

TURN BACK THE CLOCK

by

ERIC FAYNE

MIDSUMMER, 1931:

The long, long story of Tom Merry's Schooldays was starting again, right from the beginning. The title I had suggested for the first story, - "TOM MERRY - NEW BOY ", - had been adopted.

I felt a sense of responsibility. For six months I had persisted with my request that this experiment should be tried, and now it was a reality. Obviously, it was up to me to do all that I could to make it a success. From now on I worked hard to do my small share in building up the circulation of the Gem. My efforts were, of course, a drop in the ocean, but, being in the teaching profession, I was in touch with hundreds of boys and girls, and I did what I could.

My Gem Club was a tremendous hit; I was in a position to make it so. For years we had Gem dances, Gem whist drives, Gem fancy dress galas, Gem outings; everybody attending these countless functions over the years had to carry a current copy of the Gem. I ran competitions of all types in connection with the old paper; when these competitions were of a literary character, the entries were sometimes sent to the Editor, with the request that he would judge them, and he kindly did so. By these and similar methods, I won hundreds of extra readers for the Gem. My boys and girls of the nineteen-thirties were keenly Gem-conscious, and not only the youngsters, - their parents, too, took an immense interest in our various activities, and many wrote to me of their personal recol-

lections of the paper from their own youth.

Mr. R.J. Macdonald sent me a delightful original painting of Tom Merry. Framed, it hung in my senior form-room for nearly twenty years, and today it is one of my most cherished possessions. Sometimes, when a special function was in progress, a telegram with a cheery message, signed Martin Clifford, would arrive. Probably Martin himself knew nothing about it, but my boys and girls thought he did, and that was all that mattered.

BACK TO 1907:

Reviewing it now, I see that the decision of the Fleetway House to turn back the clock was a momentous one for them to have made. It must have entailed a great deal of consideration. Clearly, it would never have been done at all if the Gem had been in a healthy state in the early months of 1931. The paper was in deep waters, and the drastic measures which I had long advocated were taken, - measures which might kill or cure. The Twilight Years, the masses of substitute stories which had characterised the Gem for so long were left behind, and the clock was turned back.

The clock was turned back a quarter of a century, but the span was really far greater than the period of time suggests. In reality, the clock was turned back to another age, to an earlier, half-forgotten world, - a distance which many would have thought could never successfully be bridged.

"TOM MERRY - NEW BOY" had been written at the commencement of 1907, in a leisurely age of dusty lanes, gas-lighting, horse traffic, muffin-men, zinc milk-cans, cottage loaves, drawing rooms and parlours resplendent with red plush and horsehair sofas; servants, in caps and aprons, were two a penny, like the early Gem; two years were still to pass before Bleriot flew the Channel; ragtime was half a decade away in the future, jazz was awaiting creation; the motor car was in its infancy; the motion picture had hardly started to flicker, let alone to talk; the primitive giant-horned gramophone was just gaining popu-

larity; radio was waiting in the wings. 1907, an age of class distinction, when poverty and wealth existed side by side. Everybody was intensely patriotic, and English people spoke English; the time was still far distant when it would become fashionable for Britons to decry everything British.

Between 1907 and 1931 lay the greatest war the world had ever known. An era had ended in 1914; the habit and thought of Blue Cover days lay trampled far beneath the muddy soil of Flanders. It would seem that the suggestion I made, and upon which the Fleetway House acted, was a daring one, - and so it was, in a way.

AND YET -

Those two-score $\frac{1}{2}$ d Gem stories have a secret, illusive charm. They are so ingenuous, so full of life, so sparkling with fun; they were written with a boyish enthusiasm which is subtly but surely conveyed to the reader. They have a magic quality which one finds in no other stories.

Perhaps "TOM MERRY - NEW BOY" could hardly avoid being something of a period piece, even so long ago as 1931. It was just not believable that a boy of fifteen would arrive at a minor public school like Clavering in a velvet Faunteroy suit, for such attire had surely gone out of fashion before the turn of the century. But, allowing for the vagaries of lovable Miss Fawcett, the story got by, and the reprints were safely launched. A renewed period of prosperity came to the Gem.

But, though the initial stages were safely negotiated, there were still pitfalls ahead. The blue-cover Gems had appeared at a time when publishers gave amazing value for money. The penny Gem of the blue covers had 32 pages, as against the 28 pages of the twopenny Gem of 1931. The print of the early papers had been smaller, the space allotted to advertisements much less. In consequence, the early stories were longer than the editor required in the nineteen-thirties.

This difficulty did not present itself while the $\frac{1}{2}$ d series formed the star attractions. Those stories were roughly of the length wanted, and only a little judicious pruning was necessary. It can, in fact, be admitted that in the early stages of the reprints the abridgment was carried out quite competently.

But with the arrival of the double-length stories, we had another kettle of fish entirely. With a handful of exceptions, the 1d blue-cover Gem stories were almost double the length normally required. Again, it can be admitted that some of the tales would have lost nothing at all from careful pruning. With the coming of the long stories in 1908, we find a few of them a trifle stodgy, bogged down at times with padding in the form of facetious dialogue. Stories of this type benefited from pruning.

It is my personal opinion that the period from 1911 till 1913, inclusive of both years, was the Golden Age of the Gem. Masterpiece followed masterpiece, stories which were sometimes equalled but never surpassed in the years to come.

These were the tales which suffered most in the re-printing. As they were too long for the Gem of the thirties, a careful shrinkage was obviously indicated if they were not to be spoiled. This, unhappily, was not generally done. The abridgment was often careless and clumsy, whole chunks being cut out higgledy-piggledy, the result sometimes being a sorely unbalanced and unsatisfying story.

The delayed arrival of Levison was another factor which marred some of the fine tales of this period. In yarns which should have shown the development of Levison as a cunning and clever young rascal, the actions and remarks of Levison were attributed to the appalling name of Snipe. The arrival of Levison was delayed to coincide with the Lumley-Lumley series. Owing to the complete omission of certain tales for various reasons, the Editor found the seasons passing with greater rapidity than he could cope with. The Lumley-Lumley series had to wait for the

propitious time of year when the Outsider should appear, and this meant that Levison had to wait also.

While admitting that this sort of thing was reasonable to some extent, it must be said that the leaping forward to a group of stories, followed by a return to collect some that had been by-passed, seems at times to have been considerably more than was necessary.

I kept a sharp eye on stories which had been skipped, and on many occasions was responsible for the fact that they were eventually reprinted. Owing to the dodging about, and the fact that most of the titles were altered, it was not easy to keep a check on them all.

