

# E. S. Brooks

THE STRUGGLE IS ENDING

THE MAGNET AND GEM

by ROBERT BLYTHE

In 1912, E. S. B. was not unacquainted with writing for the Gem, for although he had written only one St. Jim's story, "The Terrible Three's Sub," in 1910, he had been writing continuously in that paper for two years. His characters of Frank Kingston, and his girl friend Dolores, must have been as familiar to Gem readers as the inhabitants of St. Jim's. So much so in fact that Hinton, in an unusual request, asked E. S. B., - "When you send in your next Frank Kingston yarn will you just mention in your letter what you estimate were the lengths of the two Gem serials you wrote." To which Brooks replied, - "In answer to your query, I estimate roughly, the length of the "Iron Island" was 235,000 words, and the "Brotherhood of Iron" 175,000 words . . ."

This was in March 1912 and therefore it must have been rather disconcerting for him to receive this letter dated 2nd May:

Dear Mr. Brooks,

Thank you very much for your letter and story received this morning. I shall let "The Shadwell Opium Den" conclude the series. For the time being ~~anyway~~, I'm afraid I cannot give you any more work.

Yours etc.,

H. A. Hinton

However, this was not the last Frank Kingston story. He was to write two more, although there was a five month gap between their appearances in the Gem.

This did mean that without the weekly cheque Edwy was once again going to be hard up. How much this contact with the Gem meant will be appreciated when it is realised that during the period 1910 until March 1912 (apart from the short stories which he had contributed to his brother's theatre magazine, "The Magazine Programme," for which he could hardly have received more than 10/- per story) he had no more than fourteen stories accepted by any other A. P. paper. Mind you, £2.2s.0d. per week at this time for a lad of 18, was not, I suppose, bad pay. Nevertheless something had to be done and so Edwy decided to submit a new St. Jim's story.

The correspondence dealing with the "Magnet" and "Gem" is extensive, over 170 letters in all, but, as I don't want to give our editor heart failure, I've pruned them drastically. What I have left in, will, I hope, make you wish that you could have had more. The letters themselves will tell the story, although I have added a few footnotes to clarify certain things.

The first letter dealing specifically with a Gem story is dated 19th March, 1912, and at this point he doesn't know that the Frank Kingston stories are going to be axed.

19th March, 1912.

Dear Mr. Hinton,

To get to the point straight away, I'm rather hard up. Except for your £2.2s.0d. cheques every week I am not drawing in much at the moment - though one or two stories in other editors hands are awaiting publication. I'm a little pressed for money and will be more so in a week or two's time.

The enclosed is the beginning of a Tom Merry story, which I thought of making into a 3d. book.

I thought the idea would do just right for a Tom Merry story, and so wrote up the first ten thousand words or so for your perusal. It is my hope, the yarn will be acceptable to you - and if so I will get ahead with it immediately.

Can you manage to look through the enclosed by Thursday morning? I shall be up in London on that day, and will call at your office. We could then discuss the matter. I hope you will not think I have taken a liberty in writing the enclosed, but I thought it best to write the first four or five chapters, just as a sample.

With kind regards,

The Tom Merry story mentioned here was eventually published as "Tom Merry's Promise," Gem 258.

The next two letters are addressed to Rex Haydon, the editor of the Boys' Realm, although for what purpose I'm not quite sure.

24th March, 1912

Dear Mr. Haydon,

As promised I herewith enclose a copy of the "Gem Library" containing "Tom Merry" story which I wrote. I also enclose the first chapters of another story of St. Jim's upon which I am at present engaged. These will give you an idea of my style of writing this class of school story. It is, of course, Mr. Hamilton's style, but I could write stories of another school in exactly the same way. I should very much like to do this, needless to say.

Yours sincerely,

26th March, 1912

Dear Mr. Haydon,

Just a line to acknowledge the "Tom Merry" MS. which you returned this morning - for which I thank you. As you didn't enclose a letter I presume you are writing me after you have glanced through the "Gem" I sent you.

