

## HAIL AND FAREWELL

by

ERIC FAYNE

"Of one thing I am quite convinced. The reprints continued far too long. They should have ceased at least a year before they did."

Those three sentences do not belong to this article. They are lifted from "Turn Back the Clock", in which I reviewed the eight years of reprints in the Gem. In the early months of 1931, when I was campaigning insistently for the reprint policy to be adopted, I had no doubts at all that I was doing right. Three years, and longer, of nothing but stories by substitute writers left no question in my mind. I believe that I was right, and I shall never regret that the old masterpieces came back.

But by mid-1938, and throughout the months until the end of that year, my mind was filled with doubt. Gem editorial policy was running wild. The odd miscellany of stories reprinted in 1938 and the opening months of 1939 proved it. True, there was a scattering of good stories, but there were also many substitute efforts as well as a number of unimpressive little pot-boilers. They were selected indiscriminately from the years 1915 to 1920, and the lack of any real policy in presentation can be gauged from the fact that one story at least was a run-of-the-mill yarn from the twenties.

Though I could see clearly what was happening, I hesitated to do anything about it, solely because I feared that a campaign for new stories might bring the substitute writers on the scene again, and almost anything was better than a return to the Twilight Years of 1928 - mid 1931. Eventually, as I have already related, I took the plunge, and in a surpris-

ingly short time I was notified that "Mr. Martin Clifford has agreed to write new stories for the Gem, and they will be starting shortly".

Even then I was uneasy, and I was scarcely happier when I was told that the opening story of the new series would be entitled "The Flying Schoolboys". It was a title which smacked of the type of story which had been published often in the Twilight Years. But my fears were groundless, as I knew as soon as I had read the opening lines of the first new story. The genuine Martin Clifford had written it, and he wrote every story that appeared from then until the end.

### AFTER ELEVEN YEARS

Martin Clifford had not written a St. Jim's series since the summer of 1928, when he made his only contribution to the Gem in that Twilight Year - the very fine Victor Cleeve series of four tales.

It was amazing the way he took up the threads in the Spring of 1939 with all his old competence and verve. One feels that he was delighted to be tapping out St. Jim's again, that the words poured in a stream from his typewriter, that he never found it necessary to look up any item to refresh his memory on the past history of Tom Merry. In fact, he made only one slip, of which more anon.

The first of the new stories appeared at the beginning of April, and they continued until this last chapter in the Gem's glorious history ended at the turn of the year. When it is realised that only four separate series were published during these nine months, it is clear how long the series must have been. It was an era of very long series - too long. Throughout the troubled thirties, the Magnet had presented long series, but from 1935 onwards they were the rule rather than the exception. I have always thought these giant-length series a mistake, though I greatly enjoyed plenty of them. But if one did not care for the theme or the central character, then the series overstayed its welcome by many weeks, which was a pity.



The new Tom Merry stories were, in rough round figures, of 20,000 words - the perfect length for the St. Jim's tale. Reading all these new stories again in preparation for this article, I have been surprised to find that I have enjoyed them very much more than I did in 1939, though they pleased me then. I wonder why this should be so. The only explanation I can offer is that the Gem had changed to a pocket-sized paper, and nothing in it seemed quite so attractive any more.

And this brings me to another point. I find myself inclining to the opinion that the new Gem stories of 1939 were superior to the Magnet stories of the same period .... as it was in the beginning. The Blue Cover era had been the Golden Age of the Gem. Most people agree that Charles Hamilton gave to the Gem his very best work of the years 1907 - 1914. The stories of the Blue Gem, generally speaking, were superior to the stories of the Red Magnet. In my view, Charles Hamilton, once again, gave his best work in 1939 to the Gem.

The Magnet in 1939 was presenting cover-to-cover stories of 35,000 words length. Frank Richards has assured us that he never "padded" a story, but it can scarcely be denied that these very long Magnet stories contained some irrelevant episodes, entertaining enough in their own way, which were really contrivances to spin out a yarn.

The actual Magnet series running at this time were (a) The Bertie Vernon series (b) The Water-Lily series (c) The Coker-expelled series (d) Some stories of the Mr. Lambe series. Though there is much to be said in favour of each of these series, some of the very long stories tended to drag, and I find the shorter, more compact yarns in the 1939 Gem make the better reading.

#### THIS REMARKABLE MAN

Let us pause for a moment to think of the author, and to consider what this remarkable man was achieving during

nine months of 1939. No longer very young - at any rate, at an age when most people decide they have earned the right to take things easy - he turned out every week, without a break, a 35,000-word Greyfriars story and a 20,000-word St. Jim's story. 55,000 words every week, with two settings, two sets of characters, two involved plots to keep in mind all the time. The very thought of it would bring most authors out into a hot sweat. We can appreciate his output all the more when we realise that he was producing, every single week, very little short of the equivalent length of the average Agatha Christie novel.

#### SWAN SONG

#### THE LAST NINE MONTHS OF THE GEM

The following is a review of the new series which appeared in the Gem before the final curtain.

#### THE BLACK BOX SERIES

This commenced at the beginning of April, and ran for ten weeks. The Gem was never strong on foreign travel series, by which I mean that series of this type were not prolific. I think that in all probability this was the best travel series that the paper ever presented.

In two ways it was written to the type of the Magnet series of later years: it was episodic, each story, apart from the connecting link, being complete in itself; also, like many Magnet holiday series, it had the bold, bad villain trailing our heroes all the way through. If these little characteristics did not spoil things for you, it was an extremely entertaining series.

In part, the author's style carried an old reader back very pleasantly to Blue Cover days. In many delicious little situations concerning Gussy and Lowther we had the facetious dialogue and the inconsequential approach, so reminiscent of "Tom Merry at the Zoo" (1909) and "Tom Merry & Co in Ireland" (1912), to mention but two, while



the adventures in Venice inevitably brought to mind the previous Venetian adventures in "Tom Merry's Discovery" and its sequel (1913).

