I Say, You Fellows!

Maurice Hall

the biography of Charles Hamilton

Have you ever wondered about Charles Hamilton?

Why he disapproved of Rufus.
Why he agreed to receive royalties for the Bunter Books.
Which newspaper he read.
Whether Frank Richards was still alive.
What he thought about Bunter on television.
What he nearly received in 1954.
What his thoughts were on substitute writers.
Why he never married.
Why Bunter replaced Wharton as the central character.

These and many other questions are answered in this fascinating account of the Master of Boys Fiction.

Original oil painting by
Norman M. Kadish
Jacket designed by Denis Hall

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Wharton Press
74 Hilldale Road
Sutton Surrey SM1 2JD

I say, you fellows!

Maurice Hall

Wharton Press

For George Baker
who first suggested that I should write
this book in 1973.

And to the memory of
the late Edith Hood,
Charles Hamilton's housekeeper and
friend for over 50 years,
who was of invaluable assistance with
her interest and advice on this project.
Miss Hood died on the 10th October 1989
in the Broadstairs Nursing Home, Kent,
shortly before this biography was
published.

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Charles Skilton, who elucidated some points about Hamilton while he was rejuvenating Bunter in his famous yellow Bunter books, and for allowing quotations to be used from *The Autobiography of Frank Richards* (Charles Skilton);

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For Dr Geoffrey Franglen for his illuminating thoughts on the book;

Dr Peter McCall for his help with advice on medical matters and for constructive comments.

Any errors in this book are mine alone, for which I would be grateful to be advised, so that any further printing can be corrected. **MMH**

Introduction by Peter Cushing, O.B.E.

THE result of Mr Hall's dedicated research is so thorough and far-reaching that it seems to me my contribution is not only superfluous, but almost an intrusion.

For those who remember the joyous excitement each week when our pocket-money was eagerly exchanged for *The Gem* and/or *The Magnet,* this pen-portrait of the author and his background will be of immense interest, and they will be intrigued to learn how St. Jim's and Greyfriars—with their beloved inhabitants—were conceived. New boys, too, will be fascinated by the history of this prolific writer.

I don't profess to have been a paragon of virtue, but in my youth I based my code of conduct upon the behaviour of Tom Merry, pledging never to swear, drink or smoke. Perhaps it says something for the impact this character had upon me, because to this day I have succumbed only to the latter 'vice', and this perforce. During the early days of my theatrical career, the script of a particular play demanded that the part entrusted to me smoked a churchwarden pipe, and I deemed it wise to break myself in gently with a few puffs of a cigarette. The habit did not leave me until I managed to break it in 1988, but as I was 22 at the time, the respect and admiration I held for my schoolboy hero kept this temptation at bay throughout my adolescence.

I imagine it is too much to hope that today's youth would be thus influenced, but it could add weight to the Government's warning printed on each packet.

In any case, there is a tremendous enjoyment to be had from Maurice Hall's work, and I feel sure *Yarooooh** will cry out from many a bookshelf or coffee-table, which will be that much richer for its presence.

Peter Cushing
Pinewood

** Working title 1973, now published as 'I Say, You Fellows!'*

Preface

THIS is the biography of a man who preferred to shun publicity rather than seek it, a man who, through his many pen names, was known to the schoolboys of the world but who, in his own name, was almost unknown. The name of this man was Charles Harold St. John Hamilton.

The stories of those fictional schools of our youth, *Greyfriars, St Jim's, Rookwood* and many others were all written under pen names, the most famous being 'Frank Richards' of the *Magnet.* Under these names Hamilton created *Harry Wharton and Co.* of Greyfriars; *Tom Merry* and *Arthur Augustus D'Arcy* of St. Jim's; *Jimmy Silver* who cheerfully passed his days at Rookwood in the midst of friendly rivalry between the Classical and Modern houses. Hamilton's most famous character was *Billy Bunter,* the fat Owl of the Remove Form at Greyfriars, an archetypal image of six of the seven deadly sins, the schoolboy who became, within a remarkably short time, one of the best known anti-heroes of his generation. The latter's cries of "I say, you fellows...", his character of perpetual greed, lies and dishonesty, pryings and spyings, have become part of our literature.

