

# RED MAGNET MAGIC

by

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The merit of the red Magnet is one of the most controversial topics in Hamiltonian lore. Collectors who were boys in this era will yield pride of place to no other period; younger members of the fraternity, on the other hand, point to the blue and white coloured Magnets as the only ones in which all characters were featured in turn, and each given a share of the limelight; while others - and they probably form the majority - claim that the finer plot construction of the late twenties and early thirties constitutes this the best period of all. The stories of the later periods have received their fair share of attention already, but the red Magnets seem to have been sadly neglected. Let us therefore take down from the shelf the early volumes of the Magnet and see what conclusions may be drawn from a perusal of these.

## 1908 - A New Venture

The first two issues are outstandingly good. The character of Harry Wharton is sketched more finely than any other hero of boys' stories had hitherto been drawn, and the account of his early tribulations still makes splendid reading. After No. 2, however, the standard declines. Charles Hamilton was undoubtedly keeping the Gem supplied with the best material at this time, and the shorter Magnet stories were given only secondary consideration. The intrusion of the aliens, Fritz Hoffman and Adolphe Meunier, in Nos. 14 and 17, for example, tends to be a little repetitious and seems to retard the development of the plot. Fortunately, Herr Rosenblaum's

Foreign Academy soon disappeared from the scene, though there are moments, like the cricket match in No. 19, when the author made excellent use of the aliens. Another charmingly inconsequential piece is No. 15 entitled "Wharton's Operatic Company".

The introduction of Marjorie Hazeldene into the stories is particularly interesting. She made her debut in No. 5, when she was kidnapped by gypsies on her way from Friar-dale station to Greyfriars. It was not, however, until her second visit in No. 14 that Bob Cherry displayed any special regard for her; the story ended thus:-

"It's been a jolly afternoon, hasn't it?" said Harry Wharton with a laugh.

"It has" said Bob Cherry, with a half sigh.

"I say, Hazeldene, when is your sister coming down again?"

Marjorie made frequent visits to Greyfriars after this, and even accompanied the juniors to Wharton Lodge for the day in No. 17. On this occasion, Bob Cherry shewed surprising resentment at a jocular reference to his features, which Nugent said were as untidy as his necktie. Later on, Bob confided in Harry Wharton thus:-

"I'm an ass, Harry. But - but what a ripping girl she is, isn't she?"

Harry Wharton looked astounded.

"She! Who?"

"Marjorie".

"I - I - but what do you mean? I know she's a ripping girl - one of the best, Bob - but that's nothing to grouse about, is it?"

"No, I suppose not".

Harry Wharton stared at him blankly. Something of the truth came into his mind, and he was strongly inclined to laugh; but the look in Bob Cherry's face banished that inclination. Bob's face was quite white.

"Bob, old chap, you're right; you are an ass" he said. "Why, you're younger than I am, and

I'm only fifteen. Bob, you are an ass, old chap."

"I know I am. Of course, its all rot" said Bob hastily; "only - only she doesn't seem to have eyes for a fellow at all; when you are around, at all events".

"My dear Bob -"

"Oh, don't say any more; I know I'm an ass! But not a word, for goodness' sake; if I were chipped about it, I should go mad" said Bob Cherry, in a low voice.

Harry Wharton advised him to forget it, but the advice does not seem to have been taken, though Bob was never in such depths of despair again. It is interesting to compare this with D'Arcy's love affairs in the Gem; Gussy was always made to look ridiculous, but Bob was presented to the readers in a more serious light, more like Figgins in his regard for Cousin Ethel. The other serious topic in 1908, apart from the vicissitudes of Mark Linley's early days was the career of Ernest Levison - the subject of a special article by Breeze Bentley\* a lily which requires no gilding here.

The early issues of the Magnet read like extracts from a diary, and one chapter often has no bearing on any other. There were no secondary plots in the stories, but a double number, like No. 43, would have two independent plots in the same story: in that issue, the tale of the Christmas concert runs parallel with the tale of Levison's spying on Wun Lung, and when the later chapters dealing with the second plot were reprinted in No. 43 of the Schoolboys' Own Library, it was not apparent that enormous cuts had been made in the text of the original story.

\* The Collectors Digest Annual 1952

The illustrations were always an integral part of the Magnet, and the first few months' drawings were well done by Hutton Mitchell. In practically every drawing of his, it is possible to distinguish each member of the Famous Four at a glance. He was succeeded at the end of the year by Arthur Clarke, who was undoubtedly a better artist, but unfortunately he tended to draw all his faces alike, and when Mr. Chapman took over he was obliged to copy this style. Hutton Mitchell's work had a number of defects: his perspective was faulty, and some of his early sketches of Billy Bunter were lacking in imagination. But his work was free from the heavy and laboured overtones that marred Clarke's first drawings, and the charm of the very early Magnet illustrations is still a pleasant feature of most 1908 issues.

