Do You Remember?

No.1 – Gem No. 1220 – 'Battling Grundy'

George Alfred Grundy was not, perhaps, a favourite character with Gem readers. Stories about him had perforce to be as blunt and as lacking in finesse as he was himself. Yet Gem No. 1220 was probably the best of all stories centring around him, being written in Charles Hamilton's vintage dryly amusing style.

Grundy was in trouble with his form-master for continually fighting, and the unfortunate manner in which Grundy sank into deeper disfavour through a combination of obstinacy and bad luck made a very readable tale in the humorous vein.

When Charles Hamilton wrote the story, he referred to Grundy's form-master as Mr. Linton, of course, not being aware that a substitute writer had removed that gentleman from the St. Jim's scene and replaced him with a Mr. Pilbeam. Accordingly, the editor had to substitute Mr. Pilbeam's name for Mr. Linton's throughout, but it is pleasing to note that, when the tale was reprinted in No. 383 of the Schoolboys' Own Library, Mr.Linton came into his own once again as Master of the Shell.

Gem No. 1220 came at the end of a period during which the substitute writers played havoc with the paper. 'Battling Grundy' is one of the eleven stories written for the Gem by Charles Hamilton between January 1928 and July 1931 when it appeared. It was also the last of the 'ancien regime', as it were, for with No. 1221 began the eight years of reprints of early stories. Looked at 23 years later, No. 1220 therefore assumes a position of some importance in the history of the Gem. Much as one likes the early stories which were then reprinted, it is also possible to wonder what the paper would have been like if Charles Hamilton had been prevailed upon to write a series of new stories for the Gem comparable to those in the Magnets of the early thirties. 'Battling Grundy' and its 10 earlier companions are all we have to console us for the stories that might have been.

No.2 – Magnet No. 640 – 'Bunter the Bankrupt'

Charles Hamilton has stated that he never works out the plots of his stories beforehand. He just sits down at the typewriter and lets the story work itself out to its own inevitable conclusion. Further, such are his powers of imagination that he can always visualise the expression on the face of each character as that character speaks, together with the intonation of each voice. There was only one occasion when all these remarkable faculties deserted him, and that was in the year 1920 when he began to write 'Bunter the Bankrupt'.

After he had written the beginning of the story (the theme of which, significantly enough, had been suggested by the editor), Charles Hamilton discovered that he was unable to carry on with it, and he put it aside for a while. When he returned to it he completed it on slightly different lines. In the result, therefore, the tale lacks the

harmony and balance usually to be found in a Magnet story, but since it came after six solid months of stories by substitute writers, no doubt the readers of the time found it a more welcome change.

The story revolved round Bunter's decision to settle all his debts by the ingenious method of going bankrupt. He put up a notice inviting all creditors to lodge their claims with his solicitor, Peter Todd, by the following Wednesday, and on the basis of the confidence so established he borrowed a few more sums up and down the Remove, even Fisher T. Fish rising to the bait.

The Removites discovered, on working things out, that Bunter owed a total of £27, and the consternation that ensued when Peter Todd solemnly announced that his client proposed to pay a penny in the pound may well be imagined. Bunter had hoped to wipe the slate clean and start borrowing all over again, but he succeeded only in making the Removites realise how much they had lent him and how little hope they had of recovering it. Mr. Todd's client was made to realise the error of his ways, however, and lived to regret the venture. And so ended a notable story, the adult humour of which enlivened a more than dreary patch in the history of the Magnet.

No. 3 – Schoolboys' Own Library No. 220 – 'The Son of a Cracksman'

Charles Hamilton has stated 'I don't quite know how it is – unless it be my own sweet nature! – but all my bad characters have a tendency to reform, and get there sooner or later, and I always liked to see them on the right path'. Valentine Mornington of Rookwood in his early days was one of the worst characters of all, and though he never completely reformed, he certainly made a great improvement. His friendship with Kit Erroll was one of the decisive factors in this improvement.

Schoolboys' Own Library No. 220, with its rather melodramatic title which belies the real merit of the story, is a reprint of a 1917 series from the Boys' Friend. Kit Erroll was brought to Rookwood by Captain Erroll who was recognised by Mornington's protege, 'Erbert, to be a notorious cracksman called Gentleman Jim. Mornington at once set himself the task of unmasking Erroll. Few would believe 'Erbert, but Mornington was wrong in judging Erroll to be of the same calibre as Gentleman Jim. The climax to their feud came when Erroll was driven to blackmailing Mornington to keep himself from being exposed, whereupon Mornington jeeringly remarked that no decent fellow would have resorted to such a device:-

> 'Erroll had won the game, and in his hour of success came doubt and hesitation.
>
> Mornington's taunt had struck home. It was the son of Gentleman Jim who had planned this defeat for Mornington; not the frank honourable schoolboy that Jimmy Silver believed him to be.
>
> Erroll knew it. He knew that in driving Mornington into this bargain he was giving up all that he had come to Rookwood for; he was abandoning the path he had marked out for himself – the path of honour. He would save himself by becoming what Mornington had accused him of being'.

Erroll released him from the bargain, but before Mornington had time to denounce Erroll he was kidnapped by Gentleman Jim. The story had still a long way to run, but it managed to reach the heights early on, and stay there to the end, when Erroll rescued Mornington, thus establishing their friendship, and the genuine Captain Erroll turned up to recognise Kit as his long lost son.

Probably no other story in the Boys' Friend surpassed this fine tale, and few managed to equal it. To have maintained a successful sequence of tales for eleven years in the miserable five or six chapters allotted weekly to Rookwood in the Boys' Friend is no mean achievement; to have contrived to write therein series of the standard of the coming of Kit Erroll is nothing short of remarkable.

No. 4 – Gem No. 797

A harsh and unpopular master was always a valuable asset to a fictional school, and St. Jim's was doubly fortunate (or unfortunate according to one's point of view) in possessing two such masters, Mr. Ratcliff and Mr. Selby.

Although there were a number of fine stories written around Mr. Ratcliff, one cannot avoid the suspicion that he was really only a caricature. We are told that Mr. Ratcliff was a suspicious and mean- minded man who disliked Figgins for his frank and open honesty of character. This was alright so far as it went, but it did not really explain all of Mr. Ratcliff's tyranny. Mr. Selby, on the other hand, as Master of the Third, suffered constantly and continually both from indigestion and from the high spirits of his form, and it is no wonder at all that a man who was inclined to be over-suspicious should become so bad tempered and irritable at finding that so many of his suspicions were in fact justified. The varying traits in his nature were never so entertainingly displayed as they were in Gem No. 797 (reprinted in Schoolboys' Own No. 344).

The Third Form had decided to buy their form master a birthday present, in an effort to soften his heart. As Wally D'Arcy said, wild beasts could be cured by kindness, and Reggie Manners added that even murderers had been known to have some good qualities. Trimble advised them to buy Mr. Selby a large birthday cake, which would have the dual advantage of touching Mr. Selby's stony heart and also in all probability would be given back to them to eat! Of course, the scheme went wrong. Unbeknownst to the Third, Trimble ate the cake and filled the box with newspapers and a brick. Mr. Selby was convinced it was a disrespectful trick on the part of his form, and caned them all round. The story ended thus:-

> "From that dreadful hour there was no suggestion in the Third of taming Mr. Selby by kindness. Kindness, evidently, was wasted on him, and the Third returned to their old methods. That night, when the Third Form-Master sought his room, a bag of flour descended from the top of the door upon his weary head, and the terrific yell that rang out from Mr. Selby brought comfort and solace to listening ears in the Third Form dormitory."

This was Charles Hamilton at his best and Mr. Selby at his worst, the recipe for many a fine story about St. Jim's.

No. 5 – Popular No. 588 (New Series) dated 3/5/30

The Popular consisted almost entirely of reprinted stories. The Rio Kid series, which began in January 1928, was a notable exception to this rule, and another minor exception was the Popolaki Patrol which displaced the Rio Kid for a while in 1930. The Popolaki Patrol was also by Charles Hamilton, and the later stories in the series appeared under his name, the only time his real name was ever seen in the Popular, curiously enough.