Devotees of Hamilton's stories may, and do, disagree about which is the greatest school, Greyfriars, St Jim's, or Rookwood. But on one thing they all agree: Hamilton was the greatest school writer of all. It did not matter whether you knew him as 'Frank Richards', 'Martin Clifford', or 'Owen Conquest'; they were all the same person: Charles Harold St. John Hamilton. In addition, Hamilton is now recognized to be the most productive writer ever (*The Guinness Book of Records*); apart from Shakespeare, he may also be the most often quoted in newspapers, from the *Times* to the *Sun.*

It is almost impossible to name all his characters. The list is vast; McCall's *Greyfriars Guide* identifies over three thousand people and associated places in one thousand issues of the *Magnet.* And there is an additional complication; sometimes it is almost impossible to tell who might be real and who is fictional, for most of Hamilton's creations embodied aspects of friends and acquaintances. Frank Nugent was Hamilton as he saw himself.

This difficulty of distinguishing between fact and fiction is always present, for Hamilton lived his stories. Ever shy and retiring, he was

happy to hide behind his pen names. Many times in his *Autobiography*, we read that 'Frank' or 'Martin' did or thought something, never 'I'; both were, of course, Charles Hamilton. He had the ability to submerge himself so completely in his writing that he was virtually unaware of what was going on around him; this provided an exceptionally close link between author and story. This must have been realized unconsciously by his readers, who felt that they, too, were actually at his fictional schools. Thousands of boy and girl readers of the *Magnet* believed that Greyfriars School really existed near Ramsgate in Kent. Many wrote to the editors with questions, and they were answered in ways which helped to confirm the authenticity of their favourite characters.

We tend today to think of the stories as being only for boys. This is not so. Right from the start Hamilton introduced girls into his stories, and provided an interest for the fairer sex. Later he supported the *School Friend*, a magazine for girls, and wrote the first six copies before handing over *Cliff House School* to his colleagues to continue. Nevertheless, it was the *Magnet* and *Gem* that the girls found the most enjoyable; the stories were even better and more exciting than those in their own papers.

Many questions have been asked about this quiet man. One, which has been raised many times, is why he chose to remain a bachelor. Probably because of his inate shyness he was unsure of himself in the company of the ladies. There is also the point that, when his writing became such a success, he really did not need anyone's company to pass the days or nights. If anything, it was the opposite; as he became more and more engrossed in his world of writing, he had the company of the many characters he had created. Utterly immersed in his story, to him his fictional world became more real than the real world.

It has been suggested that Hamilton was the product of a lower-middle class family whose father married into an upper-middle class family; the reality may be that both families were from the lower end of the social scale. The fact that Charles Hamilton was somewhat of a genius with words cannot be explained in view of this lowly background. But, from his earliest moments he had always excelled at telling stories and, it would seem that, almost before he himself knew it, he was destined to be an author. For what reasons he decided to hide his early life behind a smoke-screen can only be guessed, but in doing so, he denied his many readers details of much interest.

This book tries to redress the balance.

CHAPTER ONE

The Hamiltons of Ealing

Remember me when I am gone away,
Gone far away into the silent land,
For now I leave behind me a dream
That is for ever Greyfriars.
After Christina Rossetti and Rupert Brooke

THE stories of the boys and masters of *Greyfriars School*, set in the County of Kent, and the local people of *Courtfield Town* and *Friardale Village* have become part of our literature. Even those who have never read the stories recognize many of the quotations and characters which have come from them. Little is known, however, of their creator, Charles Hamilton.

What we do know starts with Hamilton's grandfather, John Hamilton, Senior. He was living in Acton, Middlesex, when his son, also named John, was born on the 12th May 1838. John Hamilton, Senior, was a gardener by trade according to the entry on the birth certificate. Where he should have signed the certificate is a cross; and, written in another hand, 'His 'X' mark'.

By the age of 24 John Hamilton, Junior, had taken the occupation of a stationer and was living in the Ealing area. Hamilton has said that his father was well read, a classics scholar, and was always writing, "although, as far as I know, he never had anything published".

