, of Lancashire.

S. W. E. BISHOP.

WEYBRIDGE.

Nov., 1949.

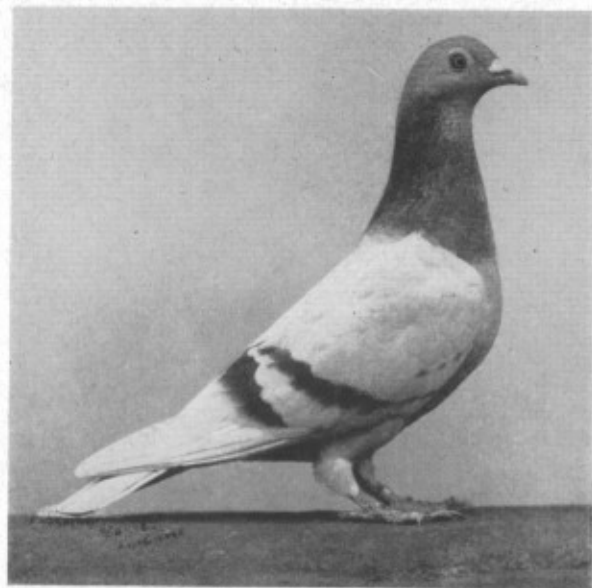


The above was written for this book in the author's lifetime, before the sport mourned the passing of the great Fred Shaw. The word "great" is a fitting description of his powers as a pigeon fancier. Some men are born great, some achieve greatness, some have greatness thrust upon them but although the seed of greatness was undoubtedly planted in Fred Shaw it was in the second category that he reached the heights. In this book of tributes let these words be mine to an old and valued friend.

S. W. E. Bishop.

Weybridge.

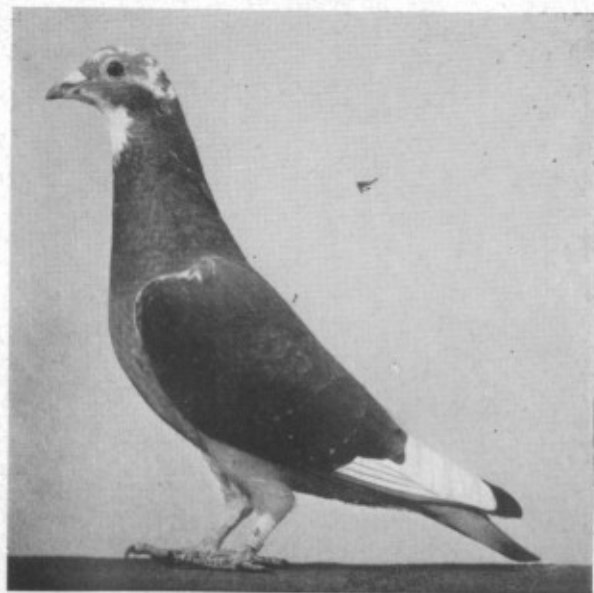
Sept., 1952.



"CHAMPION MERRY WIDOW."

Mealy hen.

In 1911 won 1st Rennes, 369 miles, disaster—only she and "Fireworks", her nest-mate, being timed in Club. 1912—1st Stockport Federation, terrible disaster, Marennes, 579 miles, 644 vel., only 31 home out of 1,600. Won 1st Denton Club by 240 yards per min.; only three birds home in club. Very late bred 1910, hand-reared and carried seven nest flights when she won Rennes disaster.



"FIREWORKS."

Dark pied cock.

In 1911 won 2nd Rennes (369 miles) disaster to his loft-mate, "Merry Widow". He had seven nest flights, being very late bred, hand-reared.

CHAPTER I.

EARLY DAYS

MANY pigeon fanciers, old and young, novice and expert, have written to me from time to time all in quest of further information relating to that prodigious and famous strain of racing pigeons known as the Gurnays. These correspondents seek answers to a wide range of questions concerning the management of the birds that made history in races to the lofts of their great founder, Renier Gurnay, of Verviers, Belgium, and to my loft at "The Grange", Hyde, at the time when I was competing in the then premier racing society of England, the Manchester Flying Club, 200 to 250 members.

It has never been possible for me to cope with such an unending stream of letters, much as I should have liked to have given all the information required, but I did not contemplate writing a book containing the answers to most of these questions until I was persuaded to do so by S. W. E. Bishop, of Weybridge, whom most fanciers will know as one of the founders of that world-renowned and leading pigeon journal, "Pigeon Racing Gazette". This book should satisfy all those who are interested in the exploits of the Gurnays when raced under the Gurnay and Gurnay-Shaw System, and all those who love a good pigeon and a hotly contested race.

Most fanciers are interested in pedigrees and I thought I might do worse than open this book with a glance at my own ancestry which begins with those Shaws who were farmers in Scotland before they decided to move south, over the border, to the district of Oldham, Lancashire. But farming at Oldham proved to be very unattractive and the family transferred its interests to the hatting trade, vide the famous house of Woodrows. It was in 1880 that my father, the grandson of those Shaws who settled near Oldham, founded the firm of George Shaw and Company in Denton. This was three years after I, the third of four sons, had been born on 15th January, 1877. The four sons were Jack, Charles, Fred and Arthur, but I was the only member of the family who showed any love of animals, birds and livestock generally.

My mother was a God-fearing woman of great kindness and personal charm to whom I am greatly indebted for her good example and who has ever been my faithful guiding star. She was one of the Brogden family, of St. Louis, U.S.A., and came to England when a young girl. Soon, my father's firm became the British agents for the abrasive manufacturing concern of Herman Behr, of Brooklyn, New York, U.S.A., and on his retirement they sent my

father the following illuminated address which I considered was a fitting testimonial to his honesty and integrity :

GEORGE SHAW, ESQUIRE,
DENTON, NEAR MANCHESTER,
ENGLAND.

DEAR MR. SHAW,

Upon your retirement from the business you founded—George Shaw & Partners—we desire to express our sincere appreciation of the very pleasant and cordial relations that have existed between us since the original agency negotiations thirty-seven years ago.

During this entire period nothing has ever occurred to mar or even cast a shadow on this happy condition. We cannot help but feel that the attitude of frank honesty and justice you have always displayed towards us has governed all your relations in business and personal life. You may indeed look back with pleasure and satisfaction on a career thus governed, and look forward to the happiness that a character thus formed will enjoy.

We are confident that in leaving your business in other hands, not only the name of George Shaw will be perpetuated, but your sterling qualities now instilled in the organization will live with it.

Your friends,

19th March, 1920.

HERMAN BEHR,

President.

ROBT. BEHR,

First Vice-President.

J. S. FRAZEE,

Second Vice-President.

HERMAN BEHR & CO. INC.

GUSTAV HEUBACK,

Secretary and Treasurer.

A. J. SIDFORD,

General Manager.

M. E. PESNEL,

Assistant Treasurer.

If the foregoing will help the reader to know me better it will also assist him to understand how I came to meet the man who was to become my very best friend, and how this friendship led to the importation of the Gurnays into this country and their subsequent feats in the races.

It would not surprise anyone to learn that a boy who loved animals eventually tried his hand at breeding rabbits, this at ten years of age, and that his ambitions should then reach out to the keeping of pigeons. But although Denton was the centre of the hatting trade, it was also located near the collieries where great numbers of colliers had to make their own sports and amusements, these included whippet racing (dogs that were a small edition of the modern greyhound) and short-distance pigeon racing (one mile). These amusements were not unaccompanied by heavy betting and many of the ills which emanate from such pastimes, and my father, whose strong Christian outlook caused him to abhor low-down sports which, because of the

heavy betting, brought misery on the poor families of those times, set his face against pigeon keeping and refused to be moved when I pressed for permission to indulge in this hobby.

But I was a determined lad and side-tracked paternal obstinacy by conniving with several friends, who agreed to keep my birds in their chicken runs and divert a part of their fowl's grain for the feeding of my pigeons, in return for a few pence from my pocket money. These pigeons cost six-pence each and, in some cases, seven-pence for better class birds. Later on, an old dog and pigeon fancier named Wright Swindells persuaded me to get rid of these sixpenny birds and invest in some "gradely 'uns" from the loft of Dick Barton, at Gee Cross, Hyde. This venture appealed to me, but it needed a great deal of consideration owing to the fabulous prices of Barton's birds. They cost no less than 2s.6d. per pair, but as I wanted the best stock before I could hope to achieve my great ambition of racing birds from London, I saved my money and became the proud possessor of the "gradely 'uns". But in spite of all precautions, rumours leaked through to my father and my strict parent smashed all my dreams by forbidding me to ever have any contact with pigeons thereafter. This put an end to my growing interest in the sport and friendship with so many good fanciers in the district of Denton. I can remember several of the great fanciers in the locality such as Dickie Mason, who regularly flew birds from London and similar distances of 188 miles. Another was Bob Pimlott, of Droylsden, who bought birds from Dickie Mason at £1 and £2 each. Of course, we all considered him to be a millionaire to afford such high prices for birds.