In the following summary of the years of the reprints, I list at the end of each year the most interesting of the stories which were left out. With a few exceptions, I ignore the stories by substitute writers.

THE YEAR 1931

At Clavering, Mr. Henry Railton, the Headmaster, became Mr. Victor Railton, - a very necessary correction. Mr. Quelch, the master of the Shell, became Mr. Welch. Wingate, the captain of Clavering, was changed to Felgate; North, the prefect, became South.

Very little pruning was done in the opening story, but one piece is of interest. In the original story was the sentence "Sir Charles Grandison in his boyish days must have been a great deal like Tom at this period of his life". This was a reference to a novel by Richardson in which Grandison, the hero, was polite and chivalrous to a tedious degree. Whether readers were familiar with the works of Richardson in 1907 is a question, but obviously they were considered as unfamiliar with that writer in 1931.

The national cricket heroes of 1931 were completely different from those in the public eye in 1907. A deleted sentence in the second reprint was "With the hitting of a young Jessop, the pace of a Fry, and the grace and style of a Palaret, Tom Merry was certainly the finest cricketer

outside the Sixth". Less necessary was the change from "A budding W.G. Grace" to "A budding Hobbs".

Inspector Skeet of the early stories became Skeat, the spelling of the name with which we were familiar.

"The Schoolboy Tecs" was the very first yarn to introduce Ferrers Locke. Jack Blake, talking of Locke, remarked, "There's a detective here. I don't know whether it's Stanley Dare or Frank Ferrett". Who Dare and Ferrett may have been I have no idea, but in the reprint, the name of Sexton Blake was substituted.

Ferrers Locke was featured in a large number of the earlier Gem tales, usually with Tom Merry as his boy assistant. It was curious that he dropped out of the Gem after the "Mysterious X" series, to reappear in the Magnet.

"Tom Merry - the Boy Tec" gave an example of a correction which should have been made but wasn't. Gussy, travelling by train from St. Jim's in Sussex, arrived at Euston. But a cabman became a taxidriver, and a seller of "Stars" and "Echoes" became a vendor of "Stars" and "Newses".

Martin Clifford does not seem to have decided very early in which part of the country St. Jim's was situated, but by 1931 everybody should have known. About a year later, in "Wally the Runaway", Tom Merry & Co. went by train from Rylcombe and, in the original tale, arrived at Charing Cross. In the reprint, the terminus was changed to Waterloo. Both were wrong, for a train from Sussex would arrive at Victoria or London Bridge.

"The St. Jim's Speed Cops" rang a false note in 1931. Tom Merry drove Lord Eastwood's car. As Tom was described as being barely fifteen years old, it is unlikely that he could have held a driving licence in 1931, even if there was no such age restriction in 1907. This was the first story to introduce Cousin Ethel, named Ethel Maynard in the original, and changed to Cleveland in the reprint.

The issue dated Dec. 5th, 1931 brought "St. Jim's for Merrie Christmas" which had appeared as "Tom Merry's Christmas" on Nov. 23rd, 1907, in the Gem's first Christmas Number and first Double Number. Fortunately, the Editor in 1931 ran it as a cover-to-cover story, and this delightful, seasonable frolic thus escaped the mutilation suffered by scores of other fine yarns later on.

OMITTED:

There were 42 Tom Merry stories in the 48 issues of the ½d Gem. Of these, only four were omitted in the reprinting policy.

"OUR CAPTAIN." As there were only four stories of Tom Merry at Clavering, it seems a pity that this, the second of them, was passed over. Probably the Editor was anxious to get Tom to St. Jim's, in order to bring back on the scene Gussy and the other well-known characters.

"THE ST. JIM'S CURATE." This story introduced Mr. Dodds who featured fairly frequently in the early years. True, it also introduced a Greyfriars whose junior captain was Yorke and whose demon bowler was one, Ponsonby, but it was a pleasant cricket story, and the names could have been changed.

"THE DIABOLISTS." Pleasant period piece of the Diabolo craze.

"SKIMPOLE'S LITTLE SCHEME." For a freak character, it would seem that Skimpole was featured far too often in the Gem's early years. A great many Skimpole stories were reprinted, but this one, the first of them all, was not. It concerned Skimpole's craze for Socialism, and brought in a tramp, Bill Bunter. It is a question whether any breath of politics is desirable in a school story, even when, as in this case, the matter is lightly and quite fairly presented. Actually it is a very droll and amusing tale, and most people, reading it today, would be vastly entertained.

THE YEAR 1932:

The ½d Gem stories continued into 1932, two of them being held over until the summer. These two, "Expelled from St. Jim's" and "Tom Merry's Camp" were joined together, and appeared as a cover-to-cover story under the title "Sacked from St. Jim's". Only very slight abridgment took place, and the welding of the two stories into one was well done, making an extremely good yarn.

The first of the double-length blue cover Gems, "The Gathering of the Clans" appeared at the end of February, under the title "The Treaty of St. Jim's". Running from cover to cover, it was practically unabridged.

A few more from the shorter ½d series then came up, and at the end of March the second of the longer stories, once more running the full length of the paper, and again very little cut.

At the end of March we had the first example of a good story spoiled by haphazard pruning. "Mellish, the Mischief-Maker" (originally "The Tell-Tale", and once published in the Penny Popular under the far superior title of "Rough Justice") would have suffered nothing from a general shrinkage in the opening and middle chapters, but instead of this a huge chunk was cut wholesale from the final chapter just when a tingling climax was working up.

By the close of May, the reprints had reached a stage in the early Gem when the stories of Alan Wayward ran side by side with the school tales. The Wayward adventure series appeared for about three months in 1908, and, in consequence, the Tom Merry stories had been much shorter. Two stories, the second of which was drastically pruned, were united in 1932, and appeared as "The Kidnapped Cricketers".

A more unusual state of affairs is evident with the next two reprints. "The St. Jim's Parliament" comprised the combination of "Skimpole's New Idea" with the opening chapters from "The Parliamentary Candidate". Then "Prime Minister of St. Jim's" opened with the closing

chapters of "The Parliamentary Candidate" linked with "Told on the Telephone". Thus, three early tales were welded and cut to make two reprints. In my view they were dry, wordy tales, and not worth the trouble.

