

MAGNETS OF THE ROARING 'TWENTIES

BY

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When the Magnet first donned the familiar blue and orange covers it assumed an appearance which was destined to last longer than any other in its history. These coloured covers, which ran continuously from 1922 to 1937, without doubt included the finest of Charles Hamilton's writings. It would not be accurate to claim that the period from 1922 to 1929 was superior to the 1930 to 1937 era, but there is no doubt that, during the 'twenties, the system of writing stories in series was fully developed for the first time, and some of these series remain unsurpassed today for their sheer vitality and ingenious use of new methods and situations. Some were written in a style which was subtly changed by the 'thirties; but the older style has the merits of forthrightness and candour, and even if the mellow humour of the next decade is lacking it is nevertheless still pleasing to read. There are indeed some collectors who esteem freshness and outspokenness higher than technical ability allied to mature dexterity, and it is these who find that this period, above all others, satisfies their requirements in a Greyfriars story.

It was during this period that Charles Hamilton switched his main interest from the Gem to the Magnet. From 1922 to 1925 the Magnet contained a large number of substitute stories - far too many, in fact - broken only by a few series and fewer single numbers written by the real Frank Richards. From 1926 onwards, however, the Gem was neglected in favour of the Magnet, and it was in this year, therefore, that the underlying genius in the Greyfriars stories first came into full flower, as the following

review will attempt to expound. As usual, substitute stories will be ignored.

1922 - Plus ca change, plus c'est la meme chose *

The first coloured cover Magnet (apart from the old double numbers which had red in place of the orange) was No. 770 dated 11/11/22. This was the third of the famous Congo series which ran from Nos. 768-774. The Congo series was in fact the first of the long foreign holiday series which henceforth constituted a unique feature of the Magnet. The juniors had been abroad before this time, of course, but never had Charles Hamilton permitted himself the luxury of a seven week series. Bob Cherry's cousin, Captain Corkran, was off to the Congo in search of a cache of buried ivory, and he was accompanied by the Famous Five and Bunter, whose services were required to impress the natives by making an idol speak. After a series of adventures, not the least of which was when Bunter installed himself as chief of a native tribe, they all returned to Greyfriars accompanied by the faithful Pickle Jar, a native who had attached himself to them just as M'Pong had insisted on returning with Tom Merry to St. Jim's from the Congo in earlier days. The English winter was too much for Pickle Jar, and he soon returned to West Africa.

No. 776 entitled "The Ghost of Mauleverer Towers" was the last of the single number Christmas stories. It was also the last Christmas holiday which was not graced by the presence of Bunter. It was, however, the first holiday spent at Mauleverer Towers and the first introduction to Mauleverer's ne'er-do-well cousin Brian. There was a fine sense of atmosphere about this tale, and it must have brightened many homes over the festive season.

1923 - Hints of Greatness

The first contribution by Charles Hamilton in the New Year was a series in Nos. 779-784 (excluding No. 780 which

* The more things change, the more they are the same.

was by a substitute writer). Jim Lee was the ward of his unscrupulous cousin, Ulick Driver, who wanted Lee to become friendly with wealthy fellows in order that he could receive invitations to spend week-ends with them, and thus instruct Driver about the geography of their homes. In order to frustrate the plot, Lee refused to become friendly with anyone, and was soon dubbed the outcast of the school. There was a fine dramatic climax, but the plot moved rather slowly in the beginning, and was not capable of much development.

"Bunter's Latest" in No. 787 was a pretence of dumbness, which was inspired by the generosity of the Famous Five towards a dumb beggar. This was a story with many amusing moments, but it was with the series in Nos. 793-799 that the Magnet really came of age, the first tale bearing the pleasantly quaint title "How Levison Minor Came to Greyfriars". The St. Jim's part of the story was fully told in the Gem: it will suffice from the Magnet point of view to state that Levison minor arrived, fell ill, and was considered to be in a serious enough condition to warrant sending for his brother. It was a first-rate series, full of splendid characterisation: Levison major had to try to live down his unsavoury past, and was the victim of plots by Skinner, Ponsonby, and Gadsby. In between whiles he encountered trouble when trying to help Hazeldene out of one of his usual scrapes, but the Bounder was able to come to his aid and repay an earlier debt. This was the first really long, varied, and dramatic series to appear in the Magnet; it was in short the first of what may be called the modern type of series.

If the Levison series looked forward to some of the good things in the future, the next story by Charles Hamilton in No. 806 entitled "Lame Bunter" looked back to some of the good things in the past: Mrs. Kebble's marking-ink provided a bruise which deceived Mr. Quelch though not the school doctor. No. 807, "Mauleverer Means Business", was another of the old type of story, telling how he raised £500 to help a shell-shocked ex-serviceman. "A Split in the Co." in No. 808 also just failed to ring the

bell, perhaps because the theme required longer treatment than a single Magnet story could provide.

There was no fault to find, however, with the Pengarth series in Nos. 809-812, the tale of the summer holiday spent in Sir Jimmy Vivian's haunted house on the Cornish coast. Bunter featured prominently at the beginning of the series, but he did not spend the holiday with the juniors, as would have been the case in later years. Incidentally, the Magnet and Gem stories were nicely linked in these days. Levison, Cardew, and Clive had decided to take a walking tour in the West Country and did not join Tom Merry & Co. in their Thames boating trip: so Cardew was on hand to render assistance to Harry Wharton & Co. at Pengarth, but the three St. Jim's juniors fell in with the boating party later in the Gem series - very satisfying continuity.