There were five members of the Popolaki Patrol who were all boy scouts living on the edge of the East African jungle - Lyn Strong, the leader, little Pip Parker, Fatty Page, Smut the Dutchman, and the immaculate Cecil Stacpoole. With them went their devoted Kikuyu, Bobo, who was a descendant of the lordly Masai. The stories were in a more sombre setting than Charles Hamilton's school stories – or, indeed those of the Rio Kid – and the tone was struck by the very first one in No. 588 which dealt with an encounter with an Arab slave-trader who left one victim to be eaten alive by ants.

The Popular was already showing signs of decline at this date, the chief of which were the continual alterations made in its composition. Greyfriars was a fairly constant feature, No. 588 containing an instalment of the 1925 Magnet series in which Loder became captain of the school. But the Ferrers Locke story 'The Druid's Drum' was not by Charles Hamilton, and neither was the fourth item, a Rookwood story, the first to be featured after a long gap. 'Thanks to Tubby' was a very clever imitation, using a Hamiltonian theme (in which the truth about some piece of trickery is written down and sealed in an envelope, to be opened after the event), but it lacked the genuine sparkle of a true Rookwood story. Finally, on a note of pathos, there was the innovation of a comic supplement.

The Popolaki Patrol was really the only hopeful sign in No. 588, but in fact that Popular now had only a short while to run, and despite many alterations (including the return of the Rio Kid and Frank Richards Schooldays) it was obvious that it could no longer live up to its name. Whether it was an editor's experiments that caused the decline of a paper or, as is usually the case, it was the decline of a paper which caused the editor to experiment, it was only a short time before the Popular was to be replaced by 'that spanking weekly treat, the Ranger'. No. 588 was the last desperate – and unsuccessful – attempt of the Popular to strike a new note.

No. 6 – Magnet No. 776 – 'The Ghost of Mauleverer Towers'

No. 776 of the Magnet was the last occasion when the time-honoured custom of a single Christmas story was observed. It was also the first ghost of Mauleverer Towers and the first introduction to Mauleverer's cousin, the ne'er-do-well Brian, who had just been released from a French prison, and was professing repentance.

According to the old legend, the death of a Mauleverer was portended by the movement of an old suit of armour, which the restless spirit of Sir Fulke returned to inhabit once again as he did when he was alive. Needless to say, the ghostly iron

footsteps were heard once again in the Christmas of 1922, and it did not take Jack Drake long to trace the real culprit.

There were a number of interesting points about No. 776: for example, Billy Bunter telephoned D'Arcy at St. Jim's to assure him that he would not fail to visit Eastwood House for Christmas, and was surprised to learn that the St. Jim's juniors were having a baring-out at the old school over the holidays (the stories about the two schools were very well integrated in the early 'twenties). In a footnote, the editor advised Magnet readers to buy the Gem and learn more about the Christmas barring-out! Jack Drake made a second appearance in No. 776 in a Ferrers Locke story by 'Owen Conquest' but it was not the master hand at work, and we need say no more. The Christmas number was rounded off by a four page edition of the Greyfriars Herald. There was, perhaps, not quite the atmosphere of the old Double Number, but nonetheless a cheerful and festive note was struck, and it cannot but be surmised that the readers of thirty-two years ago heartily enjoyed their copies of the Magnet.

No. 7 – Magnet No. 1418 – 'Quelch's Easter Egg'

Some Collectors incline to the opinion that Greyfriars stories featuring Highcliffe were always more interesting than the others. Certainly, Highcliffe was a very interesting school, with some well-drawn characters – a great improvement on Rylcombe Grammar School or Bagshot as a rival establishment. The unscrupulous Ponsonby, the remarkable de Courcy, the snobbish Mr. Mobbs, and the doddering Dr. Voysey were a fine quartet – too fine, indeed, to be restricted to occasional performances. Highcliffe played a prominent part in the Courtfield Cracksman series, and in a number of single stories, like the occasion when Ponsonby destroyed some of Mr. Mobbs' precious stamp collection and tried to incriminate Courtenay. Another typical – and seasonable - story was No. 1418 entitled 'Quelch's Easter Egg'.

1935, like the previous year, was one of many series and few single stories. The story of Mr. Quelch's famous Easter Egg was therefore all the more notable for being one of the few single stories. It was woven round a very slender theme but, like all stories by Charles Hamilton, there were no loose ends and no wasted incidents – everything dovetailed neatly into one complete and harmonious whole.

Bob Cherry had incurred the special enmity of Ponsonby, whose schemes of revenge all went awry until he hit upon the idea of sending Mr. Quelch an Easter Egg with an insulting notice. The cover has a typical Chapman illustration depicting Mr. Quelch reading the insulting words: 'Don't come back after Easter. We're fed up with you! Too much jaw, too much cane! Every man in the Remove is sick of your gargoyle of a chivvy. Get out and stay out!'

Pon had filled the remainder of the cardboard egg with an assortment of rubbish, including a torn up letter from Major Cherry to his son, which Mr. Quelch regarded as conclusive proof, but the Head, with that touch of penetrating wisdom denied to the Remove master, decided that the circumstantial evidence was a little too thin, and his investigations revealed the truth. Mr. Mobbs, it may be added, refused to believe any ill

of his favourite, and so Ponsonby escaped punishment from that quarter, though Nemesis was to overtake him from another. And so ended a pleasant, if not remarkable story, which must have brightened Easter time at many a home twenty years ago.

No. 8 – Magnet No. 106 – 'The Greyfriars Plot'

In later numbers of the Magnet, when mention was made of Billy Bunter's rather grubby countenance, there would sometimes be a reference to the famous occasion when he was given a bath in the Remove dormitory. Such references to past events were always references to stories in previous Magnets --the incident mentioned would never be one which had not been related at all. In Magnet No. 106 Bunter's aversion to washing became the joke of the school, and accordingly a party of well-wishers headed by Bulstrode, Hazeldene, Skinner and Tom Brown gave Billy Bunter a long-needed bath. Skinner obligingly scrubbed Bunter's back with a scrubbing brush whilst others deluged him with torrents of hot and cold water, and generously rubbed soap into his mouth, nose and eyes. For the purposes of the illustration Bunter was depicted as sitting in the tub in his underclothes – a somewhat curious way of having a bath. It need hardly be added that Bunter was not grateful for this unselfish administration.

In 1909 the circulation of the Magnet was at its lowest ever, and the paper nearly gave up the struggle for its existence. Fortunately, it managed to keep going, and a campaign to increase circulation was inaugurated. Magnet No. 106, dated 19/2/10, bears on its cover the modest caption '1,000,000 new readers should buy this number.' Certainly the circulation did increase, though hardly to the extent hoped for in the caption.

This was not the best period of the red Magnet. Stories tended to be rather rambling and disconnected, and this defect was even more noticeable in the longer tales like No. 106, which was the first of the regular penny numbers and had nineteen chapters. Apart from the incidents about Bunter's bath and the way in which Ionides became locked in Carne's study, the main theme was the presentation of 'Julius Caesar' by the Remove Dramatic Society – which was 'The Greyfriars Plot'. Marjorie Hazeldene earned the part of Portia by dressing up as an old freak and pretending to be a long lost aunt of Nugent's – so proving her histrionic ability. The performance of the play was most successful, but, as this left nothing to be described by the author, a note of climax was missing from the end of the story.

Despite these defects, however, 'The Greyfriars Plot' was an amusing miscellany, and no doubt assisted the recovery of the Magnet. Not only does it explain why the paper had done so badly in the past, but it also contains a hint of the glories that were in store for the future.

No. 9 – Gem No. 441 – 'Too Clever by Half'

The early Blue and White Gems really had little to distinguish them from their famous blue-covered predecessors – apart, of course, from the covers themselves. Many

of the stories in the latter half of 1916, for instance, were very fine indeed, and nearly all were interesting reading. No. 441 was no exception.

A St. Jim's story featuring Cutts and his circle has the special attraction for older readers which tales about seniors in the Gem always possess, an attraction caused by the more serious tome of the narrative. On this occasion it was St. Leger who was in the forefront; though as reckless and unscrupulous as Cutts in most things, he lacked his cool and calculating nature.

It all happened on one of those glorious summer afternoons when it was too hot for cricket, and practically all the school was down on the river. St. Leger was playing nap on the bank with a disreputable character from Wayland, and was caught in the act by a governor of the school, Major Stringer. He refused to give his name, and the Major declared he would go up to the school the next day and identify him.

