

RED, WHITE AND BLUE

by

ERIC FAYNE

Anyone who has a comprehensive knowledge of the history of the Gem must pause, now and then, to think rather wistfully of what might have been in the old paper during the "Twenties" compared with what was. Towards the close of my article on the White Cover Days, I wrote this:- "1922 was the Gem's finest year since 1912, and must ever rank as one of the best of all time. The genuine Martin Clifford wrote almost every story. What a contrast with much of the rest of the White Cover period with its drabness and disappointments! What promise for the years of the Roaring Twenties yet to come - a promise only partially fulfilled, sad to relate. But that is another story!"

ANOTHER STORY

Well, this is that "other story", a review of what was, in the remaining years of the Roaring Twenties - a little wistful in parts when we step aside to think of what might have been, and very enthusiastic in other parts when we give thanks for the smaller mercies which sum up to a good deal.

Before we analyse the offerings of these Red, White, and Blue days, let us look at the period as a whole, from November 1922 until July 1931 when the reprints started. It began well, but it deteriorated as the years passed, until we reach at the end of 1927 the period to which I refer in this article as the "Twilight Years", when the Gem was almost exclusively handled by substitute writers. Though a reader's enthusiasm must get less and less as he

progresses through the Twenties into the Thirties, there was, nevertheless, a great deal of noteworthy material during the period. Three of the series, in fact, are among the finest school stories ever written - they show Charles Hamilton at his very greatest. These were the Oliver Lynn series, the Old Bus series, and the Victor Cleeve series. True, three very great series hardly compensate for the lean time suffered by Gem readers in the Twenties, but they go far to making us feel that the time, to some extent, was worthwhile.

There were other fine stories, too. In fact, the earlier part of the time is remarkable for some outstanding "single" yarns which were gems beyond price. There were very many Levison series - these were extremely well written, but the troubles of the Levison family recur with such regularity that one wonders whether Levison was not overplayed during these years.

In the later period, when the genuine Clifford was only contributing a story very rarely, all too many of these stories were light efforts featuring Grundy or Trimble. Even the most ardent admirers of Charles Hamilton - and most people know that he has no more ardent admirer than myself - could scarcely claim that his few Gem stories between 1928 and 1931 showed the famous writer at anything like his best. In fact, why they were contributed at all is something of a puzzle - unremarkable though they were, they formed a sharp contrast with the regular material of the time, and, in any case, there were not enough of them to help the circulation of the Gem.

THE YEAR 1922

1922, the last year of the White Covers, had been a wonderful honeymoon for Gem readers. With issue No. 770, dated November 11th, 1922, the Gem blossomed forth in its Red, White, and Blue cover, it was enlarged to 28 pages, and the price was increased to 2d. At this time, the "CARDEW CUP" series was in full swing. Lightly-written, with many chapters devoted to various games in

the fight for the Cup, this series hardly figures among the Gem's greatest, but it is memorable for two delightful stories in which Cardew, in disgrace for slacking at games, seeks to regain his pals' good opinion by presenting a football cup for competition. Unable to obtain the money from his grandfather, and refused it by his uncle, he pawns his valuable tie-pin to raise the wind to pay for the Cup - and the truth of the escapade leaks out. With a typical Cardewism, he suggests that the trophy might be named "the pawnbroker's cup".

After this came two stories in which Gussy was adjudged guilty of damaging a precious volume which belonged to his form-master. Martin Clifford observed that it was a problem which "might have taxed the ingenuity of Sherlock Holmes, Sexton Blake, or the greatest of them all, Ferrers Locke".

With the Christmas Number, dated December 23rd, 1922, came the opening story of the Christmas Barring-Out series.