I had to wait several years before I could again indulge in pigeon keeping when I bought birds from "Happy" Bill Birchall, who competed and won so many prizes in the local Denton Club from French race points, and later emigrated with his family to Australia. I set about building a loft at the rear of my rented house, but this further attempt came to an end when the landlord found out and referred to the conditions of tenancy printed in the rent book. Few people appreciate the difficulties which confront fanciers, who wish for no more than a little peace in which to indulge a harmless hobby in their back gardens.

However, after another period of waiting I bought Bradburn House, Denton, and erected a loft, but, later on, Dick Hollick persuaded me to give up "Tipplers" and install some real racing pigeons. I bought from him some birds for 5s. each and one which was red, white and blue in colour for 7s.6d. I named him, somewhat appropriately I thought "Union Jack". He flew Marennes, 528 miles. I also bought a hen from Wm. Ollerenshaw, but she was barren. At the end of a season's patience, during which I waited for her to lay eggs, I took her back to Ollerenshaw and pointed out that although I had paid £1 for her, and had placed pot-eggs under hen for three nests there was little prospect of getting any young. Therefore, surely recompense was due.

He drew my attention to a late nest containing two small youngsters and said I could have one, either the blue or the mealy. I chose the latter (it was 14 days old). I had a youngster of the same age under "Union Jack". I hand-reared these two youngsters very carefully, feeding them with split beans which I crushed with a hammer, and they became very tame and friendly. Later, the dark pied youngster was called "Fireworks" and the mealy hen "The Merry Widow", but I never imagined at the time that they were destined for greatness as racers.

I joined the Denton Club and began to train the late-breds the following season, taking the same route as other club members. The mealy hen was entered in a Saturday race (Bournemouth, 188 miles), but failed to home until the Monday, when she came with a note attached to her leg, from which I discovered she had been taken in by a kind fancier at Hazel Grove, about five miles away, and fed and watered before being liberated to return home. I forget the name of the fancier but I am still grateful to him. This was in 1911.

This mealy hen had lost her cock so I attempted to mate her to another, but she nearly killed him in the nestbox, so savage was she. She had her eye on "Boy Blue", son of Bill Bradley's famous pair, "Daily Mail" and "Maid Marion", who won first Hyde Club three years in succession from Marennes, 528 miles. Please note that this loft was at Gee Cross where I was later to establish the Gurnays. However, as "Boy Blue" was comfortably settled with his hen I did not separate him but tried the mealy hen with another cock, who met the same fate as the first. I decided to break up "Boy Blue" and his hen and offer him to the mealy hen. This pleased the hen, but "Boy Blue" objected so strongly that he almost killed her. But nothing he could do would drive the hen from him. She endured the punishment and after his anger had evaporated they mated, and when she had been sitting five days on eggs I sent her to Rennes, 369 miles, along with the other late-bred "Fireworks", both carrying seven nest flights.

The race was a disaster. I timed the mealy hen, now known as "Merry Widow", at 6 p.m., and later took my clock to the clubhouse, leaving a young lad, Billy Brooks, to watch for "Fireworks". My journey to the clubhouse was delayed so that when I arrived there I found Billy Brooks dancing with excitement, gleefully announcing that the pied cock "Fireworks" had just dropped into the loft. We put the wing number in the clock and went to headquarters, where I was surprised to learn that mine was the only clock to be brought in, and that my two late-breds were the only arrivals in race time, taking 1st and 2nd in the race. I think readers will agree that this was a magnificent performance for late bred.

Next year (1912) the "Merry Widow" went to Marennes, 529 miles, with the Club and Stockport Federation. Once again the race was a disaster, with only 31 birds timed in out of about 1,600 odd entered. The "Merry

Widow" flew this disastrous race in grand style, taking 1st Club, 1st Stockport Federation and 7th Great Northern, velocity 644, winning 1st Club by 240 yards per minute, only three birds home. Her sire was a Toft and her dam a pure Hansenne. She had a pearl eye. The race imposed such a strain upon her that she grew blood quills and was withdrawn from further racing. Unfortunately, she was killed by a cat while I was away in the Balkans, etc., where I spent three years of World War I.

I had a good friend in Belgium who was a cousin of Winants, the very successful pigeon racer of Liège, and through his intermediary I imported several birds from Winant, of his Hansenne blood. Then I joined the Manchester Flying Club and, with what I had previously, plus these new birds, did some winning. But Winants had some ideas of selling birds in this country and his notions were not in line with what I had been brought up to recognise as strict business ethics, so I refused to do more business with him. Meantime, his birds had been working well, and later on Walter Torkington (of Torkington & Walker) admitted they were chiefly responsible for them winning the Fifty-Guinea Cup in the Manchester Flying Club.

It has always been my experience that honesty is the best policy. And so it turned out that my strict adherence to this policy brought its reward. My very good Belgian friend, Clement Kuetgens, of Liège (also in the hatting industry), was approached and asked to enquire, on my behalf, the name of the undisputed champion of pigeon racing clubs in Belgium. His enquiries elicited the opinion, shared by all, that the reigning champion was Renier Gurnay, of Verviers. While Clement Kuetgens was making his enquiries, another good friend, Robert Truyffaut, of Courtrai, was also looking around for the champion when he found Paul Verhoye, of Courtrai (who had won 1st, 2nd and 3rd in the National by half an hour). With these two pieces of information in mind I decided to revisit Belgium and both of the champion lofts.

I first called on Paul Verhoye and saw his wonderful Anvers type birds, where I was greatly impressed, indeed, we have been friends ever since. Unfortunately, he became blind and was unable to keep up his loft and I know readers will agree that this is the greatest affliction a fancier can suffer.





M. PAUL VERHOYE.

CHAPTER II.

THE ACHIEVEMENTS OF PAUL VERHOYE

TO describe the achievements of the pigeons of Paul Verhoye before the war of 1914-18 and the years which followed would necessitate hundreds of pages to do it justice, so I will give a brief summary of the results of the renowned exploits of the 1913 season which have passed into posterity and which were crowned with success at the famous National competition from Angoulême to Brussels.

At the start of the season the pigeon named "Le Long"—so called because of its enormous size, long neck and its wings, which were four centimetres longer than the average—gained a 1st prize over a short distance and was subsequently engaged in six more races during the season, each time winning 1st prize with a lead which increased progressively according to the distance of the race. It must be noted that this phenomenon never won less than 1st prize in its life until the last time it was engaged the 9th from the distance of Bordeaux (850 kilometres).

Our Paul Verhoye, by his absolutely sensational results made the competitions more and more empty where it was expected he would enter his birds, and in many sections he was excluded. This situation was not surprising when one thinks of the Grand National competition from Angoulême (670 kilometres) to Brussels, a competition in which the best pigeons in Belgium were entered—Paul Verhoye entered *three* pigeons for all the pools and amongst 1,800 competitors, gained the following fantastic results :

1st prize—one hour in advance of the 4th bird in the race.

2nd prize—40 minutes in advance of the 4th bird in the race.

3rd prize—30 minutes in advance of the 4th bird in the race.

The Courtrai district entered in all 36 pigeons and the only prizes which were gained were these three firsts from the same loft. The organizers would have disqualified the great victor for fraud if there had not have been hundreds of fanciers there to witness the arrival of the birds.

Not satisfied with this feat, Paul Verhoye entered ten other pigeons the following week in the famous International Competition of Tours (490 kilometres). There were 3,800 competitors, and there again the Verhoye loft gained ten prizes with the ten birds entered—including 1st, 2nd, 9th, etc. To collect the many prizes, such as clocks, ornaments, furniture, etc., he had to hire a large lorry !

To close this memorable season the same pigeons were entered in the Grand National from Angoulême to Gand. There were 4,500 competitors, and, as usual, they arrived one after the other with clock-like regularity, the first winning 32nd prize and the ninth the 150th prize, the tenth bird,

which was the best pigeon did not turn up, but was later found with a broken wing at Orleans, 100 kilometres from the departure point. This competition carried the great gold medal of the world exhibition of Gand and it witnessed the triumph of the Verhoye strain—on the following Sunday the gold medal was solemnly presented to M. Paul Verhoye for the extraordinary result which he had achieved.