There next followed an unusual event - two successive series about a temporary character, in this case Mick the Gipsy. He rendered Sir Hilton Popper a service, and realised his wish to go to school. The Greyfriars fellows were struck by his likeness to Aubrey Angel, and this was enough to make Angel the implacable enemy of the gipsy schoolboy; he even plotted with a gipsy to get him kidnapped. In the end it turned out that Mick was really Maurice Angel, Aubrey's brother, and Aubrey had the grace to repent. This first series was in Nos. 819-823; the second series was in Nos. 829-830, and constituted the Christmas holiday stories. Mick was no longer at Greyfriars, but returned temporarily to ask the Famous Five to spend Christmas with his brother and himself at Lochmuir, a castle in the Highlands, where they celebrated the festive season with only a phantom to keep them company. Charles Hamilton's one contribution to the Magnet between these two series was No. 826, featuring Bunter as "The Rebel of the Remove", a story which was subtitled "A Comedy of Errors in Twelve Acts. Now Showing - the Case of the Missing Cake!" But Bunter was, for once, innocent.

Fishy was up to his old tricks again in No. 841, trying to make money by organising a treasure hunt. In complete contrast was No. 843 entitled "Pen's Pal" which dealt with the curious friendship between Monty Newland the rich Jew and Dick Penfold the poor cobbler's son. Another pair of stories providing an interesting contrast in styles were Nos. 846 and 848. The first one, entitled "The Barring of Bunter", related the punishment which the form awarded him when he exceeded the limit in grub-raiding: this was a story which had some very amusing touches. The other tale was "Too Clever of Skinner", a most ingenious story in which he attempted to outwit not only a dubious stranger but also his partner in crime, Snoop. His cunning overreached itself, when it appeared that the sovereigns he had extorted from the stranger were counterfeit.

Out of the ordinary is the only description that can be given to the pair of stories in Nos. 854-855. Philip Blagden, who had been expelled from Greyfriars many years ago pleaded with Dr. Locke for the post of cricket-coach. In reality he wanted to continue his search for buried treasure in the vaults. The treasure was eventually found, but not by Blagden - he had gone to prison in the meantime, having been sentenced for a murderous attack on Mr. Quelch.

A fine trio of stories about a feud between the Bounder and Redwing in Nos. 858-860 was followed by the famous Sahara series in Nos. 862-869, one of the greatest of all foreign holiday series to appear within the pages of the Magnet. Ali ben Yusef, the Arab schoolboy, had become sheik of the tribe on the death of his father, and Major Cherry took some of the fellows out to Algeria with him to search for Ali when he was kidnapped. The culmination of their adventures was a remarkable sequence describing how Bob Cherry was tied to a camel which was then set loose in the desert, an epic which Charles Hamilton admits was inspired by "Mazeppa". It need not be added that everyone, including Billy Bunter and the Cliff House schoolgirls, returned safely in the end.

Wally Bunter's last appearance in the Magnet was in No. 873 entitled "Both Bunters". Billy masqueraded as Wally, ate an enormous meal at the expense of the Famous Five, and then disappeared, leaving Wally to be mistaken for himself. Bunter also featured extensively in the series in Nos. 874-877, as the following extract will show:-

"I have decided, therefore, to administer a flogging," said the Head. "It will take place before classes tomorrow morning. This punishment, I hope, will be a warning to you. You have been guilty of reckless prevarication, of disrespect to the prefects, and to your headmaster, and you have very nearly caused an innocent boy to be punished for your fault. This is very serious, Bunter."

"Is-is it, sir!"

"Do you not realised it is?" thundered the Head. Bunter jumped.

"Oh! Yes sir! Certainly! he gasped. "Awfully serious, sir! I-I was just thinking, sir, how - how frightfully serious it was."

Bunter, however, had an ingenious idea for avoiding a flogging:-

"If you please, sir," gasped Bunter, "c-c-couldn't you make it the sack -"

"Make it the sack!" repeated the Head dazedly.

"Yes, sir - make it the sack. You see I -"

"Boy! Do you mean that you would prefer to be expelled from the school?" thundered the Head.

"That's it, sir!" said Bunter eagerly. "Ever so much, sir!"

"Are you in your right senses, Bunter?"

"I-I hope so, sir."

"Are you impervious to a sense of shame - are you totally regardless of bringing disgrace upon your name and family?"

"Yes, sir! I mean" - Buntered stuttered - "I-I mean I'd rather go home, sir! You-you see, sir, I should have a few weeks at least before I was sent to another school - that would be so much to the good - "

"Bless my soul!" said the Head blankly.

"And then I might get into a better school than this - "

"A-a-a better school than Greyfriars! " gasped the Head. The mere suggestion that there existed a better school than Greyfriars seemed a good deal like profanity to Dr. Locke.

"That's it, sir. Very likely a much better one, with a headmaster who would know my value - "

"Upon my word! "

"So - if you don't mind, sir - I'd rather be bunked," said Bunter brightly. "Is it a go, sir? I-I mean, is it all right?"

After considerably more persistence, Bunter had his way, but he was disappointed to find his father had decided to send him, not to Eton or Harrow, but to work in an office, whereupon Bunter returned to Greyfriars under the delusion that he could take his place in the Remove again. A further disillusionment awaited him on this score, and he began camping in and around the school premises until a surprising turn of events enabled him to bluff the Head into forgiving him. This was a first rate series of its kind, with hardly a dull line in any chapter.

The series about Harry Wharton's fall from grace which followed in Nos. 879-888 was quite the most remarkable set of stories to appear in the Magnet during the period at present under review. The theme in itself was not a novel one, but hitherto it had never been accorded the dignity of a series, and never before had Charles Hamilton written a tragedy on so high a level.