It was around this time that John Hamilton met a young girl called Mary Ann Trinder, the daughter of Stephen Trinder, the driver of a fly or hackney carriage. After a period of courtship, John and Mary decided to get married. The banns were called at the local Congregational Church in Ealing where on the 11th of May 1864 they were married. John Hamilton's age was given as 25 years, and Mary Ann as 16. Witnesses at the ceremony were Stephen and Margaret Trinder, and Margaret Jones Hamilton. The marriage was solemnized by the Revd William Isaac, minister of the church, and registered by a William Jones, Esq. The latter name was to appear on many of the birth certificates of the children of John and Mary.

Ealing in 1864 was a small undeveloped town on the outskirts of London, traversed by long lanes edged with hedges and ditches and shadowed by trees. In the town there were many streets of small cottages where lived local shopkeeper assistants and other workers. Oak Street was one of these and where John and Mary Ann were to start their life together. Jobs were mainly in agriculture; industry had, at this time, little effect on the local inhabitants. The place was not at all that different from the area surrounding the fictitious Greyfriars School described years later in the *Magnet*.

The population was not just middle and working class; nobility abounded in the locality. At Place House in Little Ealing had lived at various times Sir Francis Dashwood, Sir Richard Littleton, Lord Brooke and Lord Robert Manners (*cf* 'Harry Manners' at St. Jim's). Amongst the many other fine old buildings, there was Ealing House, once the home of Sir James Montague, and later of Nathaniel Oldham, the virtuoso, who had an excellent collection of paintings. There was also Ealing Grove, the seat successively of the Earl of Rochford and the Dukes of Marlborough and Argyll.

As indicated already, Ealing was well off for open spaces. Besides the woods and commons, there were what were called the 'Lammas lands', part of which were bought in 1881 for the purposes of recreation for the inhabitants of the villages. Earlier, from 1865, some meadow land in the vicinity of Ealing Village had been used occasionally as a race course, although the events never achieved the celebrity of those at Aintree, Epsom, or even *Wapshot*. For those who do not recognize the latter, it is another place created by Charles Hamilton to enhance the Greyfriars scene.

At this time the railway was to begin to spread its tentacles from Paddington to Acton, and thence to Ealing. As would naturally follow, the population of London gradually expanded into the rural areas thus made accessible. The station at Ealing was rebuilt in about 1877, and became Ealing Broadway, which is only a short distance from Charles Hamilton's birthplace.

Whilst it is clear that the Hamiltons were never rich, at least, they appear not to have been badly off at this period. Incomes, of course, appear low by today's standards but, in proportion, many everyday things were cheap and plentiful. Income tax stood at 9d in the pound, but dropped sharply in 1865 to 4d.

After their marriage in 1864 John and Mary Hamilton lived at 25 Oak Street which was situated to the west of Ealing High Street, and within a stone's throw of the shops and the main part of the town. This street has since been demolished. Ealing Broadway Station now lies a little

to the north, whilst to the east lay Walpole Park, the present site of the borough's main library. But in those days, even at its centre, Ealing had the spacious feel of a country town, and this may have had a strong influence on Charles Hamilton's evident love of fields, furrows, highways and byways.

For the next decade and a half John and Mary were engaged in family life and the bearing of children. Their first child, christened Maude Marion Margaret, was born on the 21st April 1865. It was unusual in the Victorian period for children to be given many Christian names. Searches in St Catherine's House revealed that all the Hamilton children were given three, making them relatively easy to find in the records of births. On Maude's certificate the mother's name is given as *Marion*, not as Mary Ann. John's occupation was now described as 'journeyman carpenter'; no longer was he in the stationery business. Dr Geoffrey Franglen has speculated on the change of occupation:

> It was clearly a retrograde step at that time for somebody wanting to get on in the world. Socially the position of *journeyman carpenter* (or jobbing carpenter) would not have been regarded as highly as that of a *stationer* where there might have been the possibility of eventually owning one's own business. John Hamilton evidently spent the remainder of his life within carpentry, since, when he died from tuberculosis, he is recorded as being a *joiner*. Was it possible that John Hamilton was not strong, and it was thought that it would be better for him to work in the open rather than in a stuffy shop, where he might have died of tuberculosis even earlier? It might fit with the fact that Hamilton himself was not big and strong.