But although there was much that was so pleasantly reminiscent, there were many original twists. The story, set in the Dead City of the Cevennes had a splendid, convincing atmosphere, and in his pen pictures of Venice, the author was clearly drawing on his own vivid memories of that picturesque city.

Apart from the rascally Italian who was after the Black Box, there was also Pawson, Lord Eastwood's man, who had designs upon it. Pawson was an extremely well conceived piece of character work, rather on the lines of Soames, that outstanding Magnet personality. The series is especially noteworthy for the subtle development of Manners - shrewd, observant, and a trifle cynical - a cleverly devised and most pleasant character.

Altogether a first-class set of stories, ranging from Paris to the Cevennes, and thence to Italy.

#### THE SECRET PASSAGE SERIES

This series of six stories commenced in mid-June. Telling of the rivalry between the Houses of St. Jim's, it was largely the mixture as before - but it was a very jolly and welcome mixture. Here, again, there were novel twists which avoided any impression of sameness, and the reader was kept on his toes.

Fatty Wynn, for the first time since the Blue Cover stories, was prominent, and delightfully sketched by the author. It was Fatty, of course, who discovered the Secret Passage and gave Figgins & Co their unsuspected means of ingress of the rival House. There were hilarious chapters in which a tramp also stumbled on the secret entry, and in the final story a scene between Mr. Railton and Mr. Ratcliff was in the author's inimitable style for this type of clash between masters.

It was in this story, too, that Martin Clifford made the "slip" to which I referred earlier. He introduced Sefton, the shady New House prefect - evidently forgetting that he had expelled Sefton, long, long ago. Yet again, it was with this story that the Gem (and the Magnet did the same thing at this time) abandoned the system, after 32 years, of numbering the chapters. It may seem a minor point over which to be aggrieved, but I did not like the change. Somehow, with the chapter numbers missing, it did not seem that one could follow the progress of the story so well - which is an absurd reason to give to account for my irritation at the change.

Speaking of latter-day changes, it was about this time that the Magnet introduced a new style of print - one that was not nearly so pleasing to the eye as hitherto, though it was supposed to obviate any eye-strain. Fortunately, this "improvement" never reached the Gem.

#### THE BRAZIL SERIES

This 6-story series began at the end of July. Competently written, it set out unashamedly to thrill. I did not care for it in 1939, and I find it but little more attractive now. It was a feast of thrills - an indigestible feast, for the thrills came thick and fast. There were hairbreadth escapes from the bandit who dogged the party throughout the series, from other bandits, from a jaguar, a puma, an alligator, an anaconda, and from various perils of the South American jungle.

It was the type of story that one might have found in "Pluck" or the "Marvel" before the first world war, or, possibly, in "Modern Boy" in later times. It was an adventure tale, pure and simple, and it was out of its element in the Gem. The most significant thing about it was the re-introduction of Lord Conway, who, like Fatty Wynn, had faded from the St Jim's picture after Blue Cover days.

In its favour was its restrained length, and the fact that its main characters were the Star Seven - the Terrible



THE SILVERSON SERIES

This series which commenced at the beginning of September and ran for seventeen issues until the end of the year, was the last and the longest that every appeared in the Gem. It was, in addition, the most paradoxical series that the Gem or the Magnet ever published. Strangely disappointing, it was yet remarkable satisfying; far too long, yet it held the reader's interest from the first line till the last; repetitive in episodic theme, yet it never became tedious.

Though, reading it now in its entirety, there is a sense of disappointment that the author did not seize the opportunity which the plot offered for strong development and a powerful climax, it is an extremely attractive set of stories with never a dull moment, and it is a series that must certainly be classed among the Gem's greatest.

To older Hamilton fans, it was clearly loosely based on the Smedley series which had been a star attraction in the Magnet during 1933, but there are many points of difference between the two series, and these differences are interesting to consider. For one thing, Tom Merry was an entirely different character from the Bounder. Smedley had only to exploit the existing blackguardly traits of his victim; Silverson had to fake entirely false evidence in his efforts to bring about the disgrace of Tom Merry.

Again, Mr. Vernon-Smith was as unlike Miss Priscilla Fawcett as chalk is unlike cheese. At the opening of the Smedley series, Mr. Vernon-Smith threatened his son with disinheritance, and obviously meant it. In this he was acting rather out of character; apart from the fact that he had always indulged the Bounder and, to some extent, encouraged his shady traits, it was scarcely credible that the millionaire would have dealt so drastically with his beloved only son. This was a minor weakness of the Smedley







BY FRANK RICHARDS.

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

Nothing Doing!

"MERRY Christmas, Franky!"  
"Oh, my hat! Bunter!"  
exclaimed Frank Nugent.  
"Glad to see you, old chap!"

"You've got all the gladness on your side!"

"Oh, really, Nugent—"

Frank Nugent had stepped from the train at the little station of Wimford, in Surrey. He was on his way to Wharton Lodge, where the Famous Five of the Greyfriars Remove were to gather for Christmas. He had rather expected Harry Wharton and Hurree Singh to meet him at the station. He had not expected Billy Bunter. But it was the unexpected that happened—in the shape of William George Bunter!

Billy Bunter was on the platform, blinking at the train as it stopped, through his big spectacles. He spotted Nugent at once and rolled up to him. His fat face was irradiated by a friendly grin. Apparently he was glad to see Nugent. Frank Nugent did not seem to share that feeling to any great extent.

"I say, old fellow—"

"Is Wharton here?" asked Nugent.

"Oh, no! He couldn't come. Inky couldn't come. I came instead," said Bunter. "They were coming in the car to pick you up, but I fancy something happened to the car. Not that I know anything about it, you know! I haven't been anywhere near the garage. If anybody poured cinders into the petrol tank, it must have been the chauffeur. I never thought much of that chap."