Yours sincerely,

16th July, 1912

Dear Mr. Hinton,

I am now at work on the Tom Merry story - the commencement of which you have - and I'm not quite certain as to the length you wish it to run to. I should be glad if you can spare time to drop me a line some time this week, as I do not wish to make the yarn too long. 35,000 words is the length I have in mind. Is this correct?

Yours sincerely,

17th August, 1912

Dear Mr. Hinton,

I have been thinking for some time of another story on the lines of the BROTHERHOOD OF IRON, and today I have jotted the gist of it down on the enclosed sheet of paper. Of course, it would be quite fresh, and the incidents would be very different from those in the BROTHERHOOD. I am quite sure that I could write an exciting yarn from the plot - a better story than those which preceded it.

Although you told me when I saw you last that you had no opening for anything, I thought that if you saw the synopsis of this story I have in mind you might like it and decide to push it in the GEM or MAGNET.

Yours sincerely,

The "Brotherhood of Iron" story mentioned here was, in fact, accepted and appeared in Gem No. 250, dated 23rd November, and was called "The Hound of the Moor," but this was the last.

Now we come to the first mention of the "Magnet." The Gem story had been accepted and he had been asked to submit one for the "Magnet."

12th November, 1912

Dear Mr. Hinton,

With regard to the Magnet story (how would "The Greyfriars Pantomime" do for a title?) I shall be up on Friday afternoon, and I will bring an outline of the yarn with me. I can see my way quite clear to get to work on it early next week, and you can rely on the story being in your hands on Monday, 25th November, as I promised. This is, of course, provided the first ten thousand words are to your liking. I shall do my very utmost to finish the Tom Merry yarn and bring it up with me on Friday, but if I can't possibly manage it (as I have an instalment of the Breadnought serial to do as well as a short story of a series) you shall have it in your hands by next Monday. But, as I have said, I am planning my work so that I shall have next week clear for the MAGNET yarn. I shall not disappoint you over this.

With kind regards,

Yours sincerely,

"The Greyfriars Pantomime" was published without title change in Magnet 256.

24th November, 1912

Dear Mr. Hinton,

I enclose herewith MS. of THE GREYFRIARS PANTOMIME up to page 27. I shall, in accordance with my promise made to you the other day, bring the remainder of the story up tomorrow afternoon. I send the enclosed because I thought that you would, perhaps, like to have it in as early as possible. If you can find time to glance through it before I arrive I shall be glad, for I am anxious to know your opinion on it. As you will see, I have altered the episode of Coker changing places with the comedian - and I think for the better.

Yours sincerely,

Hardly had Brooks' Manuscript been accepted before Hinton sent the following telegram:

3rd December, 1912

Can you call morning eleven. Magnet yarn wanted urgently. Will give you full synopsis.

Hinton

8th December, 1912

Dear Mr. Hinton,

Sorry I am unable to enclose any of FISH'S FAG AGENCY herewith. I am, however, sending off 10,000 words tomorrow evening, and will, as arranged, let you have the remainder on Wednesday.

Yours sincerely,

\*P.S. I am confident that I can, by working hard and continuously, get the MS. completed in the time arranged - and that without letting it suffer in the least. But, in coming down here, I have lost practically a day, and I should greatly appreciate it if I had Wednesday to finish the story in. This way I could let you have about 22,000 by Wednesday morning, and the remainder on Thursday (brought up personally). I wish to impress upon you, however, that if you want the MS. in - entire - by Wednesday, according to the original arrangement, I will do it. But, as I said above, I should be very glad of the little extra time. Could you drop me a line upon receipt of this?

E.S.B.

Fishy's Fag Agency was published in Magnet No. 257. Hardly had E. S. B. digested that lot when Hinton wrote again.

Wednesday, 11th December, 1912

Dear Mr. Brooks,

Thank you for your letter and for the batch of Magnet yarn received this morning. I am relying upon seeing you on Thursday morning, as I want you to go ahead at once with a Gem yarn. You could use the plot you submitted to me for the Penny Popular St. Jim's story and make it a 30,000 word yarn.