It was Cutts who was 'Too Clever by Half'. He arranged an alibi for St. Leger by going up to Baggy Trimble and congratulating him on saving St. Leger from the pool in Ryll. Baggy at once believed that he had really done it, and St. Leger was saved – for a time. Baggy proceeded to blackmail St. Leger while Mellish and Piggott blackmailed Baggy, until eventually the whole cunning scheme collapsed like a pack of cards.

No. 441 was a satisfying story, with thrust and counter thrust between the Major and St. Leger, with Cutts spinning his cobweb of lies over it all to confuse the issue. The only blemish was the paper shortage which, one suspects, induced the author to abbreviate his story.

No. 10 – Sparshott Series No. 6 – 'Pluck Will Tell'

Merretts began to publish the Sparshott series towards the end of the last war, and, though collectors of Charles Hamilton's work will never allow any of his new schools to share pride of place with St. Jim's, Greyfriars, and Rookwood, it must be admitted that the Sparshott series could – in more favourable circumstances – have become much more popular than they actually were.

No.6 of the series distinguished by the first re-appearance of Billy Bunter after the Amalgamated Press ceased to publish the companion papers. By some odd legal quirk, Charles Hamilton enjoyed the copyright of Billy Bunter as a character (as a result of which Amalgamated Press were obliged to pay him for the use of the name in execrable cartoons of Bunter in the Knock-Out comic). On the other hand, the Amalgamated Press claimed to be able to prohibit him from writing stories about the old schools for any other publisher – a most ungenerous attitude, in view of the fact that they declined to publish his stories themselves, and one of which they had the grace to repent later on. So, while Greyfriars was temporarily out of the picture, Billy Bunter was definitely in, and could be introduced into any of the stories Charles Hamilton cared to write about his new schools.

In 'Pluck Will Tell', Billy Bunter had blackmailed his way into a shady car trip with Vernon-Smith, who had pushed him out of the car near Sparshott and driven off without him. The part Bunter played at Sparshott was not a major one, but his presence was relevant to the main plot, a rather unusual one about a new boy called Louis Merrick, half French, and rather too timid for a Public School. In the length of a typical Magnet story we were entertained by a description of how Merrick eventually found the determination to stand up to the bully of the Form. It was Billy Bunter, however, who had the last word - a promise to repay Merrick's loan with a Postal Order.

The presence of Bunter was just sufficient to remind old readers exactly how much they were missing, but the Merretts books were, on the whole, an entertaining collection. With Plum Tumpton, Tom Rake, Harry Vernon, and Barnes-Paget the Buccaneer, Sparshott provided an interesting set of characters which made it the best of Charles Hamilton's new schools. But even the best of the new schools could not survive the re-appearance of the old; the stars do not shine when the sun comes out.

No. 11 - Gems 824 - 831

Charles Hamilton's especial genius lay in the skilful portrayal of the motivating springs of human conduct. Even his bitterest critic, George Orwell, was forced to admit that every one of his schoolboy characters was different, but this was only half the story. It is not sufficient for an author merely to label his characters; he has to explain precisely why they act as they do on the particular occasion, and this Charles Hamilton never failed to explain most convincingly. There is no doubt that, for sheer presentation of character, he never surpassed himself in his stories about Cardew of St. Jim's.

Ralph Reckness Cardew was the character to appeal to the older readers; volatile And whimsical, indolent and energetic, the perfect gentleman and the perfect blackguard, intelligent enough to acknowledge good advice but too perverse to act upon it, the junior who might lie to authority, but never to his fellows, above all quite unrepentant ('Pretty Fanny's way, you know'), he is the character one never tires to read about. The various facets of his character were never so well described as in Gems 824-831, a series which was satisfactorily reprinted in Nos. 258 and 260 of the Schoolboys' Own Library. The trouble began when he refused to turn up to games practice, and dodged Kildare. He resorted practically to a subterfuge which enabled him to get away with it the first time, but Tom Merry put a spoke in his wheel on the next occasion, and thereafter Cardew decided that, if he was going to be forced to play games, he would become junior house captain and junior school captain himself.

How he set about this task makes intriguing reading; with deep-laid cunning he succeeded in putting Tom Merry in the wrong at every turn, in making the fellows laugh at 'the saintly Thomas', in winning popularity for himself. The whole series was set against a background of football, and every match was not just a pointless and boring description of a game (as was so often the custom of the substitute writers) but an integral part of the development of the story of Cardew's struggle and success. We

know that Tom Merry is the hero, and yet we hope, for the sake of the drama, that Cardew's plot will succeed. And it does.

For a while Tom Merry did his best to back up the new captain loyally but a personal bitterness soon grew up between them, and at a holiday at Eastwood House, Cardew sank to roguery in an attempt to wreak his vengeance. But in the end, Cardew tired of his position, and consented to another election being held, at which he stood again; there was a tie on the voting, and so he tipped the balance by giving Tom his vote. And on this characteristically quixotic note ended the story of Cardew's captaincy – a series which ranks among the best that ever appeared in that grand old paper, the Gem.

No. 12 – Schoolboys' Own Libraries Nos. 308 & 317

Cardew of St. Jim's and Mornington of Rookwood are a fascinating pair of characters for comparison. Cardew is the more delightful to read about, more insouciant and urbane. Moreover, his character remained the same since he was first introduced into the stories. Mornington, on the other hand, changed as frequently as Vernon-Smith, sometimes blackguard, sometimes scoundrel, sometimes hero. Cardew was wealthy and well-connected, but Mornington was deprived of fortune when his cousin Herbert turned up. He did not begrudge the one-time waif the money that had once been his, but he certainly missed it, and this deprivation undoubtedly embittered him. As he said to Erroll on one occasion, 'You don't care what clothes you wear so long as you're decent! I care no end. I hate wearin' a collar twice and a necktie three times. I hate havin' my boots soled and heeled. I hate lookin' at a quid twice before I spend it. In fact,' said Mornington, with a bitter grin – 'in fact, I've all the tastes of a gentleman's gentleman, and that's what I ought to be, I suppose. I belong to the vulgar rich, and I can't get out of it. And you don't understand it a little bit.' Charles Hamilton must have been thinking of that line from Tennyson about the crown of sorrow being the remembrance of happier things.

Like Cardew, Mornington also aspired to be junior captain, and like Cardew he succeeded. But there the resemblance ends. Mornington's rivalry was mainly a friendly one, whereas Cardew's was most unfriendly, though he maintained his urbanity as long as possible. Mornington, on the other hand, was rather reckless in the bribes he offered voters (Smythe, Tracy, and Howard were promised places in the team) whereas Cardew's promises were as vague and bland as a politician's.

The Rookwood series was the earlier of the two, appearing in the Boys' Friend in 1919, and running straight through from July to October without a break for the holidays. It was reprinted in Nos. 308 and 317 of the Schoolboys' Own Library. Many themes were first tried out at Rookwood, to be developed more fully in the Magnet and Gem at a later date, though in this case the prototype suffered from no lack of development itself.

Mornington's opportunity arose when Smythe offered the junior eleven the use of a large car to take them over to Greyfriars. Mornington bore in mind the tag from Virgil 'Timeo Danaos et dona ferentis' (I fear the Greeks and the gifts they bring), but Jimmy

Silver unsuspiciously accepted the offer. As a result, the junior eleven was taken for a ride into Devon; while Smythe presented his own team at Greyfriars. The dissatisfaction this incident caused, and the fact that Jimmy Silver had refused to heed Mornington's warning, were used as a lever by Mornington to demand a new election, which he won. Like Cardew, he had his initial successes and, again like Cardew, he later tired of the whole business. The St. Jim's and Rookwood series may be read one after another without any loss of enjoyment, so differently are they constructed and so well do they illustrate the characters who had perhaps more dramatic potentialities than any other at their respective schools.

No. 13 – Magnets Nos. 945 – 948

The Shell at Greyfriars was really more interesting than the Fourth Form. It is true that the supercilious Temple and the unscrupulous Angel both played their part in the stories, but the Shell had the more promising characters. The ill-tempered Mr. Hacker, for instance, was far more prominent than the unassuming Mr. Capper, and, though a little of Temple went a long way, one could never have too much of Hobson and Hoskins.