THE YEAR 1923

This series was completed in nine issues, and, reading it again now when more than forty years have passed since it was written, one tends to do it less than justice. It was certainly competently handled, and if it strikes one as being hackneyed today, it must be remembered that the theme was nothing like so hackneyed in 1923. Tom Merry was accused of theft in the brilliant opening story, and he was supported by two hundred juniors in the barring-out which followed. They held the School House throughout the Christmas vacation. Far-fetched, of course, it would probably have been more convincing if it had been staged on a slightly less wholesale scale. There were many original situations, one in particular when Billy Bunter joined the rebels, and then tried to "sell" them to Dr. Holmes. I fancy that strong arguments could be put forward to support a claim that this was the best of the many barring-out series which appeared in the

Gem and the Magnet over the years.

The second week in March brought the start of the SCHOOLBOY PUG series, the story of Oliver Lynn, which must rank among the very greatest that the Gem or the Magnet ever presented. I think it could be classed as the real beginning of the fine character work which Charles Hamilton was to weave into so many of his stories - particularly in the Magnet - in the years to come. In the Oliver Lynn series character was skilfully etched and analysed, and it lifted the weekly school story to a higher plane than it had ever occupied before.

Lynn, who had been known as the "Chicken" in the professional boxing-ring, was the cousin of St. Leger of the Fifth. Coming to St. Jim's he was placed in Study No. 6 with Blake & Co., who resented the intruder and disliked his rough manners and customs.

Forty years later, this series is as fine and outstanding as it was when it first appeared. I doubt whether any school story has ever been written to surpass it. In the closing chapters, sincere and touching, the story ended with a sigh - an ending without artifice, vaguely unsatisfying like real life, yet leaving behind the memory of a masterpiece.

An interesting point is that the plot was repeated later in the Dury series in the Magnet, but it did not reach the high literary quality of the Gem series. The same phenomenon was often evident when themes were repeated.

The Lynn series was followed immediately by "FRANK LEVISON'S FLIGHT", which, with its sequel, was a well-told story of a trick on Mr. Selby which resulted in Levison Minor fleeing from school and Levison Major following him to Greyfriars, where the two brothers remained for a number of weeks.

This period of Gem history is noteworthy for a number of single stories - yarns which were complete in one issue - which remain in the memory for their charm and brilliance. Such a single story was "TAMING A TARTAR", which has


"THE GREYFRIARS FLOOD!" This week's sensational story of Greyfriars School

No. 833. Vol. XXV. Week ending January 26th, 1924.