I take it you are prepared to take it on. I shall want the complete yarn by today week.

Yours sincerely,

H. A. Hinton

15th December, 1912

Dear Mr. Hinton,

Thanks very much for your wire received yesterday morning, stating that you are sending the cheque tomorrow.

I enclose the first Chapter of TOM MERRY'S PROMISE herewith. On Friday my face caused me considerable pain and inconvenience again, and was still greatly swollen yesterday. During the evening, however, something "gave," and the pain was immediately conspicuous by its absence. I am very glad to say that I am now as "wight as wain!" I am getting ahead with the work at full speed tomorrow, and I again positively assure you that you will have the two yarns in your hands on or before Christmas Eve, according to our arrangement. I will post off a big batch of the Tom Merry story on Tuesday night, and the remaining few pages about Wednesday mid-day, so that it will reach you either in the evening before you leave, or by a later post for you to receive upon your arrival on Thursday morning. I am quite sure that this will be satisfactory to you. I am not coming up to town this week, as I wish to devote the time to getting ahead with the Greyfriars yarn.

Yours sincerely,

Thursday, 19th December, 1912

Dear Mr. Brooks,

I am sorry, after my promise, regarding the advance payment cheque, that you have been kept waiting for it so long; but I have got it at last, and enclose it herewith.

I received the second portion of "Tom Merry's Promise" this morning and like it alright. Am relying upon having the conclusion in the morning.

In a day or two I will send you another synopsis for another Magnet yarn which I shall want you to push on with at once. I shall be glad to have it as soon as possible after Christmas.

Kind regards, Yours sincerely,

H. A. Hinton

22nd December, 1912

Dear Mr. Hinton,

Thank you very much for your letter, enclosing the cheque. I note what you say about another Magnet yarn, but as I shall be up on Tuesday, perhaps there will be no necessity for you to write. I enclose the opening chapters of "The Schoolboy Domestic" herewith, and you can absolutely rely upon my bringing up the remainder with me on Tuesday morning. I shall arrive at your office at about eleven o'clock.

Yours sincerely,

"The Schoolboy Domestic" was an alternate title for "Fishy's Fag Agency."

1st January, 1913

Dear Mr. Hinton,

I received your wire this evening. I am sorry for the slight delay in despatching the opening pages of HARRY WHARTON & CO'S RESCUE. Unexpected visitors in the house have caused considerable stoppage of work, but now that the holidays are over (and I am thankful for it) I am able to "get busy."

I enclose the first 5,000 words herewith, and you will receive a further batch of about 10,000 by mid-day tomorrow - Thursday, 2nd January. The remainder of the story I shall bring up with me on Friday morning, without fail.

Yours sincerely,

"Harry Wharton and Co's Rescue" was published in Magnet No. 260. Hardly had this story been written before he was urgently requested for another. The story, "The Schoolboy Professional" was published as "Fatty Wynn - Professional" in Gem No. 264.

6th January, 1913

Dear Mr. Hinton,

I am sending off the synopsis of THE SCHOOLBOY PROFESSIONAL so as to reach you on Thursday. There is no advantage in sending it sooner than this, as I am coming up to see you on Friday morning, when you can discuss it with me, and point out any little alterations you may require. I shall make it 56,000 words in length.

Yours sincerely,

Friday, 24th January, 1913

Dear Mr. Brooks,

As a result of an after-thought, I have just sent you a wire asking you to write a still longer Tom Merry yarn. I think it will be a good thing to give them for once an all-story number. I am finishing the serial this week, so it gives me the chance of trying the experiment. Will you therefore write up the conclusion of the yarn so that it will run out to the foot of Page 27 instead of page 25, as previously arranged?

Yours sincerely,

E. S. B's father's health was not too good at this time, and Edwy's concern is reflected in letters apologising for the delay in submitting fresh copy for the new St. Jim's story.