The second-born was Alexander Llewellyn Patrick on the 15th May 1867. Although he was the first boy in the family, somewhat unusually for the period he was not baptized with his father's Christian name. By then, the Hamilton family had moved to a new address, 15 St. Mary's Place, Ealing. This was just over a mile from Oak Street, but still near the Congregational Church, which seemed to be the one to which the family was most attached. The Church was situated between Oak Street and St. Mary's Place, on the west side of Ealing Green Road.

On the 16th October 1869 came the third child, Archibald Reginald Percy. Yet another change of address had occurred, this time eastwards to Avenue Road. This house was just off the Uxbridge Road, a distance of about two miles from their former abode, but still in Ealing. It is clear that they were making a great number of moves around this time. It is possible that the Hamiltons may have been allowed to stay in vacant properties-to-let at no charge by a relative, probably on the Trinder side

and working in the office of an estate agent.

When the 1871 census was taken, the Hamiltons were living at 2 Park Lodge in the Castlebar district of Ealing. Staying with them, as recorded in the official return, was Walter Hamilton Trinder, aged 18. His occupation was given as 'gas-fitter'. Walter was Marion's younger brother and, years later, was to become an important person for the Hamilton family. Despite the 'Hamilton' in his name, there is no evidence of a close family relationship before the wedding of John and Mary Ann.

Edith Hilda May, the fourth child, was born on the 29th April 1872. Making at least their fifth move since the wedding, the family returned to Oak Street, this time to No 15. This may have been the start of a relatively settled period, for it was at this address that the remainder of their children were born. Fifth came Richard Lionel Walter on the 24th August 1874. He was to have a considerable influence on his younger brother born practically two years later on the 8th August 1876. This child is the subject of our story, Charles Harold St. John. Another boy, Hugh Douglas Percy, was born on the 10th March 1879. This might have brought the record to a close, except for yet another child, who was to prove to be probably the most important person in the life of Charles Hamilton.

His sister, Una Isabel Gertrude, was born on the 11th April 1881. She was the last, and thus the baby of the family, and, perhaps because of this, became the centre of attention in the Hamilton household. Charles and Richard had been close, but, with the arrival of Una, Charles found that the pretty little sister began to take up more and more of his spare time. He particularly liked to help look after her, and a strong bond was formed between them. Later he would write adventure stories for her and recount them to her, an ever attentive audience.

It is interesting, though, that, when Hamilton later in life had to pick a female pen name, he used 'Hilda' rather than any of Una's names.

From the moment Charles Hamilton learned to talk, he was keen to extend his knowledge on every subject, in particular, languages. When he came across his father's Greek books, he secretly taught himself the Greek alphabet in the happy delusion that it would be the key to his reading and understanding of Greek. Of course, it was not: it placed him in the position of a person who knows the letters of the Greek alphabet without understanding their import. Many years later Hamilton was to make use of this experience in a *Magnet* series of 1938. In this four-issue Christmas story, known as *The Mysterious Message in Greek*, Hamilton told of a message scratched inside a silver cigarette

case in Greek letters. The case belonged to Rat Hankey, a bank robber, who was about to be arrested by the police. In order to pass information to his confederate, James Soames, Hankey scratched a cipher in the case. The case passed from person to person, but never reached Soames until after the message has been translated by Mark Linley. He was a Greyfriars scholar who knew English and Greek, both as alphabets and as language, a complete contrast to Hankey who, as Hamilton wrote 'was a man of some education who knew the Greek alphabet, but not the Greek language'.

Hamilton's education has always been shrouded in mystery. In all interviews he avoided talking about his schooling or where he went to school. It is possible, however, to make a reasonable guess. On the 1st August 1868 in the local Ealing paper an advertisement appeared for the Thorne House Academy in Ealing under the principalship of a Mr William Henry Ray. Later, in the same paper dated 19th December 1868, there was a report of an end-of-term ceremony and prize giving at this Thorne House. Nearly 150 pupils were recorded as attending the school, about 50-60 being day scholars, and the remainder boarders. The report included a long account of festivities and athletic activities.

Mr Ray used his own methods of teaching what appears to have been a predominantly commercial curriculum, although just what this system was is not revealed in the report. The teaching staff consisted of Mr Charles W. Ray (son of the Principal), and three or four assistant masters, one of whom was the French master. There were also a housekeeper-cum-matron, a cook and two housemaids below stairs. William Henry Ray died on the 26th November 1869.