The Magnet 2^d

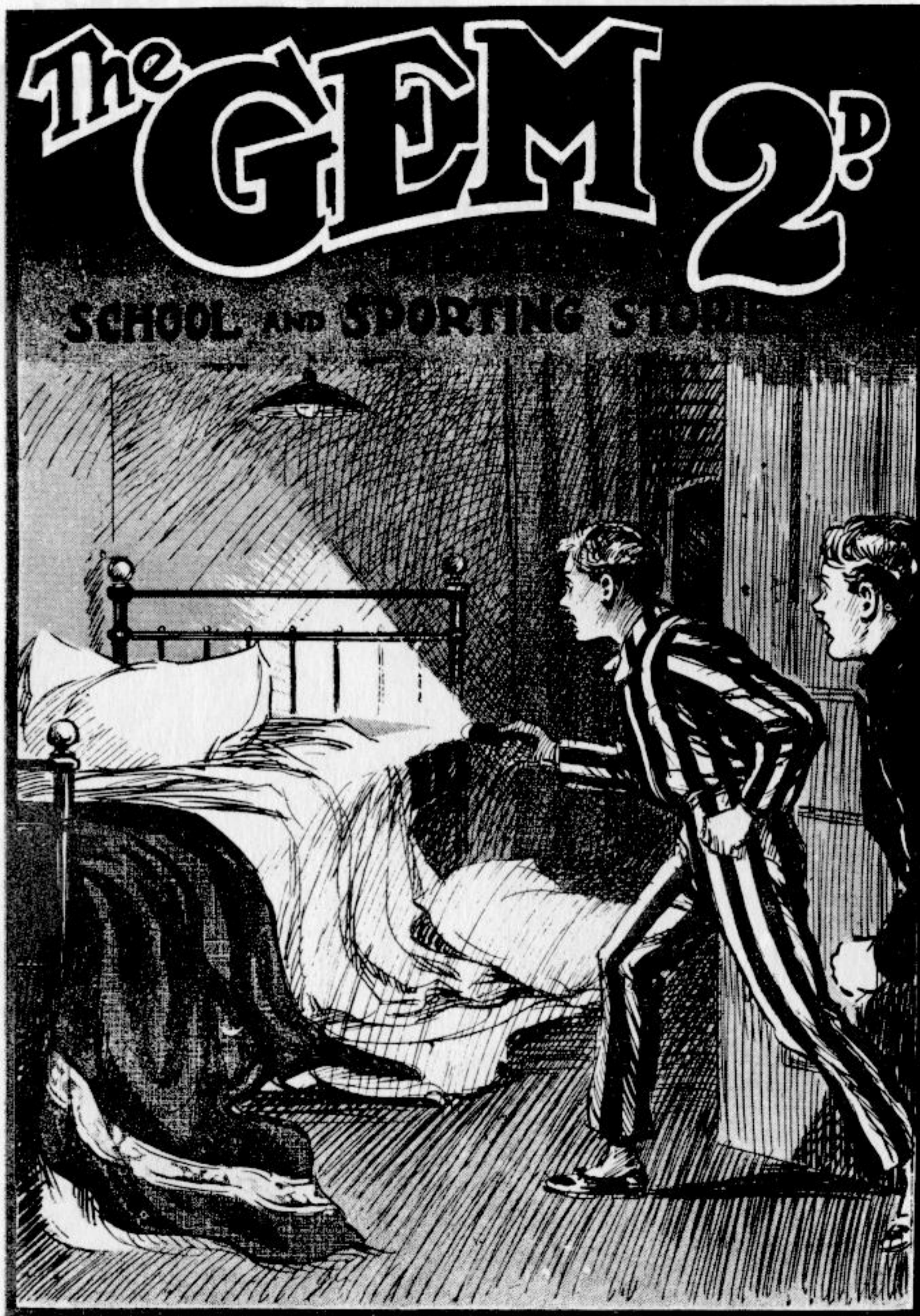
EVERY MONDAY.

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LORD MAULEVERER TAKES IT EASY!

(A diverting incident from this week's long complete story of Harry Wharton & Co., inside.)



WHAT'S HAPPENED TO MONTY LOWTHER?

Awakened at the dead of night by a faint cry, Tom Merry and Harry Manners, visitors at Holly Lodge, make a dramatic discovery! (A startling incident from the grand story of the Chimes of St. Jim's, inside.)

lost some of its original impact on account of the theme being used again later in the Magnet. The heroes of the Third had the bright plan of putting Mr. Selby into a good mood by making him a birthday gift - needless to say, the plan misfired.

A fortnight later came "TRIMBLE'S AUCTION", a joyous, sparkling gem of a story, in which Trimble announced that he was leaving St. Jim's, and a leaving-sale was conducted on his behalf. Bubbling with wit, with never a wasted line, this wonderful little yarn stands out as the light school story supreme.

The next week, No. 800, June 9th, 1923, we find "LEVISON'S RETURN" followed by "CLEARING HIS NAME". The return of the Levisons from Greyfriars is marred by a fake telegram sent by Skinner at the instigation of Racke - insinuating that Levison has been under a cloud at the Kent school, for suspected theft. After a maze of misunderstandings, things are cleared up.

Mid-July brought another "single", "RUSHDEN'S FOLLY", in which the prefect backs a horse with Mr. Banks, to raise money to aid his sister's husband. Entertaining, if not a record-breaker, this tale featured Lord Conway.

The end of July gave us a delightful character single. Manners gets a compromising photograph of Mr. Selby, and blackmails the master. A fine story in which, once again, the impact today is lessened by the theme having been repeated.

But no impact at all is lost in the case of "D'ARCY MAXIMUS", a story which stands completely on its own as one of the funniest school stories ever written. Gussy adopts a donkey - or an ass, as the Head insists on terming it.