In those far-off red Magnet days, when Coker was in the Shell, he had been Hobson's bosom pal. After Aunt Judy had secured Coker's remove into the Fifth Form, he snubbed Hobson at once. Poor old Hobson! He was rugged, honest, and simple; he thought the world of his study-mate Hoskins, the mad musician of Greyfriars, who so carefully cultivated an artistic curl on his forehead. Hoskins was clever enough to compose symphonies and sonatas using minor ninths and consecutive fifths despite the disapproval of the music master. Hobson loyally listened to Hoskins playing the violin, and even pretended to share his study-mate's indignation over the fact that pianos were not allowed in the studies. This ill-assorted couple played their greatest part in Magnets 945 – 948, the series about Pedrillo, the boy acrobat.

When Zorro's circus came to Friardale, Hobson received a letter from his father, Sir James Hobson, forbidding him to go to the circus, and the mystery was heightened when Sir James was seen visiting the circus himself to see Senor Zorro. Pedrillo, the acrobat, was injured during the performance, and Dr. Locke kindly let him stay at the school sanatorium. Later, when it was discovered that Pedrillo was an English boy who had been kidnapped in his youth, the Head arranged for him to enter the Shell; of course, he was placed in Hobson's study.

The reader was under no delusions about Sir James' complicity, though it was necessary to wait for the end of the series to learn all the whys and the wherefores. Pedrillo turned out to be Hobson's cousin Peter, but the mystery is really not the major point of interest in the story, any more than the secret of the Chuzzlewits can be said to take precedence over Mr. Pecksniff and Mrs. Gamp (which is the reason why the work of Charles Dickens and Charles Hamilton alike can be read over and over again with no diminution of pleasure). For the collector, the chief item of interest in the schoolboy circus series is the light it sheds on Study No. 3 in the Shell passage. It is to be hoped that much more will be heard from this quarter in the near future.

No. 14 – Magnets 1191 – 1194 – 'The Cavandale Abbey' Series

Christmas without Bunter would have been unthinkable in Magnet days, for as well as the seasonable fall of snow and the Yuletide mystery there always had to be the Owl of the Remove tagging himself on to the party, patronising his host and keeping the servants in their place in his own inimitable manner. And, strangely enough, the readers liked it this way. Bunter, whose intrusions into all the term-time Magnet stories have often been criticised as excessive, was really in some peculiar way the making of the Christmas story in the Magnet. There were some fine Christmas numbers in the Gem, but taken as a whole they never equalled the Magnet Christmas stories, perhaps because they lacked the vulgar, homely, and amusing touch that only Bunter could provide.

Of course, the juniors never wanted Bunter with them, and Charles Hamilton's ingenuity must have been sorely taxed at times to find a new pretext for letting Bunter join the party. Although the reason given was always plausible, it was nevertheless a pleasant change when it was Bunter who invited the others to join him. Such was the case in 1930, on the occasion of the famous Cavandale Abbey series.

Lord Cavandale was the owner of Maharajah, a famous racehorse, whose entry for the Thousand Guineas at Lantham had upset many punters who had backed Black Prince before Maharajah's form was known. Maharajah was safely guarded, and as a result attacks were made on the life of Lord Cavandale, since the death of the owner would automatically cancel his entry.

No-one else but Bunter would have travelled beneath the seat of a railway compartment and so have been able to prevent the first attack on Lord Cavandale's life; no-one else but Bunter would have invited himself to Cavandale Abbey on the strength of it; and no-one else but Bunter would then have asked the Famous Five to be his guests at someone else's home.

It was a jolly series. If the criminals were not very hard to find (and how could they be camouflaged when so few characters were strangers to the reader?), there was plenty of excitement and the skeins of the mystery were so well tangled that even Ferrers Locke took a little while to find out all the answers. Bunter was a pig in clover, aristocratically forgetting the name of the manservant assigned to him, and at times trying even the patience of the grateful host, Lord Cavandale himself. Exasperating as he was to all around him, Bunter was nonetheless a source of neverending joy to the reader. The Cavandale Abbey series, like all the other Greyfriars Christmas series, was nothing more nor less than an account of how Bunter disported himself over the festive season. We cannot find it in our hearts to begrudge him his well-earned share of the limelight at this time of the year. As Bob Cherry so nobly remarked, 'Dash it all, I'm glad to see you Bunter!'

No. 15 – Boys' Friends Nos. 1140 – 1174

Most collectors of school stories tend to regard holiday series with a good deal of impatience. The Rookwood caravanning series of 1918, the St. Jim's Thames boating trip of 1923, and the Greyfriars hiking series of 1933 are given benevolent nods of approval, but these are the exception rather than the rule. The general feeling is that a school story should be in a school setting, and, if there must be a holiday, then it should be spent amid the English countryside. Foreign holidays are nothing but adventure stories which should not be allowed to impinge upon tales of school life. Yet when all this is freely admitted, it is still rather difficult to brush aside all the foreign holiday series just with a wave of a hand. One of the series that so obstinately sticks in the memory is the trip to Canada in 1923, made by the Fistical Four at the invitation of Jimmy Silver's cousin, Hudson Smedley.

It was like old times to have the Fistical Four on their own again, though the Rookwood saga had not much longer to run. It was like old times for another reason, too, for Hudson Smedley's ranch near the Rockies brought back memories of the Cedar Creek stories which had finished two years previously. It has been a never-ending source of wonder that Charles Hamilton has been able to bring to life the atmosphere of so many different countries that he has never even visited. Certainly he never achieved greater success in this line than the way in which he brought to life the lonelier parts of Western Canada as they were thirty or forty years ago.

This series in the Boys' Friend lasted for thirty-five weeks, longer than any other series he ever wrote about his Public School characters, though it must be remembered that the Rookwood stories were only half the length of the St. Jim's and Greyfriars ones. It is doubtful whether so long a holiday series would ever have been tried out in the Gem or the Magnet, but as the Boys' Friend was not wholly a school story paper it was no doubt considered to be a judicious place in which to experiment, especially in view of the success of the Cedar Creek stories. A selection of tales from the series about the trip to the Windy River Ranch occupied no less than four Schoolboys' Owns – Nos. 146, 150, 154, and 158.

The trip to Canada was unique in that it was really a succession of series; first came the encounter with Pequod le Couteau, then the trouble with Kentuck, followed by the affair of Spanish Kit, the outbreak of the redskins, and the advent of the mysterious Monty Smith (nearly all the villains, it will be noticed, coming from South of the forty-ninth parallel), and in between these episodes occurred single stories such as the attempt of Baldy Bubbin to pass himself off as a hero. It looked as though the Rookwood stories were going to be permanently transferred to Canada, but eventually the juniors did return to Rookwood, together with the amazing Texas Lick. It would be idle to pretend that their return to school was in any to be regretted, but it is still possible to retain a sneaking affection for the memory of those days in Alberta when Jimmy Silver proved himself even more of a hero and Arthur Edward Lovell, in the certainty that he knew best, proved himself an even bigger idiot.

No. 16 – Boys' Friend 3d. Libraries Nos. 288 & 328

Charles Hamilton wrote only two stories centring around Highcliffe, but each was a veritable jewel and both have now become collectors' items. They were published in the Boys' Friend monthly library in 1915, a year in which the Magnet and Gem were in a state of relative decline, but there can be no doubt about the excellence of these two stories, which were never surpassed by anything else the author wrote in the earlier days.

No. 288 entitled 'The Boy Without a Name' appeared on New Year's Day, 1915, though it had been written before the outbreak of war. There was nothing remarkable about the plot – a new boy named Clare arrived at Highcliffe on a scholarship. His antecedents were unknown, and he had been brought up by a sea captain. Ponsonby (surely the most villainous schoolboy Charles Hamilton ever depicted) led a campaign against him, in which he was abetted by the snobbish Mr. Mobbs, who toadied to all boys who had wealthy or aristocratic connections. This is sufficient to form the basis of a very readable story, one might suppose, but why should it have been rated by Charles Hamilton as one of his very best? The secret lies in the presentation of the character of Rupert de Courcy, the Caterpillar.

The Caterpillar was one of the most fascinating characters Charles Hamilton ever created, and was quite wasted at a minor school like Highcliffe. Now and again readers would catch another glimpse of him, but he was never allowed to play such a large part again. Cardew of St. Jim's was his nearest counterpart, but Cardew was not always presented in a sympathetic light. The Caterpillar was the friend of the reader from first to last, perhaps because his enemy was Ponsonby the villain, not Tom Merry the hero.