Frank Nugent stared at the fat Owl of the Remove.

"Let's take a taxi," went on Bunter briskly. "There's one outside. I'll pay. Leave that to me. You can lend me ten bob. Rather unfortunately, I left my notecase at home with all my banknotes in it when I came over to see Wharton."

"Are you staying at Wharton Lodge?" demanded the puzzled Nugent.

To his surprise, Bunter grinned at that question as if he regarded it as a joke.

"Yes. No, not exactly," said Bunter. "That is to say, sort of, if you know what I mean."

"I haven't the faintest idea what you mean. If the fellows aren't coming to the station I'd better get off."

Frank Nugent picked up his suitcase and started down the platform to the exit. Bunter rolled after him. Outside the station Frank glanced round him. There was no sign of Harry Wharton or Hurree Janset Ram Singh, or of the car from Wharton Lodge; so he started to walk.

Bunter grabbed him by the arm.

"What about the taxi?" he asked.

"Nothing about the taxi!" answered Nugent. "I can walk a mile, I suppose."

"I've said that I'll pay!" said Bunter, with dignity.

"Well, you take the taxi, and I'll walk."

"Beast! I mean, all right, old chap; if you'd rather walk, I'll walk, too. There's a lot of snow on the road, though. A lot more coming down, too, I fancy. Better take the taxi."

"Take it—and be blowed!" answered Frank Nugent, and he shook off the fat hand and swung on his way.

Billy Bunter rolled after him. Bunter had already walked from Wharton Lodge that afternoon, and he did not

want to walk back. But, for reasons of his own—good reasons—he did not want to part company with Frank Nugent.

Leaving Wimford behind, they tramped through a carpet of snow down the road that led to Colonel Wharton's house. Nugent walked rather quickly, making little of the weight of his bag, but Billy Bunter puffed and blew as he kept pace with him.

"I say, old chap," gasped Bunter, "not so jolly fast! After I've taken the trouble to walk to the station to meet you—"

"Oh, all right!" Nugent slowed down. "What the dickens did you come to the station for, Bunter?"

"I thought you'd like to see me!" said Bunter, with dignified reproach.

"What on earth put that idea into your head?"

"Beast! I mean, look here, old chap, let me carry your bag. I mean it! I want to save you trouble, old fellow."

Nugent could only stare. It was surprising enough for Billy Bunter to take the trouble to walk to the station. It was simply amazing for him to offer to carry a fellow's bag for him.

"Hand it over," said Bunter. "Let's be pally, old scout! I've been thinking about you ever since we broke up at Greyfriars. We were always pals, weren't we—the best of pals?"

"Not that I know of."

"Oh, really, Nugent! I used to be in Study No. 1 with you before that beast Wharton came—I mean, dear old Harry! Don't you remember how miserable you were when I changed out?"

"No; I remember that I was awfully bucked."

"Beast!"

Nugent grinned and tramped on.

story, if one had been so carping as to look for weaknesses in so fine a series.

In the case of Miss Fawcett, the reader felt assured that, no matter what disgrace might befall her darling Tommy, her affection for him was so deep and great that she would never have disowned him, that she would have loved him as much in his failures and weaknesses as she idolised him in his virtues. And Tom Merry knew it, though Silverson did not.

True, the shrewd Manners pointed out that Miss Fawcett's principles were so high that there might be a limit to her indulgence, but this did not shake the reader's faith in the charming old lady's love for her Tommy - and Tom Merry instinctively knew where the truth lay.

Tom Merry was aware, from the outset, that Silverson was plotting to disgrace him, and he knew the reason. The Bounder did not know till the very end of the Smedley series that the scheming master was his relative, anxious to step into his shoes as the heir to a fortune.

The Silverson series was purely a school story. Apart from brief episodes at the very beginning and extreme end of the series, the whole drama was played out at St. Jim's. The Smedley series had several changes of locale, and much of it was played out away from Greyfriars.

Many plots were conveyed from one school to another, and repeated almost lock, stock, and barrel. The Silverson series is almost unique as a repeated theme with a difference.

The Silverson series suffered from the episodic manner of handling the stories which was prevalent at that time in both the Gem and the Magnet - a system which made every story almost complete in itself. It prevented the development of the plot to what it might have been; it left us with just an excellent set of tales, instead of a magnificent series of the class which came right out of the top drawer.



How much better it might have been had Silverson succeeded for a time, half way through the series - if Tom Merry had been expelled and on the run for a while, as Frank Richards once fled from his uncle's home in the Cedar Creek series - if we had been privileged to see Miss Priscilla's actual reactions when her darling was turfed out of St. Jim's.

I point out evidence, later in this article, to show that the Gem's end was decided as early as the close of October. It could be that the impending final curtain for the paper brought about the prolongation of the Silverson series, yet prevented the full development that the author would normally have accorded it. Certainly it never ripened to the really smashing climax which such a fine set of stories merited.

With those thoughts out of my system, I will add that the Silverson series is one of the precious gems in my memory. I rejoice that the last series of all brought Tom Merry into his own again, and the Gem curtain came down for the last time with the scene set at Laurel Villa, Huckleberry Heath, on which it had risen nearly 33 years before. I cherish the hope that the author felt the same sentiments.

#### MUSINGS ON THE LAST NINE MONTHS OF THE GEM

There are certain significant conclusions to be drawn from the new stories written for the closing months of the Gem. Much of the vast cast at St. Jim's was jettisoned. No longer did the spotlight sweep from one minor character to another. The Terrible Three and Gussy were the leading players, closely supported by Blake & Co. The holiday parties comprised this intimate little group of seven. No longer were there to be the giant parties of the twenties. The dead wood, the super-abundance of characters, was swept away, as it had been swept away at Greyfriars a decade earlier. In future the lesser characters would not steal the limelight from the stars, as they had done so much in the past. The result was that the St. Jim's story

now had an intimate quality which had been missing since Blue Cover days, and there is little doubt that, had the Gem continued, this new policy would have been pursued.