September introduced the most charming series of stories that Hamilton ever presented to his admirers - "THE OLD BUS" series, in which Tom Merry & Co. spend a holiday on the Thames. There was no plot - a mere series of episodes, drenched with the spirit of a sunny holiday on the upper

reaches of the Thames - witty, joyful, brilliant in its simple charm.

The only criticism one could make of these river stories is that they were all too short. But fifteen years later, Harry Wharton & Co. spent a holiday on the Thames in stories more than twice the length which, excellent though they were, fell short of the delight and charm of the Tom Merry "Old Bus" series.

This holiday ran late in the year, so only three weeks after the end of the Thames series we had a jolly romp, "GLYN, THE GUY MAKER".

The end of November saw the commencement of another outstanding series. Cardew, chivvied into sporting activity by Tom Merry, resolves to filch the junior captaincy from the hero of the Shell, and succeeds in doing so. It was a fine set of tales, running over Christmas into the New Year. Tom Merry and Cardew, bitter rivals, were present at Eastwood House at one of those amazing parties which were cluttered up with a host of characters from the various Hamilton schools. Years later, Hamilton advantageously chopped out the dead wood at Greyfriars, and also at St. Jim's in the final year of the Gem.

THE YEAR 1924

This was not so good as 1923. There were more substitute stories, though, taking 1924 as a whole, the genuine Martin wrote the majority of the yarns.

The Tom Merry - Cardew feud carried on for several weeks in the New Year. It was a superb series, bringing out all of Cardew's familiar whimsicalities. Tom Merry, here and there, seemed to be depicted in a slightly less sympathetic way, especially in an episode where he refused to deign to canvass votes. Mildly smug and pompous in this incident, he was irritating in a way which would be typical of Harry Wharton, but seemed out of character with the more sunny-natured Tom Merry.

A month later, in mid-February, the genuine Martin

came into the picture again with the series in which Lee leaves Wodehouse and goes to St. Jim's in the name of Claud Pomfret's nephew. Unknown to Len, this is a swindle to enable Pomfret to keep secret the fact that the real nephew is dead. Len is recognized by Cardew, who was once a pupil at Wodehouse. A pleasant, if not particularly memorable, series.

Two singles came at the end of March - "COCK OF THE WALK", in which Tompkins became a fighting-man and routed Mulvaney Minor, the bully of his study - and "THE OTHER GRUNDY", in which Grundy's cousin and double (shades of Wally Bunter) came to St. Jim's in George Alfred's name for a few chapters.

April brought several more singles, the second of them noteworthy. The first, "TROUBLE FOR TRIMBLE", told of Baggy's belief that findings are keepings. The second, "GLYN, THE GOLD MAKER", was novel and much more outstanding. Glyn, interested in the transmutation of metals, believes that he has discovered how to make gold, and prepares to be the world's first trillionaire. But the gold has really come from one of Racke's sovereigns, which Trimble has dropped into the crucible. This was followed by a neat twosome, on an entertaining if familiar theme - "UP AGAINST RATTY" and "SEVEN ON THE WARPATH".

An excellent three-story Cardew series came on the menu at the end of June, when Cardew inadvertently lets down his side at cricket. The Editor described it as "the cricket story of the year", and this was no exaggeration. Titles - "CARDEW, THE CRICKETER", "THE DESERTER", and "THE HERO OF THE HOUR".

Mid-July gave us that classic story, "THE FORM-MASTER'S MISTAKE", in which Mr. Ratcliff accused Cutts of theft, and in a delicious episode the Fifth-Former insisted on a public apology. A smash hit.

Grundy's double was re-introduced in a single cricket story, which was followed by another Grundy turn in which he locked the Head up in his own study.

A hiking series lasted four weeks, during which Tom Merry met Coker, captured his caravan, and the St. Jim's party eventually went to France and encountered Cardew.

In Mid-October, "D'ARCY'S ADOPTED" was a baby with which he was landed. Amusing, but lacking the sheer joy of the earlier "D'Arcy Maximus".

The St. Jim's stories were growing longer now, but not those from the genuine Martin Clifford. The substitute writers came more and more into the picture.