#### 1909 - The Red Magnet Finds its Feet

For some curious reason, 1909 is the scarcest year of the red Magnets, and accordingly it will not be amiss if we linger over a number of the issues of this year. No. 48 entitled "The New Term at Greyfriars" is in a way one of the minor classics. Billy Bunter banked up the fire for his cooking operations so greatly in study No. 1 that he set the chimney on fire, and eventually the walls of all the studies in the Remove passage were set alight. Harry Wharton saved Molly Locke, the Head's younger daughter, from the blaze, but strangely enough this incident occurs in the middle of the story, leaving the rest rather an anticlimax.

The following week saw the arrival of Ionides, the Greek dandy, who was appointed a prefect and later deposed by the Head all within a few days of his coming. In No. 59 he gate-crashed at a fancy dress ball held at Cliff House to celebrate the opening of that academy, but to his mortification Miss Primrose mistook him for a waiter.

A story with quite an adult flavour to it is No. 50 - "Harry Wharton's Campaign". The Head's youngest sister, Miss Locke, who was staying at the school for a while, had become a suffragette. In what must have been the most

amusing and interesting debate in the annals of the Sixth Form Society, she made a cogent and reasoned plea for votes for women. The Head reluctantly allowed her to address the school on the same topic, but the fallacy of some of her arguments were exposed when Temple demanded votes for schoolboys. Charles Hamilton presented the arguments for and against women's suffrage with fairness, but it would be interesting to know exactly what he thought himself at that time about this once stirring topic.

The stories at this time continued to be episodic in character, and most of them devoted at least one chapter to Billy Bunter's progress in ventriloquism. His main interest, however, was his work for the Patriotic Home Work Association. Having purchased (with borrowed money) an expensive box of paints from this worthy body, he proceeded to colour postcards for them, and was constantly in expectation of earning £3 a week, which, like his Postal Order, seemed never to materialise. In No. 60, he took Harry Wharton to see someone who was actually receiving this amount from the Association, but Wharton correctly divined that this was a sprat to catch a mackerel. In No. 63, Bunter picked up Wingate's five-pound note in an envelope in the quad, and persuaded himself that this was his long-awaited remittance.

The development in Bunter's character was beginning to take a distinctly unpleasant tone, and in No. 53 he used his ventriloquial skill to make Harry Wharton appear to bid £110 for a wrecked schooner. Fortunately Colonel Wharton agreed to give him an advance from the money that was to be his when he came of age, and the sailor cadet corps was founded. In No. 62, they were shipwrecked on Seagull Island with Marjorie and Clara, and when they were rescued some days later the Head forbade any future excursions.

A dramatic tale of outstanding quality for this period was No. 58 - "Cut by the Form". Bulstrode organised a party to tar and feather Mark Linley. The plot went awry, but it came to the ears of Mr. Quelch from Snoop, and Bulstrode was flogged. Snoop said Linley had sneaked and

the Lancashire junior was sent to Coventry. It was not until Marjorie Hazeldene intervened that the matter was put right.

Marjorie was, from the first, presented as a thoughtful and intelligent schoolgirl, but she was made to act somewhat out of character in No. 60 - "The Greyfriars Cricketers", when Cliff House challenged the Remove to a match. This contest proved even more farcical than the match against the aliens in No. 19; the author was perhaps allowing his keen sense of fun to run away with him. Certainly Marjorie was never presented in a ridiculous aspect again.

Another story with two plots was "Stony Broke" in No. 66. Billy Bunter had invited Fatty Wynn over for a feed, and then left it to Harry Wharton to find the wherewithal. On the same day, Linley's sister Mabel arrived to look around Greyfriars, and was ragged by Bulstrode and Co. Compared with the well-knit plots the author was providing for the Gem at this time, it is evident that the Magnet was still of only secondary importance. Even so, a number of Greyfriars stories of merit and charm did appear in 1909, like No. 78 - "Harry Wharton's Bank Holiday". They met D'Arcy and his brother in London, and went to the Crystal Palace for the day. The story was simply a string of unconnected incidents, but had it not been so, we should never have had the pleasure of reading how Gussy went into a barber's shop and had a shave on that memorable occasion.

Penny Double Numbers were plentiful at this time, and No. 95 - "Billy Bunter's Christmas Dream" - is one of the famous ones. Like many others, it has two separate plots: one, the story of Monsieur Charpentier's enemy Duprez, and the other, the story of how Bunter forced Wharton to provide the cash for a pudding which he ate in its entirety, despite the fact that it was promised as a reward to some Removites who were doing lines for him. The following week at Wharton Lodge, a Christmas Pudding Competition was organised at Bunter's instigation. He poured blacking over his opponents' mixtures, but Bob Cherry by way of

revenge mixed some cement in Bunter's, and the booby prize - a monkey on a stick - was awarded to the fat Owl.