9th February, 1913

Dear Mr. Hinton,

I enclose some more copy herewith. Owing to my father's grave illness, I have been unable to complete the yarn by tonight. You cannot tell how reluctant I am to send you the enclosed instead of the whole yarn - especially at a time when I had arranged to turn in the story within a limited number of days. Under ordinary circumstances this would have been simple - and I am quite confident that you will understand. I will come up in a day or two and bring the conclusion of the story with me together with another synopsis. I am glad to be able to add that my father is a little better today. Usually, I do not let private affairs interfere with work, but on this occasion it is a different matter.

Yours sincerely,

The yarn mentioned here as 'enclosed' was "Hidden Treasure at St. Jim's" and was published in Gem No. 268.

11th March, 1913

Dear Mr. Hinton,

I regret that I have not yet sent you the MS. of "The Informer," but there is more "meat" in this story, and is taking longer to write - to my satisfaction. I am taking considerable pains over it, and will bring up the complete yarn with me on Friday.

Yours sincerely,

"The Informer" was published under the title "The Schoolboy Informer" in Gem No. 273.

Dear Mr. Hinton,

For the last four or five days I have been suffering from a very painful and troublesome boil on my neck, and it has had the effect of making me feel very much off colour. It is especially unfortunate, as I particularly wished to bring to you the completed MS. of the Tom Merry yarn today. Under the circumstances I have not been able to work properly, and if you can give me till Friday - or, better still, till Monday morning - I shall be greatly obliged and relieved. I had made up my mind to run up today and see you, but I am unable to wear a collar, and, indeed, do not feel well enough. I am happy to add, however, that the protuberance is on the decline.

May I ask you a favour? My story, THE SCHOOLBOY INFORMER, is, I think, being published next week. Could you see your way to let me have a cheque for it on Friday, 25th April - this week? I have a rather big cheque to meet, and you would assist me greatly by complying with my request.

With kindest regards, and apologies,  
Yours sincerely,

The Manuscript mentioned in the first paragraph was published in Gem No.

281 as "Coward or Hero?" Brooks own title was "The Coward of St. Jim's."

15th May, 1913

Dear Mr. Hinton,

As I mentioned to you when I saw you for a moment in Farringden Street last Friday, my brother has been home from Canada for a few days. He sails for New York on Saturday. His visit has necessarily put a stop to work during the holidays, but I have just completed "The Coward of St. Jim's," and am now getting out a synopsis for a "Magnet" yarn. I shall run up to your office with both on Monday.

Yours sincerely,

27th May, 1913

Dear Mr. Hinton,

I am getting information with regard to the proceedings at the annual meeting at Bisley, and will let you have a synopsis in during the next few days. By the way, I suppose the boys to take part in the meeting will be Harry Wharton & Co., and Tom Brown's Australian cousin? How about the seniors? And will the boys go as Boy Scouts or members of the Greyfriars Cadet Corps? These are all very minor points, but I should like to be clear about them.

Yours sincerely,

I'm not sure which story this eventually turned out to be for I do not have the relevant issue. The Magnet titles for the period do not give much help. I'm inclined to believe that it was Magnet No. 273, "Friars versus Saints."

Between May 1913 and January 1914, letters passed backward and forward concerning "D'Arcy's Mysterious Present," Gem No. 314, "April Fools All," Magnet No. 321, "Up Against It," Magnet No. 291, but they are merely notes mentioning the posting of sections of each story.

Some of the stories mentioned during this time have titles which I have been unable to trace, mainly because the subject matter contained in Brooks title is not carried over into the final title as printed. For example "Kerr - Detective" is mentioned in a February 1914 letter. As the manuscript was accepted in January, it may possibly be "The Housemasters Peril," published in Gem No. 319 of the 21st March, 1914.

In the next letter I wondered if I had got the date right but, February 1914, is given on the letter and this is interesting when you read what E. S. B. has to say in his third sentence. It is as though war was regarded as inevitable even this early in the year.

21st February, 1914

Dear Mr. Hinton,

I enclose a MAGNET synopsis herewith. Some months ago I submitted a synopsis on similar lines, but the enclosed is very much altered, and I think would be exactly suitable for a topical Harry Wharton yarn. When I say topical I mean it will be quite all right for any time during the period of the war. The first synopsis you regarded as being a little too dramatic - but, considering the strenuous times through which we are now passing, I believe the yarn would work up really well.