Early December brought an excellent single story in which Crooke plotted to implicate Tom Merry in a theft charge, and was foiled by Talbot.

THE YEAR 1925

When the bells rang in 1925, the red light was showing. This year the genuine Clifford was to contribute considerably less than 50% of the stories. At the beginning of the year he was back with two stories concerning a new boy, Torrence, with whom Manners had an unreasonable feud.

Spring was with us before Hamilton contributed his next effort, "FOOLED ON THE FIRST", a light story, full of fun and games - all the more acceptable from the fact that genuine stories were becoming a rarity. A fortnight later he presented two tip-top yarns containing fine character work, telling of the strange disappearance of Lowther's uncle. These were well up to the star author's standard.

The above twosome was followed immediately by a pleasant frolic - short, but very sweet - in which Gussy attempted to do business with a share-pushing swindler.

In June came another Levison series, with a clever character study of Mr. Selby. He had tried to increase his bank balance by purchasing a French banknote for 10,000 francs in the hope that the rate of exchange would improve to his benefit - gambling on the foreign exchanges was apparently a pastime at that time. Racke stole the note, Levison Minor was accused of the theft, and Levison Major

took the blame. Even though it is possible that the continual tribulations of the Levison family may have tended to become a trifle monotonous, this was an extremely satisfying series, and, from the outstanding character work it contained, it probably reached the highest literary standard of all the many Levison series of the early Red, White, and Blue years.

The genuine Clifford was on the bill again in mid-September. Troope was the schoolboy owner of a famous racehorse, Kohinoor, and, as such, found himself subjected to various attempts at kidnapping. There was nothing particularly outstanding in this series, but it shines with perhaps more brilliance than it merits, owing to the fact that it appeared at a time when substitute stories glutted the Gem.

In mid-October we were treated to two stories in which Mr. Selby was blackmailed by a rascal named SNEATH, and was saved from the blackmailer by Wally D'Arcy and Cardew.

A month later came two really grand stories in light vein. Trimble, unlike Billy Bunter, was seldom a very welcome character in the stories, but this delightful romp was far and away the best in which he ever featured. The unscrupulous Baggy became smug and sanctimonious, and stirred up a mass of trouble. A pair of tales which certainly must be listed with the Gem's greatest.

The genuine Clifford wrote the Christmas story and its sequel - a thrilling yarn in a festive setting, telling of the Terrible Three caught up unwittingly in a feud between one, Rufus Beaumont, and his pursuer, a homicidal maniac. It opened at Laurel Villa, the scene passing thence to Lowther's home, Holly Lodge, and ending tranquilly at Eastwood House.

THE YEAR 1926

If 1925 had been disappointing on the whole, 1926 was far worse, for this year you could count the number of

genuine stories on the fingers of your hands.

It would seem that there was a slip-up somewhere in publication arrangements at the Fleetway House, for the Christmas stories, written by the genuine Clifford (and considered above), were followed by three substitute stories set at the school, and then, in mid-January, we found ourselves back at Eastwood House, amid the snow and ice and the after-Christmas festivities. It was explained, rather unconvincingly, that the Christmas party had returned to celebrate Lord Eastwood's birthday, but it was obvious that the two stories which now came had been intended to complete the holiday series, but for some reason they were published out of sequence. A robbery was committed at Gussy's home, and Pongo, Wally's dog, played a substantial part in recovering the loot.

The early summer was brightened by a good series of four stories, starring Figgins, Cousin Ethel, and Cardew. Gussy left a ten-pound note on the table in Study No. 6. The note blew out of the window, and was found by Trimble. He asked Cousin Ethel to change it for him into single pound notes. As the plot proceeded, Figgins saw the note, of which he already knew the number, and came to the staggering conclusion that Ethel had stolen it from Study No. 6. After many misunderstandings, the sun shone again for all. This was a charming little series, very popular in its day.

In September we were treated to the ANGELO LEE series - clever and amusing tales of a boy who wanted to leave St. Jim's to become an airman.