August brought the reprinting of the Gem's very first summer holiday series, - six tales of a party from St. Jim's abroad the S.S. "Condor". Unabridged, these stories made very satisfying reading. If Martin Clifford had actually written them in the thirties, there is no doubt that hectic adventure in foreign lands would have been the lot of the boys on the Condor. As it was, schoolboy fun and games, plus a feud with Mr. Ratcliff over the heaving waves, provided a charming holiday interlude, a charm which has never lessened with the passing of the years.

In October, "The Joker of St. Jim's" turned up as "Tom Merry at the Zoo". Typical of so many of the pleasant romps of blue cover days, it is memorable for Gussy's side-splitting efforts to tell a "shaggy dog" story. Wispy as gossamer, this story had a clever humour which I always find convulsing.

Mid-December brought "The Ghost of St. Jim's" which had first appeared in mid-November 1908. This was the story where Binks terrorised the School House by tapping on the walls from the secret passage, and it had appeared in a Xmas Double Number. Although the issue of 1932 was described as "Greatly Enlarged", the four extra pages were utilised for advertisements, and in consequence the story was cut by no less than ten chapters. This classic Christmas tale was, in consequence, a mere ghost of its former self.

The year ended with the commencement of the Gem's first travel series, Tom Merry in America with Gussy, Blake, Skimpole, and Wally D'Arcy. By later standards, these five would seem to make odd travelling companions, but six stories formed an excellent series, and one which compares favourably with the outstanding travel stories in the Gem and Magnet as time went on.

THE YEAR 1933:

In mid-February came what is apparently the first reprint of a substitute story. It must be admitted that in 1909 it is not so easy to detect the efforts of the substitute writers. Usually the imitation yarns stand out as such, but Martin Clifford was not always at his best, and what is actually a story from his pen may, possibly, be mistaken as coming from elsewhere.

"Hero and Cad", originally "D'Arcy Minor's Chum", is definitely a substitute story, and it is almost certainly the first one that ever appeared in the Gem.

This was followed by "Call of the Sea", which centred around one, James Ballantyne, who was sent to St. Jim's against his will. In the reprint his name was changed to James Raleigh, though why this change was made is a puzzle.

In March, Bernard Glyn came on the scene in "The Schoolboy Inventor". Oddly enough, in 1909, Glyn had first been mentioned as being at St. Jim's in the previous week's story, "The St. Jim's Terriers", which, in my opinion, was a substitute story.

At the end of April came two rather curious stories, "The Rival Schools" and "St. Jim's for Ever", originally published in the Gem as "Tom Merry's Triumph" and "Played Out". These stories are rewritten from "Tom Merry & Co.", a long story which Martin Clifford especially wrote for the Boys' Friend Library No. 30, in 1907, when Tom Merry had not long been at St. Jim's. This was the very first story of Rylcombe Grammar School.

"Tom Merry's Trip" was a peculiar story in October 1909. It was still more peculiar that it was selected for reprinting in July 1933. Tom Merry's uncle invited him to take a party to France. At the end of the tale, when the party was seated in the train, a telegraph boy came along the platform with a telegram stating that the start of the outing was delayed till next week.

There are two possible solutions of this mystery. One,

BUMPER CHRISTMAS NUMBER!



(No. 407.) **THE WOUNDED WARRIOR'S RETURN.** (27-11-15)

(From the painting by R. J. Macdonald.)

**MAGNIFICENT, EXTRA-LONG SCHOOL TALE
OF TOM MERRY & CO., IN THIS NUMBER.**

Grand 50,000-Word School Tale OF TOM MERRY AND TALBOT.



Some of the Characters in the Great Tale of School Life at St. Jim's in this issue :—
(Reading from left to right.)

Skimpole. Monty Lowther. Manners. Dr. Holmes. Wally D'Arcy. Arthur Augustus. Figgins. Blake.
(Sitting): Talbot. Marie Rivers. Tom Merry. Cousin Ethel. Fatty Wynn.

that the star author's copy was not ready to follow on with the series, so the Editor inserted the few lines at the end of the story. More likely, I think, the Editor discovered that the series was to culminate in the double-length Christmas story, bringing the Xmas number earlier than he wanted it. At any rate, in 1909, a substitute story followed "Tom Merry's Trip", and then Tom Merry & Co. started off on the journey abroad which was to culminate in the Christmas story at the Chateau Cernay.

In July 1933, "Tom Merry's Trip" appeared as "The Boy with Too Many Friends", closing with the vague lines about the trip being temporarily postponed. But the actual visit to France did not take place in the reprints until more than four years later, when the Chateau Cernay series formed Christmas 1937. No doubt this hold-over was due to the fact that the Chateau Cernay story had been published fairly recently in the Schoolboy's Own Library. But why publish that story in the S.O.L. at that time? And, even more pertinent, why publish the opening story of the series in the Gem of July 1933? Truly the Fleetway House moved in a mysterious way its wonders to perform.

At the end of 1909, two stories of Gussy at Tomsonio's Circus had appeared, in connection with a circus series which Charles Hamilton was then writing in Pluck. These two stories were reprinted in August 1933.

In August the Nelson Lee Library gave up the ghost, and was incorporated with the Gem. For a time, stories of St. Frank's occupied the last few pages of the Gem. This, together with the fact that more space was being devoted to advertisements, made necessary still more drastic cutting of the St. Jim's stories. It was a pity, for the yarns of the Gem's Golden Age were approaching.

At the end of September came two tales, very heavily abridged, of Tom Merry in Monte Carlo. Actually, in the early Gem, a year had elapsed between the Cernay series and this one. Possibly the Editor, in 1933, hoped that this Monte Carlo series would link with the abandoned trip of July.

At the close of November commenced the famous series where Tom Merry lost all his money, and became adrift in London - seven stories spoiled by unskilful and very severe pruning. In one of them, Tom originally met Jack, Sam, and Pete, and the dog Rory. In the reprint, the names were changed, rather sadly, to Jim, Buck, and Rastus, though the dog remained Rory.

This series included the Christmas number for 1933, entitled "Gussy, the Ghost", originally "Tom Merry's Resolve". The entire original centre of this story was scrapped, and several new chapters were written in by somebody. The portion deleted had told of Skimpole's arrival at Easthorpe to take part in a parliamentary election - a tedious sequence, the cutting of which was no loss. Unfortunately, the new chapters were very uninspired.

Actually, two years had passed in Gem stories between the Xmas Number of 1932 and that of 1933.

OMITTED:

"THE FEUD OF THE FOURTH." Substitute story in which Clifton Dane made his initial appearance.