The nobodies of Highcliffe (sons of solicitors and doctors who had to work for a living) were too much under Ponsonby's influence to chum with Clare, and it was left to de Courcy to invite him to share his study in this typical manner: 'At all events, I shall find you an interestin' study. I shall watch your manners and customs and habits, and so on – it will be as amusin' as keepin' rabbits, and much less trouble. After a term or so, I shall have a real insight into the ways and doin's of the brainy workin' classes'. (De Courcy could be equally disconcerting to others: 'You see, Franky wasn't trained like us, dear boy. Franky was brought up accordin' to the stern morality of the workin' classes. He'll never get over it. He might know you for a thousand years, Pon, old scout, and he'd never take to gambling, or smokin' or drinkin' or tellin' lies. It's a matter of trainin'). Acquaintance ripened into friendship, and in the end the Caterpillar had the satisfaction of knowing that Clare was the son of Major Courtenay, the rich uncle of whom Ponsonby had hitherto entertained high expectations.

It is interesting to note how the contemporary Magnets dealt with this situation. No.344 which appeared in September 1914 mentioned the arrival at Highcliffe of a new boy named Clare, but the circumstances were quite different: he was not a scholarship boy and his arrival aroused no antagonism. This could not have been our Clare. No. 374 dated April 1915 refers to Courtenay's earlier difficulties, however, and is the first obvious reference in the Magnet to 'The Boy Without a Name'.

No. 328 of the Boys' Friend Library entitled 'Rivals and Chums' was that rare bird – a sequel which lived up to its predecessor. Courtenay had now become form captain, and Ponsonby was full of hatred for the newcomer who had supplanted him. To add to the fun, Mr. Banks had installed a roulette game in a house in Courtfield, to which the Caterpillar was irresistably attracted. In this story Charles Hamilton devoted more space than he ever again permitted himself to an explanation of roulette, the various systems of the punters, and the way in which de Courcy realised, stage by stage, that it was impossible to beat the bank. Ponsonby reached the nadir of his infamous career when he informed the police about Mr. Banks' gaming house the night he knew de Courcy would be going, and then sent Courtenay after him, hoping that they would both be arrested together. Needless to say, all his plotting came to naught, and the story ended with Courtenay determined never to trust his cousin again.

This pair of stories illustrates, perhaps better than any other, the essential quality of timelessness in Charles Hamilton's writings. He was not concerned with topicality, the latest invention, the newest fad, all these become stale, weary, and unprofitable overnight. Topicality dates, the latest invention is soon an everyday matter not worthy of comment, and the newest fad becomes old-fashioned in a moment. These two Highcliffe stories on the other hand, are timeless because they deal with human nature in its varying facets; since human nature never changes, they remain as intriguing today as they were forty years ago. Thus it is that 'The Boy Without a Name' and 'Rivals and Chums' bear witness to the fact that Charles Hamilton wrote not for the moment, but for all time.

No. 17 – Magnet No. 846 – 'Too Clever of Skinner'

The measure of Charles Hamilton's success in character drawing may be judged by his presentations of bad characters. It is easy to depict a hero without faults and a villain with no redeeming features, but it is in between these two extremes that the vast mass of humanity falls – neither black nor white but varying shades of grey. Among the darker hues lie characters like Cardew and Vernon-Smith: they are not meant to be heroes, but they are presented with a degree of understanding that inevitably leads us to regard them with some affection, and it is the convincing portrayal of such characters as these which sets the author above the common run of story-tellers, for he is more interested in people than in events. Even more successful than Cardew and Vernon-Smith, however, was the way in which Charles Hamilton depicted Harold Skinner, without doubt one of the most unpleasant members of the Greyfriars Remove.

No trick was too base for Skinner, and no devious path would he eschew in order to gain his ends. He was inspired by a spirit of contrariness, a desire to set his form-fellows at odds with one another. His engaging disposition enabled him to derive considerable enjoyment from the misfortunes of his friends. A bad hat with a weak and vicious nature, he might well have been nothing more than a stock villain but for the magic touch which Charles Hamilton employed to bring him to life – his sense of humour.

Let it be said at once that Skinner's sense of humour never led him to see a joke against himself – that would not have been true to a nature such as his. Nevertheless, some of his exchanges with Bunter are often extremely witty, and he voiced numerous amusing criticisms of the Famous Five which contained a germ of truth, like his dubbing Wharton 'the great Panjandrum of the Remove'.

Magnet No. 846 began on a glorious summer afternoon in 1924, with a trip up the river Sark. The Famous Five were out for a pull up the river, as were Skinner and Snoop. Skinner was on top of his form in banter when he began by telling them that 'the consciousness of virtue is its own reward', and kept up the standard all the way until the end when he reminded them not to forget their tracts.

The story revolved around some sovereigns which Skinner acquired from a shady character, and which he was selling at 25/- each; then illegal to sell them at more than their face value. Wharton pointed this out to Skinner, whose rejoinder was the typically ironic 'Dear me!' The tale continued with many surprising twists and turns (including a lecture on Gresham's law of economics by Newland) until Skinner was fairly caught up in the toils of his own contriving, and escaped serious trouble only with the help of the Famous Five.

In the stories in which Skinner appeared in the main role, it was inevitable that his plottings should come to nothing and that virtue should triumph. Nevertheless, it is possible to entertain a sneaking affection for Skinner, and it seems reasonably certain that this feeling was shared by Charles Hamilton, who must have greatly enjoyed depicting such an ironic and wry mannered character. Magnet No. 846 was a typical product of its age, and our enjoyment of the story is rounded off by C. H. Chapman's most apt illustrations of the crafty, thin-lipped and sharp-featured Skinner. Long may this perverse junior continue to amuse us with his sardonic and unkind witticisms.

No.18 – Boys' Friends Nos. 1183 – 1188

Mr. Bootles was not the only master to be summarily dismissed from Rookwood. The same fate befell his successor, Mr. Dalton, some three years after he had taken over the post of master of the Fourth. Mr. Dalton's offence had been a refusal to cane the entire form on the Head's instructions, a hasty order given by Dr. Chisholm in a moment of wrath. Having dismissed Mr. Dalton, the Head naturally assumed that the matter was at an end, but he was soon disillusioned. He found the words 'We want Dicky' painted on the glass panels of the bookcase in his study, and the same message was given to him verbally over the telephone. Indiscipline became more and more pronounced, until finally, the new master of the Fourth, an unpleasant gentleman by the name of Carker, was tarred and feathered, for which art of lawlessness Jimmy Silver was sentenced to be expelled, and his associates were promised a severe flogging.

This was the signal for a rebellion, which took the form of a barring-out on an island in the river Roke. This theme was more fully developed in the Magnet in the famous Poppers Island Rebellion Series of 1934 but, within the limits of the shorter space available in the Boys' Friend, the original Rookwood version was well executed. The

plot followed the usual, but nonetheless exciting, lines: the Head made a fruitless demand that they should all surrender; a party of prefects found themselves overwhelmed by the juniors; and a gang of toughs (hired by Mr. Carker) would have been successful but for the intervention of a third party (Mr. Dalton). In the end, it was Mr. Dalton who was effective in bringing the rebellion to an end.

This series was a particularly good illustration of Dr. Chisholm's character. He was as hasty and as brusque as ever, yet there were a number of revealing incidents which rounded off his character and brought him even more clearly to life. For instance, when Lovell was caught visiting Jimmy Silver in the punishment room, the Head unexpectedly stated that he could make allowance for Lovell's natural concern about a friend under sentence of expulsion. Again, when Mr. Carker insinuated that Mr. Dalton was probably encouraging the rebels, Dr. Chisholm told him in no uncertain terms that he could entertain no such suspicion of the master he had dismissed. Similarly, when Peele deserted from the rebels, and offered to show the Head a way to penetrate their defences, Dr. Chisholm asked him in a voice of thunder if Peele was suggesting that he make him an accomplice in an act of treachery. Finally, when the rebellion was over, the Head, without losing an inch of dignity, very graciously asked Mr. Dalton if he would favour him by returning to his post as master of the Fourth. The Head of Rookwood was not, perhaps, the ideal man for the position; on the other hand, he was far from being a tyrant. This Rookwood rebellion series shews how remarkably well Charles Hamilton succeeded in sketching the character of a headmaster who was hasty and not over-considerate of the feelings of others, lofty and indifferent to the opinions of his subordinates, yet withal an honest and a just man, and fair according to his own lights. It is doubtful whether quite so convincing a picture has ever been drawn of a headmaster in fiction. The portraiture is restrained yet wholly credible. It is a pity that Dr. Chisholm was not allowed to feature even more extensively in the Rookwood series.