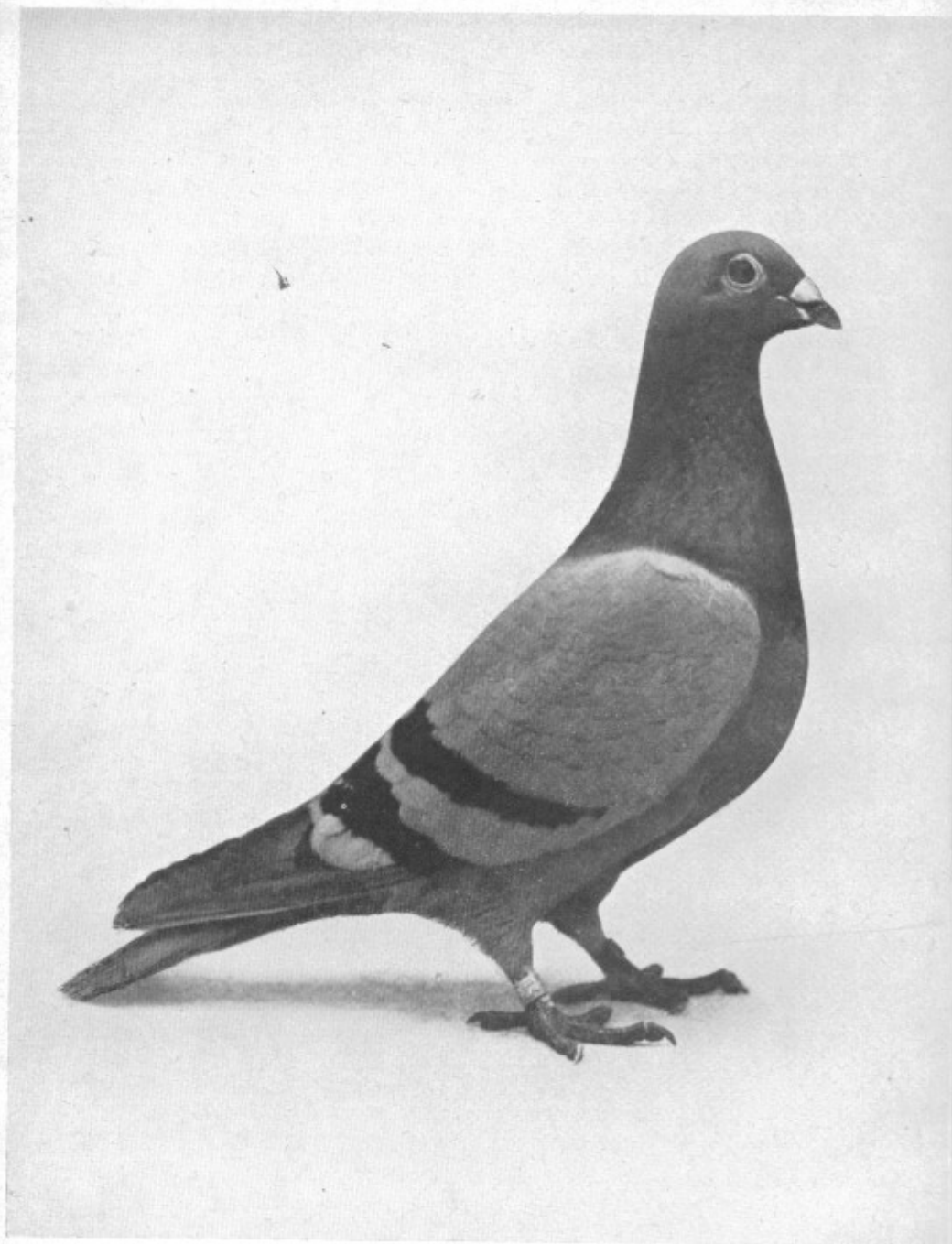
The year 1914 saw the continuation of success until war broke out. When the Germans came the pigeons of Paul Verhoye were confiscated and sent to Germany. In 1918, following intervention from high quarters, 24 of the best birds were returned to their owner, the famous "Le Long" being amongst them. Several descendants of this phenomenal bird won innumerable 1st prizes. Amongst others must be mentioned the famous "Coq" of Mr. Lenoir de Lessines, which like its father, never won less than 1st prize. It must be noted that "Le Long" was born in 1909 and he was ten years old (of which four years were spent in captivity) when he was returned to Belgium, and he continued to produce famous progeny until 1925 at the age of 16 years.





M. RENIER GURNAY.

founder of "The World's Greatest Winning Strain of Racing Pigeons". Wins to one-loft exceed £120,000.



"OLD BLUE HEN" ("Vielle Bleue").

Foundation of loft. Her descendants won to one loft (M. Gurnay's) more than £100,000. Dam of the great "Bon Bleu", which sired "Bronze Favorite", 1st Grand National by half an hour, 1,643 competing, etc., etc. Photograph taken when 15 years of age. Never beaten in the Expositions until she was 13 years of age. Presented to me by M. Gurnay, was buried in "The Grange" grounds on her death at 20 years of age.

CHAPTER III.

MY FIRST MEETING WITH M. GURNAY

AFTER visiting Paul Verhoye, I went with my friend, Clement Kuetgens, to call on Renier Gurnay, of Verviers—but here our troubles began.

It transpired that M. Gurnay was not inclined to show foreigners around his loft, due to the unfortunate experiences of past occasions. However, I am very persistent, and because Verviers is the centre of the hatting industry in Belgium I was able to call on several prominent citizens of good reputation and secure their testimonies to my own standing and integrity. Armed with these documents, I approached Madame Pauline Gurnay and won her sympathy for my cause. In a very short time she arranged an interview with M. Gurnay, who then permitted us to visit the loft and inspect his wonderful team of birds. This was at Rue Tranchee, his home at that time. The birds were housed in the roof and I shall never forget my first impressions when confronted by these beautiful specimens of the Gurnay strain. All I knew about quality, feather, shape and beauty in pigeons was shattered when I first came to view the wonderful excellence of the team he had founded on that great tutor, Alexandre Hansenne's strain.

M. Gurnay watched my eyes darting from this bird to that as I viewed each bird in the loft. Later, when I asked if I could buy a pair, he said, "Which pair would you select if I agreed to sell any pigeons to you?" No doubt his question was meant to discover if I knew anything about racing pigeons. I selected a blue chequer cock (later to be named "Clement", after the friend who had introduced me to the Gurnays) and a blue chequer hen (that I named "Bebelle", after his wife). M. Gurnay then remarked to my friend Clement: "Mr. Shaw has a very good idea of a racing pigeon. The cock he has selected is one of my racing team and a good winner, which I had to stop on account of his having been in the wires, and the hen is a daughter of my famous champion 'Le Gros'." However, eventually, and after a price had been agreed, we retired for refreshment. Both M. Gurnay and my friend Clement regaled themselves with several glasses of our host's choicest wines (he kept the finest cellar I have ever known), but I astonished Renier by declining his kind offer of hard drinks. Gurnay was astounded! "Here is an Englishman," he said, "who had the opportunity of drinking the world's best wines, yet refused to sample any of them!" To the very end of our subsequent 26 years' friendship he always marvelled that an Englishman could be natural without a liking for beer and wines, and that I could be satisfied with a little champagne at the close of a meal.

I returned to England with my pair of Gurnays and my good friend Walter Torkington was the first to see them, having called round unexpectedly.

The remarkable thing about Walter was that he was always somewhere around when anything new appeared. In the following spring I began to breed from "Clement" and "Bebelle", and "Mighty Atom" and her sister occupied the first nest of the first Gurnay pair ever to breed in this country.

After the second nest, my wife inadvertently allowed "Bebelle" to escape from the loft at 5 p.m., who, notwithstanding her several months of confinement, regained her home loft at Verviers by noon next day, a distance of 400 miles without any training. M. Gurnay notified me of her return and mentioned, as a coincidence, that on the same day another bird, sold to a fancier in Austria, had also returned. I replied to M. Gurnay and pointed out that the hen was obviously an exceptional one and that he might care to use her in his own racing team. He agreed to do this and at the same time asked me to send him some rings. These were sent to him but none of us guessed, in the spring of 1914, that the presence of these English metal rings on the legs of his pigeons would soon bring him into such terrible danger that his life could hang in the balance. On 2nd August, 1914, he despatched to me, via Antwerp, six young Gurnays, but they were never heard of again. On the 4th August Great Britain declared war on Germany, but as Verviers is situated on the Belgian frontier the Germans had passed through the town and deep into Belgium before our country made its declaration. The war was on, and nothing more could be done about the Gurnays until the curtain rose once again on a world at peace.



CHAPTER IV.