According to dramatic critics, true tragedy consists not of a series of mishaps which befall a hero by chance, but of that hero's decline in fortune owing to the faults inherent in his own character. Harry Wharton was not a faultless character, and his tragedy began when he received at the very start of a football match a telegram from Colonel Wharton asking him to meet him at Ashford. He postponed his trip until after the match, and so missed

his uncle, to his bitter regret, for he subsequently learned that the Colonel had wished to say farewell before he left the country on a dangerous mission. Wharton confided this fact to the Co., and later blamed them when the story became generally known in the form and he was censured for not going to Ashford. It soon transpired that Bunter and Skinner had been responsible for the leakage, but the Co. resented being mistrusted by Wharton, whilst he was too touchy and worried about his uncle to apologise properly. The first story ended with a split in the Co.

It was in this series that Bunter's potentialities in helping along the plot were fully realised for the first time. Up to now he had been merely an ornament in the stories, but from this time onwards he was used to full effect. In No. 880 his tattling prevented a reconciliation, with the result that Wharton accompanied Vernon-Smith to Nice for Christmas, whilst in No. 881 Bunter destroyed a conciliatory telegram from Wharton to Nugent, with the result that Nugent was unaware of Wharton's change of heart. They met, quarrelled under this misapprehension, and fought at Stonehenge. Wharton then stayed with Jimmy Silver (a fact which readers of the contemporary Boys' Friend were able to verify), and it was now Nugent who refused the olive branch.

1925 - The Ascent of Everest

The first fortnight of the new term saw no improvement, with the result that in No. 883 Mr. Quelch deprived Wharton of the captaincy, but his edict was evaded the following week by Wharton's successful nomination of Mauleverer, who was quite content to do as his predecessor advised. Mauleverer ceased to act as a stalking-horse, however, after a match for which none of the Co. were picked ended in a colossal defeat, and No. 885 concluded with a fight between Wharton and Bob Cherry, the new captain. Left with no friends except Skinner and Co., Wharton soon found the downward path was easy, and the inevitable happened: he was sentenced to be expelled. No. 888 was the last, and finest, story in the series:

Dr. Locke, who was shrewder than Mr. Quelch, could see that it was obduracy and recklessness, not viciousness, which had caused Wharton's downfall, and he decided to give him a second chance, having become convinced that Wharton had seen the foolishness of his ways. Mr. Quelch was deeply incensed with the rebel of the Remove, and could only acquiesce in silent rage to the Head's suggestion. Wharton found that he had to win the respect of his friends and form-master anew - not an easy task, but one which it is not necessary to say was successfully completed.

It is not difficult, even at this lapse of time and with the knowledge that Charles Hamilton used this theme with even greater technical success at a later date, to envisage what a tremendous impact this series had upon the public at the time: anxious readers, who were not quite so accustomed to series as were a later generation, wrote in shoals to Fleetway House enquiring about the erring hero of the stories. At this late date it may be seen that the 1932 series rose to greater technical heights, but the earlier series had the merit of the fresh approach, the new idea, and also possessed an ending which was far more rational and believable, whereas the ending of the later series was somewhat artificial and contrived. But whatever the relative merits of each, it may be declared without hesitation that the first series signified a landmark in the history of the Magnet.

After this series, the return to the normal type of story seemed somewhat of an anti-climax. A tale of the latest craze (crossword-puzzles) in No. 893 was followed three weeks later by "Poor Old Bunter", a popular Magnet title. In this number we were presumably intended to sympathise with Bunter's plot to get leave from lessons ostensibly to attend the funeral of a relative, but actually to visit the theatre using Coker's ticket. With the aid of an onion, Bunter was able to produce some realistic tears, but somehow the plot misfired. "Bunter the Cavalier" in No. 897 showed that Mr. Bunter had forgotten the earlier Viscount Bunter episode. He was now laying claim to the lapsed de Bonterre baronetcy. Bunter discounted Skinner's

tale that the first baronet was a cheesemonger who had purchased the title, and strutted around in high fettle, reminding Mr. Quelch that he was only a commoner. In the end, it turned out that Mr. Bunter was no luckier than before. It was Vernon-Smith who was "Playing the Goat" in No. 899. He was dropped from the Remove eleven, and played for Temple's team, only to find that Temple had no intention of giving him a fair show in the cricket match. This was a good story, but much too compressed for a single number.

The main interest in the Magnet was usually the characters and the background, not the story, which was nothing more than a vehicle for displaying the first two items. In the Ragged Dick series in Nos. 906-909, however, the plot assumed more than the usual importance. Sir Henry Compton, a wealthy landowner, befriended a waif and sent him to Greyfriars as his grandson, as part of a plot to stop a wastrel cousin from inheriting the estates. How the tangle was sorted out in a really surprising finish was told in a taut and dramatic series which is as noteworthy as it is unique.