Gussy figured prominently in every story, and it seems clear that he was now intended to be the backbone of the St. Jim's framework as Billy Bunter was at Greyfriars. Gussy, of course, had always been well to the fore down the years, but he seemed to be groomed now for the Bunter type of stardom.

The most striking development was in the characterisation of Manners. In the new order of things, he was one of the most interesting people at St. Jim's. As I have mentioned earlier, the cameos of the long-neglected Fatty Wynn were delightful. In a skilful piece of by-play in the Silverson series, the petty tyrant ordered him to go and wash himself, and Fatty, to whom personal cleanliness was nearly a fetish, refused - and appealed to the Head for judgment. Mr. Linton, from being scarcely more than a name for so long, emerged as a living character - dry, sarcastic, scrupulously just - a perfect picture of a schoolmaster.

The temporary characters were often clever etchings, too. I have already mentioned this in connection with Pawson. My fondest memory of Silverson comes in the penultimate story of the series when the beaten schemer, detested and despised by the boys, ignored by the masters, still refuses to leave St. Jim's though his class has been taken from his hands.

These new stories are precious to the Gem student as pointing to what might have been. Reading them again now, I wish more than ever that the reprints had ceased a year before they did. I wish that the Gem could have gone on after 1939. But I cannot help wondering whether, if this had happened, it was not certain that stories by substitute writers must have featured again, possibly in both the Magnet and the Gem. It is difficult to think that Charles



Hamilton could have gone on indefinitely churning out 55,000 words of Greyfriars and St. Jim's, week in, week out. The same problem with which the Editor had to cope many years earlier would surely have presented itself afresh.

### THE SUPPORTING PROGRAMME

For several months, the new Tom Merry stories were supported by the Cedar Creek tales and the stories of the Benbow. This meant that the Gem at this time was entirely a Hamilton-story paper.

The Benbow yarns had originally appeared in the Greyfriars Herald when that paper was issued as a separate entity and re-appeared (after being suspended during the war) in November 1919. The first three dozen or so of these Benbow stories had charm, due to the originality of the setting of a school conducted on an old sailing ship moored at the river bank. They were pleasant reading, though the plots were on hackneyed lines. The theme of the wealthy boy (Jack Drake) whose father lost his money, a fact which the boy tried to hide from his snob friends, and of the quiet, studious, poor lad (Dick Rodney) who now became Drake's close pal, was typical of the school stories of the day when they were originally written. There was, too, the inevitable fat boy (Tuckey Toodles) on very, very familiar lines, and the wealthy scamp (Daubeny), who afterwards reformed, was another whom we had met before under other names.

I liked the early tales in this series well enough, but after the ship was fitted out and sailed off to the West Indies, with adventures in Trinidad and elsewhere, I found little to interest me. After the Benbow returned from its voyage, Jack Drake and Rodney went to Greyfriars, and special Greyfriars stories, featuring Drake, appeared for some time in the Boy's Herald, which the former Greyfriars Herald had now become.

These stories were reprinted in the Gem, and by the time the new Tom Merry tales began, the cruise to the West Indies was taking place. These were followed in due course by the Drake-Greyfriars tales which, in the last few weeks of the Gem, appeared intermittently, and died with the last issue of the Gem.

An editorial page was headed "Blake Answers Back", and purported to consist of answers which Jack Blake gave to readers' queries. The authority of many of the replies seemed to be the Who's Who which had been published in both the Gem and the Magnet at the end of 1917. Some of the information which "Blake" dished out was not too accurate. Here is a selection:- (a) Redfern of the New House and Barbara Redfern are brother and sister. (b) There is not a single copy of Gem No. 1 now in existence. (c) Archie Howell is a member of the Greyfriars Remove. (d) Bulstrode is the Greyfriars wicket-keeper.

Many of the Editor's readers would have been far better qualified to answer questions accurately than "Blake" was. As Bulstrode had not been mentioned in a Magnet story for twelve years, it was very unlikely that he was the Greyfriars wicket-keeper. But evidently "Blake" didn't read the Magnet.

During the last two months of the Gem's existence, it carried every week a quarter-page advertisement of the Triumph. The discontinuing of the Cedar Creek tales was another pointer. Every one of these stories was first-class, and must have been right up the street of the Gem reader. Their sudden cessation came as a great surprise.

They were replaced in the Gem by a short Biggles serial, probably intended to acclimatise the Gem reader to the type of fare he would receive in the Triumph when the time came. This was followed by a story of a wartime-flying-ace, Mad Carew, who was featuring every week in the Triumph. The Jack Drake-Greyfriars stories alternated with "Told in the Tuckshop", a series by George Rochester, and yet another taste of what Triumph held in store.



## AFTERMATH

Those of us who love the Gem like to feel that the grand old paper was a casualty of the war, as, in fact, it was. There is no reason to believe that the popularity of the Gem had decreased or that a falling circulation had hastened its end. But we have to bite on the bullet over the certainty that the Gem was amalgamated with the Triumph, not the Triumph with the Gem. The Gem finished, the Triumph went on.

It was an odd amalgamation. There could have been little in common between the tastes of Gem readers and the readers of the Triumph. I, personally, should have been happier if the Gem had combined with the Magnet. Probably the Magnet needed no shot in the arm from an influx of Gem readers, while the Triumph did. At any rate, the minor tragedy had to be faced - the Gem was finished.