### 1910 - The Year of Promise

The third year of the Magnet was one of great promise, as the Double Number "Nugent Minor" in No. 100 well shews. The arrival of Nugent's spoilt younger brother, and the vicissitudes of his first few days in the school read as well now as they did 52 years ago. For the first time, a Double Number related a single coherent story, instead of two separate ones. The culmination of Nugent Minor's early career - throwing a stone at Wingate, and the sequel - the sentence of expulsion later commuted to a flogging, seemed to have brought Dicky Nugent to his senses for a while, but he always remained a trouble to his major in the Remove.

The next issue shewed, however, that the Magnet still received less of the author's time than the Gem, for the climax of the story - Ionides' accusation that Wharton was a thief - came in the middle of the tale instead of at the end. The fault was remedied six weeks later, in "The Cad of the Sixth" which had a really splendid climax at the end of the story. On this occasion Carberry inveigled Nugent Minor to the Waterside Inn with Loder and Carne. Bunter ventriloquised outside the window, making them think that the Head had seen them. Carberry went straight back to Dr. Locke and told him that he had entered the inn only in pursuit of Nugent. The outcome of all this was the expulsion of Carberry, a notable end to another remarkably good early Magnet story.

No. 119 saw the advent of a really famous character - Herbert Tudor Vernon-Smith. Smithy arrived at the school the worse for drink, but like Lumley-Lumley of St. Jim's, he could not be expelled because his father had a hold over the Head. The Bounder soon began to encourage Hazeldene in his bad ways, and, to remove Marjorie's brother from his bad influence, Harry Wharton and Co. took Hazeldene to Lausanne with them for a fortnight in Nos. 123 and 124. Vernon-Smith also took a trip to Switzerland, and

before long he and Hazeldene were gambling in the Kursaal; Hazeldene with stolen money. This somewhat loosely-written travel story turned itself in the end into a fine dramatic tale. Incidentally, it is curious to note that No. 79 of the Schoolboys' Own Library, which is a reprint of these two Magnet stories, contains a few passages written by Charles Hamilton which were for some reason omitted from Magnet No. 124.

The following week saw another arrival - Alonzo Theophilus Todd. There is a quaint charm which surrounds this character, but it seems that he was not greatly liked by the readers, for Alonzo stayed at Greyfriars as a regular pupil for only five years. Earnest, tactless, long-winded, always quoting the precepts of Uncle Benjamin to an unappreciative audience, he was perhaps a little too prim and old-fashioned for the readers. It is impossible not to laugh at many of his howlers, especially when, on the first day, he took Skinner's advice and asked Mr. Quelch if his father was out of prison yet; again, seven weeks later, he attempted to foster a romance between Miss Primrose and Mr. Quelch, which ended in that lady swooning in the arms of the Remove master just before the Head appeared. It was all done from the best of motives, but it all ended in the same unfortunate manner. Poor Alonzo!

It was about this time that the author began to develop the power of writing about arguments in a convincing manner. This was especially noticeable in No. 129 in which Bulstrode appealed to the Head against lines set by Mr. Quelch; on the face of things, the Remove master had acted hastily, but the wise questioning of Dr. Locke eventually elicited the true facts. It was long past red Magnet days, however, before Charles Hamilton reached the peak of proficiency in describing such battles of words.

One of the red Magnet classics was No. 145 - "Coker's Catch". Coker was the oldest fellow in the Shell, and his Aunt Judy arrived at Greyfriars to bludgeon the Head into giving him his remove into the Fifth. Dr. Locke acted on the principle that Coker might just as well be a fool in the

Fifth as a fool in the Shell, but Aunt Judy went away convinced that the Head had begun to realise what a genius her nephew was.

Hazeldene was (once again) not on friendly terms with Harry Wharton at this time, and so in No. 147 - "The Schoolboy Traitor" - he agreed to fall in with Ponsonby's plans to administer a drug in Wharton's coffee before the match, so that Highcliffe would have an easy victory for a change (Ponsonby was junior captain at that time - Courtenay did not arrive at Highcliffe until 1915). Solly Lazarus overheard the plot and put Wharton on his guard. As usual, Hazeldene escaped punishment, in order that Marjorie should not be worried.

The following week - "Bunter's Bust-up" - was another Double Number, with Bunter eating doctored Christmas pudding and writing to a charitable organisation to raise cash for another feed. Considered as a Double Number, the story is inferior to "Nugent Minor" at the beginning of the year.

Fisher T. Fish arrived in No. 150. From the start he was never attractive, being boastful and unpleasant early on, and growing positively avaricious after a while. The Famous Four put up with him sufficiently to be able to bear his company at Wharton Lodge over the Christmas holiday that season, but this was a rare occasion.

The following issue saw the arrival of Johnny Bull. He is perhaps the least interesting member of the Co., possibly because one always knows in advance exactly how he will react; dependability can be a little dull at times. In the early days, of course, he was not a member of the Co. The first intimation the Remove had of his presence was an unearthly wailing which turned out to be his concertina being played. This unpopular instrument was destined to have a short life.