I REVISIT M. RENIER GURNAY.

WITH Belgium occupied by the Germans, and myself in the Balkans for three years, ways and means had to be devised whereby I could keep in touch with my friend, Renier Gurnay, at Verviers. At last, and through the good offices of friends in the Balkans, England, Denmark, Germany and Belgium, our letters were able to take this roundabout route to the address in the Rue Aux Laines, where a high German official had been billeted on M. Gurnay. He had moved to this address which was located only about 100 yards from the house where we had our first meeting.

M. Gurnay had the utmost difficulty in preventing the carrying out of the order that all pigeons should be killed. His best birds had been hidden in several different places so that a sudden misfortune could not fall on them all at once and the same time; he spent a small fortune maintaining these secreted birds. The great "Bon Bleu" and equally great "Angoulême" were together in one house, secreted with their hens, and one of these laid an egg. Because it was impossible to detect which of the two cocks had sired the bronze cock youngster hatched from this egg, it was later brought to England as "The Great Unknown".

Eventually, a miserable informer gave information to the Germans and they visited Gurnay's loft, finding there several pigeons, including those which bore the English rings I had sent to Gurnay in the spring of 1914. M. Gurnay was hard put to it to refute the accusation that he was keeping English birds on his premises for the purpose of espionage. A great amount of cross-examination followed and he escaped the supreme penalty by a hair's-breadth. In the meantime, German officials were living at his house (having been billeted by the German Army authorities), and when the war came to an end in 1918, M. Gurnay became the victim of vile rumours that alleged he had been friendly with the Germans. The people had already forgotten that Gurnay had intervened and saved many of their pigeons from wholesale slaughter. The mobs attacked his house and smashed furniture, but when Gurnay instituted court proceedings the Town Council was compelled to pay the cost of this wanton damage, after the court had proved his entire innocence. Mob law is a very dangerous thing, nor is there ever any justice in it.

In February, 1919, I was demobbed from General Headquarters in Ireland, where I had been sent to take over from Capt. Jackson. I lost no time in notifying Renier Gurnay of the good news and before long I was once again on my way to Belgium, in person, to renew that sincere and abiding friendship which had sprung up between us in the early days.

As I write these chapters of my book, nearly 30 years after the event, I experience once again the feeling of elation which possessed me as I was met at the railway station in Verviers and we made our way to the Rue Aux Laines. The reunion that followed my arrival there, after Gurnay's wonderful and charming wife had joined him in giving me a really royal reception, was carried on into the early hours of the following morning as we sat there exchanging our personal reminiscences of the war years, and touching, time and time again, on the racing pigeons that had been the cause of our meeting in the first place. It was a remarkable occasion and one that was to live on in my memory as a red-letter day, a milestone in my career as a pigeon fancier.

It was about 3.30 a.m. when M. Gurnay made an astounding offer. He said, "Well, Fred, I have selected my 20 birds and I will sell you the remainder for £1,200."

This came as somewhat of a shock and Gurnay must have noticed he had startled me because he added, "You need not pay for them until you are satisfied." Of course, I was very pleased to have this opportunity of importing a worth while consignment of Gurnays to this country, and I was soon on my way back to Denton, and later on the consignment arrived.

About the first fancier to see these birds was Mr. Palmer, of Ireland, who was so struck by them that he bought four pairs. On returning to Ireland, and comparing the Gurnays with his own birds, he found that his first impressions had been so correct that he came back and bought four more pairs for the same price. Thus were the Gurnays imported into Ireland at a cost of several hundred pounds.

I found that I had inadequate room at Denton, so I bought "The Grange" at Hyde, and moved in with my Gurnays. It should be noted that "The Grange" was at Gee Cross, where I had previously bought "gradely 'uns" for 2s.6d. per pair! Here, at Hyde, the Gurnays were to begin what fanciers said would be the acclimatisation period so necessary before they could be expected to begin winning in the races, but before very long an incident occurred which caused me to alter my plans.

Early in 1921 my breeding list contained particulars of a red chequer hen that had won 1st prize S.E. Section. M.F.C., from Guernsey (in 1920 young birds had been raced whilst under the management of A. H. Turner before I removed from Denton to "The Grange", Hyde), but shortly after publishing the list I received a letter from J. Bruce, Secretary of the M.F.C., asking me to insert a correction in a Fancy Press journal, giving such correction as much publicity as that previously given to my advertisement. It appeared that George Yates had inspired this letter from Bruce and had pointed out that the red chequer hen had certainly won 1st prize in the young bird race, which was not an M.F.C. race, but one *organised* by the M.F.C.

I trust I may not be held unreasonable in supposing that this was "hair-splitting" with a vengeance. When I sent my reply I pointed out that if I, too, wished to delve into microscopic details concerning the M.F.C. and its members I could find fault easily enough. I quoted as an example the case of a member (unnamed in my letter) who had trapped one of my young Gurnays, reported it, and wanted to keep it when he found out that it came from my loft. He had offered to buy it, but I pointed out that if he was anxious to obtain the Gurnay blood, he could come along and do business in the proper manner—in the meantime I wanted my bird returned. He then wrote to say that the bird had escaped from his loft and cleared off. Fortunately I retained this letter.

As soon as my letter had been received by M.F.C. I was asked to substantiate my case, but I requested them to let the matter drop, saying that I raised it in my letter only as an instance of irregularity which could be brought to light if the members and officials were looking round for subjects of complaint. But George Yates thought he had a good case against me for making an accusation I could not substantiate. Once again they requested me to report the name of the fancier who had trapped my bird, but, beyond telling them that it was one of their leading fanciers, I refused to carry the matter any further.

But Mr. Yates was not prepared to abandon this opportunity for cornering Fred Shaw. I was notified that if I refused to divulge the name of the fancier I would be penalised. I then considered that I had done everything possible to protect the fancier responsible for the trapping and advised them that it was S. P. Griffiths, adding a rider to the effect that I had believed S. P. Griffiths when he said the bird had cleared off.

However, having gone so far, neither Mr. Yates nor his committee felt they were able to withdraw and a meeting of the club was called to investigate the matter. Mr. Yates was still bent on getting at me if he could. When the meeting was held, S. P. Griffiths was only faintly able to remember the occasion when the bird entered his loft, but, after persistent questioning, he suddenly recollected that it was a blue hen. At this admission Mr. Yates announced that he saw nothing irregular in the matter, since he had done the same thing, and asked me to retire while they considered a verdict. S. P. Griffiths was allowed to remain in the room. I was then called back into the room and told that the club considered S. P. Griffiths was in order,

I remember saying, "Mr. Chairman, is that the opinion of this meeting?" The Chairman replied that it was. I said, "Then Gentlemen, I wish you a good-night."

When I returned home I considered the matter, letting my mind rove over the events of the evening, somewhat regretting the incident and feeling that my case had not received a fair hearing.

I felt, too, that my purchase and importation of the Gurnays was in a way responsible for this new hostility, this strange and unprecedented antagonism in a club where I had always been on the most friendly terms with everybody. I surveyed the happenings of the recent months and called to mind that all the members of the M.F.C. who had called to inspect the Gurnays had been unsparing of their praise for the birds, this magnificent breed of racers. But while they had all been spontaneous with their acclamations it was possible that here and there, few in number, but nevertheless present, some may have feared that their chances in the races would dwindle as the Gurnays got into their stride. For instance, it is not usual for a leading fancier to covet a stray pigeon to the point of refusing to return it to its owner, then liberate it if the owner refuses to sell. Such strange behaviour has to be accounted for when weighing up the reasons that led up to this very unfortunate occurrence.

The result of this quiet but intensive cogitation was to be found in my decision to abandon the period of acclimatisation and bring things to a head by racing the Gurnays the following season. One member was not surprised by this decision. When I left the meeting above referred to, Harry Pashley accompanied me and volunteered the opinion that I had been treated very badly. At the same time he remarked upon the "look in my eye" as I said "good-night" to the members. He opined that my demeanour intimated that I was about to embark on a course of action which might have considerable bearing on the M.F.C. in days to come. I gave him no answer, but in the six years that followed he found answer enough. This was when the Gurnays went into action in M.F.C. races, sweeping the decks clean and hitting the pools so hard and so often that they ceased to exist as such, no member having any incentive to pit his birds against the Gurnays. That was my answer and it is one of the few that prevail in pigeonfancy. I offer it to those who feel they are at variance with members; get some good pigeons and set about them in the races and by being a good sportsman, but a determined winner, show them that Jack is as good as his master.