Looking over the issues of the Triumph which followed, it is difficult for a Gem lover to discern what attractions the Triumph possessed that the Gem did not have twenty times over. The programme offered in Triumph comprised a number of short adventure stories, supported by scrappy little stories of St. Jim's. These sorry shadows of Tom Merry & Co were reprints of sections of stories with a war flavour which had appeared in the Gem in 1915, but they were mere scraps, almost unrecognisable as former Gem stories.

During the 33 years of the Gem, there had been many mysteries in connection with the handling of the St. Jim's story, and I have discussed them from time to time in my articles. The last mystery of all came while the St. Jim's stories were being reprinted in the Triumph. The stories were published in which George Alfred Grundy first came to St. Jim's, but for some entirely unfathomable reason, his name was changed. His henchmen, Wilkins and Gunn, appeared as themselves, but Grundy became Norman Leonard Parker.

It was the final mystery of St. Jim's, and the most amazing of the lot.

## HIGHLIGHTS OF GEM HISTORY

In the closing pages of this article, I pinpoint certain types of story, and make some comparisons between the Gem's and the Magnet's contributions.

The history of the Gem falls into no less than nine divisions:-

1907 - 1909.....	THE RISE OF THE GEM
1910 - 1914.....	THE GOLDEN AGE OF THE GEM
1915 - 1920.....	THE DECLINE OF THE GEM
1921 - 1925.....	THE INDIAN SUMMER
1926.....	THE TIME OF GATHERING CLOUDS
1927 - June 1931.....	THE TWILIGHT YEARS
July 1931 - 1937 .....	THE GOLDEN RE-PRINT YEARS
1938 - March 1939.....	TWILIGHT OVER THE RE-PRINTS
April - December 1939.	THE GLORIOUS SWANSONG OF THE GEM

No other paper within my knowledge has such well-defined divisions. They add a strange interest to the history of the Gem.

No other paper suffered from the substitute blight to anything approaching the extent the Gem suffered. No other paper had re-printed in it more than 400 of the stories which it had published in earlier years.

No other author - not even Frank Richards - can compare with Martin Clifford in having his stories re-printed over and over again.

## THE AMAZING MR. CLIFFORD

One of the most astonishing qualities of Charles Hamilton's work is the difference in style between the offerings of Martin Clifford and those of Frank Richards - a difference which has lasted from 1907 till 1958.



It may be an extravagant claim, but I believe that if I were handed a fairly lengthy passage, with no names or anything at all to hint from whence it came, I could state correctly whether it was an extract from the work of Martin Clifford or from a story by Frank. Even when Gussy appeared in a Magnet story, or Bunter or Coker in a St. Jim's story, there was a very subtle difference in the presentation of the character. All this, no doubt, helped to preserve the illusion, so carefully fostered by the Editor, that different authors were at work.

All the same, it is remarkable that more readers did not realise before 1945 that the same amazing hand was responsible for the two schools. There were certain literary idiosyncrasies or whimsicalities which showed occasionally in all Charles Hamilton's work (except the Rio Kid stories which were unique in this respect), and I think that any reader of keen perception should have realised that all the best stories in both papers came from the same source. This does not mean that Charles Hamilton was ever guilty of literary mannerism, that bugbear that makes so many writers irritating. It is his completely natural style and lack of mannerism that has always made Charles Hamilton so readable.

It should, too, have occurred to any reader that, assuming a busy author had the time to read the work of a rival writer, there was a blatant plagiarism in the air, unless one man was common to both papers.

It has been suggested that, broadly speaking, the Gem stories were lighter than those of the Magnet; that there was more fun and games, more knockabout humour; in effect, perhaps, that the Gem catered for a rather younger age group than the Magnet.

I do not subscribe to this view in any way. The background of St. Jim's with its two Houses, together with the proximity of the Grammar School, gave natural scope for stories of schoolboy rivalry, which were inevitably in light vein, and stories of this type appeared regularly down

the years. But the House rivalry at St. Jim's had its counterpart in form rivalry at Greyfriars, while the clashes with the Grammar School were balanced in the Magnet by rivalry with Courtfield County School, Cliff House, and Highcliffe. Stories of Glyn's inventions and Gussy's love affairs can be placed beside the countless stories of Fishy, Coker, Wun Lung, and Wibley's impersonations, and, if anything, I tend to think that when the light type of story is weighed, the scales bump heavily on the side of Greyfriars.

Martin Clifford was certainly unsurpassed in the inconsequential type of story. He had two perfect foils for this sort of thing - Gussy and Monty Lowther - and he made his brilliant best of these two characters who had no counterparts elsewhere. I referred to a Blue Cover story which I described as "wispy as gossamer, and delightful in its spontaneous hilarity". This description could apply to many a Gem story, and I can recall none of quite the same nature in the Magnet.

In my opinion, the difference in the stories of the two papers lay chiefly in this - the St. Jim's tales were mainly stories of School life, the Greyfriars yarns were stories of schoolboy adventure. This may sound Irish - a difference with no diversity, as it were - but it is not really so. Many of the Magnet's greatest were played out either totally or in part away from the school; the Gem's greatest were almost entirely school stories.

#### HOLIDAY SERIES

Tom Merry did not travel anything like so widely as Harry Wharton. The era of long travel series commenced in the Magnet in the mid-twenties, and while the Magnet was presenting its long series of adventure abroad, the Gem was either in the hands of a substitute writer or was offering reprints. All the same, the Gem was first in this field, for Tom Merry went to America in a 6-story series in 1908. There were a South Seas series and a



Congo series during the Golden Age, both absolutely first-class but too short to bear comparison with similar adventures in the later Magnet.

In 1920, Tom Merry & Co, the Levison brothers, and Mr. Levison went to America, pursued by a madman, Dirk Power. Fantastic and melodramatic, it was too unconvincing to have been very entertaining to any but the very young. Like the Brazil series of 1939, which was far better written, it was out of place in the Gem.