#### 1911 - The Year of Fulfilment

Johnny Bull was featured fairly prominently in 1911. In

No. 152 he was obliged to play the concertina in the grounds of Wharton Lodge at night, so greatly did the others object to hearing it, and the midnight moanings convinced everyone that the grounds were haunted. In No. 154 his Aunt Tabitha gave him £500 to see if he could be trusted to spend the money without dissipation, and so earn the right to be her heir. In No. 156 his cousin Lucas Crane attempted unsuccessfully to lead him into bad ways in order to get him disinherited, but the scheme came to naught. These stories were out of the ordinary, certainly, but not particularly striking for any other reason.

How Bunter dived into an empty swimming-bath and lost his memory, becoming quite a tolerable fellow for a while, was told in No. 160 - "Poor Old Bunter". Johnny Bull played his concertina to the invalid, who promptly threw it on the fire. The Removites were very kind to Bunter during his illness, and accordingly he attempted to convince them three weeks later that he had had a relapse. Alonzo Todd borrowed Gosling's coke-hammer and obligingly offered to cure Bunter by giving him another blow on the head. Bunter succeeded in convincing nobody except Marjorie Hazeldene and Alonzo Todd, and even Alonzo was brutally frank to Bunter at times, as is evidenced by this amusing excerpt from No. 163:-

"Do I understand you to make the extraordinary assertion that Wharton is jealous of you on account of your good looks?"

"Yes, ass".

"But your statement is amazing, my dear Bunter. You see, it has no foundation. Wharton is not the kind of fellow to be jealous of another fellow's good looks. Besides, you have no good looks, you know, my dear Bunter".

"Eh?"

"You are a very plain boy, not to say ugly" went on the candid duffer of Greyfriars.

"You do not mind my speaking plainly, do you? My Uncle Benjamin always impressed upon me

never to flatter. Of course, a fellow cannot help his looks, though you could certainly improve your appearance by eating less, sleeping less, taking more exercise, and cultivating a loftier kind of thought. Good meditations lend a very agreeable expression to the countenance my dear Bunter."

"You - you ass!"

"Your thoughts are continually running upon eating and drinking and bodily comfort" went on Todd. "That is bound to lead to the gross expression of countenance which renders your face so unpleasant to look upon, my dear Bunter."

Uncle Benjamin had always advised Alonzo never to fail to put in a word in season, and the above extract is typical of Alonzo in red Magnet days.

Dr. Locke's family were rarely, if ever, featured after the early stories, though they enjoyed a good share of the limelight in their time. In "Wingate's Chum" (No. 162) Mademoiselle Rosina of the circus turned out to be none other than Miss Rosie Locke who had been kidnapped years before, and five weeks later she was kidnapped once again in "The Prisoner of the Priory". This was an expensive business for Dr. Locke, and he had borrowed money from Mr. Vernon-Smith to pay for the search.

In May 1911 began what may be called the heyday of the red Magnet. First class stories, week by week, came pouring from the pen of Charles Hamilton. It is difficult to pick and choose from such a distinguished collection. There was Uncle Benjamin himself at Greyfriars in No. 169, remarking that he was sure Alonzo was a reckless young rascal, always getting into scrapes, but he thought none the worse of him for that. There was Bulstrode becoming form captain again in No. 170 (the beginning of a set of exceptionally fine stories about this character), and a new headmaster, Mr. Lothrop, who caused a rebellion during his fortnight's stay in Nos. 171 and 172. There was a spiteful new boy called Heath in Nos. 173 and 174 who so cleverly

engineered Bob Cherry's expulsion that only Linley and Wharton remained true to their chum. There was Harry Wharton as "The King's Guest" in No. 175, the Coronation number, and there was Bulstrode, still form captain, being "Barred by his People" in No. 177, owing to a misunderstanding caused by Bunter. There was the unusual episode of Bulstrode minor in No. 178, a wild young lad who died at the school after a reckless escapade, upon which Bulstrode left the school for a while and Harry Wharton became captain again. There was "Bob Cherry in Search of His Father" in No. 179, while Mark Linley was striving desperately for the Founder's Scholarship in No. 180, and nearly robbed of it by the vindictive intervention of the Bounder. Vernon-Smith celebrated his own success somewhat prematurely by a midnight party outside the school, and he was expelled. In No. 181 Bob Cherry saved Mr. Vernon-Smith's car from a crash, and when offered a reward demanded that the Head's I.O.U. be cancelled. The Head was saved from the ruin the millionaire had threatened if his son were expelled and the Bounder was allowed to return to the school. And so ended a truly amazing sequence of first rate stories.

