

TOM MERRY and Co. and the GRAMMARIANS

THE GEM LIBRARY 1d.

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Grand Loure
Complete Tale by

TOM MERRY'S TRIUMPH.

MARTIN CLIFFORD



THE ARRIVAL OF THE RAIDERS!

THOSE BEGUILING BLUE GEMS

BY

ROGER M. JENKINS

The history of the blue Gem is really nothing more nor less than the story of Tom Merry. Tom - practically the only character whom Charles Hamilton referred to by his Christian name alone - was cast in a truly heroic mould. He was not only the central character like Harry Wharton in the red Magnet; he was also a thoroughly likeable personality. We read that he had a handsome face surmounted by curly hair, through which he would run his fingers in moments of perplexity; he had a laugh that was pleasant to hear; and his athletic prowess went without saying. The fags in the Lower Forms would have done anything for him. Could any reader of the Gem more than half a century ago have asked for anyone better?

Harry Wharton, considered as a piece of characterisation, was far more successful than Tom Merry, even in those early days. For Harry had a temper and a streak of obstinacy that made him a completely credible character. And yet - well, one couldn't help preferring Tom Merry at first. As the reader grew older, Harry Wharton became more interesting to read about, but one never lost entirely the old affection for Tom Merry. Harry Wharton may have been captain of the junior eleven, but Tom Merry was all that and something more - he was the Hero of his Form. Not by any stretch of imagination could that epithet have been applied to Harry Wharton.

In those early days, the Gem was far superior to the Magnet; perhaps Tom Merry had something to do with this. At all events, let us turn back the clock and try to envisage what sort of impression the Gem must have made in those

far off halcyon days when Edward VII was on the throne and the pound was worth its weight in gold.

1907 - Tom Merry Makes His Bow

Tom Merry had to share the Gem with adventure stories in the early days, and consequently it was not until No. 3 entitled "Tom Merry's Schooldays" dated 10/3/07 that he was introduced to the public. We first meet Tom on the train bound for Clavering College. He was dressed in a dark blue velvet suit and his nurse and guardian, Miss Priscilla Fawcett, was another anachronism wearing clothes which had been fashionable twenty years previously.

Tom Merry took the opportunity to give her the slip at Westholm, and was rather late in arriving at Clavering, having been misdirected by Manners and Lowther. Tom had a queer manner of speech in these early days, rather like the long-windedness later seen in Alonzo Todd. But Mr. Railton only smiled grimly when the new boy remarked on going to bed "They seem to have overlooked the hot water bottle".

Quite a number of jokes were played on Tom Merry (who was nicknamed "Spooney") and he also suffered from the solicitous and persistent enquiries from his governess as to whether he had got his chest protector on and was regularly taking all his medicines, but he managed to live all of it down, and after a while he lost his quaint mannerisms.

Clavering College had but a short lease of life; it appeared in the Gem fortnightly until No. 11, when we learned that Mr. Railton, the Head, was under the thumb of a moneylender who was going to foreclose because there was a seam of coal under the school. Accordingly, the whole school was transferred to St. Jim's, where Mr. Railton later became housemaster in place of Mr. Kidd. Herr Schneider, the German master also went to St. Jim's, but Mr. Quelch, the master of the Shell, and Wingate, the captain of Clavering, disappeared from mortal ken.

With No. 11 the St. Jim's stories were transferred from Pluck to the Gem, and from this time onwards Tom Merry made regular weekly appearances. St. Jim's was, of course, not quite the same sort of place in those days, though it changed less than Greyfriars did. For instance, Dr. Holmes was known as the Principal, and there was a Remove form mentioned as well as the Fourth, and both forms then fagged for the Sixth.

No. 15 of the ½d Gem saw the advent into the stories of Mr. Dodds the curate of Huckleberry Heath. A cricket match with Greyfriars was worrying the juniors because Yorke, the Greyfriars captain, was proposing to play Ponsonby of the Fifth (it should be noted that this was before the Magnet began). Mr. Dodds secured undying popularity by playing for the St. Jim's team as a counter-weight.

In No. 36 D'Arcy was in love with the Head's niece, Miss Ethel Courtney, while No. 38 related the amusing story of how the diablo craze swept through the school. In one chapter the juniors donned Guy Fawkes masks as a disguise when they searched Mr. Linton's room for their devils and whips. The master of the Shell was extremely surprised when Mr. Lathom, who was of a spiritualistic turn of mind, forecast that it heralded Mr. Linton's impending demise.

No. 41 was probably the wittiest of the ½d Gems. In this number Skimpole became a convert to Socialism. He declared that D'Arcy was a bloated capitalist and aristocrat (Gussy objected most strongly to the adjective). Skimpole even went out of his way to assist tramps, as this extract beautifully illustrates:-

"There are some sacks which you can use to keep yourself warm," said Skimpole. "I am sorry that I can offer you no better covering, but really the sacks will suffer considerably by contact with your person. My poor fellow, you are a terrible example of the oppression of the lower classes. I have seldom seen a man so absolutely degraded and filthy. I must do everything I can for you."

"Thank you kindly, sir!" said Honest Bill Bunter, through his gritting teeth.

"You are looking angry, and no wonder. I suppose my words have brought home to you for the first time the terrible wrongs you groan under. But take hope, my friend - take hope! Socialism is coming - like a burst of sunshine to lighten the darkness of the millions now enslaved - and when it comes you will be a clean, sober, hardworking man. Think of that, my poor fellow!"

In fairness, it should perhaps be added that it was made clear that it was Skimpole and not Socialism which was crackbrained: Dr. Holmes indeed remarked that Socialism was a subject worthy of deep consideration by intelligent people.

1907 ended on a comic note with No. 42 - "Figgins' Fig Pudding", into which was mixed an ingredient not specified in any cookery book - syrup of figs!

1908 - Tom Merry Consolidates His Success

In the week ending 15/2/08, less than a year after the Gem had commenced publication, it doubled its size and price, and began a new series. In the same week, the Magnet was launched as a halfpenny paper to cash in on the success of the Gem. Taken all in all, this is no mean tribute to the popularity of Tom Merry.

No. 1 of the new series was entitled "The Gathering of the Clans" and relates how Marmaduke Smythe and Arthur Digby returned to the school. Though the story was in no way outstanding, it contains a number of pleasant touches of characterisation. The St. Jim's characters were sorted out far more quickly than those at Greyfriars, and the circle of the chief characters was, as Gussy used to say, "select, not to say swaggah". These early tales were full of little touches which helped to build up the complete and detailed picture of St. Jim's, and many of them were very amusing. In No. 2, Miss Priscilla Fawcett's attempt to

act as peacemaker was foredoomed to failure; in No. 5, Gussy was in love again with another Ethel - this time the music professor's daughter.

Skimpole was to the fore again in No. 7, in the guise of a detective, but strangely enough Dr. Holmes refused to engage him in place of Ferrers Locke, and when that worthy detective arrived he spurned Skimpole's offer of assistance. A fortnight later another detective appeared, this time a Mr. Joseph Link whom Gussy had invited down to solve the mystery of his missing gold watch. The watch eventually turned up in the pocket of one of Gussy's many waistcoats, but not before he had had some remarkable encounters with "The Bogus Detective".