"THE ST. JIM'S TERRIERS." Dated story of the Territorial Army, almost certainly by a substitute. Introduced Dane and his weird snakes, and the first story in which Glyn is mentioned as being at St. Jim's. The first genuine story about Glyn appeared the next week, which suggests that the writer of the Terrier story must have read "The Schoolboy Inventor" in script form.

THE YEAR 1934:

With the New Year, the words "Incorporating the Nelson Lee" were dropped from the Gem title, though the St. Frank's stories continued at the end of the paper for some time longer.

A good deal of dodging about was now being done with the St. Jim's stories, leaping forward and then hopping back to collect yarns which had been passed over. A big backward

leap was taken to pick up Albert Clyne, originally "The Cad of St. Jim's" and now "The Worst Boy at St. Jim's". seems to have been the first tale to refer to Gussy's tenor solos.

In 1907, Martin Clifford had written a long story entitled "Tom Merry's Conquest" for No. 38 of the Boy's Friend Library. In April 1911, this story was divided to make two issues of the Gem under the titles "The Rival Schools" and "Saints versus Grammarians". As, by 1911, Gordon Gay had long been on the scene, first in a series by Prosper Howard (who invented him) in the Empire Library, and also in the Gem stories, readers must have wondered that he did not appear in these two Gem tales. These were reprinted in 1934 as "Rival Riggers" and "What Price Victory?"

The story which introduced Levison to St. Jim's had been by-passed, and the acts and remarks of Levison in subsequent tales were attributed to Snipe.

The delightful South Seas series from 1911 appeared as an Easter treat for Gem readers in April 1934. Not too heavily abridged, the only fly in the ointment was the change of Levison's name to Snipe in the opening story.

Now we went back a year to collect Lumley-Lumley. In the opening story, Mr. Lumley-Lumley paid three years' fees in advance. The fees at St. Jim's had risen from £30 a term in 1910, to £50 a term in 1934 - far too low on both occasions for a school like St. Jim's. Lumley also featured in the next tale, "The Complete Cad", originally "The Terrible Three's Cricket Match". Then came a jump to another Lumley tale, "A Disgrace to St. Jim's, originally "Lumley-Lumley's Luck". It was an improvement to bring these Lumley stories in sequence.

Oddly enough, the next reprint "The St. Jim's Jockeys", originally "Lumley-Lumley's Rival", was a substitute story. It is really curious how a substitute writer was able to produce a story on a character so recently introduced, and I regard it as another proof that the sub writer

must have read the genuine stories in script form.

The next tale, "Towser's Rivals", originally "Herries' First Prize", introduced Lumley and Dane, and has the hallmarks of a substitute story. After this came a certain genuine story, "Outsider and Hero", originally "Lumley-Lumley, Hero". Quite a fascinating study, these early Lumley stories. Puzzling, too!

"Gussy's Cricket Party" and "The Demon Bowler" came next. The end of the first story and the whole of the second had made up "D'Arcy's Cricket Week" for the S.O.L., not so many years before.

Now came a big leap forward to two more Lumley stories, "The Marooned School" and "The School Without Masters". Then, back again for that famous story "A Shadow Over St. Jim's" in which Lumley-Lumley "died".

And so at last, in September 1934, Levison was introduced in "The Boy Who Came Back", the title referring to Lumley-Lumley.

November brought that delightful travel series with Tom Merry & Co. on the Congo. Three stories, all much abridged, but excellent reading.

For Christmas we had that classic story "The Ghost of St. Jim's" in which Mr. Selby's guest donned the robes of the mystic and restless spectral monk. This story which had appeared in a double number in 1911 was cut by more than half its original length, and thereby reduced to indifference in 1934.

OMITTED:

"TOM MERRY'S MASTER-STROKE". A story in which Sir Hilton Popper forbade the use of the island on the river near St. Jim's. Really, Mr. Clifford!

"LEVISON, THE SCHOOLBOY DETECTIVE." Appeared, most inappropriately, in the Xmas Double Number for 1910. A good story, but quite unseasonable, and of normal length, so that the 1910 Xmas Gem had a mass of short stories to

support the main feature. No obvious reason why it was omitted from the reprints.

"HIS FALSE POSITION". Excellent tale, with fine character work. Had a slightly sadistic sequence in which Levison arranged for Moneith to trip over a rope and fall, clad only in running clothes, into a heap of broken glass. Probably omitted on account of this episode, but I think the omission of a fine story like this was a big mistake.

THE YEAR 1935:

With the issue dated January 19th, 1935, the Packsaddle series, by Frank Richards, joined St. Frank's in the supporting programmes, necessitating further pruning of the St. Jim's tales. The pages were now divided into three columns instead of two, which, according to the Editor, gave him more space to play with. The St. Jim's story told of the arrival of Redfern, Owen, and Lawrence, the scholarship boys.

The first Dick Brooke story had not been reprinted, but the second appeared in April. Less sentimental, and with more action than the first story, it had a sequel in which the juniors took it upon themselves to expel Levison. As usual, many of the original chapters were deleted.

After their return from the South Seas in 1911, Tom Merry & Co. had spent their treasure money to celebrate the coronation of King George the Fifth. I suggested to the Editor that this story should be published, twenty-five years later, to celebrate the Jubilee of the great king. This was done, and "Coronation Day at St. Jim's" in 1911, became "Jubilee Day at St. Jim's" in 1935.

Some of the Gem's finest stories appeared that summer of 1935, all of them spoiled by mutilation. "The Whip Hand", "Tom Merry's Concert Party", "Stage Struck", "The Limit", "The Spy of the School", - I quote the original titles - followed one another with their brilliance dimmed.

At the beginning of August came what I regard as the greatest Gem story of all time, "Bought Honours", in which

Levison sat for an examination in Gussy's name. The superb original title was changed to "The Cheat". A beautiful school story, hacked about and disfigured to make space for a full supporting programme which was nothing to write home about. The Editor should have had his head examined.

The Packsaddle series ended in August, and now, for a time, there was much less abridgment. Such stories as "The Flooded School", "The Mysterious X" series (the last Gem tales to feature Ferrers Locke, so far as I remember), "The Prefect's Plot", and "The Wrong Team" came on the scene unspoiled.

In mid-October came "The Captain's Rival", a fine Kildare-Monteith story from December 1912, a tale which Martin Clifford had rewritten from a story of his which had first appeared in Pluck. This excellent yarn, very long in 1912, lost several chapters in 1935.