No. 19 – Magnets 994 & 995

Amongst Mr. Quelch's relations may be numbered not only his plump niece Cora, but also his nephew Roger. Cora was not heard of again after the days of the Blue and White cover, but Roger was referred to on a number of occasions after his initial debut, which took place in Magnet No. 994.

Roger Quelch was in the Fourth Form at High Coombe, in Devon, although he does not seem to have appeared in any of the stories that Charles Hamilton wrote about the School for Slackers. Mr. Quelch's brother considered (not surprisingly) that his son was not making enough progress at High Coombe, and Roger was accordingly transferred to Greyfriars for a fortnight with the possibility of making the transfer permanent. Mr. Quelch was kindly prepared to give him extra tuition daily, and to coach him for a number of prize examinations and scholarships. To quote: 'Mr. Quelch knew what was good for a boy, better than the boy himself could possibly know. He was sure of that. Any disagreement on that point savoured of disrespect and frivolity of mind. Disrespect and frivolity were quite intolerable to Mr. Quelch'.

Roger appreciated his uncle's kindness, but did not intend to avail himself of it. His one ambition was to return to High Coombe as rapidly as possible, and to achieve this object he set about playing a number of tricks on his uncle. A bell rang very mysteriously several times in the form-room, and another bell rang just as mysteriously and just as often in Mr. Quelch's study when he was giving a tea-party. Later on, the Remove master became locked in his room, and when help was eventually obtained it turned out that the door had somehow become unlocked again, and Mr. Quelch need never have called for help at all. The crowning jest, however, was to stack fireworks behind the coal in the grate in Mr. Quelch's study. The Head happened to be there when they began to explode, and he had quite an exciting time dodging jumping crackers.

After this, it was quite certain that Roger must leave. To quote again: " 'As you will not, and do not, belong to this school, it is doubtful whether I am entitled to punish you as form-master.' Roger brightened up. 'But as an uncle it is my duty to punish you with the utmost severity!'" As Roger said, 'My uncle's fond of me, and I'm fond of him - and the less we see of one another the more fond we are!'.

No. 20 – Magnet No. 1000

The occasion of the thousandth number of the Magnet (which was dated 16/4/27) was quite justifiably taken by the editor as an excuse for a good deal of self-congratulation. In No. 999 he had said: 'I do not know how my youthful chums would get on without the chums of Greyfriars to keep them company every week. If any further proof be needed that the Magnet is indeed the centre of attraction, the proof will be supplied in that cheery number 'one thousand' which one will see on next Monday's cover. Isn't it just scrumptious? Doesn't it make the scoffers take a back seat, for what paper – unless it has popularity behind it – can endure the test of age?'

In the thousandth number half the centre page was devoted to further eulogies by the editor: 'Many an editor has sighed wistfully for the day when he would see that formidable and eloquent number gracing the cover page of the paper he controls. But it doesn't fall to the lot of every editor to produce and maintain a paper with such a world-wide appeal, nor to cater for such a loyal and enthusiastic body of readers as it has been my pleasure to serve.' The peroration ended with a wish that was not so fanciful as it may have seemed at the time: 'You will not think it boastful of me if I, having seen to press one thousand issues of the Magnet, should raise an imaginary glass of foaming ginger-pop and say: 'Magnetites, you will honour me by drinking to our two-thousandth issue.'

The other half of the centre page was graced with a photograph of Charles Hamilton, and entitled 'Some reminiscences of Frank Richards'. This seems to have been the only occasion on which the author of the Greyfriars stories sent a personal message to his readers. The article dealt with his early attempt at writing, culminating with the sale of his first story, when still at school, for 15/-. 'My father was a poet. The remuneration he received for his verses paid, I believe, for the ink he used, but not for the paper. This may help to account for my feeling no attraction towards poetry.' There was also

an amusing apocryphal anecdote about the way in which Frank Richards showed Martin Clifford the first Greyfriars story, and was told that there was only one better writer, and that was Martin Clifford.

Magnet No. 1000, like Gem No. 1000, contained reproductions of the covers of the first Magnet and the first penny Gem. The curious thing about the reproduction in both papers of the cover of the first Magnet is that it was not in fact taken from Magnet No. 1 but from the advertisement of Magnet No. 1 in the first penny Gem. It was apparently the original design for the cover of the first Magnet, which was then discarded in favour of a slightly different version, but it seems that it was decided not to carry the change through to the advertisement in the Gem. Hence the muddle.

As for the Greyfriars story in Magnet No. 1000 – well, you must wait for the Annual for a comment on that.

No. 21 – Gems 743 – 747 – 'Rogue Rackstraw' Series

1922 was one of the best years of the Gem, and the Rogue Rackstraw series possessed all the requisite ingredients of a good tale, including a novel and ingenious plot. Despite all these auspicious concomitants, however, the series failed to ring a bell. Perhaps the shortness of the stories was the cause (they seldom exceeded nine chapters at this time), or perhaps the author was not up to his usual form. At any rate, the epic was told in a jerky manner which did less than full justice to the originality of the theme.

The story revolved around a remarkable series of kidnappings, which began with Tom Merry and Kildare. Dr. Holmes paid £500 to ransom Tom Merry, and then further kidnappings occurred - Lowther, Gordon Gay, Inspector Fix, Mr. Railton, Manners and Talbot. The real hero of the series was Wildrake, and it was he who guessed half way through that the culprit was Mr. Brown the miller, of Wayland Moor. Wildrake became the confidante of Inspector Fix, and he played the game on his own later when the Inspector disappeared, being responsible in the last number for the successful climax.

It was pleasant to have Tom Merry more prominently featured once again and there is no doubt that the atmosphere of tension and anxiety was well depicted. Yet it was perhaps too large a theme to be handled successfully in some forty odd chapters. The events were too rapid and the characters too numerous to allow the reader to take in fully the bewildering sequence of disasters. Hamilton fans with a taste for this type of story would be better advised to turn to an earlier, and far superior, series in Nos. 906 – 911 of the Boys' Friend (reprinted in No. 20 of the Schoolboys' Own Library), where the manner in which the Fistical Four disappeared one by one was related most eerily and with consummate skill on the appropriately smaller canvas of Rookwood School. The Rookwood series was as compact and intimate as the St. Jim's series was amorphous and impersonal. One of the drawbacks of the Gem was that the author began with plenty of space but was cut down severely and permanently after the first ten years. The Rookwood stories were always on a small scale, a factor which helped them

to retain a much more consistent standard. A disappointing series like that of Rogue Rackstraw would thus not have occurred in the Rookwood saga, but, though the series was not up to standard, it was not a failure, and the reader who prefers study No. 10 in the Shell passage will find a good deal in this series to please him. For a lover of the old blue Gems, this is a recommendation which covers a multitude of sins.

No. 22 – Gems Nos. 1635 – 1640 – 'The Secret Passage' Series

Charles Hamilton produced nothing new for the Gem between 1931 and 1939, Nos. 1221 to 1624 of that paper being devoted entirely to reprints of the earlier stories. The last four series which he wrote for the Gem in 1939 are therefore of especial interest in that they represent his first (and last) piece of sustained writing for the paper since the lapse in the middle 'twenties.

The series in Nos. 1625 to 1634 concerned foreign travel: consequently it was not until the Secret Passage series that a new school series of the old type re-appeared, and the question that inevitably arises is 'Does it bear comparison with the best St. Jim's stories of the previous decade?' As in so many other spheres, it is difficult to give a clear-cut answer. The sheer brilliance and sparkle of the old tales was definitely lacking, though there were a number of amusing touches, like the following when D'Arcy had just been dismissed at cricket for a duck:-

> 'The pwospect looks wathah wocky now, I feah!' said Arthur Augustus sadly.
> 'Not much chance for you fellows, I am afwaid.'
> 'Oh, we'll try to stop one or two,' said Blake sarcastically.
> 'Yaas, wathah! Twy your hardest, old chap!' said Arthur Augustus. 'Nothin' like twyin', at any wate, even if it isn't any good.'