1911 saw the advent of a number of permanent residents in the Greyfriars Remove. Bolsover, the bully, arrived in No. 182 and a fortnight later came Lord Mauleverer, good natured, but easily led into wrongdoing in those earlier numbers - quite different to what he subsequently became in the thirties. Penfold, the son of the local cobbler, arrived in No. 194 and he was subjected to even more snobbish treatment than Mark Linley had been.

The finest story of the year - dare one say the finest red Magnet story of all? - was undoubtedly No. 186 - "The Only Way". Rupert Valence, the Hazeldene of the Sixth Form, was caught poaching by Sir Hilton Popper, and he gave Courtney's name to the keeper who caught him. Sir Hilton sent Courtney a note telling him to come and take a flogging or be brought before a magistrate. Without knowing what the trouble was about, Valence's sister Vi, asked Courtney to help her brother and Courtney went to

Hilton Hall in Valence's place. The story has perhaps dated a little, and for this reason was never reprinted (another reason was the fact that Pentelow later thoughtlessly wrote a story removing the principal characters from the school - see Magnet No. 520 entitled "A Very Gallant Gentleman"). But there is no denying the high dramatic quality of the story in No. 186 and the intrinsic merit of its theme.

A temporary master with a difference was Mr. Lang, who appeared in No. 189 to take Mr. Quelch's place for a while. Temporary masters were usually depicted as tyrants or freaks - there was little point in having them as a rule unless they were one or the other - but the character of Mr. Lang was drawn as carefully as that of a permanent resident. Young, keen on classics, officious, well-meaning but unfortunate in his manner, he became on bad terms with the Remove by a series of unfortunate incidents into which he was led by the defects of his character. His attitude to games, which he regarded as childish, set the seal on the misunderstanding. This is a red Magnet story for adults to relish, one in which Charles Hamilton took great pains to give us a character study of an unusual type.

Most Magnet collectors know that the Remove had obtained exemption from fagging, but probably few can have come across the interesting story in which this actually came about - No. 190 entitled "The Outlaws of the School". We are told that the Head had abolished fagging for the Upper Fourth as a preliminary to abolishing the institution altogether. Loder's ill-treatment of a fag precipitated the strike of the Remove, but they received scant sympathy from the rest of the school, the higher forms thinking them presumptuous and the lower forms alarmed because they foresaw that they would have to do more fagging if the Removites were exempted. The story contains a particularly interesting scene in which Wingate caned the Remove for disobedience, in spite of Mr. Quelch's order that he should stop. When Mr. Quelch appeared a second time, Wingate bandied words with him - the only time on record that the captain of the school was impudent to a master. The point

was well made that, in attempting to suppress defiance, Wingate was defiant himself, and eventually he came to agree with the Remove that their campaign should succeed.

Loder was the cause of another disturbance in No. 196 when he was attacked in the dark by Skinner. Blame fell upon Harry Wharton, who was later cleared owing to Frank Nugent's efforts. Skinner was expelled and no more was heard of him for two years.

The Christmas Double Number was "Wingate's Folly" in No. 200, in which he fell in love with a pantomime actress. The plot was well integrated and there were no loose ends, but it is not the sort of story to appeal to younger collectors who were brought up on the style of later issues. It was, however, by no means out of place in red Magnet days, and as a story of a young man in love is a work of some merit.

#### 1912 - On the Crest of the Wave

1912 was a year of consistently good stories rather than a year containing a few outstanding ones. Peter Todd made a fleeting appearance in "The Duffer's Double" in No. 205 - much to the surprise of the Removites - and Bolsover minor was rescued from the London slums in No. 206 without any rejoicing on the part of Bolsover major. A pair of stories in Nos. 217 and 218 related how the clue to treasure was acquired, and how it was found on the slopes of Mount Vesuvius.

A fine pair of stories appeared in Nos. 221 and 224, again featuring Courtney and Valence. There was another poaching expedition which again came to grief, and this time Valence was expelled. In the second story he returned to the school disguised as a new boy, hoping to win the respect of the Head anew. By a series of unfortunate happenings he became mixed up with Banks, the bookmaker, but all came right in the end and he was allowed to stay. It would be false to assert that stories centring round the Sixth Form were frequent, but there is no doubt that the Wingate-Courtney-Valence relationship was a good basis for

writing such stories, and Pentelow cannot be condemned sufficiently for destroying it for the sake of writing a piece of cheap and sentimental heroism. Faulkner, Sykes, Gwynne and North are merely names to Magnet collectors, but Courtney and Valence were well-drawn characters which the Magnet ought never to have lost.

The difference between the Magnet and Gem stories was not so great in these early days, as is evidenced by No. 223 - "Frank Nugent's Great Wheeze". The Fifth Form refused to play the Remove at cricket so the Removites disguised themselves as a French team and did not reveal their true identities until after they had won the match - shades of Gordon Gay indeed!