The St. Jim's stories were cut by half in Nos. 11 to 16 and also in No. 18, when adventure stories about Alan Wayward intruded. The St. Jim's tales at this time seemed to run in pairs at first; so it would seem that full length stories by Charles Hamilton were cut in two by the editor. One of the famous institutions - the St. Jim's Parliament - was brought into being in No. 13. Skimpole failed to be elected as Socialist candidate, perhaps because of the candid manner in which he told the electors that the fact that they were all rude, ignorant, foolish, and brutal was the result of their early training in sordid surroundings with vicious and selfish parents. Skimpole's disappointment was assuaged by his latest ISM - Determinism. (It is a pity that, when the early Gem stories were reprinted in 1931, all references to Socialism were obliterated, and Skimpole was always referred to as a Determinist, which made nonsense of many of the jokes about him.) Skimpole was featured again in No. 18, when he had begun writing his famous work on Socialism. He brought a tramp into St. Jim's (a human document, as he called him), and nourished him with Gore's food, but nothing eventful occurred except some petty thefts.

The first real series in the Gem appeared in Nos. 28-32, when St. Jim's was spending the summer holidays on board the S.S. Condor. Mr. Ratcliff was acting as headmaster,

and No. 30 contained a fine description of a clash between Tom Merry and the new Housemaster, which culminated in Tom Merry's jumping overboard. The summer cruise made good reading and was a happy augury of further series to come.

Cousin Ethel made frequent appearances in these early days. Although she was D'Arcy's cousin, she seemed far more interested in Figgins. Even Tom Merry took second place here, and in No. 34, when he referred to Figgins in her presence as "that rotter", she paid him out in her own coin. The following week when they all went to the Zoo, she refused her cousin's offer to take a cab from Charing Cross on the grounds that they all ought to keep together, but, when Figgins suggested a hansom as they emerged from Regent's Park tube station, she accepted with alacrity, and poor Gussy could only remark in perplexity "There nevah is any understandin' girls!" Ethel Cleveland had a streak of playfulness which Marjorie Hazeldene never possessed at all, but Ethel became more sober as the years went by.

A fortnight later saw the arrival of Gussy's younger brother Wally, who soon became Mr. Selby's pet aversion. Cheeky and grubby (Gussy was always asking him when he had last changed his collar) Wally was a thoroughly likeable scamp from beginning to end.

Whereas the red Magnet always had a regular artist (first Hutton Mitchell, then Clarke, and finally C.H. Chapman), the Blue Gem at this time was illustrated by a panel of artists, including Macdonald*, Clarke, Briscoe, Hutton Mitchell, H.M. Lewis, P.J. Hayward, and of course the incomparable Warwick Reynolds.

* With No. 121 Macdonald became the regular Gem artist, until he joined the Navy in the war.

Warwick Reynolds was not without faults; his perspective would sometimes offend the normal rules of vision, and occasionally his heads would seem too large for their bodies, but these defects could all be forgiven him on account of the magnificent sense of atmosphere afforded to the reader by his richly detailed, sombre drawings with the beautifully clear black lines. Whether it was Dr. Holmes in his panelled study or the class in an ancient form-room with a splendid vaulted ceiling, Warwick Reynolds could always be relied upon to fire the imagination of the reader at once with the beauty and charm of the ancient setting of the stories.

A drawing by Reynolds has been traced as early as No. 31, but his first really remarkable contribution was in Gem No. 41. Christmas double numbers often appeared in November, and No. 41 was no exception. It was one of many stories entitled "The Ghost of St. Jim's." The first fall of snow always heralded the coming of the ghost of the blind monk Rufus who had been murdered by the Abbot Wolfram. The haunting on this occasion took the form of tapping, which eventually turned out to be Binks, the page, wandering around secret corridors, the exit from which was the famous secret panel in Study No. 6. Binks' mind had apparently been turned by reading cheap American comics, which seemed to have been a cause of juvenile delinquency earlier than might have been expected!

1909 - The Mixture as Before

Fresh fields and pastures new was the order of the day in Nos. 46-50 when Tom Merry and Co. made their American tour. It was the first foreign travel series ever, but not otherwise noteworthy, and it was pleasant to have them back again at St. Jim's with the new boy Buck Finn whom they had met in the wild and woolly west. A new boy of a different sort was Clyne in No. 56 who knew several novel ways of bullying fags, but he was only a bird of passage.

Skimpole was always hard up, and his fees were never paid

on time. The Codicote scholarship in No. 58 was therefore a fine opportunity for him, and he managed to win it after most of the other candidates had had to withdraw after accidentally seeing the question papers beforehand.

Nos. 60 and 61 featured a trip to Liverpool, to meet Digby's uncle from Ireland. An unexpected companion for the return trip was 'Erbert, a waif from the slums who was befriended by the juniors and smuggled to school. Dr. Holmes was expecting a new boy called Bernard Glyn, and so it was some days before the deception was discovered. 'Erbert was permitted by the Head to remain at school though he soon faded into the background.

A strange transformation overcame Mr. Ratcliff in No. 66 - "The Form Master's Secret". He became almost pleasant for a while, and everyone was puzzled until it transpired that he was in love with Glyn's sister Edith, and even went so far as to take her some flowers in a box which, unbeknownst to him, had been filled instead with mouldy pastries. Even after his suit had been rejected, Mr. Ratcliff retained some traces of benevolence the following week when he allowed leave to Figgins and Co. for the week-end. Tom Merry and Co. had also obtained leave, and the six of them surprised Study No. 6 by arriving at Eastwood House as uninvited guests. Lord Eastwood's new butler, Jelf, was somewhat put out by this invasion, which rather scotched his plan to admit confederates to break open the safe.

1909 was a bumper year for new boys. Apart from Buck Finn, there was Clifton Dane, the Canadian hypnotist in No. 57 (written by a substitute writer) and Bernard Glyn the inventor in No. 63. The third member of the trio, Harry Noble from Australia, arrived in No. 69 appropriately entitled "A Son of the Empire".

Noble, or Kangaroo as he came to be called, had rather a chequered career when he first arrived, since all studies shewed the usual rooted objection to having a new boy. He was moved from Tom Merry's study to Figgins' in the New House (where he made the interesting discovery that Fatty

Wynn talked in his sleep about frying food in lard) and from there to Blake's study in the School House, but not until he settled in the end study with Glyn and Dane did he find a permanent resting-place.

Another expedition took place a fortnight later in a tale entitled "Sent to Coventry". Gussy's elder brother, Lord Conway, was in that city buying bicycles for the Home Guard, and the juniors cycled there to see the sights, one of which was Hamilton's famous factory. No. 75 saw the arrival of "Gussy's Guest", the one and only W.G. Bunter. Gussy could not remember the invitation which Bunter assured him he had given him, but everyone played up, and Bunter was given a superb feed at which he outshone even Fatty Wynn.

Some of the tales in the early Gems were built around a number of unconnected incidents, like No. 76, in which Skimpole proclaimed his faith in the theory of mind over matter, Gore painted spots on Towser and Pongo, the juniors took a cycle ride with cousin Ethel, and a party was invited to Glyn House to see Glyn's model boats sail. Glyn was to the fore again in No. 80 when he made a life-sized model of Skimpole, which could walk - Skimpole II. This contraption had a short life, but more was to be heard of it in the future.

Stories came in pairs at this time. Nos. 82 and 83 saw the arrival of Tom Merry's cousin Herbert Dorrian from South Africa who left a box of diamonds in his care. Nos. 84 and 85 formed another dramatic pair, with Gore being expelled for forging Tom Merry's writing in an attempt to cause quarrels. Mr. Gore was the typical Roman parent, who flogged his son himself and put him on a diet of bread and water, with the consequence that Gore returned to the school as a fugitive and camped out in the old tower until Dr. Holmes agreed he could re-enter the school. Nos. 86 and 87 saw Miss Priscilla Fawcett being threatened by an anonymous letter writer, and a surprising denouement at Huckleberry Heath.