In stories of European travel, however - and there were a number of short series set in France and on the Mediterranean, as well as the Black Box series of 1939 - the Gem was in advance of the Magnet. I regard, too, the Gem's Canadian series of 1927 as superior to the Magnet's Texas series of ten years later.

In English summer series, I consider the Gem completely supreme. They had a charm and brilliant simplicity which Frank Richards never quite captured. In my view the Magnet had, of their type, nothing to touch the Gem's "Solomon" stories (equalled, perhaps, in the Rookwood story), and the "Old Bus" series which stands second to none.

### BARRING-OUT SERIES

These would come under the heading of light reading, and the Magnet had many. In the Gem there was only one big barring-out series - the Tom Merry Christmas barring-out of 1922-23. This did not reach the high level of the Brander series in the Magnet, but it is notable for a brilliant opening story with an ensuing series which was marked by restraint and thoughtful development. It did not degenerate into a riot of slapstick like, for instance, the Hacker series in the Magnet.

### MYSTERY STORIES

Here the Gem was supreme, though it offered little of this class of story. "Baffled" and "Caught Redhanded",

in the Golden Age, were never surpassed, and remain original. The theft of the Head's Rembrandt, accomplished by Captain Mellish while he was actually on guard over the picture with a number of other men, was described with such skill that the memory of the mounting suspense of the tale lingers ever.

I regard, too, the Gem's "Rogue Rackstraw" kidnapping series of 1922 as the best of their class that Charles Hamilton ever wrote. The Rookwood kidnapping series, outstanding for a remarkable eerie quality, came near, but the limitation of action puts the Rookwood series behind the Gem series. In the latter, the reason for the kidnapping, the method of carrying it out, and the people responsible for it were kept shrouded in mystery for some time - and in this alone the series is unique. The stories were taut and tense, characterisation was first-class, and the climax was thrilling and original. With never a trace of artifice to prolong the series, which ran its natural length at spanking pace, these stories, in my view at any rate, stand entirely alone of their type. The only fly in the ointment, perhaps, was that the star was Wildrake - a newly-introduced character who was uninspired and quite unnecessary.

In 1925, the kidnapping of Lowther's uncle provided two stories which, though not particularly original, are memorable for some outstanding character work.

### CHRISTMAS STORIES

In this sphere, the Gem could not hold a candle to the Magnet. The Christmas stories of Tom Merry up till and including 1913 have a quaint festive flavour which was probably never recaptured afterwards, and they are precious to the Gem enthusiast. But after the fine Painted Room story of 1913, there was no Christmas story in the Gem which lingers much in the memory. Far too many were, of course, by substitute writers, but those by the genuine Clifford had little magic about them. The early charm of Eastwood



House was lost in a lavish display of wealth, and the host of characters who turned up at the parties not only banished any sense of intimacy but was also beyond the bounds of reason. The intimate, homely atmosphere of Wharton Lodge was always endearing, but such atmosphere was rare in the Gem, except perhaps in the very few stories staged at Laurel Villa.

### CIRCUS STORIES

The Magnet had many, the finest being the famous Whiffles series. The Gem had a few pairs about Tomsonio's and Chumgum's circus, but there is nothing memorable about them.

### DRAMA

The Gem never presented a story of such depth and power as the Harry Wharton, Rebel series in the 1925 Magnet, but this, in many ways, was an adult study of boyhood.

Stress had been laid so often - and deservedly - on the superb characterisation in the Golden Age of the Magnet from 1925 onwards, that the Gem has tended to become over-shadowed. But there is no reason why the Gem should play second fiddle to any paper, for it had its own moments of greatness, its own perfect etchings of character, its own outstanding stories which are second to none.

Representing tense drama in the Gem we have the Tom Merry adrift in London series and "Bought Honours" from the Golden Age, the Outram series and the Manners "His Brother's Keeper" series from the white cover period, plus, from the Indian Summer era, the incomparable "Schoolboy Pug" series, at least two of the Levison-Cardew series, and the Victor Cleeve series. I claim that nothing in the Magnet, apart from the Rebel series, surpasses them.

### STORIES OF DOUBLES

My prime favourite in the Magnet is the "Stacey" series,

of Harry Wharton's double. A great favourite in the Gem is the series of Reggie Clavering, Tom Merry's double. Billy Bunter's double is common to both. Need I say more.

### CONCERNING THE GEM ALONE

#### JACK BLAKE

The St. Jim's stories, with Jack Blake & Co as the main characters, appeared originally in Pluck. Tom Merry did not arrive at St. Jim's until the Gem was 11 weeks old. Would the St. Jim's stories have continued for 33 years in the Gem had Tom Merry never taken over the lead of the St. Jim's juniors?

This is purely a hypothetical question, and there can be no answer, but it is interesting to theorise on the subject. It is my opinion that without Tom Merry the St. Jim's stories would have disappeared long before the first Great War. For Jack Blake & Co carried little of the characterisation of the Terrible Three.

Gussy, certainly, was a great pen painting down the years; he was, perhaps, the Gem's greatest pillar. But Gussy was not in the leader class; like Billy Bunter, he was the larger-than-life character, of infinite use to the author for a variety of purposes in connection with his stories. In a changed world, Bunter sells the Bunter books to-day, but I have never believed that he was the foundation stone for the success of the Magnet. In the same way I regard Gussy, whom I love dearly, as a pillar of strength but not the foundation stone of the Gem.

As for Blake, Herries, and Digby, they figured probably in every story of St. Jim's that was ever written, but what is to be said of them as character sketches? Blake was good-tempered, loyal, and, above everything, more or less patient with Gussy; Herries was a lover of animals; Digby was - well, just Dig. Though each has reserved for him a very warm spot in our hearts, I cannot recall one outstanding story in which Blake, Herries, or Dig played a leading part.