Charles Hamilton gives us a good impression of what life in the slums was like in those times; in Nos. 228 Bolsover minor, weary of the taunts and jibes of his elder brother, ran away from Greyfriars back to the slums he had come from. Bolsover major had the grace to be sorry when his younger brother was discovered again, very ill, but his sorrow was short lived.

Typical of red Magnet stories was the day excursion from the school or home. In No. 234 Lord Mauleverer took a party to Blackpool. The most amazing episode was undoubtedly Monsieur Charpentier dressed up as a pierrot and singing saucy songs on the promenade. Poor Mossoo was then, as always, short of cash.

Charles Hamilton often found the idea for a story in reading items in the daily papers. The mystery of the Marie Celeste, that strange vessel which was found floating in the Atlantic without a soul on board, but otherwise in perfect order, undoubtedly inspired the story of "The Hidden Horror" in No. 239. In this tale, the Aspasia floated into Pegg Bay and ran ashore. The ship was empty and the Co. intended to claim the salvage, but they had many unpleasant experiences before the mystery was solved.

Coker's younger brother arrived in No. 241 and was put into the Sixth Form, much to Coker's indignation, but even



a protest to the Head did not succeed in sparing Horace this indignity. The following week Fishy was in the lime-light again with his Insurance Company. There was a mysterious outbreak of throwing stones through study windows, and after that many juniors insured against a repetition of this. Strangely enough, those who didn't insure soon had their windows broken again. The Bounder was one of those who refused to join in the scheme, but he paid Fishy off in his own coin by smashing the windows of all those who had insured themselves, and the Insurance Company soon went bankrupt after paying out a record number of claims.

The year ended in a grand manner with the famous series in Nos. 247 to 254. The first three stories explain how Vernon-Smith became on more than usually bad terms with the Famous Five and Mark Linley, and the last five tales show how he set about getting all of them expelled. When it came to Bob Cherry's turn in the last number, he refused to go, and he barricaded out with Inky in the old tower. Of course, all came right in the end and even the Bounder was allowed to stay. But the last number of the series must have been a great favourite with the readers, for the advertisement columns in the Magnet for years afterwards contained requests for copies of "Bob Cherry's Barring-Out".

### 1913 - The Flag Still Flies High

1913 saw the arrival of a number of new boys - Richard Rake in No. 258 and Oliver Kipps, the conjurer, in No. 268, but neither was destined to play a large part on the Greyfriars stage. One with more potentialities was Jack Wingate in No. 265. He arrived, rather like Nugent minor, a spoilt child who expected everything to go right with him. Wingate minor, however, was even worse in that respect in that he expected his major to ensure that he had everything he wanted. Loder favoured him ostentatiously in order to aggravate the situation, and the fags would have nothing to do with him. Four weeks later he was sent to Coventry, only Bolsover minor standing by him, but he eventually

managed to live down his reputation as a sneak, though he always remained a weak-willed sort of character.

Another newcomer was one who always remained in the forefront - Peter Todd, the amateur lawyer. In No. 271 - "The Impossible Four" - he came to Greyfriars to stay, attempting to make study No. 7 the leaders of the Remove, rather like Redfern and Co. who called themselves the New Firm at St. Jim's. Peter's task was hopeless from the first, but he never despaired of making a man of Bunter.

Bob Cherry was also in the forefront at this time, in two stories featuring his ne'er-do-well cousin Paul Tyrell. In No. 266, Tyrell arrived as a games coach, seeking to rob the school, and in No. 270 he re-appeared, robbed Mauly of a considerable sum and vanished to Monte Carlo to attempt to win a fortune at roulette (the similarity to the episode in the Gem featuring Figgins' cousin, Archie Hilton, is striking). As always, the description of the game of roulette and the gamblers around the table is remarkably good.

Charles Hamilton must have begun to realise that it was a waste to expel well-drawn characters. At any rate, Levison was resuscitated in the Gem, and in Magnet No. 274 Skinner was allowed to return to Greyfriars. Skinner was tired of office work, and, by shamming illness on a visit to the school, managed to gain the Head's sympathy and a pardon for his previous wrongdoings. The return of Skinner was no gain for the Remove, but it was a valuable contribution to many Magnet stories in the future.

1913 was undoubtedly Fishy's year. In No. 272 he set up the Twentieth Century New York Loan Office, lending money at  $2\frac{1}{2}\%$  interest a day. Unfortunately none of his clients would pay, and when the affair came to the ears of Dr. Locke it was only because the Head considered him more stupid than wicked that he was not expelled. In No. 284 he found his pawnshop was a failure (Bunter would bring articles belonging to others, and the real owners then retrieved them by force without payment). In No. 290 when Mrs. Mible had to close her shop for a while, he opened one of his own -

at exorbitant rates - but it was soon put out of business when his swindled customers decided to run one in competition. In No. 302 he was shadowing Mossoo, convinced he was the local cracksman, but even Fishy had to admit he was barking up the wrong tree when Monsieur Charpentier captured the real villain. Fisher T. Fish is not everyone's favourite, but there is no doubt that Charles Hamilton exercised a good deal of ingenuity in writing about this character.