Originally Thorne House had been a well-established school, but by March 1880 the Board of Governors was meeting to consider its future. The plan was to rent it out to provide accommodation for Ashford schools. It was estimated that over one hundred beds could be fitted up at Thorne House, which gives some idea of the size of the building. The lease-holders of Thorn House, (by now the 'e' had been dropped), Messrs J.W. Tidy and R.W. Atlee, asked the enormous annual rent of £140. After many discussions, the Board decided to drop the project, and the school was taken over by a Mr F.K. Bynce who announced a grand reopening in the columns of the local paper on 11th December 1880. The message was simple: 'Thorn House Commercial Day and Boarding School would be opening at the start of term, 6th January 1881 (Prospectus from the Principal)'.

It seems likely that Charles Hamilton attended Thorn House School, if for no other reason than there were few other local schools which he could have attended. It must be realized, however, that there is no

definite evidence for this, and it is only on such circumstantial and scanty facts that we can get any idea of what Hamilton's schooldays may have been like.

If we assume that Charles Hamilton attended this school, it would follow that Mr Bynce would have had an important hand in the shaping of his future interests. The school now housed fewer boys than in Mr Ray's time: there were just over 50 scholars, day boys and boarders combined. Later, in 1884, Mr Bynce assembled an orchestra and choir from his pupils, and one can only wonder if Hamilton's love of music was born at this period. Did he, I wonder, sing in the choir? He had a high voice which could have been suitable for boy treble parts; later he was to become a tenor.

At this point two events were to occur which were to have an enormous impact on the young Hamilton. On the 20th February 1884, when he was seven years old, his father died, aged forty-five. John Hamilton had been ill for at least two, if not three, years, suffering from one of the scourges of the period, *phthisis*, more commonly known as 'the consumption', or now as 'tuberculosis'. At that time there was no effective treatment; despite what the doctor might have tried to do, John Hamilton faded away, possibly helped to a quicker end by alcoholism.

Hamilton has described in some detail his father's outbursts of uncontrolled temper, and clearly assumed that these were due to drink. It may well be that this was not the case. Dr Peter McCall has pointed out:

> Untreated tuberculosis commonly affects the brain. In addition, the temperatures caused by the disease can induce delusions. Add to this depression, so frequently encountered, and pain relieved only by alcohol or morphine, both easily available in those days, and you have the picture of a brutal drunken father, enraged by fever and disease and followed by remorse in his saner moments. Obviously, a child could know nothing of this, and so Charles Hamilton may well have blackened the memory of his father through no fault of either.

The effect on Hamilton was profound. On one occasion he was to tell of the death of the father of a school friend which had occurred before his own father had died. Young Hamilton's comment to his friend had been, 'I wish it had been my father'. It sounds callous, but I feel it emphasizes how unpleasant he found the shouting and unsteady gait when his parent was having, in his eyes, a drunken outburst. He was to instil this distaste into his schoolboy readers by making it very clear that there was nothing nice about getting drunk at any age.

John Hamilton's occupation at the time of his death was given as 'joiner', but, for many months before this, he would have been unable to work. The death certificate was signed by a Dr W.C. Steele, M.R.C.P. John's wife was by his side when he died, not in his home, but in a house in Lancaster Road which adjoins Oak Street, Ealing. It is likely that, as John began to decline, he was moved out of 15 Oak Street, which would have been already overcrowded by the rest of the family.

The death of John Hamilton caused a number of changes for Mary Ann. The outbursts of anger by her husband were now things of the past, but, without his wages, she found times hard. Trying to feed the children was difficult enough, but to keep them in clothing and pay rent for the house would soon be too much. Around this time an advertisement appeared in the Ealing local paper offering to take in washing; the address was given as Oak Street, and the name of the lady as 'Margaret Hamilton'. Whether or not this referred to Mary Ann Hamilton has never been confirmed, and, in any case, the second important event in the life of the young Hamilton was just about to take place.

Walter Hamilton Trinder, brother of Mary Ann, has already made an appearance in this story, when he had been living with the Hamiltons at the time of the 1871 census. He now re-appears as an important person of some substance. According to Edith Hood he was supposed to have been a 'Freeman of the City of London', but enquiries have failed to prove this. It seems more likely that he was elected a member of his craftsmans' guild in recognition of his successful business acumen. On hearing of John Hamilton's death, he came to his widowed sister's aid in her time of need.