In fact, they were normal, ordinary boys, just like the boys we sat next to in class, or perhaps, much the same as we ourselves were in our schooldays. Their very naturalness enhanced the St. Jim's stories; they could never have carried the Gem for 33 years.

### THE TERRIBLE THREE

The characters of the Terrible Three were drawn with much firmer lines. In Martin Clifford's own words:- "Bosom pals as the three were, they had many tastes that were not in common. On several points they agreed to disagree, as it were.

"Tom Merry and Lowther bore manfully with Manners' camera. And Tom Merry and Manners resigned themselves patiently to Monty Lowther's enthusiasm for the films, and often allowed him to march them off to Wayland Cinema. While Manners and Lowther joined in Tom's enthusiasm for football and cricket, though not to the same extent - and bore cheerfully with the rest. But it sometimes happened that different tastes led different ways".

It was to a world of idealism that Tom Merry, Charles Hamilton's first great schoolboy leader, was introduced in 1907. His description caught the imagination at once - sturdy, curly-haired, blue-eyed, always smiling. His characteristics, too, were full of appeal - straight as a die, brave, manly, a giant at sport, a great pal, full of mischief, and kind as only the simple at heart can be. Tom Merry was every schoolboy's ideal in those days preceding the first World War, before values became distorted and mankind became cynical. He was what every boy would have liked to have been, but knew that he was not. The foundation of the greatness of the Gem was laid on this ideal schoolboy leader, and the magnificent series of stories between the blue covers made the Gem the most popular boys' paper in the kingdom in those golden years.

Manners, in contrast, was quieter, shrewder, a fellow who never allowed his heart to control his head. Where Tom

was a little too easy-going, Manners had just that bit of extra ballast that his leader lacked. His only weakness was his camera - and his minor. It is difficult to determine whether the coming of Manners Minor upset the balance a little. At any rate, it showed Manners in a new light, from his family background. The younger son was spoiled and indulged by foolish parents who bestowed less affection than his due on the elder son. Looking back on it now I think that here the author used too much the brush he had handled when sketching the character of Frank Nugent, who, fundamentally, was quite different from Manners. Be that as it may, one of the very finest series of White Cover days was the "His Brother's Keeper" series, one of the most powerful and touching that the Gem ever presented.

As I commented earlier, Manners really came into his own in the last nine months of the Gem, when the salient points of his character were strongly emphasised.

Monty Lowther was, again, a complete contrast to Tom Merry and Manners. Happy-go-lucky, full of high spirits and bad puns, irresponsible to a degree, he was still capable of deep feeling as was shown in "Stage Struck", in the series when his uncle was kidnapped, and on many occasions during his life at school. He was the perfect complement to the other two members of the Terrible Three.

Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther were strong character studies; Blake, Herries, and Dig were not. But, with Gussy, we had seven juniors who made the perfect combination for magnificent school stories.

### THE PREFECTS OF ST. JIM'S

For some reason, I always prefer Kildare to Wingate. Perhaps Kildare seemed to have less pomposity and sense of dignity, to be more the human, older boy. In early days there were many splendid stories introducing the rivalry between Kildare and Monteith, the captain of the New House, - a rivalry which was cleverly reflected in the emotions of junior school.



Monteith was a grand character study. A restless, jealous type, thin-skinned and querulous, he was not without a sense of decency. A fine contrast to Kildare, he featured in stories of strife between older boys - stories which were mature and worthwhile. Why Monteith was dropped from the scene with the Blue Covers is something I have never understood and have always regretted. The Sixth Form never held much interest again, and readers will recall that Roger Jenkins has observed that, in the same way, the glory went from the Sixth Form at Greyfriars with the killing off of Courtney.

Knox was just the stereotyped bullying prefect, chiefly serving as a reason for fun and games among the juniors in lighter tales. Langton was weak, and also dropped out with the Blue Covers. Darrell was pleasant enough, but featured too seldom to be worth consideration. The rest were merely names among many.

#### COUSIN ETHEL

I have always been somewhat puzzled as to what Cousin Ethel's age was intended to be, but I thought of her as being rather older than the boys. Her manner of speech and her general conduct seemed far more mature and sober than that of the Cliff House girls, and this was an advantage in the roles she played.

Probably the impression that she was about seventeen was fostered by the fact that there was never any mention in Martin Clifford's St. Jim's tales about Ethel being at school. A girl of Ethel's class, at the age of fifteen, would surely have been at school, but she appeared to drop in at St. Jim's for brief visits like a young lady of leisure. True, a serial story, "Cousin Ethel's Schooldays", by Martin Clifford, was published in the Empire Library about 1912, and was reprinted as a serial in the Gem a couple of years later, but even here one had the impression that Ethel was at finishing school, a course which ended at the close of the story.

However, whatever Ethel's age may have been, she embellished every yarn in which she featured.

#### THE DECLINE OF THE GEM

I have made a very close and comprehensive study of the Gem in recent years, and I have no doubt at all that the decline of the Gem in White Cover Days was a result of the change in story policy which first became evident towards the end of 1914 and was intensified during the next year or two. It seems odd that fine characters, built up to enjoy tremendous popularity during the Golden Age of the Gem, should have been relegated to the background or, in many cases, dropped entirely from the story. If dispensing with certain characters had meant a higher development of a smaller cast, there would have been no grounds for criticism, but as it was, a great many new characters were introduced who altered the whole aspect of the St. Jim's story.

#### TALBOT

The coming of Talbot marked the start of the change of policy. The first two Talbot series were first-class, but for the next year or more, he monopolised the St. Jim's stage, and the Gem became, for too long, largely the story of Talbot. However well-written these yarns were - and most of them are excellent - this overplaying of a new character was surely a mistake.

Roger Jenkins has recently, in a thoughtful and discriminating article, pointed out that the coming of Talbot, with the resultant close friendship and understanding between the Toff and Tom Merry struck a blow at the unity of the Terrible Three. It is an accurate observation. It was the first change in the balance of the St. Jim's stories. It was by no means the last.