The editor would occasionally take unwarrantable liberties

with the stories. In No. 89 the juniors set off for Paris, but the editor altered the end of the story to bring them back to St. Jim's so that the scene would be right for a tale by a substitute writer in No. 90 which had nothing to do with the foreign travel series. They were allowed to resume their trip in No. 91, but it was not until the Christmas Double Number (No. 93 - another November issue) that anything memorable occurred; this was the thrilling episode in the haunted Chateau Cernay, one of the most exciting and dramatic incidents that the Gem had featured to date. Poor Skimpole was not able to accompany the holidaymakers, though the artist duly featured him in most of the illustrations - by way of compensation, perhaps.

At this time Charles Hamilton was writing a series of stories for "Pluck" revolving around Tomsonio's Circus, featuring Jack Talbot the boy tiger tamer. This circus was introduced into the Magnet and Gem on several occasions, some of the most notable of which were probably Nos. 96 and 97 of the Gem. In the first number, Dr. Holmes graciously permitted the circus to be pitched at St. Jim's. The clown, when performing a conjuring trick, took a bottle of brandy and pipe out of Gussy's pocket. Mr. Ratcliff did not appreciate that it was a trick, and duly reported Gussy to the Head. There followed a grand scene in which D'Arcy magnificently pointed out to Dr. Holmes that this was not the first time that Mr. Ratcliff had been impertinent. In No. 97 the juniors paid another trip to the circus which was then at Wayland, and Gussy (who was a superb rider) acted as substitute for Jack Talbot in a riding act with Clothilde.

1910 - The Old Order Changeth. . . .

The New Year saw a distinct change in the Gem stories. Hitherto, the plot had been only of secondary importance in most tales; the interesting point was the way in which the different incidents had served to display the various facets of the characters of Gussy, Tom Merry, Skimpole, etc.. There was an indefinable air of charm that lingered over the

earliest stories, the plots of which were very thin indeed, judged by Charles Hamilton's later standards.

Tempora mutantur, nos et mutamur in illis.* At all events, the plot began to assume a greater importance at this time, and the characters were subordinated to the plot. No. 103 entitled "Skimpole the Third" is a good example of this. In No. 80 we had been introduced to Glyn's mechanical figure, Skimpole II, but the author had not made much use of the idea. No. 103 saw the idea revived; Glyn had put a gramophone record in the figure, which could now deliver a lecture on Determinism if a button were pressed on the back of its head. There were endless ramifications and diversions in this story, the final one being when Kerr (Skimpole the Third) dressed up in imitation of the figure and then ran amok, making everyone believe that the machinery had gone wrong. This story was undoubtedly one of the most polished and skilful which had been written by the author at that time, and stands comparison with the Magnets of the early 'thirties.

It was some time before another story on quite the same high level appeared, but there were some very good ones in 1910, nonetheless. A pair in Nos. 106 and 107 related how Gussy witnessed an ambush on Mr. Selby and refused to give the Head the name of the assailent. Rather than be flogged for disobedience he "retired" from the school for a while, and sought employment at Tomosonio's circus, though he had a number of amusing adventures on the way, including falling in with a tramp who robbed him of everything while he slept. Another fine pair was Nos. 111 and 112, dealing with the famous trip to Nice and Monte Carlo where the juniors beguiled themselves with the carnival, and Figgins' cousin Archie Hilton stole money from Miss Fawcett to use in gambling at the casino. Their return to school was not published until No. 115, but as the intervening

* Times are changing, and we must change with them.

two stories were written by substitute writers they featured at the school all the juniors who were supposed to be away. The editor seemed untroubled by any considerations about preserving the continuity of the tales, and the readers of the time must have been hopelessly puzzled.

Dr. Holmes was very benevolent in early days, and the juniors were allowed constant leaves of absence. A pair of stories in Nos. 123 and 124 describe how they were allowed to visit Eastwood House for a cricket week - two pleasant stories which are so reminiscent of Charles Hamilton's serial "King Cricket".

A famous tale was No. 126 entitled "The mystery of the Moat House" in which an inmate of a private lunatic asylum deceived the juniors into thinking he was falsely imprisoned, and persuaded them to rescue him. Even more famous was No. 127 - "D'Arcy's Bank Book". In order to teach Gussy to be more careful with money, Lord Eastwood opened a bank account for £50 in the name of his son. The experiment was hardly a success, and the account soon ran into debit. Gussy shewed a masterly disregard for the conventions of banking when he attempted to remedy this by drawing a cheque in favour of himself to replenish the account and when the Bank manager objected, Gussy asked him sternly if this meant that the Bank had no further assets.

With No. 129 began a sequence of tales that struck a new and somewhat disturbingly unpleasant note. It was a new boy from America, Jerrold Lumley-Lumley who effected this transformation. In the first few days he earned the nickname "The Outsider", but the Head was powerless to expel him, because he had signed an agreement to keep him at the school for at least three years. The following week, after they had broken up for the holidays, Lumley-Lumley was offensive to Cousin Ethel at Huckleberry Heath, but he received short shrift from Tom Merry & Co. Incidentally, it is interesting to note that with this number Cousin Ethel's character was developed into something more than the pleasant good-natured girl which she had hitherto been depicted to be.

In No. 131 (a story by a substitute writer) the juniors were back at school again, but the tale of their holidays was continued in No. 132 with a description of a trip to the Japanese exhibition at the White City which was enlivened by several encounters with Captain Punter, a pick-pocket of considerable resource.

The saga of Lumley-Lumley was continued somewhat intermittently, a number of tales being written by substitute writers (and later being among the handful of stories not by Charles Hamilton which were chosen for reprinting in the 'thirties). A genuine story in No. 134 saw Lumley-Lumley at the Green Man, playing poker with Mr. Joliffe and Mr. Banks who intended to fleece him. The Outsider, however, was even more expert at cheating than they were, and he came away with £70 of their money, which Dr. Holmes later made him refund. A fine story appeared in No. 138, in which Lumley-Lumley drove off with Cousin Ethel in a trap against her will, to make her spend the afternoon with him. At one stage he performed a brave deed, and Ethel began to hope that he might, after all, prove to be a decent fellow, but he spoilt it all by excessive familiarity. The story ended thus:-

He was thinking of the chance he had had that day of gaining the regard of Cousin Ethel - the chance he had had of winning her respect - and how he had, with the caddishness that seemed inherent in his nature, thrown that chance away. The girl had been growing to trust him, and he had lost her trust. The chance was gone! Would it ever recur?

No. 141 saw the beginning of a pair of most remarkable stories. Lumley-Lumley had reached the nadir of his infamous career in attempting to drug the Shell football team who were playing the Fourth. It was just after his treachery had been exposed that he was knocked down by a motor car, and the shock aggravated a peculiar malady from which he had always suffered, with the consequence that he died soon after. This tale was told with a depth of sympathy and sentiment that was unusual even for the early

stories, and which was rather drastically pruned when it was reprinted in Gem No. 1385. The following week saw the arrival of Ernest Levison who had been expelled from Greyfriars some two years previously, and who seemed to have left all his few good qualities behind him. It was Levison who, having known the Outsider previously, correctly guessed that he was merely in a trance, and in a stirring scene he went down to the vaults in the night to bring Lumley-Lumley back to life. Needless to say, Lumley-Lumley then left the school for a while to recuperate.

Probably in case readers should be alarmed at the somewhat sombre nature of these stories, there followed a few more in the old vein. In No. 144 Gussy was in love again, and this time the recipient of his attentions allowed herself to become engaged to him, in order that he should begin to realise all it involved. The Christmas Double Number in No. 145 dealt with Binks the page and the fortune he had just inherited. Binks's father was too proud to work, and his mother was what D'Arcy called a "washerlady"; it was to these rather unusual parents that he returned on his accession to fortune. (The next week a story by E.S. Brooks featuring Binks still as the page was tactlessly printed by the editor.) Binks returned in No. 147 and asked to be allowed to become a pupil. Dr. Holmes agreed and after the possibilities of the subject had been exhausted it was given out that Binks had decided it would be better to go to another school. Binks's elevation was rather a pity, because Toby, his successor, was nothing like so good a piece of character drawing.