THE YEAR 1927

There was a slight improvement in 1927, which gave us about a score of genuine stories, which included a series of Tom Merry & Co. in Canada.

Towards the end of January came an excellent four-story series on serious lines. Crooke, who had run into debt

to the tune of £50, stole that amount from Mr. Railton, and the blame fell on Crooke's cousin, Talbot. This series offered the reader a month of fascinating reading, with a plot which was never obvious.

The issue dated April 16th, 1927, was Gem No. 1000, and, as was only fitting, it was graced with a genuine story, though a very light one. "TRIMBLE'S TENNER" was counterfeit, obtained from his father for the purpose of swank. The idea was unoriginal, for Tubby Muffin had done the same thing a few years earlier.

Levison was in trouble yet once again at the end of May - he endured more than his fair share of suffering in these Red, White, and Blue years, but the two stories which told the tale were first-class of their type. That shady gentleman, Tickey Tapp, was reintroduced to readers, and on this occasion Levison shouldered the blame for a fault of Cardew, and fell from the ivy while trying to run away from school.

At the end of July, the St. Jim's chums went to Canada as the guests of Kit Wil Drake. This series was, perhaps, not Martin Clifford in his very best holiday mood, but it had its moments and was well-written throughout. Its impact was lessened for the inveterate Hamilton fan by the fact that Jimmy Silver had enjoyed similar adventures in a very long series in the Boy's Friend, only a few years before.

The real Martin was back again in mid-November with yet another yarn of Levison's suffering. It was a single story, and prepared the way for the Levison brothers' departure for Greyfriars, to play their parts in that fine "Toad of the Remove" series in the Magnet. The Levisons went to Greyfriars in search of a will, the title of the St. Jim's story being "LEVISON'S LAST DAY". It was an excellent tale.

In mid-December came another single, "LEVISON'S RETURN", the title of which explains the theme.

This was followed immediately by a good single Christmas story which opened at Cardew's home, where Cardew met

Jimmy, the rat, and then was played out to a climax at Eastwood House. This was the last Christmas tale that Hamilton was to write for the Gem for many a long day - in fact, the next one was in the very last issue of the Gem, at the end of 1939.

THE TWILIGHT YEARS

THE YEAR 1928

This was a dreadful year, with only four stories from Hamilton. These four stories were fine, but, as four swallows cannot make a summer, so these four stories could not save 1928 from being one of the blackest in Gem history. The policy for the old paper was now plain. It seems evident that substitute writers were now handling the stories almost exclusively, and they were allowed to make fundamental changes as no substitute writer had ever done before.

From the Christmas story of 1927, we saw no further St. Jim's story from the master hand until the second week of August, 1928. Then the Gem commenced to present metal models free with the paper, the gifts were advertised widely, an influx of new readers was expected - so it is fairly certain that something extra-special in the way of stories was arranged in an effort to consolidate the loyalty of the new readers.

These four stories were as good as anything that Charles Hamilton ever wrote, which is saying something. There is no doubt that he put everything he had got into this series - and that meant plenty. These stories, too, were much longer than those he had written in earlier Red, White and Blue days, for now the Gem programme consisted only of the school story and a serial. The appeal of the Victor Cleeve series was chiefly to older readers, the more discriminating, and the intelligent. Probably the series is not so well known as a great many of the others, for, owing to the glut of substitute material during these twilight years, it is likely that a number of





the old faithfuls had given up the Gem in despair before this series appeared. Yet it is so good that, between stiff covers, it might well become a school story classic.

Victor Cleeve, Mr. Railton's nephew, had been expelled from Barcroft for theft, and came to St. Jim's. He hated his new school and its occupants, he resented his uncle's kindness. Mr. Railton tried to make him friendly with Tom Merry, and Tom did his best, without any marked success for a time. The stories contained fascinating cricket sequences, natural dialogue, superb character painting, tense situations, working up to a grand climax. A satisfying dish of fare for the most jaded palate. What a treat for the Gem reader during this twilight year! But what an anti-climax when the party was over, and the sun of Charles Hamilton's genius was covered again by the clouds of substitution!