The most remarkable feature about the Bunter Court series in Nos. 910-917 is the way in which the author managed to compose the most comical series of all without betraying an iota of affection for the chief character, Billy Bunter. He was still a character to be laughed at, but not yet a character to be sympathised with. The misfortune that eventually befell him was regarded as his just deserts (as indeed it was); but there was little mercy tempered with the justice, and Bunter succeeded in being downright unpleasant from beginning to end. Yet this in no way detracted from the hilarity of this justly famous series, which is too well-known to need much description here. Suffice to say that, by a combination of trickery and co-incidence (Charles Hamilton has remarked that the beginning of this series was the most contrived plot he had ever been forced to employ), Bunter took a furnished tenancy of the enormous Combermere Lodge, had its name changed to Bunter Court, and invited the Famous Five to

spend the summer vacation with him. The whole place was run on tick from beginning to end, and Bunter borrowed from his guests to tip the servants when they became restive about their unpaid wages. Eventually, when the estate agent became suspicious, Bunter managed to lock him in the wine cellar, and Walsingham the butler soon joined him there. Finally D'Arcy discovered the prisoners, but Bunter succeeded in locking him in as well. The inevitable crash could be staved off no longer, and the last two numbers of the series were a description of Bunter on the run; they were in their way little masterpieces of characterisation, and perhaps even funnier than the scenes at Bunter Court. In the end Mauleverer was able to put matters right, and Bunter was saved from a nasty mess. This is a series to be savoured, and savoured again. It was not the Bunter of later years, but it was near enough to make little difference. Incidentally, the Schoolboys' Own reprint of this series in two monthly numbers was, like many similar reprints of Magnet stories of this era, very abridged.

A series centring around the Sixth Form always made a welcome change, since such series were usually on a high dramatic level - the Sixth did not lend itself to comedy. The series in Nos. 923-931, which constituted Charles Hamilton's last contribution to the Magnet in 1925, was no exception to this rule; it was a very fine story relating how Loder plotted the downfall of Wingate through his minor in the Third Form. Loder scored all along the line - Wingate resigned his captaincy and prefectship, he was edged out of football, and later given a prefects' beating. Loder realised his long-cherished ambition, and became captain of the school, but his tactlessness, his vicious temper, and his pride proved to be his undoing. He even descended to roguery during the Christmas holiday in order to keep Wingate away from Greyfriars next term, but his cunning recoiled upon his own head. This type of series was typical of the Magnet of this period: Charles Hamilton did not write a lot for the paper, but nearly everything he did write was first-class.

The first story by Charles Hamilton in the New Year was published at the end of February, in No. 942. This was entitled "The Mystery of the Head's Study", and was a little comedy relating how Bunter became locked in that august apartment, and used his ventriloquial powers to imitate the Head's voice. This was followed by a series in Nos. 945-948 starring Pedrillo, the acrobat at Senor Zorro's circus, who turned out to be Hobson's long-lost cousin Peter. The charm of this series lay in the prominent featuring of Hobson and Hoskins of the Shell.

Another short series followed in Nos. 956-957 which told the story of Billy Bunter's barring-in, whilst Nos. 958-959 dealt with a plot of Ponsonby's, and the way in which he was punished for his misdeeds. It may be noted that, from this time onwards, a story by a substitute writer became the exception rather than the rule: indeed, only 21 more substitute stories appeared in the Magnet in the remaining 14 years of its existence, and the switch of Charles Hamilton's main interest from the Gem to the Magnet dates from about June 1926.

The India series which followed in Magnets 960 to 970 has never achieved quite the same renown as the earlier Sahara series or the later China trip. It was perhaps not quite on the same level, though it had some fine moments. The first three weeks consisted of local attempts to kidnap Hurree Singh, and it was not until No. 963 that Colonel Wharton escorted his party out to Bhanipur, where we were privileged to meet Mook Mookerjee, the moonshee who had taught Hurree Singh his weird and wonderful English. After many adventures the treacherous uncle was dealt with, the nabob's kingdom assured, and everyone returned to England.

Two single stories came next: in No. 971 Coker was placed in a false position by Walker, whilst in No. 973 Hazeldene was "Asking for Trouble" again in a fine tale which also featured Wharton and Vernon-Smith at logger-heads.

The series of the year was undoubtedly the one about Bob Cherry in Nos. 975-979. Major Cherry was dissatisfied with his son's progress in class, and presented him with the ultimatum of winning the Head's Latin prize or leaving the school. Bob Cherry as the swot of the Remove was a novel role for him to play: he did his best to obey his father's wish, and succeeded in antagonising the whole form. This series was extremely popular in its day, and was rather in the nature of a minor variation on the Harry Wharton series of 1924/5, revealing as it did with a wealth of convincing detail how a series of misunderstandings, coupled with faults on both sides, could lead to a sustained rift between old friends.

An innovation was a series centring around Coker, which formed the theme for the Christmas series in Nos. 981-984. Coker had been invited to spend his holidays with Aunt Judy and her brother Uncle Henry, who were then living at Holly House, but Poynings, the secretary, had other ideas, and Coker was kidnapped. The Head stated that anyone who wished to search for Coker could remain at school over the holidays. Potter and Greene packed their bags and left hastily, whilst Reggie Coker (who subsequently disappeared from the stories) left it to the Famous Five, who duly rescued Horace and accompanied him to Holly House, where further adventures were in store for them.

1927 - Smithy's Year

There were many different series about odd newcomers to Greyfriars, but none was so successful as the series about Richard Dury, the Game Kid, in Magnets Nos. 985-990. Having rendered Dr. Locke a service, he was given a place in the Remove, and succeeded in antagonising the whole form, not because he ate with a knife or dropped his aitches but because he thought his exceptional strength should have commanded for him universal liking and respect. Yet he was not without his pride, and was deeply gratified at being taken up by Hilton of the Fifth, and performed many services for his patron until he

realised that his idol had feet of clay. Eventually he found that the call of the ring was too strong for him, and he left Greyfriars precipitately. This was a fine series, with plenty of action and drama as well as characterisation.

The Game Kid series was followed by a single story in No. 992 about a mysterious new master, and a series in Nos. 994-995 concerning Roger Quelch, the nephew of the Remove master. Roger was visiting Greyfriars to receive special tuition from his uncle, with a view to making the transfer from High Coombe, his old school, a permanency. But Roger had a propensity for practical joking, and in the end both uncle and nephew were equally pleased to be relieved of each other's presence.