"The Sentence of the House" told originally of Eric Lorne, a friend of Cousin Ethel's. Reprinted as "The Boy who Defied His Form", the boy's name was changed to Eric Page. This may have been due to the fact that an Alec Lorne had appeared in a story some time before.

The Christmas Issue for 1935 contained the famous story "Nobody's Study". Although it ran from cover to cover, it still was drastically cut, an entire sequence concerning an acrostic by Levison for Tom Merry's Weekly being omitted.

OMITTED:

"FIGGY'S FOLLY." A Figgins-Cousin Ethel story, very sentimental, and rather out of its element in the Gem.

"D'ARCY'S LIBEL ACTION." A screamingly funny story, probably passed over on account of a suffragette sequence. With slight pruning, would have made a good rib-tickler in 1935. (Incidentally, the first St. Jim's story that I ever read).

"TOM MERRY & CO. IN IRELAND." Good story of an

excursion. Could easily have been brought up to date.

"JACK BLAKE ON THE WARPETH." A story rewritten in 1912 by Martin Clifford, based on an old Pluck yarn.

THE YEAR 1936:

At the beginning of February came the two stories introducing Harry Hammond, the Cockney Schoolboy, which had appeared at the end of 1913.

Mid-February, under the rather smug title "They Faced Dishonour" came the reprint of "Shoulder to Shoulder", a story from early 1913. It was, perhaps, a slightly smug story altogether, which was a pity, for it was a first-class yarn in many ways. Tom Merry, Gussy, Wally, and others, all told lies. One line - "It was a lie - the first that Tom Merry of St. Jim's had ever told" was deleted in the reprint. Even in 1913, it had been a mildly priggish tale; in 1936 it just failed to ring the bell for the same reason.

Koumi Rao came on the scene in the issue dated February 29th, a fine character with great possibilities which never became facts.

In March, at my request, was reprinted "Held to Ransom" as "The Kidnapped Headmaster", a story which had first appeared in 1910.

Two fine travel tales of Tom Merry in Venice came in April. The first, originally called "Tom Merry's Discovery" and renamed "Clue to a Fortune", told of a treasure document given to Tom Merry by an Italian named Marco Frulo. In the reprint, his name was changed to Maro Luigi, though goodness knows why.

The second Venice story, and a grand one it was, ran from cover to cover, and suffered only minor pruning.

Next week, at the end of April, "The Making of Harry Wharton" began as a serial, so the first Magnet stories joined the St. Jim's reprints.

In June came a very fine Lumley-Lumley story. "For the Honour of St. Jim's". This was the very first tale to feature the iniquitous and ubiquitous Tickey Tapp with his gambling den. In passing, every story in which Tickey Tapp appeared over the years was first-class.

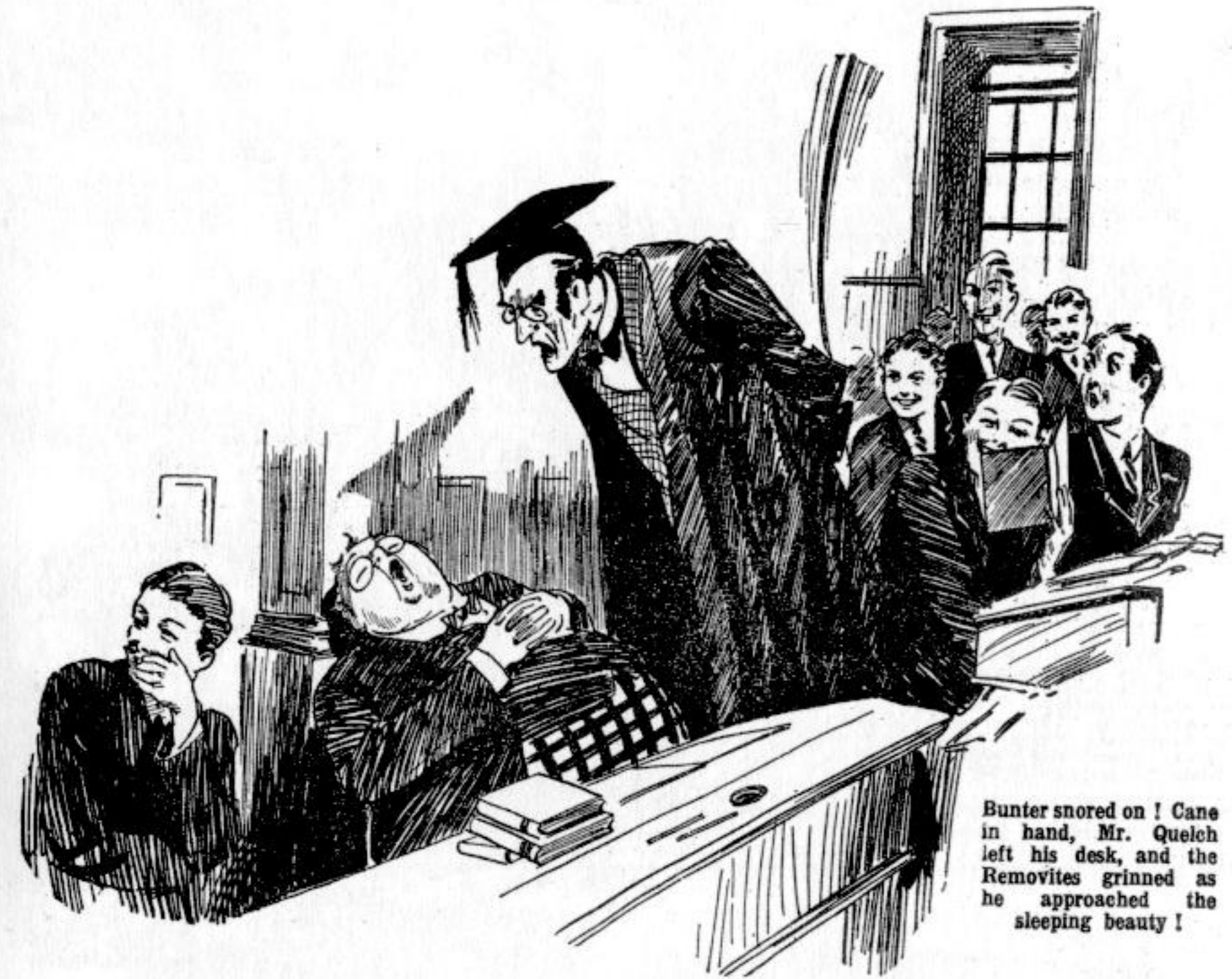
This was followed by that classic substitute story "Misunderstood" which the Editor thought to improve with the clumsy title "They Called Him a Coward". After this, at my request, came "The Laugh's on the First Eleven", a story published round about 1910 under the title "The Rally of the Rival Co's".