I shall be in town tomorrow, at about five o'clock, and will bring with me the GEM yarn upon which I am now engaged, and I hope you will have glanced through the MAGNET synopsis by the time I arrive.

Yours sincerely,

In view of the dates and what we know Brooks had written for the Gem and Magnet this letter must refer to the Magnet story, "Changed by Adversity" Magnet No. 347, and "Tom Merry's Find," (by a coincidence) Gem No. 347.

"Squiff's Fateful Purchase" was published under the title "The Great Bat Mystery," Magnet No. 448. "The Wrong Track," Magnet No. 495 was in fact the last Magnet story to be written by Brooks. It will be noted that although the letter is dated April 1914, the stories did not get published until September 1916 and August 1917, respectively. Obviously Hamilton was turning in stories regularly at this period (or other writers were), and Edwy's stories had been salted away for a rainy day.

8th April, 1914

Dear Mr. Hinton,

I enclose the remainder of "Squiff's Fateful Purchase" herewith. I am now working hard on the next yarn - "The Wrong Track" - the synopsis of which you passed last week. I will let you have it in, complete, next week, on Friday.

I'm sorry I'm a little later with the copy on this occasion and I am going to work extra hard for the next few days, and you can rely on my carrying out the following programme:

"The Wrong Track" - Friday, the 15th  
 Another yarn complete - Friday, the 23rd  
 " " " " - Monday, 3rd May

and then the next story a fortnight later, and so on. I will let you have another synopsis early next week, so that you can decide upon it when I see you on the Friday. You can positively rely upon getting the copy in on time - for I'm devoting all my energies to these stories now, and wish to continue doing so.

Yours sincerely,

19th May, 1914

Dear Mr. Hinton,

If you can manage to send me a small cheque this week-end (a pound or two) on account of that GEM yarn - "The Mysterious Tenant" - I shall be very grateful. I am now getting ahead with "Mauly, the Swot," and will turn in the first portion in a few days, and let you have the conclusion next week - as I promised Mr. Down.

With kind regards,

Yours sincerely,

What these two stories eventually turned out to be I cannot say. No title quite ties up with Brooks. The same goes for the Magnet, although in this case it is probably "The Mystery of Mauly," Magnet No. 451.

One of the most interesting of the letters is the two that follow. What a pity that the telegram followed so soon. It would have given us an interesting example of contrasting styles. I wonder if Edwy ever received any recompense for his efforts.

18th August, 1914

Dear Mr. Brooks,

I am sending you herewith about 15,000 words of a Gem yarn begun by Hamilton. The second half has never been received, having been dispatched from Austria at the beginning of the war. Will you get to work at once and finish the story as rapidly as possible. I want it about 25,000 words complete, so another 10,000 is all that is wanted - it should not take you long to polish that off.

Yours sincerely,

C. M. Down

20th August, 1914

Dear Mr. Down,

Your letter received, with the enclosed 15,000 words of manuscript, last night. You sent it to my old address (although I gave you my new one when I saw you last), and it was held up in the post for a whole day. Consequently, I have lost a day completely, for if I had received it yesterday morning I should have commenced work instantly. As it is I shall get busy the very minute I have posted this letter.

I will read the MS. carefully, and then continue on from the point where it is broken off. You can rely upon receiving it on Monday, completed. I cannot possibly promise it for tomorrow, Friday, owing to the lost day.

I have no definite work on hand now, and am quite prepared to devote all my time to writing

GEN and MAGNET yarns. Say the word, and I will turn in one complete yarn every week until further orders. I should do no other work whatever and so could centre all my attention upon your stuff. And you could rely upon me - for under such circumstances I would make it a point of honour to let you have the copy in promptly and regularly.

Try me - I should not fail you.

With kind regards.

Yours sincerely,

25th August, 1914

Brooks, 181 Annerley Rd., S.E.