The most famous single story about Billy Bunter is undoubtedly "Bunter's Brain-Storm" in No. 996. On the occasion of Roger's visit Mr. Quelch had ordered tuck for a tea party by telephone from Chunkley's stores, and Bunter was now seized of the brilliant idea of telephoning another order in his form-master's name. The order duly arrived, but Mr. Quelch returned unexpectedly early before Bunter had had time to remove the loot from his form-master's study. Nemesis soon caught up with the schemer, and matters were not improved when Bunter suggested to Mr. Quelch that he had been suffering from a brain-storm when he telephoned in his master's name. Mr. Quelch was, however, lenient, and sentenced Bunter to only thirty strokes of the cane. This classic story was the only one to be reprinted twice in the Schoolboys' Own Library.

The remainder of the year's stories were dominated by the inhabitants of Study No. 4, principally Vernon-Smith. The Dallas series in Nos. 997-1004 shewed the Bounder at his very worst. His father had befriended the orphan son of an old acquaintance, and had decided to send the boy, Paul Dallas, to Greyfriars. Overcome with groundless jealousy, the Bounder stopped at nothing to achieve the downfall of the boy whom he had mistakenly regarded as

the rival for his father's affections. Eventually, Dallas's own father turned up, and Dallas decided to leave Greyfriars and accompany his father to South America. When Vernon-Smith realised that Dallas had not been trying to supplant him, he had the grace to apologise, but it was too late to undo other ill deeds: he was still the outcast of the form, and Redwing had left Greyfriars, having become involved in Smithy's feud, and taunted by the Bounder with being at the school on the scholarship specially founded for him by Mr. Vernon-Smith (a reference to events in the far-off year of 1918). Despised and friendless, the outlook for Vernon-Smith was bleak indeed.

After a single story in No. 1005 about Bunter's attempts to redeem himself in the eyes of his form-fellows after having run away from Tubb of the Third, another first-class series about the Bounder followed in Nos. 1007-1009. Mr. Quelch was rapidly losing his patience with Vernon-Smith, and the series recounted how the rebel of the form succeeded in proving that the Head's guest, Captain Spencer, was in fact a criminal wanted by the police. The plot was well-knit, but especially readable are the passages in which Mr. Quelch is forced to admit that Vernon-Smith had performed a useful service in his activities which everyone else had hitherto believed to be baseless accusations.

A varied batch of single stories followed. It was Skinner and Bunter who were "Taking up Trotter" - under the delusion that he had come into a large fortune, whilst "Bolsover's Brother" in No. 1011 provided an interesting character-study of Mr. Wiggins, the absent-minded master of the Third Form. The complex nature of Vernon-Smith's character was further displayed in Nos. 1012 and 1013, entitled "The Bounder's Good Turn" and "Smithy's Way". His good deed was misunderstood, and he became at daggers drawn with Wharton, only to finish up with a change of heart after a surprising conclusion. "Smithy's Pal" in No. 1015 was, of course, Redwing who had returned from his voyage and was at

Hawkscliff once more, while "Brave Bunter" the following week way by way of being an intermission in the sequence of tales about Vernon-Smith: it was indeed an unusual story, shewing the Owl of the Remove in a new and not unwelcome role.

The most important feature of the South Seas series in Nos. 1017-1026 was the introduction of Soames who was destined to feature several times in the Magnet in coming years. At the commencement of this series Soames was Mr. Vernon-Smith's valet, and had been in his service for many years. The juniors were helping Tom Redwing search for Black Peter's treasure on a South Seas Island, and Mr. Vernon-Smith left them in the care of Soames, who soon showed himself in his true colours. After a number of hair-raising adventures the treasure was found, an escape effected, and Soames disappeared. Redwing was thus able to return to Greyfriars once again, this time on an independent footing. An epilogue to the series occurred in No. 1028 in which Skinner and Co. contrived to bag Study No. 1 before the return of the Famous Five, but Skinner's victory was short-lived.

The series which appeared in Nos. 1028-1034 (excepting No. 1030 which was by a substitute writer) was the last of the joint Magnet-Gem series: henceforth the two papers ceased to run in double harness and went their separate ways. The series in question was about Edgar Bright, who became known as the Toad of the Remove. The first number of the series dealt with the return of Redwing and the advent of Bright, who was admitted to the school only at the request of Sir Hilton Popper, whose lands were heavily mortgaged to Mr. Bright: the description of the baronet in the moneylender's toils was first-rate. The Levisons arrived at Greyfriars later in the series, Ernest attempting to discover the lost Will of a former Remove master which would save his father from ruin at the hands of Mr. Bright. He was of course successful in the end. The St. Jim's side of the story was

briefed, and was as usual dealt with concurrently in the Gem.

A single number shewing Loder in a disgraceful light (No. 1035) was followed by what must be the most peculiar of all Christmas series to appear in the Magnet, in Nos. 1036 and 1037. It began on a note of farce, with Bunter expecting a valuable Christmas present from his uncle George, which eventually turned out to be a shilling edition of Dickens' "Christmas Carol". The story then switched to an entirely different level: Bunter was impressed with the story, and began to turn benevolent like Scrooge. He fell in with a millionaire philanthropist, who invited him to spend Christmas at a Park Lane mansion, continuing to perform charitable deeds. The second story saw a similar change of tone: Bunter began to tire of philanthropy, and the millionaire was shewn to be nothing but a crank in the estimation of the poor, his servants, and his relatives. He was taken ill and left for the South of France, having given Bunter carte blanche. His relatives, however, had other ideas, and Bunter was promptly ejected from the mansion. After which Bunter gave up philanthropy, and became his old self once more.