A leap forward now to a famous scouting story "The Curlew Patrol Wins Through". With the reprinting of this story came the chill feeling that the Golden summer of blue cover days was passing. Like the early morning mists and cool breezes which herald the autumn and warn us that winter is near, so this story, published originally a few weeks before the outbreak of the first Great War, told us that the best was past. True, there were a number of fine stories yet to come, but, after the outbreak of war in 1914, the really good yarns were fewer and farther between.

But the next week, in mid-July 1936, we went back and collected another famous story, "Under a Cloud", the first to introduce Reggie Clavering, Tom Merry's Double.

The end of August saw the reprinting of that very fine tale, "The Black Sheep", with Cutts and Digby playing star roles. I cherish this issue, for it contained a photograph of a number of boy members of my own Gem Club.

The following week, a photograph of the girl members of my Gem Club appeared. The Editor referred to it as "a smiling group who 'fell' for Tom Merry, and now read about him regularly". This was true. With this issue came "The Toff", the first Talbot story, which had appeared in the Gem dated July 4th, 1914, exactly one month before the outbreak of war. This first Talbot series covered four stories.



"Cave!" Billy Bunter bundled into bed, dressed as he was, and dragged sheets and blankets round him, and up round his neck to hide his collar. He was only just in time, for the next moment the dormitory door opened, and Mr. Quelch, his eyes gleaming in the light of a lamp, looked into the dormitory.





Mr. Lathom turned quickly, startled by the crash of his door and the white, excited face that stared in at him. "Clive what—?" "Levison, sir!" panted Clive. "Has anything happened to Levison? I've heard—I mean, a fellow thinks—will you tell me, sir, if—if—if—" "Calm yourself, Clive," said the Fourth-form master gently. "Levison has confessed to the theft of Mr. Selby's banknote, and has been sent away from the school!" (See page 9.)



"I suggest, D'Arcy, that you mind your own affairs," said the school nurse firmly, "and leave other people to mind theirs!" "Bai Jove!" murmured Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, turning crimson. He had not expected this sharp rebuke from a girl who was usually kindness itself. (See Chapter 3.)

Firework day was the occasion for a return to 1913 for a remarkably fine tale, "By Whose Hand?", featuring Koumi Rao, the last one about him to be reprinted, and the last but one about him that was ever written. It finished with that classic humorous chapter when Gussy helped Glyn to make fireworks, with disastrous results.

A four-story series now came up concerning Kildare's recall to Ireland. Tom Merry became Captain of the School for two stories, to be succeeded in that exalted position by Cutts for two more stories. When originally published, the series was split by the insertion of a substitute effort half-way through the series.

Christmas 1936 brought that magnificent tale "The Mystery of the Painted Room", from Christmas 1913. With the memory of the mutilation of "Nobody's Study", I asked the Editor that this might be divided and made into two stories, to avoid abridgment. This was done, and the first story (with the intriguing "Painted Room" title changed to the hackneyed one of "The Mystery of Eastwood House") consisted of the first thirteen chapters of the original tale, uncut. In the second story, a couple of new chapters were written by somebody to give, as it were, a synopsis of what had happened so far, after which the original tale carried on unabridged. I felt very happy that my plan had been carried out so successfully.

The year was wound up with "The Ghost of St. Jim's", originally "The Ghost Hunters". Levison was up to his tricks, but it was Prye of the Fifth who was expelled at the end.

THE YEAR 1937:

The stories in hand this year were chiefly those published during late 1914, and 1915; they needed a fair amount of revising to make them suitable for the Gem in 1937, for they had a pronounced war flavour. Some had too much war atmosphere for them to be revised at all, and, in consequence, there were many omissions.

At the end of February, "The King's Pardon" was reprinted as "The Return of the Toff". In the original story, Talbot had been pardoned for saving a troop train from being wrecked by a German spy. In the reprint, Elberfelt, the German spy, became Gonzales, a Spanish spy; the troop train was carrying soldiers for the near East; the Great War was changed to the Spanish Civil War. Quite a neat transition.

"Tom Merry's War Fund" of November 1914 became "The St. Jim's Charity Fund" in April 1937.

The series concerning Tom Merry's double, Reggie Clavering, came in May. The last story of this series, with much of its suspense lost by drastic pruning, appeared in the Coronation Number of the Gem, May 15th, 1937.

In June came the United Kingdom series from June 1915, with Kildare representing Ireland, Fatty Wynn standing for Wales, Kerr on behalf of Scotland, and Tom Merry for England. There was nothing outstanding in this series.

Grundy arrived in July.

In 1915 the summer holidays were somewhat unusual, the same curious feature being present in 1937. A party spent the holiday at Eastwood House, with Bunter as an unwelcome guest. They returned to St. Jim's to find that Levison & Co had taken possession of Study No. 6. In the next issue they were back on holiday, in a single caravanning story.

This was followed by a leap back over two years to take in "Tom Merry Minor", the story of a pet monkey.

Julian, "The Jew of St. Jim's", arrived in September.

New Gem readers must have been a little puzzled at this time, for Levison was featuring in the early stories of Greyfriars as well as in the St. Jim's tales. At the beginning of October, Levison was expelled from Greyfriars, and older readers must have thought rather wryly of that series in the twenties when we were assured

that Levison had not, in fact, been expelled from the Kentish school.

A Talbot series, introducing the Professor and Marie Rivers, was reprinted in November. These tales, in the last of which Tom Merry found Talbot on the Embankment, are regarded by many as being the best of all the many Talbot stories.

For Christmas, we went back to Christmas 1909, for the Chateau Cernay series, temporarily postponed (in this case, the postponement lasted several years). The series occupied three issues of the Gem at the close of 1937, the last story, now called "The Ghost of the Ruined Chateau", running from cover to cover.

This Christmas Number was the last issue of the attractive red, white, and blue covers, and it may be added that throughout the years since the reprints began, the Gem had been perhaps the most enchanting periodical in appearance on the bookstalls. Macdonald, the artist, had given of his very best, and the blending of red, white, and blue, - a Union Jack adorned the top corner for a long time, - had been a delight to the eye.

In the last Gem of 1937, Baggy Trimble arrived on the scene.