If anyone had begun to wonder whether Tom Merry was losing the limelight, the series which began in No. 148 would have re-assured him on this point. Crooke's father was a financier, and one of his successful coups involved the ruination of Miss Fawcett. Cousin Ethel came to the rescue to look after his guardian, and Tom went to London to seek employment, but found things hard going. The year ended on a more cheerful note with Tom temporarily re-united with his old friends for Christmas at Eastwood House.

The New Year saw more vicissitudes, Tom Merry playing for the Wayland Ramblers football team, and later (in No. 153) acting as Master of the Third while Mr. Selby was away. It was clear, however, that Tom was not the person to keep the fags in order, and the fortunate arrival of Mr. Poinsett, his millionaire uncle from Arizona, enabled Tom to return to the ranks of the Shell again. A postscript to this series in Nos. 154 and 155 described how Joe Frayne, the waif from the London slum who had met Tom Merry during the period of his misfortune, was brought back to St. Jim's and entered the Third Form. Joe was not exactly welcomed by his form-fellows, but he managed to make a place for himself.

Lumley-Lumley returned in No. 158, apparently cured of his malady, but not otherwise changed. Tom Merry good-naturedly agreed to let him play in the team, against the wishes of everyone else, and this incident heralded the commencement of a rift in the lute, which was aggravated by Lumley-Lumley's efforts to get Tom Merry disgraced. This was a fine series, too short perhaps to compare with the later series about Harry Wharton's relapses, but nevertheless outstanding for its time. Only Wally D'Arcy and the fags remained loyal to Tom Merry, and it was poetic justice that it should be Wally who was instrumental in foiling the plot in No. 160. The next number was aptly entitled "By Order of the Head, or Lumley-Lumley's Last Chance"; in this Tom Merry and Co. were requested to try to reform the Boy from the Bowery. It was an uphill task, but not unsuccessful.

Joe Frayne claimed the limelight in No. 162 when he was driven from the school by Mr. Selby's harshness. The following week he became a temporary convert to Skimpole's Socialism, while a more serious pair of stories in Nos. 165 and 166 dealt with the embarrassing arrival at St. Jim's of some of his old acquaintances from the London slums.

Not all the Gem stories were original to the Library.

Nos. 167 and 168 were reprint of Boys' Friend monthly library No. 38 entitled "Tom Merry's Conquest". The theme was one of a war with the Grammar School, in which each campaign was directed by a different leader whose name was drawn out of the hat. It need hardly be added that it was under Tom Merry's generalship that success was achieved. Another interesting pair of stories was in Nos. 170 and 171 when the school was cut off by floods when Dr. Holmes was ill. He left for a holiday in France with all the masters to see him off. Unfortunately they did not get off the boat in time, and St. Jim's was left in charge of Knox for a day or two.

A really famous trio of stories came with Nos. 173 to 175, dealing with a trip to a Treasure Island in the South Seas. There is a smack of Robert Louis Stevenson about the duel with the Spanish dwarf Lopez, and it must have been a popular series, for it was reprinted on several occasions.

There was a pleasant, old-fashioned ring about the titles of many of these early stories. No. 181 - "The Secret of the Sea", or the Manuscript in the Bottle" related how the juniors spent a holiday at Clovelly and rescued a ship-wrecked mariner.

Levison was such an utter villain at this time that it makes some of the stories written about him a little too incredible, and the re-actions of Tom Merry & Co. were so strong that the old atmosphere of pleasantry would at times disappear, leaving rather more primitive passions exposed:-

"That chap's a cad!" Lowther remarked.

"But don't be too warlike, Tommy, my son. You never used to fly out in this way".

Tom Merry flushed again.

"I can't stand that chap!" he exclaimed. "He's always got something to say with a beastly sting in it - he lets nobody off. He'd make out the whole human race is rotten at the core, I believe. I'm sick of it."

Levison played an ignoble part in No. 182 in which Glyn

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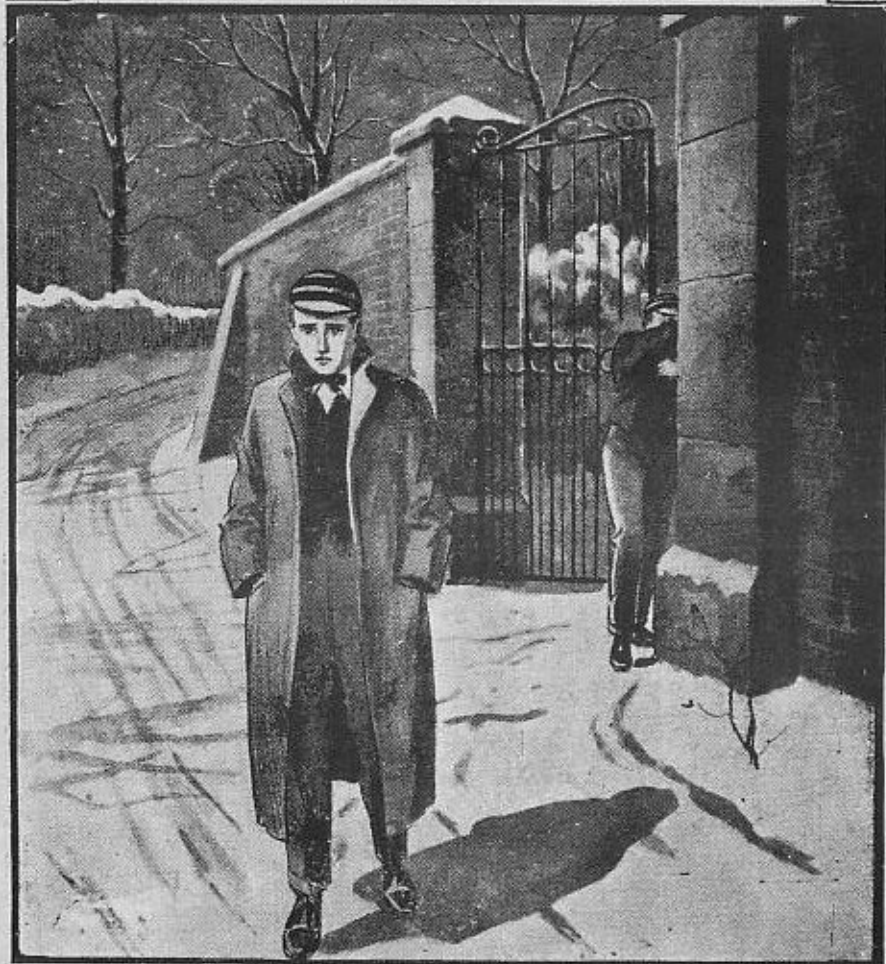
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TALBOT PARTS FROM TOM MERRY!

"Good-bye Tom! God bless you! Believe in me, that's all I can ask you now—that will help me! Good-bye—good-bye! the best pal a chap ever had." Tom, blind with tears, watched Talbot as he passed through the school gateway. He could not speak—his voice was choked with sobs. "Good-bye!" whispered Talbot. And he was gone! (See the grand school tale in this issue.)

invented his famous bowling machine. Glyn had sent the plans to the Patent Office, but Levison was - quite correctly - suspected of having intercepted them. There was an unpleasant scene in which the juniors had decided on suspicion alone to rag him until he handed them over, and were stopped only by Kildare's intervention. Episodes like this redounded to the credit of none of the parties concerned, and one cannot help wondering why the author included such distasteful passages, where all the characters shewed up badly.