The crucial test is in the racing and the proof is in the winning of the races, there is no better way of vindicating both man and his birds when the name of both, or either, is taken in vain. And so, for the Gurnays, the year 1921 was to be the year of destiny and the turning-point in my own career as a fancier. My plans were made during the winter months and I made a point of spending much time with the birds, studying them as individuals, learning all I could about their characteristics, exercising them around the loft, and preparing them for the great tasks that would confront them when the racing season opened.

As I worked with the birds so my confidence in them hardened and became strong. It is safe for me to say that when the Gurnays were sent to the first race (they were all yearlings, with a sprinkling of late-breds) my

confidence was boundless and I knew they would not only give a good account of themselves, but might cover their name with glory. Everyone knows that this handful of young Gurnays won ten of the eleven races in which they competed that year, their sensational performances providing one of the most widely discussed subjects of conversation at that time. History had been made in the Manchester Flying Club.

Breeding and racing, with all its manifold pleasures, is not always a bed of roses. In 1921, a month before mating time, I entered the loft one morning to find my 13 trained youngsters (now yearlings) gasping for breath and opening wide their mouths. I was very puzzled by this strange happening and, finding it so unaccountable, sent for my old friend, Frank Battersby, a chemist then living in Hyde, to inspect the birds and give me his opinion. When he examined the birds he found they were badly burned in the mouth, throat and tongue by caustic acid. This gave me a great shock, as it was so near the time for the Gurnays to make their *début* in England. However, he went home and returned with his instruments, and I had the very unpleasant task of holding the birds while he lanced portions of burnt flesh and cut away part of the birds' tongues. By neglecting his business he ultimately succeeded in curing them by daily treatment, and, as is well known, the stamina of racing pigeons is marvellous. They soon were mated up and seemed none the worse when they began their record-breaking run of winning ten 1st prizes in eleven races, including 1st, 2nd; 1st, 2nd, 3rd and also 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th.

The following year, the first time a Gurnay cock was sent to Marennes, 529 miles, Frank Battersby beat me for 1st prize by a decimal point, and in this he was greatly delighted. While I regretted this break in a sequence of 1st prizes (the Gurnay cocks won a 1st nearly every time they went to a new race-point, as the programme gradually extended through the first and second seasons), yet it was fitting and proper that after all he had done his should be the honour of winning 1st prize to Shaw's 2nd.

After the incident described above in connection with the caustic acid, the grounds of "The Grange" were guarded by two savage dogs. I recently received a reminder of the days when these dogs prowled around the lofts when I had the pleasure of meeting Tom Yates, son of the late 95-year-old George Yates. Tom Yates told me that he had had 16 of his cocks stolen and he remarked that this would never have happened at Fred Shaw's place, with the dogs loose in the grounds. As can be observed from the ground plan published in this book, the netting enclosing the Gurnay-bred stock birds was only about six yards from the public road, and on one occasion this had been broken down, with the result that, when the birds were released in the aviary in the early morning, they escaped from the enclosure and certain losses were incurred.

When the Gurnays were first sent to the races their condition and beauty were remarked upon by all who were marking them and were passed to

fancier from fancier in admiration, each one handling the birds and testing their feather qualities. When this was reported to me by my man, who had taken the birds for marking, I quickly made it my business to report the fact to George Yates (then the Supervisor of marking of the M.F.C.), who immediately put a stop to such practices.

In a race where the Gurnays won 1st, 2nd, 3rd and 4th I knew that someone from the club would be calling to verify birds and ring numbers, and my loftman was instructed to request that such a visit should be made at a time when I would be in personal attendance at the lofts, adding that I suggested this arrangement because I did not care for the birds to be handled by others in my absence. Strange to relate, this simple request was construed by the club committee as a "refusal to permit the club official to verify", so good old George Yates was sent to enforce the rules.

He arrived on a Saturday, at the very moment when we were expecting birds to arrive in a race, but in spite of my pointing out that the moment was inopportune he insisted that the birds be produced and tossed in accordance with the rules (which stated "on demand") or be completely disqualified. He adamantly refused to wait a little until our first arrival had been timed in. However, the four cock winners of the previous week's race were brought from the loft, their rings examined, and then they were basketed prior to being placed in the loft, when George Yates asked what we were doing. "Putting them back into the loft," I replied. To my astonishment I was thereupon informed that the rule number so-and-so required the birds to be liberated and then re-examined when they re-entered the loft.

So, with one eye on the sky, looking for the first arrival from the race, the other one had to watch George Yates liberating the four pigeons, who were soon flying round the loft. The control at "The Grange" lofts was always strictly regimental and the birds soon fell into line and obeyed commands. Therefore, when I gave the signal the four cocks heard me call "In quick" and dived for the loft, passed by my head, and flew straight on to their perches at the entrance to the nestboxes. Then spoke George Yates,

"Shaw—Shaw! Now I understand everything! I have never seen anything like it in my life." Thereafter, whenever he heard fanciers discussing Fred Shaw he would say: "Have you ever seen the routine at Shaw's loft?" If the answer was in the negative, he would then say: "Well, go there and see for yourself, after which you won't talk any more nonsense." We became firm friends right to his passing away.

During the first year's racing at "The Grange" I had a Yorkshire loftman who had the honour of being the only man to time in Gurnays when I was absent. He did this correctly, the birds winning 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th, all Sections, M.F.C., Guernsey, completing the work before I returned home from business. At the end of the year his services terminated and he advertised in the Press: "I was Loft Manager for Mr. Shaw when he won 10 1sts in

11 races. My price for the system—£1." He did well out of it, including a pound from myself through a friend. What a joke it all was, and what a vivid imagination! It could have been nothing else because I basketed and timed in every bird during the whole six seasons with the only exception mentioned above. I also carried out all the ringing from stock birds to racers to avoid any possibility of error, supervised the feeding and training, etc. During the daytime hours spent at business, the loftman was at liberty to observe the birds and, when impressed by any particular pigeon, would recommend it for pooling, only to find such selection was invariably wrong. There is no one particular infallible way of knowing which bird will win in the next race—it requires observation from many aspects of pigeons' ways.

During the racing one experiences many surprises and disappointments. One of my greatest disappointments, and it happened at a time when there were many signs that the continued successes of the Gurnays were being received with hostility, occurred after "Champion Repeater" had won 1st 86 miles, 1st 188 miles, 5th St. Malo (beaten by loft-mates) and 1st 529 miles in one season and was then specially prepared the following season to win the race from Dol (France) and was pooled right through. He returned the following day with his claw fastened in the rubber ring. This was disheartening, to say the least about it. The same when "Champion Picture", heavily pooled, arrived late, minus tail—his astonishment was only equal to my own.

To revert to the conversation I was having with Tom Yates, he informed me, as many others have done, that a certain section of the Fancy maintained that such phenomenal and consistent wins cannot be the result of honest achievement and credited me with sleight of hand, or some such nonsense, an aspersion which is far from being a compliment to the birds who exerted themselves sufficiently to win 50 per cent to 80 per cent of the races—with the pooled-through bird. Perhaps these undesirable fanciers can explain how this is brought about? I have often found myself wondering if another of the birds I entered in the race should have carried the weight, but results inevitably proved that my first decision was the best.

In an attempt to quieten the detractors of the Shaw-Gurnays I challenged any of the critics to a series of ten races for £200 per race—60 per cent and 40 per cent or 50 per cent, 30 per cent and 20 per cent allocated as prize money. They were not takers, only a tentative suggestion that one race might be arranged from Marennes, 529 miles (and his bird to fly about 70 miles less distance). As any simpleton knows, anything can happen in a single race to render it inconclusive, but no series of incidents could excuse performances in a series of ten races. However, there were no acceptors of this challenge to quieten those who credited me with clock manipulation. In all the M.F.C. races it was my practice to have two separate clocks set. The first bird's ring went into the clock kept in the loft and the others were timed in the reserve clock—a precaution I took against either of the clocks deciding to stop.

In local club races, where the Shaw-Gurnays competed more for the benefit of the training and experimental flights only, one clock was used, because the "Average" prizes were not sought after. Incidentally, I do not approve of these "Average" prizes, believing that the fancier who wins nine out of ten races is a better winner of averages than one who wins no prizes worth mentioning but manages to "time one in" in all the races. However, it would be a strange world if everyone agreed on these subjects, not that we are lacking in many such anomalies.

The champion of the clubs in Verviers is the one who achieves the greatest number of wins, and for more than 30 years M. Gurnay was the champion of his club. At times he competed very little, or not at all, with young birds. His usual procedure was to select promising youngsters and only commence their training at two years of age. During this waiting period they bred, because, on the Gurnay system of racing cocks only, the actual racing birds reared youngsters only when their work was finished, except one youngster in the first nest.