Walter relieved the financial problems of the Hamilton household, and enabled the education of the younger children to continue. This kind and generous act added another facet to the character of Charles Hamilton, and was directly responsible for a a line of thought he was to express many times later in life. Amongst his plots was a recurring theme about an ill-treated prisoner, kept, as likely as not, in a den of thieves. Then comes a chance for this lad to help someone: Dr Locke, Mr Quelch, Mauleverer, or some person of note. Who ever it is, it is somebody who has money, or position, to offer him a place at Greyfriars, so that the waif should have the chance of an education beyond his wildest expectations. The interpretation is obvious: for Locke, Quelch or Mauleverer, read 'Walter Trinder', for the waif, 'Charles Hamilton'.

It is likely that Walter Trinder would have sent the younger boys to Thorn House School. Despite the difference in age, Charles and his brother Richard, or Dick as he liked to be called, would have been able

to see each other during the day. The number of pupils at the school, day and boarders, was under a hundred, and classes included a wide range of ages, unlike today. The standard was good, and discipline and manners played an important part in the curriculum.

Looking at advertisements and reports about Thorn House School, Mr Bynce appears to have been a 'bit of a go-getter', not unlike Jimmy McCann, the ginger-headed Headmaster of the *School for Slackers* stories written by Hamilton in *Modern Boy* in the 1930s. At Thorn House his brother, Dick Hamilton, was the more adventurous in various games and larks and, although Charles Hamilton did not take the lead in schoolboy escapades, like Frank Nugent in the *Magnet* who supported Wharton, he was always a willing follower of his brother.

At lessons Hamilton showed that he was more than able to keep up with his teacher, and, with impish delight, he would read up on the subject further ahead than his master had expected. The result of this extra study produced amusing results for him, but not necessarily for his master. One could not, I suspect, have played this game with Quelch, who would always have been far ahead of his class.

Hamilton was, without doubt, a very gifted boy for, apart from his ability to learn most subjects with ease, he was also an able draughtsman who, had he continued with his art, might well have become another C.H. Chapman and spent much of his time illustrating other authors' work. Equally talented with music, the piano was a frequently used instrument as he grew older, and many a brief minute developed into a long hour when he sat down to play Mozart. His ability was, again, above average and he could compose his own music, the lyrics writing themselves almost simultaneously.

It is impossible not to assume that, if he did attend Thorn House School, some of the masters there must have been used later by Hamilton in the creation of his fictional Common Rooms. But who was the original Quelch? Who were the original forerunners of Prout, of Hacker, of all those other splendid members of staff at Greyfriars, St. Jim's and Rookwood?

Miss Hood, Hamilton's housekeeper for many years, recounts how, after leaving school, he had private tuition from a lady who specialized in modern languages; sadly we have no other information about the lady herself. She improved his already proficient French, and gave him a good grounding in German and Spanish. Hamilton now was fully conversant with Ancient Greek and Latin, and later it was to books in these languages that he would turn for relaxation. After a long day at the typewriter, he could always pick up the *Æniad* and ponder over the different translations which might be applied to the Latin. Like our own

language, Latin has the ability to imply many different shades of meanings to identical words. This was to be ably demonstrated by Hamilton many times at Greyfriars in his classroom scenes or in learned discussion between Dr Locke and Mr Quelch.

From 1886, in steady succession, most of Hamilton's sisters and brothers got married. Maude married a Walter Barraclough, a chef, on the 7th November 1886. They both lived at 66 Fetter Lane, Holborn, and were wed in the Parish Church of St. Andrew's. Maude's mother, now *Marianne* Hannah Hamilton, was present at the ceremony, no longer 'Mary Ann' or 'Marion' as previously. Her father's occupation was given as 'grocer' and, rather strangely, despite his death two years earlier, he was not shown in the register as deceased. Dr Geoffrey Franglen has commented on these changes of name and occupation:

> Mrs Mary Ann Hamilton seems to have been less than totally honest about her names and her family background. Your findings suggest that she was a determined social climber, the daughter of a fly or hackney carriage driver who wanted to advance in the world. A hint of this is given by the way she was prepared to commit purgery when giving her name on official occasions, first plain Mary Ann, then Marion, then Marianne, gradually making her name 'grander' on each occasion. It is possible that this climbing came more to the fore when husband John died, and her successful brother, Walter, had started to help her. In such circumstances she would have to insist that her children remember always to keep quiet about their background and about their family. A lot of Charles Hamilton's reticence about his beginnings and schooling might stem from this. He was told to keep quiet about the truth about his family, and so he always did.