This was vintage Gussy, and there was also another amusing sequence on the old high level at the end of the series when Mr. Ratcliff took it upon himself to interfere in matters which didn't concern him.

The Secret Passage lay between the crypt in the ruined priory and the Fourth Form passage in the School House. It was Fatty Wynn who stumbled upon the secret, and it was he who was the star of the series for the one and only time in his career. The School House was raided in a manner most mysterious to everyone but Figgins, Kerr and Wynn, and there were several amusing incidents concerning the attempts to solve the mystery.

The general verdict on this series is therefore not first class, but nevertheless promising well for the future. Unfortunately the sands of time were running out.

No. 23 – Gems Nos. 1069 – 1072 – 'The Victor Cleeve' Stories

Masters' Nephews were on the whole an unprepossessing lot. The story of Mr. Ratcliff's nephew now seems only a shadowy memory of an unpleasant boy who was

worthy of his uncle. The more recent tale of Mr. Hacker's nephew was recounted in a curiously intermittent series which was well constructed but not particularly inspired. Mr. Manders' nephew Marcus was the most odious and memorable of them all: he featured in a series which was almost Grand Guignol in its presentation of the housemaster of the Modern Side at Rookwood. Varied as these Series were, however, none could hold a candle to the tale of Victor Cleeve, nephew of Mr. Railton, and the boy who hated St. Jim's.

In his fine Annual article 'Red, White and Blue', Eric Fayne lists this as one of the three best Gem series that some collectors, when faced with the rich store of series to be found in this era, might consider they would cherish more than the Victor Cleeve Series. But no-one would quarrel with Eric's apt summing-up: 'The stories contained fascinating cricket sequences, natural dialogue, superb character painting, tense situations, working up to a grand climax.'

Victor Cleeve had left his former school under a cloud, and had obtained a place at St. Jim's only through the influence of his Uncle. He hesitated to become friendly with the others for fear of being dropped if the story of the theft at his old school should become known. In a delightful sequence Cardew told him that if he were expelled and sent to a new school he would act in precisely the opposite manner to Cleeve in order not to give grounds for suspicion. The moral was not lost on Cleeve, but he had little time left, and the story drew to a grand conclusion when it became known that the stolen money was being passed near St. Jim's. He eventually returned to his old school in a final blaze of glory, having won the Greyfriars and Rookwood matches for St. Jim's.

What is the secret of the fascination of the Victor Cleeve series? The answer must surely lie in its cohesion. It stuck almost entirely to the old characters - Tom Merry and Co. and Jack Blake and Co. The story was told tautly and concisely in only four numbers, and not a word was superfluous, not a note rang false. Above all, looked at from a distance of time, the series may be regarded as the Indian Summer of the Gem, the last series which Charles Hamilton wrote for the coloured covers. It is no wonder that to the lover of St. Jim's this series really defies criticism.

No. 24 – Magnet No. 1328 – 'Bunter the Ventriloquist'

There were innumerable tales in the Magnet about Bunter's ventriloquism, but none of them was so well constructed as No. 1328. The story began in a familiar manner, with Bunter creating a diversion with an imaginary bumble bee in the French class, which ended in detention for Bob Cherry on the day of the cricket match at Rookwood. When this difficulty had been overcome the plot moved to Rookwood (which had mysteriously moved from Hampshire to Sussex for the purpose of this story).

The greater part of this Magnet story in fact, took place at Rookwood, which must be unique so far as the Magnets of the 'thirties are concerned. Jimmy Silver was detained by Dr. Chisholm, and it was Bunter's ventriloquism which deceived Mr. Dalton and so

set Jimmy Silver free to play in the match. (Vernon-Smith later assisted by turning a hose on Dr. Chisholm who was on his way to watch the cricket.)

Greyfriars won the thrilling match by a single run, and the story might well have been considered finished at this point, but there then came one of those little touches which so delighted Magnet readers: flushed with success, Bunter did not know where to stop, and he decided to imitate Mr. Quelch's voice and tell Monsieur Charpentier through his study door to cancel the morning's French lesson. Unfortunately, Mr. Quelch happened to be talking to the French master at that very moment (Bunter could really not be expected to think of a possibility like that) and the deception was useless. To quote: 'The door flew open, and Mr. Quelch almost flew out. His grasp closed on Billy Bunter's collar, 'Come' said Mr. Quelch, in a voice that was like the filing of a saw. And he marched Bunter away to his study'. A perfect ending to a perfect little story.

No. 25 – Magnet No. 242 – 'The Greyfriars Insurance Co.'

Although Fisher T. Fish was an unprepossessing character he never failed to hold the readers' interest. Like many of Charles Hamilton's freakish characters he changed with the passing of time. In the very early days he was brash and boastful, a typical American extrovert, but he was not unpleasant, and was even invited to spend a holiday at Wharton Lodge. At this period he was deemed a sufficient attraction to be featured in a Gem story. As the years went by he became more unscrupulous and devoted to the pursuit of money, but his exploits still made interesting reading. At the beginning of the First World War, however, when animosity towards the Americans reached an unprecedented height, he became downright unpleasant, the very epitome of everything dishonourable: even Skinner and Snoop despised him. The stories about him in those days still leave an unpleasant taste in the mouth. It is not surprising that during the 'twenties he was scarcely featured at all, and finally in the 'thirties he reverted to something like his immediate pre-war self, except that he seemed more reticent. His money-lending was confined to fags, and his avarice took the less conspicuous form of reckoning up the cost of the spread on the few occasions on which he was invited out to tea.

'The Greyfriars Insurance Co.' was written in 1912 when Fishy was the bustling American hustler, when the red Magnet was at its very best, and when single stories were the almost invariable rule. This was the period when stories about Fishy were most numerous, varied and amusing. The prelude to the launching of the scheme was a mysterious outbreak of throwing stones through study windows, and with this auspicious background Fishy offered to insure against breakages for a penny a week, and did quite a trade.

Bunter was especially attracted to the sickness insurance scheme, run on Lloyd George lines. Wingate cured him of his first painful illness by homoeopathic treatment, i.e. by the application of a cane! Bunter then tried it on Mr. Quelch, and (having read an advertisement for a patent medicine) told his astonished form-master that he had a general tired feeling, a dizziness in the head, and a weakness in the joints of the limbs. Other symptoms included a slight fluttering in the heart and a feeling of

cramp and heaviness all over. The mysterious illness was rounded off with spots before the eyes, a bed taste in the mouth, and a peculiar dryness in the throat. Fishy, however, was not paying illness benefit without a doctor's certificate, but what Bunter failed to get by deceit he later obtained by blackmail.

Vernon-Smith had refused to join the insurance scheme, and was soon treated to another stone through his study window to bring him to heel. But Fishy was, as usual, too clever, and his indignation knew no bounds when someone else took a hand in the stone throwing campaign and smashed the windows of all the Removites who had insured with him, after which the insurance company went bankrupt.

'The Greyfriars Insurance Co.' was not an outstanding story, but it was typical of its time – competent, amusing, and well told. The particular retribution which overtook Fishy was probably more apt than on any other occasion. As a social satire, the character of Fisher T. Fish seems somewhat dated nowadays, but as the mainspring of the plot of a Greyfriars story he still provides an hour's good entertainment.

No. 26 – Magnets 196 & 274 – 'The Expulsion of Skinner'

Greyfriars changed considerably more than St. Jim's with the passing of the years, and consequently a red Magnet story today seems much more incongruous than a tale in a blue Gem. Certainly Magnet No. 196 entitled 'For the Honour of His Chum' which was published towards the end of 1911 now read rather like a period piece, though, like many antiques, its outward strangeness does not entirely belie the intrinsic merit in its construction.

The plot was not complicated. Harry Wharton had left the dormitory with the intention of setting about Loder with a whip. Neither of them guessed that a third party was lurking in the darkness, ready to carry on where Wharton left off. Loder was later discovered in the quadrangle insensible, and Wharton was adjudged the guilty party.

Frank Nugent was the only member of the Co. who really believed Wharton was innocent. Even Bob Cherry, who had cause enough to be grateful for Wharton';s friendship earlier in the year, was doubtful whether Wharton's temper had not carried him too far on this occasion. Nevertheless, all the Co. backed up Frank in his efforts, and there was a grand scene in Skinner's study in which Nugent eventually managed to beat Skinner in a battle of wits. Nugent did not often have a star part of this magnitude, and his contribution to the climax of the story was both pleasing and memorable.