1928 - Wider Still and Wider.....

The remainder of the Christmas holiday was spent at Wharton Lodge, where in No. 1038 Bunter befriended a gipsy waif and generously gave him several things belonging to other people. This was followed by a very readable series in Nos. 1039-1041 about a new Second-Form master who bore such a striking resemblance to an escaped convict that Billy Bunter denounced him in the confident expectation of receiving the promised £50 reward - an expectation which was unfortunately not fulfilled.

One of the best stories about Coker, written in sparkling vein, was No. 1042 entitled "The Boy Who Wouldn't be Caned". Coker was annoyed at his sentence and even more annoyed to learn that the rest of the Fifth resented it not because Coker mattered but because it impaired the

dignity of the form generally. Nor did Coker make matters any better by telling Mr. Prout that the whole thing was quite impossible as he himself would realise when he came into a more reasonable frame of mind. This type of story, more than any other, is essentially readable and re-readable.

Skinner's greatest achievement was undoubtedly the way in which he contrived to get Mr. Quelch dismissed from Greyfriars at the beginning of the High Oaks series in Nos. 1043-1049. Charles Hamilton was always especially convincing in his description of the masters' relations with one another, and No. 1043 is a veritable jewel, demonstrating how, step by step, the misunderstanding grew between Dr. Locke and Mr. Quelch until it culminated in the dismissal of the Remove master. The remainder of the series inevitably could not live up to this high level, but it is noteworthy for shewing Mauleverer in the lead, purchasing a large mansion called High Oaks to which the Remove decamped until the misunderstanding was cleared up and Mr. Quelch re-instated.

Henry Christopher Crum who featured in the Schoolboy Hypnotist series in Nos. 1050-1052 was definitely not a Greyfriars type, and gained admission to the school only because his father had hypnotised Dr. Locke. This was a series with some very funny incidents and a number of finely-drawn human touches, but somehow it did not add up to a coherent and satisfying whole - perhaps because the plot, as well as Crum, was not in the Greyfriars tradition. Much more delightful and traditional were the pair of stories in Nos. 1056 and 1057, concerning a stolen bike which was innocently purchased by Bunter (mainly on credit) and re-sold to Fisher T. Fish: in the end it turned out to belong to de Courcy of Highcliffe.

"You do not know India", said the Eurasian, da Costa. "You do not know the East. You do not know Hurree Singh." Wharton felt a great gulf opening in front of him, though even then he did not realise what was in store for him in the famous da Costa series in Nos. 1059-1067. The

new boy was the emissary of Captain Marker, the man who was to inherit £50,000 if Wharton were expelled from Greyfriars. At first da Costa felt he could not betray his new friend, but later after a misunderstanding he lost all inhibitions, and the series, which was set against a pleasant background of cricket, went on from climax to climax in its descriptions of da Costa's attempts to get Wharton expelled. This series was definitely one of the highlights of the period.

"Billy Bunter's Bookmaker" in No. 1068 was by way of being comic relief, and described how he lost the desire, acquired some weeks previously, to make a fortune by gambling. Billy Bunter was also the star character in the summer holiday series about Whiffles' circus in Nos. 1069-1076: the theme of this series was basically the same as that of the Bunter Court series - how a thoughtless impersonation lightly assumed could be sustained by Bunter for several weeks without regard to the inevitable reckoning. It began with Bunter dashing out of detention en route for the circus, hotly pursued by Mr. Quelch and Loder. Mr. Whiffles was bathing in the river having naturally left his wig and his false whiskers with his clothes on the bank. Bunter, just as naturally, donned them by way of disguise, and retained them when he discovered that all the circus hands mistook him for the proprietor. Bunter was in the wrong, of course, and he was quite unrepentent, but the reader was clearly invited to sympathise with him - a paradoxical achievement of which no ordinary writer would have been capable.

Roger Quelch had in his time earned the title of the Joker of the Remove, but compared to Christopher Clarence Carboy he was (in the words of the quotation beloved of Charles Hamilton) as moonlight unto sunlight, as water unto wine. The series in Nos. 1078-1082 went off to a flying start with Bunter meeting the new boy at the station and offering to stand him a feed at the Court-field bunshop, but unfortunately Bunter's calculations went awry, and he was left to pay the bill himself, with nothing but a bad halfpenny in his pocket. No. 1078 con-

cluded magnificently with an audacious attempt to jape Mr. Quelch, but the Remove master was more than equal to the occasion, and Carboy discovered that twisting the tail of the tiger was a risky business. A feud between Carboy and Wharton occupied the next two numbers, but high comedy returned with No. 1081, the finest story in the series. Bunter had found out that Carboy had had to leave his former school, Oldcroft, and Skinner was the leading spirit in the movement to send him to Coventry, until he found out - or thought that he had found out - that Carboy was the son of a multi-millionaire. How Skinner, Bunter, Fish & Co. tactfully dropped the sentence of Coventry and became friendly with Carboy, only to discover that Mr. Carboy was not a wealthy man at all, made a delightful episode inimitably described in Charles Hamilton's wittiest vein. Carboy's troubles ended the following week, and he returned to Oldcroft, but it must have been a long time before the Magnet readers of the day forgot this series, which deserves to be far more popular with collectors than some of the more renowned Magnet series.