In contrast to many fanciers I know of M. Gurnay did not personally keep records of the positions and wins of his birds—if these were required he simply sent to the secretary for the particulars required—say of the season's positions in the various clubs. What he did keep was a book.

AMOUNT PAID.

AMOUNT RECEIVED.

The former was deducted from the prize moneys paid and the difference was winnings, quite in contrast to some fanciers in this country who send 70 or more birds to a race and if they won all the prizes would be out of pocket—and when in M. Gurnay's particulars, for instance, "Angoulême" won 1st in the £40 pool, this is the amount on the one bird, £40 on one bird and winnings would be usually twenty times (£800), or the lot in a unique pool, so the *winnings* would be £760, not £800.

In business M. Gurnay was a renowned merchant in tailors' linings and bought from England many of these goods and, as a young man, he carried his samples on his back, visiting the various tailors all over Belgium. He had tremendous energy and a wonderful personality and prospered, and many of the successful men owe their success to the credit he gave them in their early days; and many commenced on their own through the persuasiveness of M. Gurnay, with the assurance of credit for all goods for the first two years or so. Many tailors are pigeon fanciers.

When the war of 1914 broke out and cinemas, theatres and hotels were closed by the Germans and were not profitable and could be bought, he invested his money in buying them with confidence that some day the Germans would be driven out, and when they were, in 1918, he re-opened them and made considerable profits, and he catered well for the working-class people by providing cheap entertainment, food and drink, and was universally respected as a great benefactor to the poor and needy.

Generosity was his second nature and this make-up helped, we may assume, in the "calculations" and judgments of the inmates of his lofts—understanding comes from experience. And I never forget the confidence of his birds when moving in the lofts—the birds seemed to understand their "Master", and even when not in the loft he so arranged that, when in the dining-room partaking of his meals, he could see the various entrances of the lofts and the movements of his birds, and the same remarks apply to his bedroom, when in bed he could see them. So his great love for his birds was evident, not only in the loft, but in his home. In the photos of the house we see the front, but the back looked towards the loft which, being on the third storey, was seen easily. All my life I have been an "early to bed", but at M. Gurnay's we invariably talked into the small hours, he smoking and drinking, and myself unable to do either, but more interested in hearing and learning all I could from the greatest fancier the sport has ever known, and whose birds are to be found in all parts of the world, continuing to make records and give pleasure in winnings, but also in their beauty, as anyone looking at the photos of the birds will admit, and only to be excelled by the birds themselves when handled.



CHAPTER V.

THE FUN BEGINS

IN the year 1921 there existed the Stockport Social Circle, a pigeon racing club comprised of members from the S.E. Section of the M.F.C. It was a club of expert pigeon fanciers and included among its members were Alf Cunliffe (Drabble & Co.), Torkington & Walker, Arthur Billinge (of "Rob Roy" fame), Fred Nelson, Frank Battersby, Percy Appleby, etc. The system in this club was for each member to pool a substantial sum for old birds and young birds, £10 or £20 each, with two prizes only—60 per cent and 40 per cent.

The race procedure was for each member to nominate a certain number of birds at the beginning of each season with which to compete (about six). Now it happened that during the first season (1921) the great majority of the prizes were won by the Shaw-Gurnays, so in the following season of 1922 it was decided there should be a reduction in the number of birds each member could nominate. However, once again the Shaw-Gurnays won most of the prizes. In the following 1923 and 1924 seasons the procedure was altered for the third time, providing that each member should nominate so many birds *per race*. Even this failed to bring about a change in the results. During the four seasons the Shaw-Gurnays won over 80 per cent of the prizes.

Therefore, at what proved to be the last Annual General Meeting of the Stockport Social Circle, after four seasons racing, during which about 80 per cent of the prize money had been won by the Shaw-Gurnay racing to "The Grange", my good friend Arthur Billinge was constrained to announce—"I have tried every way to beat you, Fred, I have failed and am resigning"—an example which was promptly followed by all the other members, and so, since I myself did not offer to resign, the club disintegrated and has so remained these past 24 years, a fact which I look upon with some regret.

In passing, it should be noted that when the club reduced the number of birds to be nominated, with a view to minimising the possibility of success for the Shaw-Gurnays, they did, in fact, increase that possibility; they virtually handicapped themselves, for most other members flew cocks and hens, whereas, under the Shaw-Gurnay system of cocks only, there were always a greater number of cocks fit and ready, and the percentage of these increased in proportion as the number of birds to be nominated decreased, a fact which was amply demonstrated by results in which eight out of ten races were won by the pool bird, the few exceptions being chiefly young bird races.

Another amusing racing experience was with the Hyde Homing Society, a club of about 50 members and which was primarily a working-man's

society. Here the Gurnays competed mostly for training purposes, for instance, when they were not engaged in M.F.C. races. Therefore, racing the Gurnays in this club was not regarded as a serious occupation until an occasion when a deputation from the club requested that an argument which persisted among the members on every marking night be settled in a practical manner. This constant argument was based on the general opinion, widespread among the members, that, though the Shaw-Gurnays could succeed in the M.F.C., they could not repeat such success in the Hyde Club.

It was decided to accede to the request for a practical solution to the problem by entering in the club's shortest race, Worcester, 86 miles; Bournemouth, 188 miles, and Marennnes, 529 miles. The following results settled the arguments to the satisfaction of all concerned: Worcester race (entry of five Gurnays), 1st, 2nd, 3rd and 4th; Bournemouth race (entry of four Gurnays), 1st, 2nd and 3rd. Even these results failed to subdue some of the die-hard argumentators who contended that, although the Gurnays could win short and middle distance races, a 529-miles Marennnes race was a different matter. Accordingly, this further argument was suitably answered with 1st, 3rd and 6th in that particular race. In all these events none of the "First Team" birds were engaged, with the exception of "Champion Apollo", who won all the pools.

As regards the hens, these were raced for either experimental or convenience purposes. In two experimental races hens were taken off their eggs, result: "Spotter", 1st Stockport Federation by ten yards per minute, with 3,601 birds competing, and "Dancer", 1st Stockport Federation by six yards per minute, with 3,881 birds competing.

The Shaw-Gurnays competed and won 1st prizes in several convenient clubs other than those mentioned, and though 20 years have passed when fanciers discuss them, they recall such points as colour, shape, eyes, ring numbers, etc., of winning birds which have long been forgotten by their owner.

In the year 1922 the team consisted of 20 cocks, mostly yearlings, with a few two-year-olds. The birds commenced with 1st and 2nd in the Bath race, M.F.C., winning practically all the pools, viz. 1st and 2nd in the 6d., 1s., 2s.6d., 5s., 10s. and £1 pools. This they followed up with 1st, 2nd, 3rd and 4th in the Bournemouth race, 188 miles, all four positions with premier velocities, 1,170 birds competing.

Then again, with a strenuous north-east wind blowing, in the race from Rennes, 369 miles, at a velocity of 942 yards, against 586 competitors, "Neaty" winning by 14 minutes and 1st in all pools 6d. to £1, from Captain E. E. Jackson, who was 3rd, all Sections. Then followed 6th Marennnes, with 257 birds competing, a velocity of 896, winning in this race 2nd in the 10s. and £1 pools. Incidentally, this was the first occasion on which a cock had been sent to Marennnes, a yearling, "Spot", which won 2nd in the Hyde club, losing first place only by a fraction to my old friend, Mr. Frank Battersby.

Only two seconds lost prevented the Gurnay cocks from achieving 1st prizes in all their first races—Stafford, 50 miles; Bournemouth, 188 miles; Guernsey, 278 miles; Granville, 319 miles; and Marennnes, 529 miles. Six birds to Marennnes, 529 miles, four yearlings, all home, five clocked in. 6th M.F.C., 2nd 3 Clubs, "Neaty", after winning the Rennes race, flew Marennnes and was awarded the N.H.U. Gold Medal for best performance. I see that he had also won from Bournemouth before going to Rennes.

When young birds followed, in their races, they won 3rd Worcester, 1st and 3rd Bath, 365 birds competing, 1st all Sections and premier velocity of 795, 1,071 birds competing, also winning 1st, 2nd or 3rd of all pools to £1.

This year's racing brought best Young Bird Average with a velocity of 1,127 yards, and the Combined Average and Fifty-Guinea Cup, with a velocity of 1,039 yards. Highest prize-winner with £215 for 34 1st prizes, etc., etc.