THE YEAR 1929

For the first time in Gem history, the genuine Martin Clifford contributed no story at all to the paper during the year.

THE YEAR 1930

A radical change took place at St. Jim's in April, 1930 - Etons were abolished - and Mr. Hamilton took over for one week only to introduce the change. The story was nothing to write home about, and one wonders why it was that the genuine Clifford came back just to mark the change of attire.

The Magnet had gained by the passing of Etons. I doubt whether the Gem did, for R.J. Macdonald's boys in Etons always seemed to me to be more attractive than those he depicted in sports jackets. However, that is merely a passing thought.

At the end of May the genuine Martin was back in the picture with a single story. "BRAINY GRUNDY" was no masterpiece, though it was mildly amusing.

June brought a genuine story, "A KNOCK-OUT FOR KNOX", on familiar lines but quite good entertainment.

THE YEAR 1931

A remarkable year - though up till the end of June there were only four genuine stories.

At the end of January we had another single. Talbot recognised in Mr. Linton's nephew a man he had known in his old "Toff" days in Angel Alley. Rogue Rawdon had kidnapped the real nephew, and taken his place. This was purely a rank-and-file yarn, but it seemed to shine brightly among the surrounding stories.

This was followed immediately by "FIGGINS IN A FUNK" in which Cousin Ethel caused Figgins to promise that he would not "lay a finger on Trimble". Trimble overheard the conversation, took advantage of the promise, and set out to bully Figgins. A trifle, this story, but like other genuine tales of the period, it tends to shine far beyond its merits on account of the surrounding bog of substitute yarns.

But at the end of March the genuine Clifford was back in form with "THE SHADY THREE", the best story since the Cleeve series. Mr. Lathom was struck down by St. Leger who was returning from a trip to the Green Man. Trimble, who happened to be in Lathom's study in search for a confiscated cake, was blamed for the attack and expelled. It is a thought that stories which introduced the Fifth-formers were usually much above average quality.

The issue dated June 20th, 1931, contained a substitute story called "Gussy the Waiter". It also contained a small panel with the announcement, "A BIG SURPRISE IN STORE FOR ALL GEM READERS". I knew what that surprise was going to be. I had heard from the Fleetway House that a suggestion which I had made and pressed home for many months was to be put into operation for a trial period.

The following week the Gem contained another substitute story, "Skimpole's Musical Spasm". It also contained another panel, "THE BIG PLAN! There's a royal treat in

store for Gem readers".

This Skimpole story was the last new substitute effort ever to be published in the Gem. The substitute writers, who were more to be pitied than blamed, departed from the old paper, unwept, unhonoured, and unsung.

No. 1220, dated July 4th, 1931, contained a story by the genuine Martin Clifford. Ironic, perhaps, but very fitting, that the real Martin should come into his own again for this historic occasion. "BATTLING GRUNDY" was the last new story of St. Jim's to appear for many years. Eight years were to go by before the genuine Clifford used his agile brain to give us new stories of Tom Merry.

"BATTLING GRUNDY" was quite a good yarn of the Grundy type. He was in trouble with his form-master, Mr. Pilbeam, for fighting. Mr. Pilbeam was a character created by a substitute writer. Expulsion threatened Grundy if he received any more black eyes, but he got one in saving the Head from a tramp.

Charles Hamilton told me that he had never heard of Mr. Pilbeam, and had featured Mr. Linton in the story. The names were changed by an enterprising editor.

So ended another phase in the St. Jim's saga. That issue contained a full two-page "spread" in the centre of the paper, announcing, "YOUR EDITOR'S BIG PLAN! Next Week, - "TOM MERRY - NEW BOY".

R E V E R I E

A poet has observed that the saddest words in the English tongue are "It might have been". That, of course, is rather a morbid thought, and we can comfort ourselves with the knowledge that nothing is so bad but that it might be worse, and, to be completely practical, it is no use crying over spilt milk.

We are probably all more or less in agreement with regard to what I have called "The Twilight Years", but there are

varying opinions concerning the reprints.