Coker came to the fore again in Nos. 1084-1085 in which he threatened to punch Mr. Prout, and was then surprised to find himself expelled when this dire deed was done in the dark of his own study. Equally amusing was "The Form-Masters' Feud" between Mr. Quelch and Mr. Hacker in No. 1086, a distressing occurrence which was brought about by Bunter's ventriloquism. Mr. Quelch did not recognise the imitation of his own voice, and was cross with the Famous Five for having been deceived by Bunter: "Did you suppose, when this absurd boy spoke in that gruff, unpleasant, ridiculous voice, that it was I who spoke?" Wharton had to admit that he did suppose just that, and was rewarded with the comment that he was a very stupid boy.

The Phantom of the Cave series in Nos. 1087-1089 marked the first re-appearance of Soames, and constituted a somewhat delayed sequel to the South Seas series: Redwing was kidnapped by Soames in an attempt to obtain

IN A BOMBAY BUNGALOW! In a quiet residential quarter of the Indian city, in all appearances as quiet and orderly as a London suburb, desperate men are creeping—unseen, unheard—through the shadows, approaching the sleeping-quarters of Hurree Jamsset Ram Singh and his chums, to carry out their dastardly work!

Harry Wharton & Co in India!

A Magnificent, New Long Complete Story,
dealing with the adventures of Harry Wharton
& Co. abroad. By FRANK RICHARDS.

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

Bunter is Fed-Up!

"N O!"
"But—"
"No, ass!"
"I tell you—"
"Rate!"

Billy Bunter sat up in the long wicker chair, his fat face pink with indignation and the heat of Bombay, and fixed his little round eyes, through his big spectacles, upon Harry Wharton.

It was a withering glare, which ought to have withered the captain of the Greyfriars Remove upon the spot.

But it didn't.
In fact, Wharton did not seem to notice it at all. He turned his back on Bunter, and looked down from the bungalow veranda towards the shining waters of the bay.

Bob Cherry, sitting on the veranda rail, chuckled. Bob balanced himself on the rail, and looked every moment as if he would plunge over into the garden below. Johnny Bull and Frank Nugent sat in cane chairs and sipped lemon-squash through long straws. Hurree Jamsset Ram Singh fanned himself gently with a large green leaf.

The Famous Five were far from Greyfriars School now.
"Chuck it, Bunter, old fat bean!" said Bob Cherry. "We're all under orders here, you know."

"Oh, really, Cherry—"
"Don't talk so much, old man!" yawned Johnny Bull.
"The talkfulness of the esteemed Bunter is terrific," remarked Hurree Jamsset Ram Singh. "The restfulness of his excellent and untiring jaw would be the proper caper."

"Oh, really, Inky—"
"Looks ripping from here, doesn't it?" said Harry Wharton.
"Bombay's no end of a place!"

"I tell you—" hooted Bunter.
"Dry up!" said Nugent.

"I tell you I'm not sticking here. We've been hanging about this dashed bungalow all day!" said Billy Bunter indignantly. "I suppose we're going to have a look at Bombay before we leave!"

"We had a jolly old walk with the colonel," said Bob.
"You nearly got run over by a bullock-cart, and nearly run in by a Pathan policeman. Now give yourself a rest—especially your chin, old man. It needs it."

"I'm going out!" said Bunter.
"You're not, fathead!"

"I am!" roared Bunter indignantly.
Harry Wharton turned back from the contemplation of the bay and the white snails that dotted the shining waters. He fixed his eyes upon the indignant face of the Owl of the Remove.

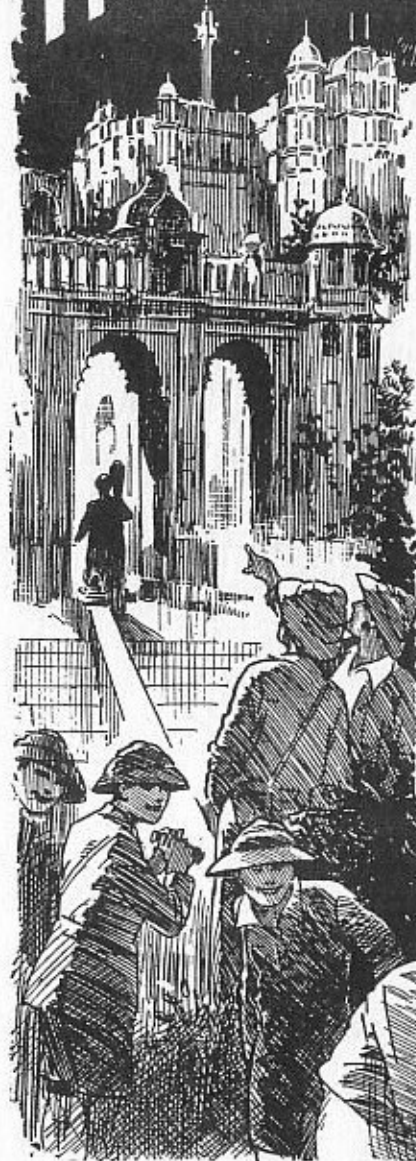
"Now, look here, Bunter—" he said quietly.
"Sha'n't!"

"Look here, you ass! My uncle left us here with a strict order not to go out of the bung," said Harry. "We're not going. Now shut up!"

Billy Bunter snorted indignantly.
"That's all very well for you fellows," he said. "You can't take care of yourselves. You think there's danger, and you're funky. I don't care for danger."

"You nearly got run over by a bullock-cart, and nearly run in by a Pathan policeman. Now give yourself a rest—especially your chin, old man. It needs it."

"I'm going out!" said Bunter.
"You're not, fathead!"



Black Peter's treasure by another method, and the juniors spent part of their Christmas holidays searching for Redwing and Vernon-Smith who had also fallen victim to the kidnapper. Poor Mr. Grimes was, as always, well off the scent, but the intervention of the Famous Five naturally proved decisive.