OMITTED:

"SECRET OF THE ISLAND". Story of Figgins and some coiners.

"LEVISON'S LAST CHANCE". Levison story introducing Greyfriars, and referring to Levison's expulsion from that school.

"SCOUTS TO THE FORE". Levison story, plus a German spy.

"ST. JIM'S AIRMEN". Period piece, with Tom Merry in a war-stricken Europe.

"FOES OF ST. JIM'S". Schneider versus the French master.

"ST. JIM'S RECRUIT". Talbot story. Mr. Railton and John Rivers join the army as privates.

"HERR SCHNEIDER'S SECRET". Concerning Mr. Carrington, the master who replaced Mr. Railton.

"AN AFFAIR OF STATE". Gussy claims an audience with the Prime Minister.

"THE HOUSEMASTER'S HOMECOMING". A 60,000 word story which appeared in a Summer Double Number in August 1915. Though many people have considered this a masterpiece, it was never reprinted, and its omission here seems to have left the story of Talbot very incomplete. It told of Mr. Railton's discharge from the army, and of Talbot's discovery that Colonel Lyndon was his uncle and Crooke his cousin.

"TALBOT'S RESCUE". A splendid story telling of a new boy, Loring, who was kidnapped, an impostor taking his place at St. Jim's. Loring was rescued by Talbot and the Terrible Three. This plot was used in a yellow and black Magnet, which could, possibly, be the reason why "Talbot's Rescue" was omitted from the reprints.

I have at times expressed my personal opinion that Talbot, excellent character though he was, was given far too much prominence in the Gem in the year which followed his introduction. It would seem that the Editor, in 1937-8 took the same view, for many Talbot tales were omitted from the reprints, not all of them, by any means, dated by the war flavour.

THE YEAR 1938:

With the issue dated December 18th, 1937, the Gem came out as a "pocket" weekly, consisting of 36 smaller pages, and with a mustard-coloured cover. The reason for this is uncertain. Usually when a change of this sweeping type

occurred, it was a sure sign that a paper was in deep waters. Personally, I do not think that such was the case with the Gem. Other papers, including the Magnet, had abandoned the covers of two-colour printing on white paper. No doubt the new style was much cheaper, but the mustard colour was unattractive. What a pity that they did not return to the blue cover of the early years.

It may have been that, with far less attractive stories now looming ahead in the reprints, the Editor decided that a bigger supporting programme of stories was essential. Possibly, the smaller pages made it possible to give more reading matter. Whatever the reason, the charm of the Gem had passed. It would never be the same again.

Early in January, Manners Minor arrived.

In mid-February came "The Artful Dodger", a reprint of "Trimble Tries it On". This was a story from the roaring twenties, and was, in fact, the very latest story to be reprinted in the Gem. After this, we went back to 1915 for "The Thief", a story featuring Gore.

In mid-March, as "Moneybags Minor", Aubrey Racke arrived. At the beginning of April, Sidney Clive turned up.

The two Outram stories, - one had been in the last of the blue-cover Gems, the other in the first of the white covers, - headed the bill at the end of May. Both tales were heavily abridged.

In July, for some unfathomable reason, two camping stories by a substitute writer, collected from the Twenties, were served up to Gem readers. Greyfriars now left the Gem, and the St. Jim's stories were supported by the Benbow series plus the tales of Frank Richards at Cedar Creek.

To follow the substitute writer's camping tales came a long caravanning series by the genuine Martin, from the year 1919. Two stories, dated by certain factors, were omitted from the series, which still comprised nine tales.

Incidentally, they were first-class, and this must have been one of the very longest of all the Gem's scores of series.

After this, at the end of September, a return was made to introduce "LEVISON MINOR", with the resultant reform of Levison in the next few stories. All were drastically abridged.

In mid-November Cardew arrived. This story had originally appeared during the war years, with a definite war background. Much pruning made it suitable for 1938 consumption.

THE YEAR 1939:

At the end of January, yet another new boy arrived in the person of Roylance from New Zealand, who figured in a 3-story series concerning a feud with Manners, naturally over Manners Minor.

Another newcomer, Leslie Clampe, was depicted as a snob who was ashamed of his relation, a sailor. Clampe thought his relation a mere jolly jack tar, but the said relation was only testing Clampe, and was really a Lieutenant, R.N.

Clarence York Tompkins turned up in "They Called Him a Duffer" at the end of February.

The last of the reprints was dated April 1st, 1939. It was "The St. Jim's Hunger Striker", and the original of the same name had appeared at the end of November 1920. There was no need to abridge this story, - the St. Jim's tales of 1920 only ran to nine chapters, - and 1920 was anything but a vintage year for the Gem. In any case, it was a substitute story.

REVERIE

And so the reprints which started with a fanfare of trumpets and a glowing tunic of red, white, and blue, presenting "TOM MERRY - NEW BOY", joyous, sparkling,

evergreen, ended with "THE ST. JIM'S HUNGER STRIKER", an unimpressive and forgotten little pot-boiler selected from one of the worst years of the Gem, in a pathetic pocket edition encased in a mustard-coloured shroud.

That the reprint policy was a success can scarcely be gainsaid. It brought scores of the Gem's finest stories to many thousands of readers who otherwise would never have known them, and it certainly brought renewed prosperity to the grand old paper. The reprinting of four hundred stories in the same paper which had given them birth must be something entirely without precedent in the publishing world. It is a wonderful tribute to the genius of Martin Clifford that the experiment was the unique and unqualified triumph it was.

The reprint period, like the whole of the Red, White, and Blue era, was a fascinating, joyful, and sometimes maddening time. The joys of those years, - and they were countless, - are obvious. The infuriating factors are not few, and so often inexplicable. The ruthless pruning, so frequently very badly done, often sank almost to the level of vandalism. That some abridgment was necessary is freely admitted; that those very long stories would have lost nothing by skilful shrinkage has been stressed in this article; but one cannot help feeling that the Fleetway House should have made certain that an expert was put on to so important a task.

In the past, comments have been made to the effect that very few substitute stories were reprinted, and in comparison with the genuine stories, this is true; but in actual fact there were quite a number, as I have discovered while preparing this review. The point is that there was not the remotest necessity for even one of the substitute stories to have been used in the reprints. It seems fantastic that stories by the genuine Clifford should have remained unused, while weak imitation efforts took their place among the reprints.