I have occasionally heard it suggested that the decision to re-print the old St. Jim's tales was a mistake; that it halted the full development of the Tom Merry saga; that during the Thirties the Gem might have presented St. Jim's stories greater than ever before, in the same way that the finest Magnet tales were published in those later years. If the people who believe these things are right, then I was hopelessly in error in 1931, and indeed I have much for which to answer. For I have no doubt at all that the re-print experiment would never have been tried at all, but for my well-intentioned (though perhaps misguided, as I freely admit) activities.

In the early weeks of 1931, I made the suggestion to the Fleetway House that the St. Jim's story should be told again in the Gem from the beginning. At first, the suggestion was turned down flat, - "the Gem has never been a re-print paper, and will never be one"; - "the St. Jim's stories are more popular now than ever before" (?), and so on.

I renewed the suggestion, and campaigned for the plan to be adopted. In March came a message, "your suggestion is to be considered"; then, "the idea has not been shelved, but is to receive further consideration". In May, - "the plan is to be adopted for a trial period".

They even accepted my suggestion for the title of the opening story, "TOM MERRY - NEW BOY". That title had been used in the Penny Popular in 1912, so I can't claim to have been original, but I felt mightily pleased with myself that summer of 1931.

If I was wrong, I can only bow my head in shame, and seek some sackcloth and ashes. I wonder, sometimes, what might have happened in 1931 if, instead of suggesting the re-prints, I had campaigned for the permanent return of the genuine Martin Clifford. But if Martin Clifford had returned to the Gem, Frank Richards might not have given us all those wonderful series in the Magnet for which

we are so grateful.

Over a number of years we had had but a mere handful of stories from the genuine Clifford, and, when he popped up very occasionally, he seemed careful not to be very good.

It could be argued that the substitute writers who handled the Gem stories in the Twilight Years showed literary ability in excess of that of other substitute writers. Personally, I liked these stories far less than anything the Gem had ever presented. The simple reason was that they were blasting to smithereens the traditions of the St. Jim's tales. They never captured the spirit of the Gem.

Dozens of the stories were on fantastic lines; a section of the school embarked on a tour of the world in a giant airship, with lessons carried on in the air, and calls being made at amazing imaginary lands. Some of the titles tell their own tale - "The Snake Men of Zundaki"; "The Tyrant of Urudor"; "Kildare of the Foreign Legion", and so on.

A girls' school, Spalding Hall, was opened near St. Jim's, - Cousin Ethel and Doris Levison went as pupils, and a new range of girl characters came into the stories and appeared frequently.

St. Frank's was brought into close relationship with St. Jim's, and the stories sometimes ran in concert with the two schools. This, perhaps, was a mere detail, except that St. Frank's and St. Jim's had never before been connected.

Mr. Linton was retired - a major step indeed, considering that he had been in the stories for well over twenty years - and his place was taken by a Mr. Pilbeam. A tedious American character, Cyrus Handcock, was introduced and even joined the Terrible Three, so that we read of "Tom Merry, Manners, Lowther, and Handcock, the chums of Study No. 10". Straws, maybe, but the last one broke the camel's back.

My opinion then was that such major changes would never have been made at all, had not the substitute

writers been assured that the future of the St. Jim's stories had passed permanently into their hands - and I am still of the same opinion.

I believed, and still believe, that in early 1931 the end of the Gem was imminent, and that only the re-prints saved it.

I proved conclusively that a determined reader can have a marked effect on the policy of a paper; I wished that I had realised it earlier. In the years that followed, I played a part on occasions in connection with the re-printing of certain stories, and when, in 1939, I campaigned that we had had enough of the re-prints - they stopped.

Was the re-print policy a success? Well, it continued for eight years, so one can reasonably assume that it was.

The old song calls for "Three cheers for the Red, White, and Blue". This fascinating, intriguing, and at times infuriating period of the Gem hardly merits such acclamation. So let us compromise, with the memory of the Old Bus and other fine stories in our minds, and call for TWO hearty cheers for the Red, White, and Blue.