Hamilton's belated copy coming in. Do not continue with Secret of Airship story.

Down

The story mentioned in the next letter was not published until December, 1915, but those that follow eventually appeared in Gem No. 374, "A Wasters Reward;" Gem No. 391, "A Captured Chum;" Gem No. 411, "True Blue;" Gem No. 429, "A Mission of Mystery;" Magnet No. 347, "Changed by Adversity;" and Magnet No. 388, "The Mystery of the Gables." The letters give no indication and I haven't the books to compare the plots. It's good to know that whatever readers then and now think of substitute writers, the letters leave one in no doubt as to what the editors thought - as far as Brooks was concerned at any rate.

9th September, 1914

Dear Mr. Brooks,

Your synopsis for the story entitled "The Bouders Relapse" is pretty good, and you can get on with the story.

In the synopsis you have left all the explanation of the story till the end. I think this must be arranged differently in the actual story - otherwise the last chapter or so will be purely explanatory and rather dull.

Yours sincerely,

C. M. Down

25th January, 1915

Dear Mr. Brooks,

I approve the enclosed synopsis, which seems to have the makings of a very good yarn.

I think the blackmailing incident had better be toned down somewhat; and one or two light touches should be introduced to relieve what will otherwise be rather a morbid story.

Yours sincerely,

H. A. Hinton

28th April, 1915

Dear Mr. Brooks,

Thanks for your letter to hand this morning. I think you had better make the yarn 30,000 words. Talbot's name may be mentioned, but it would be wise not to do anything violent. Mr. Railton should not come into the story.

You have given me very short notice for a special pay-sheet. However, I will send one down today, but it will not do for you to rely upon getting the payment this week from the cashiers.

Yours sincerely,

H. A. Hinton

27th January, 1915

Dear Mr. Hinton,

Thanks for your letter of the 25th. I am glad you like the synopsis, and I will get on with the yarn at once, making the slight alterations you suggest. I am not quite clear about one point - is the yarn to be 25,000 or 30,000 words? And shall I bring Talbot's name in now and again? How about Mr. Railton - perhaps I had better refrain from mentioning him at all?

Can you manage an advance for me this week - about half the payment for "The Mystic Circle?" I am rather in a fix and a cheque this week-end would be exceedingly welcome. I sincerely trust you will be able to render me this little assistance - or rather, big assistance, for it will get me out of a hole.

With kind regards.

Yours sincerely,

28th January, 1915

Dear Mr. Hinton,

Thanks for the letter of yesterday's date. You can rely upon receiving the GEN yarn on Monday, 8th February. As you are preparing a time-table for the next two months' stories the following are the

dates upon which I can send in yarns: One on 22nd February - another on 8th March - and another on 22nd March. This makes four stories during the period of two months. I have got no other work on hand, so you can positively rely upon receiving one yarn on each of the above dates. Of course, I will bring each story up myself, so that we can discuss the next synopsis - which I will submit, as usual, before starting on the actual writing.

I trust the above will be satisfactory to you - because, if so, I shall not look for other commissions elsewhere. As a matter of absolute fact, I would prefer not to seek other commissions, as it would suit me splendidly to do the work I have outline above.

With kind regards.

Yours sincerely,

And with that the Magnet and Gem correspondence closes, with Brooks still having difficulty in making ends meet.

I have called this effort "The Struggle is Ending." I wish I could have called it "The Struggle has Ended" but unfortunately there are no more letters.

Later that year, in September, Edwy wrote his first Nelson Lee story and from then until the first St. Frank's story in 1917, he wrote a total of sixty-three full-length detective stories.

Although we must be very grateful that all this correspondence between 1907 and 1915 has been left to us, it is nevertheless, a very great pity that not one letter mentioning the Nelson Lee Library has survived. The explanation is, I'm sure, that they were lost during transit from Halstead in Essex, to London, sometime just before the last war. But, whatever the reason we shall never know under what circumstances Brooks was asked to write a detective story for the Lee, or how he was invited to create a new school. If we did, then I could truly call this article - "The Struggle is Ended."