#### THE REFORMATION OF LEVISON

Whether one prefers Levison as the bad lad or as the



reformed character is a matter of taste, but it is certain that his reform caused many changes at St. Jim's. The reformed Levison needed his own friends, so Clive and Cardew were introduced to make up the new set, Levison & Co.

One would have thought that, even with Levison reformed, the Black Sheep were sufficiently represented by the grey Cardew, the black Crooke, and the yellow Mellish. But it was evidently felt that Crooke and Mellish were now left without an evil genius, so Racke came along to fill the place, and, in case he were not enough, Clampe, Chowle, and Scrope were added to the cast.

To bring about the reform of Levison, his minor had to come to St. Jim's, and this altered the balance of the Third Form. Where, previously, the Third, in its infrequent appearances, had been represented by Wally, Curly Gibson, Jameson, and Joe Frayne, the advent of Manners Minor (with his consequent impact on his brother) and of Frank Levison, changed the Third's heroes to the Three Minors. And as the Third Form was now to feature more prominently in the general scheme, the unpleasant Piggott was added to the scene.

#### TYPES FROM GREYFRIARS

In a way it is curious that copies of Bunter and Coker should have been introduced at this time, for I should imagine that by 1916 neither had reached the zenith of his popularity in the Magnet. However, it is clear that the possibilities of both had been proved, so Trimble came along as the St. Jim's version of Bunter, though entirely lacking the Bunter magic. Mellish was attached to him, with Scrope and Clampe, and these birds of a feather made another new Co.

Grundy turned up as something of a Coker, and Wilkins and Gunn were invented as his Potter and Greene. Yet another Co!

Unreasonably, perhaps, I resented their intrusion, for I considered St. Jim's as far from needing ornamentation from Greyfriars. At any rate, I never cared for poor Baggy and Grundy.

#### Inference

It is a feasible inference that the decline of the Gem after 1915 was due to these changes, plus a diffusion of the limelight over an ever-increasing cast. It is my opinion that of all the new characters introduced after 1912, only two exalted St. Jim's and, in the course of time, became indispensable. Those two are Talbot and Cardew.

The Gem rallied again - it still had many years to live after the white covers passed into history - though it seems certain that it never fully recovered the lost ground. New readers, and old readers who remained loyal, had a wonderful treat during the few years of the Gem's Indian Summer, when Martin Clifford once again poured all his greatest gifts into the old paper.

The Gem always rewarded loyalty. The often drab period of White Cover days emerged into the golden glow of the Indian Summer; the Twilight Years gave place to the luscious time when the mellow masterpieces came into their own again; and, as twilight settled over the reprints, Martin Clifford took up his pen once more and, in the closing months before the final curtain, gave us new stories to rank with the Gem's finest.

#### R. J. MACDONALD

This history would be sadly incomplete without a tribute to the artist who first illustrated the Gem in 1909 (No. 91 - "Tom Merry & Co Abroad"). From that issue till the very end, with the exception of the period from August 1916 till July 1919, during which time Warwick Reynolds deputised for him, there were very few issues of the Gem that Mac did not illustrate.



He was not very strong on character details (except that nobody else could ever portray Gussy as he did), but there was no artist who could touch him in the field of depicting schoolboys in Etons. Only Shields and Chapman could equal him in drawing schoolboys who were really natural and attractive always. Occasionally he seemed to produce his pictures without referring carefully to the incident described by the author. Four examples of this come to mind, but there were others. He showed Skimpole as taking part in a football match in France, when Skimmy was not even a member of the holiday party; he showed Tom Merry & Co, spick and span in Etons, when they were roughing it in the breathless heat of the Congo; again, he dressed them in those unlikely Etons when they were on their flying holiday in 1939; and in the Silverson series, when a stranger recognized Gussy as being a St. Jim's boy by his cap, Mac drew him with a toppler.

But these were very minor faults. Macdonald's work, over the years, gave the Gem the most distinctive covers on the bookstalls. He can never be forgotten while St. Jim's is remembered.

#### HAIL & FAREWELL

Wonderful, wonderful Gem. The first great school story paper, the school story paper that lived longer than any other, the paper that set a pattern which was often imitated but seldom equalled, the paper that inspired Britain's boyhood for 33 years and still inspires and cheers so many of Britain's men.

Incomparable Gem, with its remarkable history of ups and downs, sunshine and shadow, joys and disappointments. We shall never see its like again.

Charles Hamilton's Gem stories, early or late, are as fresh and entertaining to-day as when they were first written. None is dated by technique; a few, from theme alone, have become precious period pieces.

We shall never again see the Gem's type of weekly story, for the simple reason that there will never be another Charles Hamilton. It is obvious to anyone that he could have become famous in almost any literary field - that his gifts were far beyond those necessary for the class of work he was doing. He made permanent, stories which were, at the time he wrote them, considered impermanent.

If we wonder sometimes why he did not carry his great gifts of writing to other spheres, the answer is plain. He loved the work he was doing. And, even more important, his unique talents enabled him to combine a phenomenal output with his inimitable consistency of high quality. Were it not so, there would be no histories of the Gem and Magnet of which to write to-day.

The Story of the Gem is now told. We have praised, we have criticised, and I can only hope that we have not done too much of either. In sincerity and affection, we have done our best to produce a worthy monument to a wonderful paper.

The Gem is finished, this work of mine is finished - but one thing is certain. We shall go on discussing, praising, criticising different aspects of the paper that was "Published every Wednesday - Every Story a Gem". Tom Merry, Gussy, and St. Jim's will never die while we remain who loved the Gem so much.

As, with a sigh, I turn the last page of the last Gem, dated the last day of the year 1939, only three words are still to be added here -

AVE ATQUA VALE