There were a number of single stories of merit at this time: No. 183 was a thoughtful study of Dick Brooke, the day-boy, and his broken-down father; No. 184 was about Gerald Blane, who had tried to conceal his shady past until an old acquaintance returned; and No. 185 "The Black House on the Moor" in which Cousin Ethel was the intended victim of her relative Dr. Gadsby - a piece of sheer melodrama which shews the influence of Sherlock Holmes and "The Speckled Band".

A taste for foreign adventure must have been in their blood, for the juniors made a trip to the Congo in Nos. 190 to 192 (albeit unwittingly) and Tom Merry brought back to St. Jim's M'Pong, a cannibal, whose banishment was effected by Levison. Levison played another part in No. 194, a tale with some considerable atmosphere, in which he was assisting some gentlemen from the Bird in Hand to kidnap Lumley-Lumley. But perhaps the tale with the most carefully wrought atmosphere of all was the Christmas Double number in No. 197 - another "Ghost of St. Jim's". This time the ghost was Dr. Wynde, a brilliant surgeon and vivisectionist who was staying at the school as the guest of Mr. Selby. The doctor's mind had been turned by his cruel experiments, and in reading old books of the legends of the school he fancied that the spirits of the old phantoms were seeking possession of his body.

A thoughtful story of some merit was No. 201 in which Bishop of the Fourth, who had built up a legend of his father's wealth, saw his fantasies collapse when his poorly-

dressed sister paid a visit to the school. There were a number of subsequent stories about juniors who were ashamed of their relatives, but none were so fine as this.

1912 - The Blue Gem at its Zenith

1912 was a particularly successful year, and it is noteworthy that Charles Hamilton wrote every story but one that appeared in the Gem for that year (the odd one in No. 226 being the first of Pentelow's imitations).

The year opened in grand style in No. 204 with Gussy being elected captain of the school for a few days in Kildare's absence. The story was mainly comedy, but there was a fine dramatic sequel the following week which dealt with Monteith's feud with D'Arcy for having beaten him in the election. Levison also had a grudge against Monteith, and arranged a rope for him to trip over, and thoughtfully provided some broken glass to cushion his fall. This rather gruesome episode led to some fine reading when suspicion fell on D'Arcy. Levison was the culprit again in No. 207 when he tried to get his rival in the Southcote examination - Figgins - disqualified for cheating.

It was evidently thought time for some more new juniors to arrive, for No. 211 saw three scholarship boys - Lawrence, Redfern, and Owen - who became known as the New Firm of the New House. The following week related the story of the first barring-out, after which Mr. Ratcliff took a long holiday and the school was intrigued by the new temporary master, Mr. Wodyer.

Joe Frayne came into prominence again in No. 218 when he fell into disgrace as a result of being too loyal to Langton the prefect. Dick Brooke also had a large share of the limelight in a series from No. 220 to 222. He incurred the enmity of Levison, who concocted a forged note to Mr. Lathom, bearing insulting words in Brooke's handwriting. Levison's guilt came to light unexpectedly, and he shammed illness to avoid expulsion. The juniors were so disgusted that they expelled him themselves and put him on the train to London. Dr. Holmes was therefore constrained to

allow Levison to return, to show the school who was headmaster. After Levison had saved Cousin Ethel from a bull he was released from the sentence of Coventry which had been imposed on him. The reader was, for the first time, given a hint that perhaps Levison was not after all the unmitigated scoundrel he had hitherto seemed to be.

A most unusual tale by Charles Hamilton was "Figgy's Folly" in No. 223. Figgins impulsively jumped on the train that was bearing Cousin Ethel away to Paris, because he was afraid she might not be safe among foreigners. His resentment against the middle-aged Frenchman who engaged Ethel in conversation was convincingly narrated, but it was nevertheless an odd sort of tale to find in the Gem, and it is not surprising that the strangeness of its theme once led a famous collector to declare it was the work of a substitute writer.

Langton was to the fore again in No. 225, being blackmailed by a bookmaker to sell a match, whilst No. 229 saw Levison locked in the Head's safe, and the new games coach being forced to reveal himself as a cracksman in order to save the life of the boy who was plotting against him - a fine story, this, with a splendid character study of Mr. Selby. Levison was still convalescing the following week, and so Crooke was brought forward to play the villain, with an ingenious scheme to get Monty Lowther suspected of theft. After the Fourth had suffered the pangs of a temporary form-mistress, Miss Ponsonby, in No. 232, Monty Lowther played a prominent part again in No. 237 entitled "Stage Struck", in which he ran away from school to join a seedy theatrical company touring third rate provincial theatres. How the scales gradually fell from his eyes and how he came to realise he was only the dupe of the manager who used his premium to spend on drink was related in a splendid story which is probably as true of stage life today as it was when it was written all those years ago.

Another fine tale appeared the following week - possibly the finest story to be published in this finest year - "Bought Honours". D'Arcy decided to learn Greek and enter

for the Greek Medal (all in one week!), and he accepted Levison's offer to coach him. When D'Arcy began to realise what a poor chance he had got, Levison gradually persuaded him - in a veritable masterpiece of conversational writing - to let him take the exam disguised as D'Arcy (with a view to blackmailing him afterwards). Needless to say, although Levison won the prize for him, D'Arcy could not bear to enjoy his bought honours for long.

Tom Merry was in trouble in No. 239 when a secret entrusted to him by Kildare and Langton was spread about the school and he got the blame for it. Mr. Ratcliff was very much in the centre of things in No. 240; he became so intolerable that Kerr dressed up as a lady and pretended to be his abandoned wife, an episode which so upset him that he had to leave the school for another holiday. Tom Merry was in more trouble in No. 242 entitled "The Prefect's Plot" in which Bingham schemed to get him expelled. This was a queer sort of story which seemed to begin half way through; it had a fine dramatic start, and tailed off a little at the end.

Humour was the keynote in No. 244 "The Flooded School" in which Mr. Selby played an unworthy part. Drama was to the fore again, however, in Nos. 247 "Baffled" and 248 "Caught Red-Handed" which featured Ferrers Locke and a series of amazing burglaries by the Mysterious X at Glyn House and St. Jim's. There was a very ingenious solution to the mystery which was far less patent than many of Charles Hamilton's later stories about crime.

"Nobody's Study" in No. 250 was a very seasonable offering, in which Levison disappeared overnight (when locked in the punishment room) leaving only his clothes behind him, like the monk in the legend. Levison's trickery was discovered by the juniors earlier than he had intended, and the story never made clear what excuse Levison had intended to offer when he did re-appear.

The year ended on a note of mystery with Nos 253-255 which present rather a puzzle to the reader. They are not in the style of the period, yet they are not imitations.

The explanation is that they were adapted from early St. Jim's stories in Pluck. Since Tom Merry was not at St. Jim's in those days, Charles Hamilton duly obliged by writing in a part for the Terrible Three into his old stories, though most of the interpolation was directed to explaining why Tom Merry did not feature much in the story. Other amendments were necessary, Mr. Railton being substituted for Mr. Kidd - not a happy substitution, for their characters were not alike.

1913 - On Top of the World

Charles Hamilton must have been indisposed at this time, for the first five stories of the year were imitations, and No. 261 was another Pluck adaptation. He was back at the peak of his form, however, with No. 266 entitled "The Last Hope" in which Tom Merry rashly lent Cutts some Club Funds to pay pressing debts on the strength of Cutts's word that he would be able to return the money on Friday. Tom Merry was later aghast to discover that the repayment depended upon the prowess of another horse (which also lost), and he had some anxious moments before he could retrieve the situation.