In this season the birds had one toss only, 46 miles, before being entered in the first race, 86 miles. I must here stress the object of the whole six seasons of racing, viz. experimental work carried out in accordance with the wishes of my great friend, M. Renier Gurnay, in conjunction with tests which he was making simultaneously with birds of other strains, under different methods and a variety of feeding systems. In the end it was proven that no other strain could exist in harmony with the Gurnays, which are endowed with both pugnacious and predacious qualities. Any other bird among them of shy and timid nature eventually met an untimely end by one means or another. Only when the Gurnay encountered one of equal spirit and courage was there accord, and should a stranger by chance encroach on their preserves a quick retreat was its only chance of survival before being pounced upon and despatched.

In 1923 I adopted a "free and easy system" of racing, including the hens, and the Shaw-Gurnay system was not applied. Even so, the team commenced again with 1st Bath, premier velocity of 1,096, 1,665 birds competing, and successes in several pools followed, including 1st, 2nd and 3rd Bournemouth, all premier velocities, 1,463 competing (1,095 yards). This was another north-east race and the first birds being two cocks, "Champion Apollo" and "Beauty Spot", the third a hen, "Double Event". A congratulatory letter was received from Mr. S. P. Griffiths, who acclaimed the result as an exceptionally great performance, since it was won by 56 yards per minute, with 1,463 competing, under harsh north-east wind conditions.

One particularly interesting feature in this result was that "Beauty Spot", a yearling, had previously flown off-course east of the Pennines, arriving at Morpeth, Northumberland, after 2 hours 30 minutes' flying, from whence it was returned by Mr. Jim Shotton, who, incidentally, later became my loftman. However, "Beauty Spot" was then specially prepared to redeem himself, which, four weeks later, he most certainly did, sharing 1st prize in that extremely hard race. Perhaps an even more novel feature of this

same race was that on the arrival of "Double Event" (some minutes after the first two cocks had been timed), I was not inclined to trouble myself putting her ring into the clock until persuaded to do so by the loftman, just out of curiosity to learn her position in the race. As mentioned above, she proved to be 3rd prize winner and eight yards per minute faster than the next of the 1,463 competitors.

Then came 1st, 2nd and 10th Guernsey, 278 miles, 810 competitors, with 1st and 2nd premier velocity, gaining all the pools. These two Gurnays were "Champion Apollo" and "Champion Picture", the former in the previous year had won 1st Bath, 1st Bournemouth, all Sections. In the young bird races, 1st Worcester, velocity 1,301, "Vitality", all Sections, 1,446 competing. A grandson of "Champion Picture", "Vitality", who was son of "Tableau" (winner of 1st Bath, with 381 birds competing in the Hyde H.S.), carried success to the third generation as father, son and grandson—all 1st prize winners and premier velocity in one season, taking practically all the pools. Then followed 1st and 3rd Cheltenham, premier velocity, 1,289 competing, with nearly all the pools, and 4th, 5th and 6th Bath, 221 birds competing. Note premier velocity is equal to 1st Federation.

Thus, in the third season with M.F.C. of 200 to 250 members, the loft won second highest prize-winner (making twice second highest prize-winner and one first highest prize-winner in three successive seasons). The £5 pool win in the Marennes race increases the aggregate considerably so far as actual prize winning is concerned.

In passing it is well to note that the famous Fifty-Guinea Cup is awarded for the best average over old and young bird races, irrespective of whether a prize has been won. Thus, if a fancier wins nine 1st prizes out of ten races he is not necessarily champion of the club, which is in contrast to the Belgian conception of the title "Champion", and, incidentally, to my own opinion, for a clock may stop or some other accident arise to affect a race result. In this country we see average cups being won by fanciers without a single prize position.

In 1924 the old birds won 1st prize in three successive races. 1st and 4th Worcester, 1st all Sections, velocity 1,483, 1,679 birds competing, with 1st or 1st, 2nd or 3rd all pools to 5s, and the £5 2-bird nomination and 1st £5 single nomination, 1st and 3rd Bath, with 1st and 3rd in the 6d. to 2s.6d. pools, 1st and 2nd 5s. pool and 1st 10s. pool, and £1 pool finally. 1st and 2nd Bournemouth, 238 competing, with 1st and 3rd pools to 5s, and 1st £5 single nomination, thus achieving 1st prize £5 single nomination in the three successive races. In addition—8th Nantes, with several pools and including 2nd £1 open. Young birds in this season's racing gained several prizes and pools.

Third highest prize-winner for the season. Free and easy style.

Season 1925 again proved one of the highest prize-winners under various experimental systems of racing, including such results as :

Worcester—3rd, 4th and 6th, 486 competing, including pools, 1st, 2nd, 3rd 5s. and the 5s. 2-bird nomination pool.

Bath—1st, 2nd and 6th, 454 competing, with 1st premier velocity, 1,394 yards, with 1,858 birds competing, and again 1st, 2nd and 3rd in the 5s. pool.

Bournemouth—1st, 2nd, 3rd, with 380 birds competing, velocity 1,353. 1st, 2nd in the 6d. to 5s. pools, 1st 10s. and £1 pools and the £5 2-bird nomination. 1st and 2nd £5 single nomination.

St. Malo—3rd, 4th, 5th, with 585 birds competing, pool wins including 1st and 2nd's, and 1st 10s. and £1 pools.

Nantes—2nd and 8th, 251 birds competing. In this race "Aladdin", son of "Champion Apollo", lost the premier velocity by one yard only to a bird flying 12 miles less in distance. His brother "Dandy" won £22 from Marennes, 6th M.F.C., 19th Great Northern.

Young bird results were : 4th Worcester, 6th Cheltenham with pools, 5th Bath, and 1st and 3rd Bournemouth, 188 miles, with 230 competing, plus various special awards and pools, including £7.7s. for best average.

Highest prize-winner for this year again in the M.F.C.

It was in this year, 1926, that I contemplated the cessation of racing, since, as observed by M. Gurnay (with whom I concurred), it appeared there was more financial reward in "playing marbles" than successful pigeon racing under the existing pool conditions. For the past five years I had clocked the birds with my own hands in every race, with just one exception, and my normal business was demanding my time and attention, added to which the local Town Council was pressing me for permission to purchase "The Grange" and adjoining lands for conversion to hospital premises. Therefore, I realised that this might be my last season. Furthermore, it seemed that a more preferable and profitable proposition would be to continue participation in the sport from Verviers, where I could wager upon Renier Gurnay's birds, where a speculation of £300 could realise £3,000. For instance, M. Gurnay selected "Bronze Favourite" to win 1st Grand National by half an hour, while I selected "Cigarette", who was 12th, with 1,643 competing, and in eight days these, and "Young Bossu" and "Leon", won 1st and 2nd National Vierzon, bringing £4,000—a nice profit.

However, to revert to the results of racing in 1926. Since the Gurnays in the previous five years had won 1st Bath and 1st Bournemouth, that is ten 1sts in ten races, the club switched its line from Bath to Mangotsfield. It made no difference to the Gurnays, who repeated the results of previous years, winning 1st, 2nd and 3rd with premier velocities, all Sections, 2,011 birds competing, and gaining practically all the pools up to and including the 3-bird nomination of £5. 1st prize winner in this race was "Champion

Best Quality". Then followed 6th Bournemouth—the first time the Gurnays had been beaten from this race point in six years.

The young birds won 1st and 2nd Worcester, with velocity of 1,071, premier velocity, all Sections, 1,751 birds competing, and pools. Pools at Cheltenham, Mangotsfield and Bournemouth, with best average S.E. Section, 1,251 velocity.

Finishing the year with 6th highest prize-winner.

Total prize money won in M.F.C.—£1,024.

The six years of racing had certainly provided ample amusement, especially during the more successful second and third years, when such devices as cameras, stop-watches, binoculars, etc., were brought into use by some of the more ardent "followers" of the sport and operated from behind the cover of hedges, walls and the like; this despite the fact that the loft was situated in an open field for all to see.

The pigeon Fancy is comprised of a great variety of personalities, and during one's quiet moments past incidents, interesting or amusing, come to mind, such as the Sunday afternoon arrival of four "chara" loads come to view "The Gurnays"—a busy occasion, to be sure. Or the more amusing one where two fanciers come visiting together, one of whom contrives to remain behind in the stock loft whilst the owner accompanies his companion to another, after due note has been taken as to when a certain pair may be expected to hatch. I noticed one such fancier stay behind and observed he kept his hand in one of his jacket pockets, so "accidentally" it happened that I pushed against this hand, and lo and behold two eggs were smashed in the process! Maybe he harboured the idea of "swapping" them (if the reader appreciates the meaning of this Lancashire term). Strange to say such "strategy" was entirely unnecessary, since youngsters from any pairs could be booked and purchased, the owner being quite content to keep and race those which remained, having supreme confidence in all the stock bred—sufficient testimonial in itself of the remarkable quality of the stock.