There were a number of unusual tales in 1913. Harry Wharton and Bob Cherry were involved in mutiny on the Spindrift in No. 267; Johnny Bull's cousin Fluffy put in an appearance in No. 283 - "The Sandow Girl at Greyfriars" - and Bunter found himself in an iron grip after he had asked for a kiss; the Remove were playing football by moonlight in No. 293 after they had been forbidden to play for a time by Mr. Quelch; and Fishy and Harry Wharton and Co. were busying themselves with the Greyfriars Herald in Nos. 296 and 306.

More in the usual run of things, however, were Nos. 297 and 298, with Vernon-Smith breaking detention to play in a match at St. Jim's, and Mr. Quelch chasing over for him, only to be led astray by a trick on the part of Levison. Another familiar sort of story was "The Scapegoat" in No. 303, with Hazeldene in trouble again with a bookmaker, and Harry Wharton receiving no thanks for getting him out of it.

#### 1914 - Coming Events Cast Their Shadow Before

In the first six years of the Magnet there were only seven stories by substitute writers. There were as many as this in 1914 alone, and every year up to 1926 was to see the number increase. The coming of the war, and the uncertainty of the author's movements were to leave their mark on the Magnet. No. 311 revolved around the unpleasant Mr. Mobbs of Highcliffe. After getting the Remove caned as a result of one of his complaints, he was waylaid and snowballed on the way back. Of course, Skinner had to put a stone in one of his snowballs, and the next day Mr. Mobbs was back again

with another complaint. It was a story without a twist in the tail, but nevertheless provided some good characterisation.

Wibley arrived in No. 322, mistaking a threatening scene in the Remove Dramatic Society's rehearsal for the real thing. He was thrown out when he suggested later that he could teach them a thing or two, but the time soon came when the Remove were willing to admit that he was the authority on the subject of dramatics, and he was the mainspring of many a plot in future Magnets.

Mr. Lascelles came into the stories in No. 324. He was Larry Lynx, a professional boxer, but was, like Mr. Dalton at Rookwood, allowed to remain at the school after he had rendered the Head a service. Some weeks later he was kidnapped by old friends who wanted him to return to his old life, but he was rescued by the Remove. This theme was repeated, after a decent interval of nineteen years, in 1933. Another repeated theme was that in No. 332, when the Removites had a day trip to Boulogne, and a certain member of the party stole money to gamble at the casino. After thirty-nine years, a similar tale appeared in "Billy Bunter's Beanfeast". Repetition there may be in the Greyfriars stories, but it can be spotted only by the inveterate collectors.

A new boy with a difference was Sir Harry Beauclerc in No. 329. Bunter claimed him as a relation until he found that Sir Harry spoke without sounding his aspirates. It transpired that he had taken the place of the real Sir Harry who wanted to go to Highcliffe. The next week the genuine baronet antagonised the whole of the Remove, thinking that money could buy him everything he wanted, and when this failed he resorted to scheming, for which he was expelled. Sir Harry was quite right to have preferred Highcliffe; Mr. Mobbs would have toadied to him to his heart's content.

Wally Bunter changed places with cousin Billy in No. 333 and pleasantly surprised the Removites. The story ended "Never again was Greyfriars likely to ring to the shout of 'Bravo Bunter!' ". Not again until 1919, at any rate, when

they made an exchange lasting several weeks.

Smithy's reform was nearly nullified in No. 334, in which Jerry Hawke was released from prison and attempted to blackmail Smithy with an old I.O.U. Desperate remedies were needed and a neat little kidnapping solved the difficulty. There were more desperate remedies needed four weeks later when Temple arranged for the Remove eleven to be kidnapped in a small coach, so that his eleven could then play the cricket fixture with St. Jim's. In a gruesome scene, Smithy dug his penknife into the chauffeur's neck as the only means of getting him to stop the coach.

The Summer Double Number in Magnet 340 is not really a red Magnet at all since it had a coloured cover, not unlike the Gems of the thirties. It was a description of a series of cricket matches played by Harry Wharton's eleven during the holidays. It was the last of the rambling, inconsequential sort of Double Number, but was nonetheless a pleasant and interesting account of how the juniors spent the last pre-war summer. The war had in fact broken out before this number appeared, but it did not take the Magnet long to catch up with events. In No. 352 Peter Todd and Vernon-Smith tried to make their way to Switzerland to rescue Alonzo Todd and Uncle Benjamin, who were stranded without funds and were contemplating returning through Germany. In this grim story the two juniors ran into some fighting in France and were sentenced to be shot as spies by the advancing German troops. Some weeks later, the editorial columns stated that war stories were definitely out. It would seem that this episode was too gruesome for most readers.