Gussy provided some comic relief in No. 269 when he became an interpreter at a Wayland Hotel for a while, and again in No. 274 when he took up the cause of women's suffrage at Wayland where "Windows had been broken, pillar boxes had been raided, policemen had been scratched and even bitten - in fact there were all the signs of progress". More serious was No. 272 in which Tom Merry's double - Reggie Clavering - made his first appearance and caused a great deal of dissension.

After a trip to Italy searching for buried treasure in Nos. 275 and 276, Levison came to the fore again in No. 278. His father expected to make a fortune on the Stock Exchange, but he was ruined instead, and Levison came back in disguise as a boot boy, maliciously setting to work to create trouble everywhere.

Mr. Ratcliff was the villain of the piece in No. 280, but

he was successfully paid out by the Terrible Three. A fortnight later saw Tickey Tapp ensconced in the old Manor House in charge of a casino, during which time Gore had a bad attack of gambling fever and the readers were treated to a fine description of how the croupier manipulated the wheel. This story was followed by "Taggles' Benefit" in No. 283, when the school porter's sixty-fifth birthday was suitably commemorated.

The only substitute story which need be considered in this article is No. 285 entitled "Misunderstood", the authorship of which has not been discovered. In this tale Manners was unjustly suspected of being a coward and he redeemed his reputation later by saving a child from a fire at Wayland. Stories about saving lives do not perhaps rank very highly in the annals of literature; often they are merely a cheap and easy way for the author of resolving a difficult situation. But this story merits some note if only because of the skilful manner in which Manners' estrangement from his friends was portrayed. The story must have been read by Charles Hamilton, for he later made many references to the splendid camera which Manners was awarded for his courage.

Cutts of the Fifth was a well-drawn character around whom many first class stories were written. No. 287 was one such tale, in which he obtained a place in the first eleven by roguery in order to let the side down and so win a large bet. How he was foiled by Fatty Wynn made an intriguing story to be classed with "The Last Hope" earlier in the year.

Stories about Figgins' regard for Cousin Ethel always made fine reading. If "Figgy's Folly" had been a little too extravagant in theme and "The Black House on the Moor" too melodramatic for some readers, "Figgins' Foe" in No. 288 suffered from neither defect. In this tale Brooke aroused much ill-feeling by meeting Cousin Ethel out of school in rather mysterious circumstances, which Levison ferreted out and made known. Both D'Arcy and Figgins were shewn at their best - and worst - in this

notable tale.

An excellent sequel to No. 287 appeared in No. 291 in which Cutts sought to blacken Digby's character in order to extricate himself from his debts to bookmakers. A light topical story in a humorous vein was "The Rag-Time Schoolboys" in No. 293 which was, for obvious reasons, never reprinted.

There were a number of good humorous tales at this time including No. 294 "Gussy's Guest" describing a visit by Fisher T. Fish, No. 295 "At the Eleventh Hour" in which Mr. Lathom and Skimpole took up geology and a prehistoric man was supplied for them to find, and No. 296 "Tom Merry's Minor" relating how a monkey caused no little disturbance at the school. All these stories had a serious topic included, but the humorous parts were none the less funny for that.

Undoubtedly the most famous of all Christmas numbers was "The Mystery of the Painted Room" in No. 302. In addition to the usual seasonable atmosphere of all the previous Christmas stories, this tale had a really well-knit and imaginative plot, revolving round an historic room at Eastwood House with a beautifully painted ceiling. The figure of Bacchus was, indeed, so lifelike that its eyes seemed at times to wink!

1914 - The Calm Before the Storm

Lord Eastwood was getting stingy with his "fivahs" again in No. 311, and Gussy was driven to the desperate expedient of seeking work, but neither as errand boy nor as barber's assistant could he manage to find a steady job. A fortnight later saw Figgins grinding away at Latin - as a result of a hint from Cousin Ethel - in order to win the Bishop's Medal. He was more successful than Gussy in attempting something unusual.

No. 315 was another Cutts story, this time featuring Monty Lowther, who had taken to gambling because his uncle had cut his allowance. This rather unbelievable

circumstance tended, perhaps, to mar an otherwise good story.

A series of four stories commencing with No. 317 (broken by No. 319 - a story by E.S. Brooks which did not relate to the series) brought Cutts and Tom Merry into prominence again. Kildare was obliged to leave the school for a while, and Cutts set about eliminating all rival candidates for the captaincy. Just when it seemed that he had succeeded, Tom Merry came forward and was elected by a large majority. His tenure of office was glorious, but brief, and then Cutts came to power for a fortnight until Kildare returned. It is interesting to note how self-contained each story in this series is; indeed, there are some inconsistencies, for No. 320 ends with Mr. Railton warning Cutts to mend his ways, and No. 321 begins by stating that Cutts enjoyed the housemaster's confidence. In later days, Charles Hamilton would not have regarded each story so much as a separate unit.

After Tom Merry's double had put in another appearance in Nos. 323 to 325, No. 328 saw Gussy taking up ventriloquism in a series of amusing episodes in which his progress was precisely nil. Another humorous story was No. 331 in which Algernon Blenkinsop, the fourteenth son of the Rev. Rabbits Blenkinsop, arrived from Huckleberry Heath endowed with a great capacity to sing hymns and pass on his father's tracts, and also - like Mrs. Jellyby in "Bleak House" - he had an absorbing interest in missionary work in far-off islands. The following week saw Lowther "Playing a Part" on the stage again with his old friend Mr. Horatio Curll.

With No. 334 began a series of four stories dealing with the introduction of one of the most likeable characters to appear in the Gem - Reginald Talbot, "The Toff". Handsome, popular, splendid cricketer - he seemed to have the world at his beck and call; yet he was also a schoolboy cracksman and leader of a gang of criminals. (The same theme was later used most successfully for the Lancaster series in the Magnet.) The first two Talbot series were

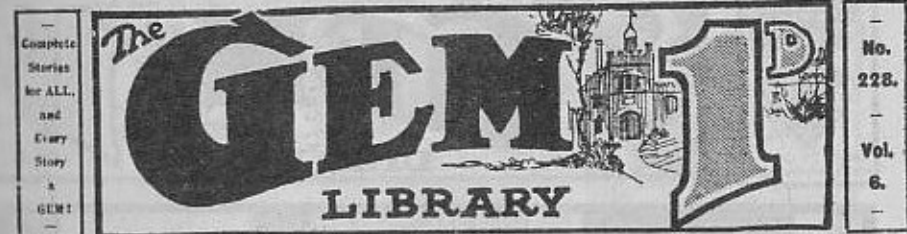
ALL SCHOOL-STORY NUMBER!

"SHUNNED BY HIS FATHER!"

"THE SCHOOL UNDER CANVAS!"

A Long, Complete School Tale of Tom Merry & Co.

The Long First Instalment of a Grand New School Serial Story.



LEVISON'S LATEST LARK!

The lady picked up loose stones from the roadway and hurled them through the window with terrific destruction to the array of lobster tins, salmon tins, and other articles with which the window was dressed. Crash! Smash! "Great snakes!" gasped Lumley-Lumley, rushing out of the shop to defend his employer's property. (See the long, complete school story inside.)

D'ARCY'S DEBT!

A Magnificent New, Long, Complete Tale of School Life at St. Jim's



THE BROKER'S MAN IN GUSSY'S STUDY!

(An Exciting Scene in the Magnificent Long, Complete School Tale in this issue.)

perhaps the finest series of all in the Blue Gems. How in this first series he was suspected by Levison and just managed to allay suspicion, how he tired of his life of hypocrisy, and how he had to give himself away in order to foil an attack by the gang on the school safe was related in first-class manner in this really magnificent quartet of stories. He left the school in No. 337, but it was certain that St. Jim's had not heard the last of him.