Among the many amusing and harmless incidents there were, unfortunately, others I recall only with repugnance. For example, the incident of the caustic acid mixed with the birds' corn, the desperate resort of unscrupulous and unsportsmanlike gamblers who had sustained a succession of losing wagers against Shaw's Gurnays. A bitter recollection is that of "Champion Repeater", son of "Masterpiece", who, after achievements in one racing season of 1st Worcester, 1st Bournemouth, 5th St. Malo (beaten by loft-mates), and 1st Marennes, was specially prepared to win the Dol race and was entered in every pool, only to return from the race with his claw clamped back along the leg by faulty rubber ringing. He and "Best Quality", incidentally, had replaced "Champion Apollo" and "Champion Picture", who, by request, had been retired from racing.

Reflection on the following results in the premier club of England—the Manchester Flying Club—with not so much as one penny of prize money, owing to the systems of sectionisation, seemed a final and determining factor for retirement :

THE PREMIER CLUB OF ENGLAND

MANCHESTER FLYING CLUB—200 TO 250 MEMBERS.

<i>Thirteen times winner of premier velocity.</i>	} <i>Radius :</i>	
<i>Twice the first four,</i>		<i>about 100 miles S. to N.</i>
<i>Twice the first three,</i>		<i>" 40 " W. to E.</i>
<i>Six times the first two,</i>		<i>No prize money for</i>
<i>Thirteen times first,</i>		<i>these results.</i>

In 1923 the Gurnays won premier velocity five races out of ten by 17 yards, 4 yards, 56 yards, 31 yards and 42 yards per minute from the next competitor. No prize money for these wins except Section prizes.

There is no room for wonder in that, after long discussions with Renier Gurnay, we reached the same conclusions regarding the obsolete methods of awarding prizes for pigeon racing in this country. During the six years of racing, the Shaw-Gurnays won more prizes, more 1st, 2nd, 3rd and 4th prizes, more actual prize money and pool money (there were, of course, many more winning positions than those mentioned in the foregoing), than any other member, and in spite of this the gross amount won was little more than £1,030. It became abundantly clear that a succession of wins in the pools discouraged competition.

Perhaps the "last straw" was the return of pool money for an event in which it transpired that no competitor could be persuaded to wager a pound against the Gurnays and, to add to this discouraging state of affairs, for some obscure reason *five per cent had been deducted from the pool money returned—for "commission!"*

In one season only seven members scored over the Shaw-Gurnays (in two races out of ten), while all other members were beaten nine or ten times in as many races. In addition to prizes already mentioned, the Gurnays won, during the six seasons, one 1st, two 2nds, two 3rds, two 4ths and a 6th in produce races. *During this period an average of four prizes per race was maintained—no less than 50 prizes per season! Over 54 different Gurnays won 1st prizes—bred and raced to one loft—an average of nine new 1st prize winners per season,* though flying in different clubs and at all distances from 46 miles to 529 miles, with velocities as low as 758 yards and as high as 1,712 yards per minute.

The most outstanding achievements were accomplished in north-east winds which was contrary to the generally accepted theory of "loft position", since the loft was situated in the south-east section.

An unusual incident can be recalled on the occasion when "Neaty" won 1st Rennes, premier velocity. The loftman observed a "hawk" a mile or so distant, hovering as though ready to pounce and kill. We watched it drop out of the sky, hovering again and repeating these movements four or five times . . . before it came sweeping through the open door of the loft to win the premier velocity by 14 minutes, a distance of 369 miles. North-east wind.

MANCHESTER FLYING CLUB—200 TO 250 MEMBERS.

BATH RACE (143 miles) :

	<i>Velocity y.p.m.</i>	<i>Year</i>
Shaw—1st, 3rd	1391	1921
Shaw—1st, 2nd	1324	1922
Shaw—1st	1096	1923
Shaw—1st, 3rd	1520	1924
Shaw—1st, 2nd	1394	1925

BOURNEMOUTH (188 miles) :

Shaw—1st, 2nd	1439	1921
Shaw—1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th	1265	1922
Shaw—1st, 2nd, 3rd	1095	1923
Shaw—1st, 2nd	1490	1924
Shaw—1st, 2nd, 3rd	1353	1925

The wonderful coincidence is that each year the same bird has won the same two races, Bath and Bournemouth, and each succeeding year it has been with a different bird :

1921, "Little Favourite"; 1922, "Champion Apollo"; 1923, "Silent Check"; 1924, "Champion Picture"; 1925, "Viking".

"Champion Apollo" and "Viking", sired by two brothers, one when nine years of age and the other when 11 years of age, and both champion racers themselves—viz., "Petite Ecaille Vierzon", £1,600 in 16 races, never out of the money, and the other "Angoulême", the £40 pool winner in the 1914 Grand National.

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Example of one year's prize list—other five years were similar :

WINS. MANCHESTER F.C., S.E. SECTION.

1st 10s. pool, Worcester, O.B.	1st 5s. pool.
1st £1 pool, Worcester, O.B.	1st 10s. pool.
1st Bath, O.B.	1st £1 pool.
2nd Bath, O.B.	6th Marennes.
1st 6d. pool.	2nd 10s. pool.
2nd 6d. pool.	2nd £1 pool.
1st 1s. pool.	3rd Worcester, Y.B.
2nd 1s. pool.	3rd 5s. pool.
1st 2s. 6d. pool.	1st Bath, Y.B.
2nd 2s. 6d. pool.	2nd Bath, Y.B.
1st 5s. pool.	1st and 3rd 6d. pool.
2nd 5s. pool.	1st and 3rd 1s. pool.
1st 10s. pool.	1st and 2nd 2s. 6d. pool.
2nd 10s. pool.	1st and 2nd 5s. pool.
1st £1 pool.	1st and 2nd 10s. pool.
2nd £1 pool.	1st and 2nd £1 pool.
1st Bournemouth, O.B.	2nd Bournemouth, Y.B.
2nd Bournemouth, O.B.	3rd Bournemouth, Y.B.
3rd Bournemouth, O.B.	5th Bournemouth, Y.B.
4th Bournemouth, O.B.	6th Bournemouth, Y.B.
1st 6d. pool, Bournemouth, O.B.	2nd Produce, Bournemouth, Y.B.
2nd 6d. pool, Bournemouth, O.B.	3rd Produce, Bournemouth, Y.B.
1st 1s. pool, Bournemouth, O.B.	4th Produce, Bournemouth, Y.B.
2nd 1s. pool, Bournemouth, O.B.	2nd 6d. pool, Bournemouth, Y.B.
1st 2s. 6d. pool, Bournemouth, O.B.	2nd 1s. pool, Bournemouth, Y.B.
2nd 2s. 6d. pool, Bournemouth, O.B.	1st and 2nd 2s. 6d. pool, Bournemouth, Y.B.
1st 5s. pool, Bournemouth, O.B.	1st, 2nd and 3rd 5s. pool, Bournemouth, Y.B.
2nd 5s. pool, Bournemouth, O.B.	1st and 2nd 10s. pool, Bournemouth, Y.B.
1st 10s. pool, Bournemouth, O.B.	1st and 2nd £1 pool, Bournemouth, Y.B.
1st £1 pool, Bournemouth, O.B.	Y.B. Average Prize.
8th Guernsey, O.B.	Mr. G. W. Holt's Special Prize, Best Y.B. Average, all sections.
2nd £1 pool.	N.H.U. Gold Medal.
1st Rennes.	
1st 6d. pool.	
1st 1s. pool.	
1st 2s. 6d. pool.	
50 Guinea Cup Combined Averages.	

The details given are of one season's wins in the Manchester F.C., 200 to 250 members, and results over the other five years were similar but "The Grange" Gurnays also competed in Saturday races with Hyde H.S. (50 members), Gee Cross H.S., Mottram H.S., Manchester Saturday F.C., Stockport Social Circle F.C., in all of which 1sts and other similar results were achieved, probably doubling the Manchester F.C. wins, and, in addition, the Cheshire Nantes Club prizes.

The details are far too numerous to enumerate, but any intelligent fancier can calculate what it all means from the fact that each season on an average nine *new* 1st prize winners were added to the already long list, then there were those good racers who never won a 1st prize owing to their being beaten by loft-mates such as "Aladdin", "Dandy", "Jack Horner", etc., etc.

What A. P. Taft, Esq., said in "R.P." 13th January, 1923 :

"I have been flying pigeons over 50 years and I believe have tried every known strain and breed and handled as many birds as any fancier in England. *For beauty and intelligence I have seen nothing to equal the Gurnays, and the work they have done in England and Belgium proves they have strength, courage and speed beyond any other strain.*"