Skinner was expelled, and nothing more of him as heard for some time, when in Magnet No. 274 entitled 'Standing by Skinner' dated May, 1913, it transpired that he had been sent to work in his father's office. Bulstrode had learnt that he would be a member of a visiting cricket team, and had set to work to make things easy for his old chum, with the result that Skinner was given something of an ovation. Skinner utilised his visit as an opportunity to ingratiate himself with Mr. Quelch and Dr. Locke, but

Mr. Quelch had no use for soft sawder, and Skinner left the Remove master's study feeling quite discomfited. He found Dr. Locke was easier game, but even the kind old Head jibbed when Skinner laid it on too thick and referred to his dismay at leaving the dear old place and going out in the cold world, and the Head was quite firm in his refusal to allow Skinner to return. Eventually Skinner faked an accident and he was brought back to Greyfriars supposedly injured. Mr. Skinner said that his son was worried about not being allowed to take his place at the old school again, and at last the Head agreed to take him back, in order to speed his recovery.

No. 274 was an interesting story, but one cannot help wondering why Charles Hamilton decided to re-instate Skinner after such a long time, when it looked as though he had intended to dispense with him for good. Moreover, Skinner was not half so good a character then as he later became. His morals never improved, but he later developed a wry sense of humour which endowed his unpleasant sardonic remarks with a seasoning of sophistication which the Removites no doubt found infuriating but which older readers enjoy immensely. So perhaps it was just as well that Greyfriars never said farewell for ever to Harold Skinner, the schemer of the Remove.

No. 27 – Boys' Friends 1175 – 1180 – 'The Texas Lick' Series

Quite a number of American characters appeared at Charles Hamilton's schools from time to time, and very few of them were in any way a credit to the United States. Certainly one of the most striking was Texas Lick whom the Fistical Four had encountered during their long Canadian visit in 1923.

Texas Lick was rather like Fisher T. Fish in his supreme contempt for the backward country in which he was obliged to obtain his education, but apart from that there was little resemblance between the two characters. The Rookwood schoolboy was the ebullient, adventurous son of a millionaire, yet this made him no more attractive than Fish because with all his enterprise there was a note of cynicism and hardness that made him quite repulsive. Tubby Muffin was quite sorry for having fatuously offered to take him in hand and civilise him.

Jimmy Silver in his good-natured way asked his chums if they could stand the American junior over the Christmas holidays to save him from having to remain on at Rookwood on his own, but the answer to his enquiry was an emphatic negative. These preliminaries, however, turned out to be quite superfluous, for Texas Lick invited himself, and all five of them were eventually installed at Jimmy Silver's home, where there was in due course yet another Ghost of the Priory.

The author never intended that Texas Lick should be likeable, but he did not grudge him the attributes of courageousness and resourcefulness. He successfully roped in a mad bull at Rookwood (a feat which earned him a pardon for having lassooed Mr. Dalton just beforehand), he refused to be intimidated when Lovell masqueraded as the ghost of the Priory, and he was also instrumental in saving Mr. Silver from being cheated of a thousand pounds.

Mr. Silver was an art collector, but, like many people in those hard times, he was feeling the pinch and had decided to sell a Tintoretto to a dealer for that amount. Texas Lick opined that whilst Mr. Silver was a wise man, the purchaser must have been a mug to pay so much for such a daub. His impudence was, however, forgiven when, by a neat piece of tracking in the snow, he discovered that the man who had called to collect the painting was an imposter. This Christmas story constituted the most pleasant number in the series.

Back at School again in 1924 the series began to deteriorate. Texas Lick encountered a cardsharp on the train (the ubiquitous Captain Punter), and turned the tables on him, only to find that no-one had any admiration for his cunning. He became more and more unpopular until eventually the crash came; in an odd sort of a tale he induced the Fistical Four to accompany him to Brighton on a spree, without leave. The result was a flogging apiece – except for Texas Lick, who decided to leave Rookwood precipitately, and the old school knew him no more.

The Texas Lick series was in more senses than one a hangover from the long Canadian series. The decision had almost been made to leave the Fistical Four in Canada permanently, and their eventual return to Rookwood perhaps found the author a little out of touch, like the juniors who had been absent for so long. But this was not the end of the Rookwood stories in the Boys' Friend, and there were still some good things in store for readers when Texas Lick finally departed from the Rookwood scene.

No. 28 – Magnet No. 186 – 'The Only Way'

There was an intriguing set-up in the Greyfriars Sixth Form in the hey-day of the red Magnet, there being five seniors with well-defined characters. The black sheep were Loder and Carne (Walker was not often mentioned), and on the other side of the ledger were Wingate and Courtney. In between was Rupert Valence.

Arthur Courtney was Wingate's closest friend, whilst Valence with his waywardness and instability of character was someone with whom the rugged and forthright Wingate had little patience. Courtney however, was very much attracted to Valence's sister, Vi, and was in consequence closely connected with Valence's affairs. This was the Hazeldene theme all over again, but, because of the age of those concerned, it was much more plausible and realistic. It is therefore hardly surprising that all these characters should have featured in the finest red Magnet story of all, 'The Only Way'.

There is no disguising the fact that this story is a period piece, a drama which comes dangerously close to being melodrama. Yet when all this is freely admitted, the story lives today because of the convincing display of characterisation , which triumphs even when the theme is so Victoria as this passage in which Courtney censures Valence:-

> 'You have been after the game'
> 'Well, supposing I have? I remember you had some of the partridges when I stood a game supper in my study'.

'That's not so bad. I don't hold with it, considering that the birds are private property; but poaching a partridge or two for a feed isn't so bad. But – '
'But what?'
'You've done more than that!' said Courtney sternly. 'You've sold a dozen brace in Friardale.'
Valence flushed red.'

It was Sir Hilton Popper's preserves which were being raided, and when Valence was caught red-handed one evening he gave Courtney's name to the keepers. So it was that Courtney received a stern letter from the baronet inviting him to Popper Court for a flogging as an alternative to reporting the matter to the police. How Courtney saved Valence from this predicament and what thanks he received for his pains constituted the main part of a most engrossing story.

As most collectors know, Courtney and Valence were removed from Greyfriars by Pentelow in that famous story 'A Very Gallant Gentleman'. In the interests of accuracy it is only fair to point out that collectors regard this story with very mixed feelings, some esteeming it highly for its noble sentiments, and others deploring it for its sentimentality. But whatever may be thought of this story as a single story, it is obvious that, considered as one of a sequence of many hundreds of Greyfriars stories, it is entirely misplaced. Death was not a proper topic for the pages of the Magnet, and permanent characters were not to be disposed of in such a manner.

Pentelow himself declared that this story had brought him more letters than anything else published in the Magnet for years past, and added that some readers had confessed to crying over the last chapter. It was clear that he thought that 'Frank Richards' had excelled himself on this occasion. At the same time, it is equally clear that Pentelow had some doubts about what he had irrevocably done: 'Those who talk about a big gap left by Courtney's disappearance are guilty of exaggeration. Sometimes we heard nothing of Courtney for months together; and in only two or three stories did he ever play more than a minor part.' This excuse has some validity if the characters had in fact been his to dispose of. As it is, one can only wonder what the 'twenties and 'thirties might have held in store for Courtney and Valence if Pentelow had not intervened.

At all events, the fabric which Charles Hamilton had so carefully woven was mutilated beyond repair by the work of a minute, and the Sixth Form at Greyfriars was never so interesting again. The other prefects – Gwynne, Sykes, North, Bancroft, etc, – were merely names, and Wingate was left with no intimate friend. That is why, in later Magnets, he seems something of a lone wolf, an isolated figure in the school with no-one he really trusted and with no-one upon whom he could completely rely. That is why collectors who like the occasional story about the senior forms can only deplore Pentelow's judgement in writing 'A Very Gallant Gentleman'. There were many substitute writers, and many of them made mistakes, but only Pentelow succeeded in perpetrating irreparable damage. For the sake of his Roman holiday he deprived future readers of many interesting possibilities in later years.

'The Only Way' was, in all events, a path which Charles Hamilton never trod again.