Nos. 339 and 340 saw the last of all the pre-war summer holidays. Lumley-Lumley was inveigled into spending a few days with Cutts and Captain Punter, a gambling party that ended up with a fight for the winnings, after which Lumley-Lumley moved over to Eastwood House and Billy Bunter came along to exercise what he thought was his fatal attraction over Cousin Ethel. In No. 341 Monty Lowther evolved a wheeze to prolong their holidays, but when they returned to St. Jim's it was found that Study No. 6 had been bagged, and Monty had to think deeply before he could retrieve it for the Fourth-Formers.

Each Gem story was of course written many weeks before publication, and it was not therefore until No. 349 dated 17/10/14 that a hint of war was to be found. In that number the juniors had rather an amazing adventure which ended up with their being under guard in an Austrian hotel with a soldier outside the door with fixed bayonet - an obvious dramatisation of the author's own experiences.

The second excellent Talbot series commenced with No. 351, telling how Talbot won the King's Pardon for saving a troop train from being blown up by a German spy. Disdaining charity, he sought a job as boot-boy in the New House the following week, but Mr. Ratcliff was not the most considerate of employers, and he was glad when the governors offered him one of the old scholarships to enable him to return to the Shell. This second series ended magnificently with No. 353 in which he did Levison a good turn, which was unexpectedly repaid when Levison contrived to overthrow the plot of Tresham to get Talbot expelled for robbing the Fifth Form Football Club funds (which Tresham

had in fact appropriated for his own purposes). The curious friendship between Levison and Talbot was another step on the road to Levison's reformation.

None of the Talbot stories that followed could ever reach quite the same heights as those in the first two series. Many were very good, but the novelty was gone, and the old drama could never be resuscitated on such a high level again. No. 355 was one such "repeat" story; Hookey Walker, another member of the gang, escaped from prison, and was captured by Levison's quick-wittedness. No. 356 was only indirectly connected with Talbot, the main plot being the story of how the juniors mistakenly suspected Kildare of being a blackguard, but Talbot's past was re-opened in No. 358 in which John Rivers, "The Professor", arrived at St. Jim's under the alias of Mr. Packington. His stay was brief, but more was to be heard of him. "Talbot's Christmas" in No. 359 was spent at Huckleberry Heath with a German spy and a ghost to enliven the festivities.

1915 - The Blue Gem Carries On

The New Year saw another Talbot series. The Professor's daughter, Marie Rivers, came to St. Jim's as a nurse, and in No. 362 Talbot was kidnapped. A burglary was carefully staged to make it look like the work of the Toff, but all came right in No. 363 and Marie Rivers repented.

Talbot's reformation was quite convincing, though Marie Rivers' change of heart seemed rather sudden. When, however, in No. 364 the Professor himself decided to join the army to atone for his past, one is left with the feeling that this was perhaps too much of a good thing (though allowances should of course be made for the patriotic fervour which was sweeping the country at the time). But No. 364 had some interesting moments, especially when Mr. Railton went to Lantham to make a recruiting speech, and was pertinently asked by a heckler why he didn't join up himself:-

"I am a schoolmaster", said Mr. Railton, feeling that he was called upon to defend himself, for

the mockery of the crowd stung him to the quick.
"It would be very difficult for me to be replaced -"

In the end, Mr. Railton became Private Railton and the Hero of the school, and was in fact replaced quite easily by Mr. Carrington, an Australian. The new Housemaster soon incurred the dislike of Mr. Ratcliff in No. 368, in which Chungum's circus came to Rylcombe.

It is a pity that nearly all the Talbot stories dealt with spectres from his past. No. 375, the Spring Double Number, entitled "Winning His Spurs", described how he helped Hookey Walker to emigrate. It was a rather disappointing tale, ending up with the capture of a German spy. Far better was the series in Nos. 376-378, in which Gore fell into the clutches of Tickey Tapp, and stole money from the Head's safe to pay his debts. Talbot was caught taking the money back, and naturally fell under suspicion. Talbot had a number of adventures at his job in Chungum's Circus before Gore confessed and he was re-instated.

A novel sort of competition commenced with No. 380, the object being to see in which part of the Kingdom the greatest number of copies of the Gem was purchased. A quartet of stories specially written to accord with the competition bore the titles "Kildare for St. Jim's", "A Son of Scotland", "A Hero of Wales", and "Tom Merry for England". Only the second story, which described Kerr's efforts to get Figgins cleared of an unjust suspicion, is in any way worthy of note. Incidentally, the competition was of course won by England.

A most remarkable story was "Levison's Last Card" in No. 385 (a sequel to No. 375). Levison borrowed £5 from Mr. Moses, the moneylender, in order to repay Talbot, and now he was faced with expulsion if he could not pay up. How he blackmailed Mr. Moses, how his cunning over-reached itself, and how Talbot came to the rescue is related in a most enthralling manner which nevertheless leaves the reader with the impression that Levison was definitely not such a rogue as he had been.

The Summer Double Number was "The Housemaster's Homecoming" in No. 393. Sergeant Railton, having been wounded at the front, returned to the school accompanied by his C.O., Colonel Lyndon, who was Crooke's uncle. The Colonel was also a governor of the school, and after Crooke had done his best to blacken Talbot's character in his eyes, it did not take the Colonel long to decide that Talbot was not a fit person to remain at the school. In the end it transpired that Talbot was in fact the Colonel's nephew, and so the last chapter was written in Talbot's history. It is not surprising that Charles Hamilton once rated "The Housemaster's Homecoming" with "The Boy Without a Name" as his finest stories. Both these (and the early ill-fated St. Kit's stories later) possessed one theme in common - that of the boy who was half-recognised by a governor of the school and falsely suspected of being dishonest. The theme had great potentialities, and "The Housemaster's Homecoming" utilised them to the full.

Dick Julian, the Jewish junior, was the new arrival in No. 394. Monty Lowther set out to pull his leg, but soon found that the joke recoiled upon his own head. Three weeks later saw Julian featured again when it became known that Mr. Moses, the moneylender, was his uncle. In No. 399 Corporal John Rivers was home on leave from the front, while No. 403 saw the re-appearance of another old friend, Mr. Horatio Curll. This time it was "The Call of the Cinema" for Monty Lowther, but he soon found that playing piano accompaniment for silent films was not so glamorous as it seemed.

The Christmas Double Number was "A Stolen Holiday" in No. 407. It was another spy story, but a great improvement on the previous year's, mainly because it was a battle of wits with Kerr as the chief protagonist.

1916 - Goodbye to the Blue Gem

The fat and fatuous Bagley Trimble arrived in No. 414. As Charles Hamilton says, "Baggy owed his existence to the fact that Bunter was such a 'draw' in the other paper: but

though he was the work of my own hands, I never liked him much: the real truth being that an author should never imitate even himself. He had to be differentiated from Billy Bunter, and all the differences somehow seemed to turn out badly for him." Perhaps this judgment is a little harsh, but it is certain that Baggy never succeeded in capturing the sympathy of the reader in the way that Billy Bunter did.

"Finis" was written to the misadventures of John Rivers in No. 416, in which it became known that he had won the V.C., and Colonel Lyndon was obtaining a free pardon for him. Nos. 421 and 422 were a fine pair of stories dealing with the arrival of Manners minor. Reggie Manners was a spoilt petulant youngster, and his elder brother in the Shell received all the blame for Reggie's misdeeds. After Gussy had become embroiled in hire purchase transactions in No. 426, and rescued by the kindness of Mr. Moses, more was heard of Reggie Manners in No. 432 in which he was taken up by Cutts of the Fifth; he didn't require much leading.