#### 1915 - Farewell to the Red Magnet

Billy Bunter appeared in a new light in No. 364 when he saved Mr. Quelch's niece Cora from a bull. Cora was a plump young lady who thought that Billy's interest in subjects like cooking was very sensible for a boy. She visited the school again on only one other occasion, in No. 460.

Johnny Bull was to the fore again in No. 367, when his rich

uncle from Australia sent his secretary, Falke, to Friar-dale to report on Johnny's character. Falke was double-crossing his master and meant to use the Bounder as a tool to ruin Johnny, but Vernon-Smith was not such a rogue as the secretary thought. The following week Johnny Bull told his uncle what he thought of him, but uncle was not put out and decided that his nephew was worthy of inheriting his money as well as Aunt Tabitha's. After which, Johnny went for a trip to Australia with his uncle and Squiff temporarily filled his place with the Famous Five.

Another Double Number with a coloured cover was No. 374, "The Fall of the Fifth". Ponsonby - under an alias - advertised for amateur dramatic companies to play at a private house. The Remove found out the hoax in time, but Coker would not be warned, and his company arrived at Eastwood House, much to the surprise of Lord Eastwood, to play "Red Ruin", a drama in verse written by Coker's own fair hand. Incidentally, this issue saw a gathering of the clans indeed, with Greyfriars, St. Jim's, Highcliffe and Cliff House well represented.

Although it was war time, it was business as usual so far as Fishy was concerned. He was issuing insurance policies against punishments in No. 381, and a fortnight later Bunter and he attempted to take advantage of an advertisement offering £50 if anyone could prove that Gobbey's Ginger Beer contained any impure ingredients - Fishy was sure it did, because he put them in himself! It was fierce - not to say the bee's knee - but nothing advantageous accrued from these ventures.

Mauleverer was featured again in No. 386 in "Mauly's Flirtation". He had succumbed to the fetching charms of Miss Bella Bunbury, a romance which her father encouraged, since every visit to the shop resulted in a large purchase. It is interesting to note that this romantic type of story seemed to disappear from the Magnet and Gem after the first world war. Looked at as part of a series, it is evident that it seemed somewhat out of place.

Probably the most famous Double Number in the Magnet

was No. 392 - "Schoolboys Never Shall Be Slaves". A picnic on Popper's Island which Sir Hilton Popper claimed without foundation to be his property, together with a smoking party elsewhere, so infuriated the baronet that he laid a complaint with Dr. Locke. Sir Hilton had just become a governor of the school and he was convinced that the school was going to the dogs. Accordingly he introduced a Sergeant Sharp, and, instead of games, drilling took place outside school hours. The episode ended in rebellion, and when Colonel Wharton visited the school he soon identified Sharp as a deserter from the German army. Sir Hilton's scheme collapsed like a pack of cards, and he resigned from the Board of Governors. The story is a favourite with many collectors who enjoy tales of rebellion, but it is written in a rather sombre tone without any of the high spirits which usually accompany revolts. Incidentally, the cover bore the amazing inscription "Long complete anti-German school story" much to the annoyance of Charles Hamilton. The last red Magnet appeared four weeks later (the blue Gems went on for nearly another year, since the blue dye was easier to obtain than the red one), and we may accordingly end our researches with this famous story.

### Conclusion

It would be idle to pretend that the red Magnet period was the best in the history of that paper. A case could, perhaps, be made out for the claim that it was superior to the blue and white cover period, but only because the latter was the time of thin numbers and many stories by substitute writers. The red Magnets cannot hold a candle to the later coloured covered ones when it comes to plot construction and characterisation.

Yet the red Magnets are not without merit. They were written at a time when everything was new to the author, and they possess an exuberance and freshness that were later displaced by a highly polished style of writing. Each red Magnet is unique in that the plot is new and the author's observations had never been made before. We miss the familiar phrases, but it is a pleasant change to find

each situation described in a different way.

The very early ones are really of only historical interest. We like to know, for example, exactly how Bob Cherry arrived in No. 3, but it cannot be claimed that this was a good story in its own right. It is satisfactory to note that, when Inky arrived in No. 6, he was really intended to go to Herr Rosenblum's Academy, but the story itself is only a collection of unrelated incidents, with the author exploring the ground, so to speak.

The red Magnets of the middle period were undoubtedly the best selection. The two years commencing May 1911 were probably the finest sequence of tales to appear between the red covers. A number of good stories appeared after this time, of course, but the author's foreign travels, especially the one in Austria at the beginning of the war, and the hectic days in Paris afterwards, undoubtedly caused the fluctuations in the standard of the later red Magnet stories.

We may close our volume on a note of approbation. The readers who are prepared to judge the stories as the early work of a promising author, the readers who are willing temporarily to forget the later stories, the readers who will accept a very different Billy Bunter, the readers who are keen to see what Greyfriars was like when the world was young - it is they alone who can pass through the mystic portals and enter the celestial abode where they may fall victims to the spell of red Magnet magic.