1929 Shall thy Bounds be Set

It was Loder who was "Under Bunter's Thumb" in No. 1090, but once the incriminating evidence was destroyed Bunter had reason to repent of his amateur roguery. This was the only single story Charles Hamilton wrote for the Spring Term, for Nos. 1092-1107 were occupied with the account of the legendary Hollywood series. Mr. Hiram K. Fish persuaded the Head to allow a party of boys to accompany him back to Hollywood in term time, stressing the educational value of the trip, though Mr. Fish's intention was to use their services for nothing in making a film of school life. Quite a number of unforeseen events occurred - including Bunter blackmailing his way into quite another type of film - but there can be little doubt that Magnet readers were not sorry when the time came to return to England.

"The Shylock of Greyfriars" in No. 1110 was, of course, Fisher T. Fish, who over-reached himself in a vain attempt to bring retribution on Bunter for tuck-raiding. Nos. 1111-1115 formed a rather loosely-written series about Loder: the first two numbers related his feud with Wingate, and the last three saw his enmity transferred to the Famous Five. The theme brings to mind the 1925 series about Loder, which was on a far higher dramatic level, though the later series was better from a technical point of view - a not infrequent state of affairs so far as repeated themes were concerned. The term time stories were rounded off by a pair in Nos. 1116 and 1117, the first of which was distinguished by a very striking cover picture: these two stories related how a banknote for £10, which belonged to Stewart of the Shell, was blown away in the wind, and how suspicion of having found it and

converted it fell upon Mark Linley.

The 1929 summer holiday series was split into two quite distinct sets of stories. The first part in Nos. 1118-1121 dealt with an ancient motor tricycle (nicknamed Methuselah) which Bob Cherry insisted would form an essential part of their walking tour through Surrey, Bucks, and Oxfordshire. This was Charles Hamilton at his brightest and best, and was undoubtedly the most endearing holiday series of all to appear in the Magnet during the 'twenties. In No. 1121 Bunter sold Methuselah to Gunner of Rookwood, and then departed in haste to escape the wrath of Bob Cherry. After this Bunter was missing for the remainder of the holidays (for the last time in the Magnet), and the second part of the series in Nos. 1122-1125 can be described only as grim. This constituted the well-known Ravenspur Grange series, which the editor requested be written on Edgar Wallace lines. It co-incided with a free gift and was undoubtedly part and parcel of the stunt, but there is no doubt that the Magnet was not the place for four murders in a row. The Ravenspur Grange series is immensely readable, but it did not need the Famous Five at all, and should never have appeared in the Magnet. At any rate, Charles Hamilton was not happy about the experiment, and it was never repeated.

"The Boy Without a Friend" was the title of the first of a series of three stories in Nos. 1126-1128, and accurately described Julian Devarney, whose pride had not diminished when his father was ruined by a financier whom Devarney thought was a Jew. His anti-Semitism extended itself to Monty Newland, but there was a surprise ending to the story which made Devarney appear somewhat ridiculous.

The indignity which had been so narrowly averted in No. 1042 was actually visited upon Coker in No. 1129 entitled "Coker Comes a Cropper": he was caned, and decided to don an impenetrable disguise and inflict the same punishment upon Mr. Prout, but the scheme went awry, like so

many of Coker's plots. This was followed by a very readable series in Nos. 1130-1131, in which Vernon-Smith played a notable part in exposing a new boy, Arthur Durance, who had come to Greyfriars under false colours.

"Skinner's Shady Scheme" in No. 1132 was to wreck Mr. Quelch's study and get Mark Linley blamed - another plot which misfired. Coker featured again in Nos. 1133-1134, in which he contrived to get the better of a blackmailer who was worrying Mr. Prout: these two numbers were aptly entitled "Blackmail" and "Fool's Luck" respectively.

Readers of a previous decade were re-introduced to Snoop's Canadian uncle, Mr. Huggins, in No. 1135. He had decided to remove his nephew from the school, but Snoop managed to avert the tragedy by displaying a little "Coward's Courage". The following week appeared a tale in a more humorous vein: the Famous Five and Peter Todd set out to avenge one of Bunter's wrongs at the hands of Walker. When their revenge had fallen upon Monsieur Charpentier by mistake they learned that Bunter had not been wronged at all, with the result that there were "Six in the Soup".

Billy Bunter at his most outrageous always makes amusing reading, but it is difficult to enthuse over "Bunter the Bandit" in No. 1137. In this story his head was turned by a cheap film, and he acted in a way which was somewhat out of character, in that his outrageousness was not prompted by some other event but seemed to be merely stupidity for its own sake. With this rather unsatisfactory story (which was far from being typical of the period), this review must close, since No. 1138 was the somewhat indirect commencement of the Courtfield Cracksman series which ran until No. 1151, well into the year 1930.

Conclusion

It is difficult to generalise about this period with its variety of styles and mannerisms. Perhaps the only safe conclusion which can be drawn is to state that, for the first time in its history, the Magnet had contained a large

number of outstanding stories, many of them of first-class quality. The best was yet to be, but even if the Magnet had never lived to see the nineteen-thirties it would still have been judged a success on the basis of the 'twenties alone. The readers of this period had indeed grown accustomed to a steadily-improving standard of story-telling, and the future was not destined to disappoint them.



Redwing stood watching the Bounder with a deeply knitted and anxious brow, as the Greytrials follow went pedalling down the street. At the corner Vernon-Smith turned his head and waved his hand, before disappearing from sight. (See Chapter B.)