The war was beginning to affect the size of the Gem. It was reduced at this time from 28 pages (excluding covers) to 24 and then 20. Charles Hamilton probably found the rapid reductions rather disconcerting. At all events, No. 431 "Grundy the Ventriloquist" seems to have been too short, for Pentelow interpolated parts into the story, while No. 434 "The Man from the Front" shows signs of considerable condensation.

The last Blue Gem was No. 436 dated 17/6/16. The Blue Gem had survived the Red Magnet by nearly a year, owing to the fact that the bluish green dye for the Gem was easier to obtain than the red dye for the Magnet. With No. 436 the Blue Gem ended with more of a bang than a whimper. Valentine Outram was the subject of the story, the strange new boy who was - quite incorrectly - adjudged a funk by everyone except Gussy (and Levison, who knew his secret). The tale was duly completed in No. 437, the first of the Blue and White Gems. And so began the era when the

Magnet and Gem looked exactly alike on the bookstalls, and in appearance really lived up to the title of "The Companion Papers".

Conclusion

The Blue Cover days of the Gem undoubtedly constituted the hey-day of the paper. Finer stories appeared in the early 'twenties, which may be called its golden age, but there can be no doubt that it lost its ascendancy when it lost its blue cover. By May 1919, (Gem No. 590), the editor was complaining that the circulation of the Magnet had outstripped that of its older competitor. The new rumbustiousness of Bunter was apparently more suited to the post-war world than the old and leisurely humour of D'Arcy.

There is perhaps an impression that the St. Jim's stories were full of ragging and japing to the exclusion of more serious topics. Compared with the Greyfriars stories, this is true, though the number of such St. Jim's stories has probably been exaggerated. Tales of this nature have largely been omitted from the foregoing review, as have most tales of heroism (for reasons explained in connection with Gem No. 285), stories about Grundy, and tales about Tom Merry's Weekly, which usually revolved around some secret insertion at the last minute, to the dismay of the editors. Stories of all these types were undoubtedly popular with young readers, and may indeed be read with pleasure by older people now and again, but none of them can rank with such first-rate tales as "Bought Honours" in which interplay of character upon character is so masterfully related.

The stories in the Blue Gem were reprinted many times - in Populars, Holiday Annuals, and Schoolboys' Owns. Charles Hamilton might have foreseen a measure of this reprinting, but it is certain that no-one in those early days would have guessed that in 1931 would commence the reprinting of 404 grand old stories from the Gem, the great majority of which being taken from the blue cover period,

and that the reprints would appear this time in the Gem itself.

There are mixed feelings about these reprints. On the adverse side it is said that they were too abridged, they lacked the old atmosphere, and they stopped Charles Hamilton from writing new stories for the Gem. On the other hand, it may be said quite definitely that they saved the Gem from extinction - a danger threatened by the publication of hundreds of stories by substitute writers. Further, they introduced a new generation of readers to a first-class set of stories. The collecting world owes, therefore, a debt of gratitude to Eric Fayne for persuading the Amalgamated Press to take the step of issuing these reprints.

The list in the 1949 C.D. Annual is a useful guide for the reader who wishes to obtain the reprinted issue of any particular story, but for the true collector there is no substitute for the complete and original Blue Gem itself. The Blue Gem period is the only period in which attention was given wholeheartedly to St. Jim's (for the following ten years Rookwood reigned supreme, and after that Greyfriars gained the author's almost undivided attention). St. Jim's was Charles Hamilton's first love, and even those who prefer to read about Greyfriars or Rookwood will always acknowledge that in the Blue Gem the Sussex school, with its wealth of detail and studied background, and its long and well-planned stories possessed attributes which were never quite reproduced elsewhere. It was the testing ground for many an idea which received fuller development elsewhere; in later Magnets such an idea would have formed the basis of a series of many numbers, whereas in the Blue Gem it would be presented concisely in some 15 to 20 chapters, and the following week would see another remarkable story in a totally different vein. What the Blue Gem lacked in development of treatment, therefore, it gained in variety of stories.

The days of the Blue Gem were largely halcyon days, days when Tom Merry and D'Arcy, Blake and Figgins reigned

supreme. The sun shone ever brightly on the green sward of St. Jim's where cricket was played in a serene and untroubled world that had no fear for the future. Life as it was before the cataclysm seems even more attractive now. The Blue Gem echoed the faith and certainty of its time in a magnificent sequence of stories to which the Red Magnets, fine though some of them were, could never even hold a candle. The success of the Blue Gem was no mystery, as the foregoing review has attempted to prove. Unlike the Red Magnets, many of which are now only of historical interest, the Blue Gems contained fine stories in their own right which do not require to be popularised by the prop of subsequent achievement. For all collectors, nearly every Blue Gem is Beguiling.

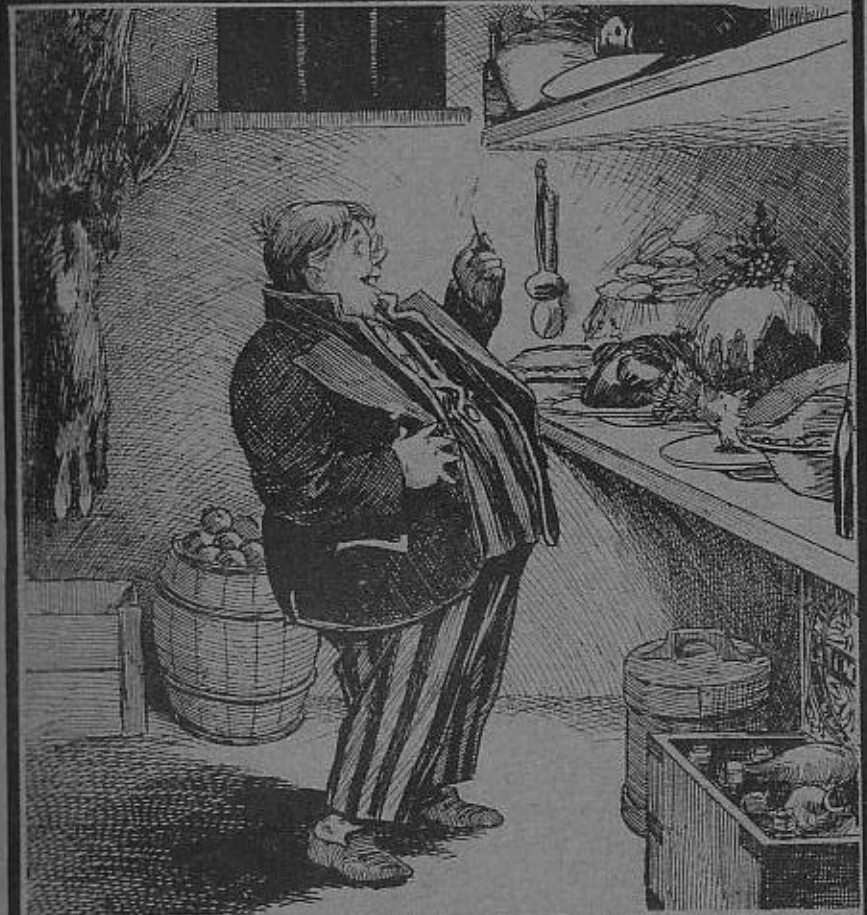
"JOHN BULL JUNIOR."

Splendid
School
Tale of
Harry
Wharton
& Co.



Thrilling
Detective
Story of
Stanley
Dare,
the Boy
Detective

No. 152 | The Complete Story-Book for ALL | Vol. 5.



"My hat!" murmured Billy Bunter. "This is ripping! They can put it down to the cat in the morning."