I have no doubt at all that this was due to accident rather than to editorial design. So much dodging about

over the years was done between 1933 and 1939 that the Editor lost track of certain tales. This does not, however, account for the odd miscellany of stories which were reprinted in 1938 and early 1939. For instance, the obvious selection for the Christmas Number, 1938, was the Outram story from Christmas 1917, the Gem's very last Double Number. Yet the Editor published a poor substitute story from a much later date.

I do not hold myself blameless in this matter. As I have said, I was responsible for the appearance of very many stories which would have been lost had I not taken a hand. Invariably, when I asked for a certain story, long after it had been by-passed, I was told pleasantly that it would be looked up, and it always appeared a few weeks later. There was not one single occasion when a request was refused.

My only excuse is that I, too, lost track of some of these stories, and my collection of the early Gems was not so complete then as it is today. Also, I was a very busy person, and had long periods of time when I could not concentrate on Gem matters.

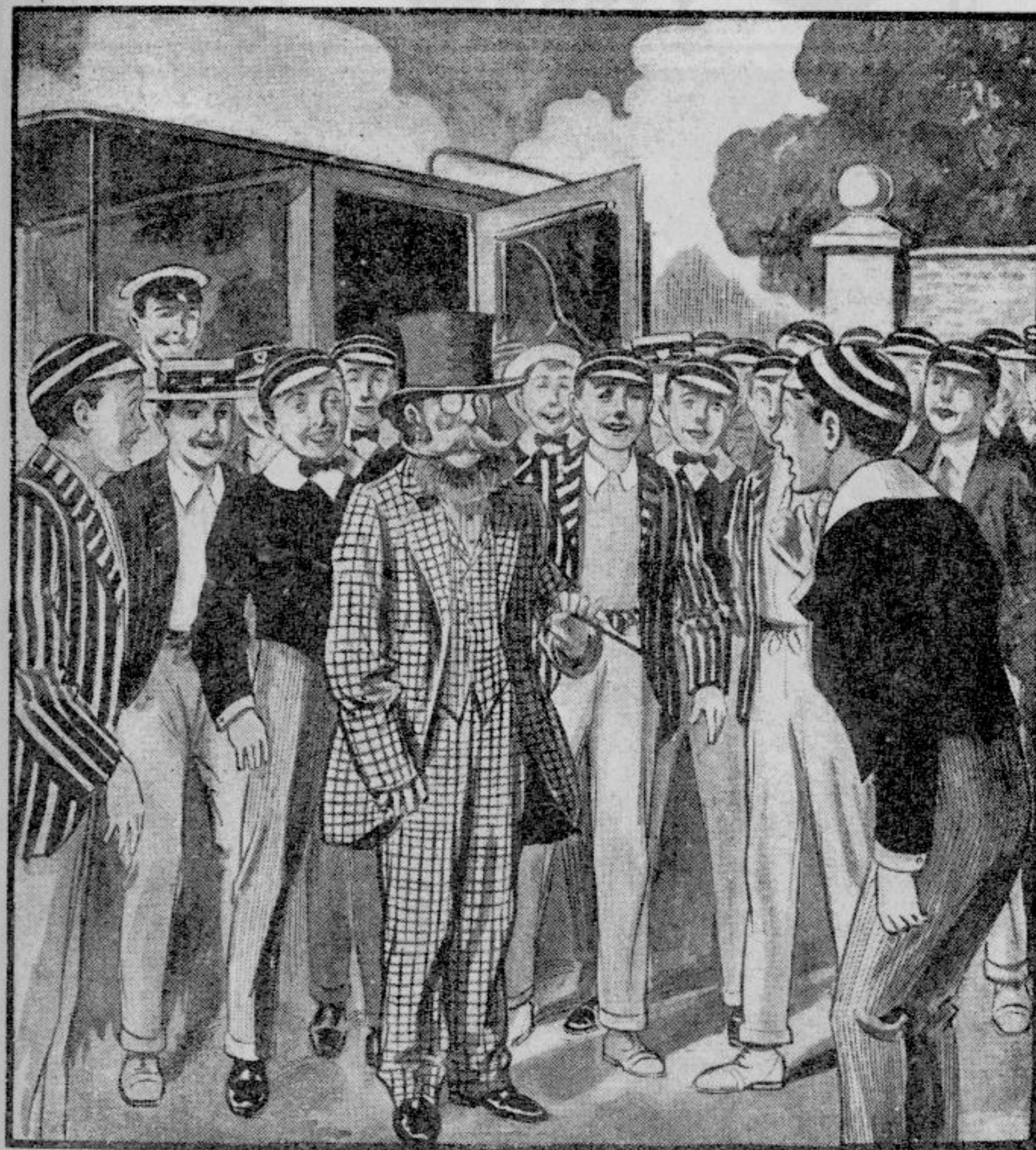
With all their faults, I revel in the eight reprint years, and rejoice that they replaced the Twilight Years of 1927 - 1930. Of one thing, however, I am quite convinced. The reprints continued too long. They should have ceased at least a year before they did.

I knew, as every keen student of the early Gem must know, that after the outbreak of war in 1914, the general high quality of the stories fell away. I knew the shortcomings of so many of the yarns between the white covers. I knew that after 1914, for some reason on which I will not pass an opinion here, the circulation of the Gem gradually dropped. I saw that the Editor was even ignoring many of the good tales which had appeared between the early white covers, and was dithering with pot-boiler material from a later time.

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RUSHING THE BRAKE! A stirring incident from this week's grand School Story, entitled: "HARD PRESSED!"

Yet I delayed far too long in putting my views to the Fleetway House.

All through the year 1938 I toyed with the idea of asking for new stories to replace the reprints. I hesitated, simply because I feared a return to the policy of the Twilight Years, which would have been far worse than continuing with the reprints.

It was not until the end of the year, or perhaps the start of 1939, that I suggested to the Fleetway House that, after eight years of old stories, the REAL Martin Clifford should be asked to write new stories for the Gem. This time there was none of the delay in getting my request granted that I had experienced before the reprints began in mid-1931. Within a few weeks, I was informed that "Mr. Martin Clifford is busy with a new series of St. Jim's yarns which will be commencing shortly" Even so, I was uneasy until the first new story appeared, and then, surely in common with every Gem reader, I was happy.

Such then, is the history of the Gem's eight years of reprints, when Tom Merry, the first of the world's great schoolboy leaders, came into his own again, - and the modest part that I played in it. A grand and glorious period which, like life itself, was not without some minor disappointments.

TOM MERRY AT CLAVERING! SPECIAL SCHOOL STORY INSIDE!