Next, brother Alexander married a Miss Rosa Pugh on the 16th September 1893, when he was 26 years old, and she 21. Alexander was a 'ticket writer', an occupation requiring a skilled hand. It was not until Mr Selfridge came to England in the early 1900s that window dressing, as we know it today, became a feature of the High Street and Shopping Precinct. Instead, sample materials were put on show, and the most decorative part of the window was the *ticket* or price tag. Alexander's wife, Rosa, was the daughter of a Charles Pugh, a waiter. In 1896, on the 13th of April, another sister, Edith, married Richard George Jackson. The latter was a commercial clerk from Forest Gate, London. Both Richard and Alexander Hamilton attended the marriage performed under special licence at the Fulham Register Office.

Richard, the brother nearest to Charles in age, was the next. On the 26th September 1900 he married Miss Emma Mary Cluley in the Church of St. Mary and St. Benedict in Coventry. Emma Cluley was the

first of the Hamilton brides to be entered in the register as having a trade or profession to her name. She was noted as being 'a clerk in a manufactory'. It seems an odd description, but, coupled with the fact that her father, Daniel Cluley, was a cycle maker, it seems likely that she was her father's personal assistant; now-a-days she might have been glorified with the description of 'secretary' or even 'assistant to'. Her husband was a ticket writer, like his brother Alexander. No trace was found of the remainder of the family getting married; Archibald and Hugh appear to have remained bachelors, as did Charles Hamilton.

When brothers and sisters marry and set up their own homes, a drifting apart can easily happen in many families. This seems to have happened to Hamilton. Always a shy, self-contained boy, he soon found his own niche in life, and did not keep in close contact with the rest of his family. Dr Franglen has speculated about this as follows:

> I just wonder whether this lack of contact was deliberate and part of a trait inherited from his mother. It seems almost like an extension of his reticence about his schooling—he wanted to hide his humble origins rather as his mother did, so he would not keep contact with his family since they might give him away. And they would not know where he was and what he was doing since he used pen-names so assiduously. It may even explain why he was so keen on pen-names—they would not associate 'Frank Richards' with their little 'Charlie boy'.

The only exception to this isolation from his family was young Una who was a constant visitor to his rooms. She was also to join him on holiday trips, to the seaside and on his many visits to the Continent. From now on, Charles and Una were to be constantly together, or in touch, until his death.

CHAPTER TWO

Out into the World

But, when he writes, what elocution flows!
Soft as the fleeces of descending snows
The Greyfriars *characters fall with easy art;*
Melting they fall and sink into the heart.
Iliad—Homer (Amended)

IN HIS early years Hamilton had often written short stories, mainly for his own amusement, but also for his sister, Una. It came easily to him to think up an adventure tale. A plot was not a difficult matter; it was there, inside his head. The only problem was how to write it down quickly enough. It was not until many years later that he discovered that other authors had to work out a story, and then, quite often, had to rewrite, and even rewrite again.

His first story was published in 1893, for which he was paid the princely sum of Five Guineas by a Mr 'M', who was collecting authors for his new paper. 'M' was Dowling Maitland, perhaps best described as an entrepreneur of the time. As disclosed in Hamilton's *Autobiography*, on first meeting, Mr M commented, 'You're very young, aren't you?'

These words must have stuck in Hamilton's mind, for they were to reappear in 1946, used by Hamilton himself when first meeting Charles Skilton, the publisher of the Bunter books. The story of that meeting with Mr M is to be found in the *Autobiography of Frank Richards*:

> Mr M. having courteously bade him be seated, entered into conversation, his keen grey eyes scanning Frank the while. *(Hamilton was using his favourite pen name of 'Frank Richards'.)* Frank did not know then, though it has dawned on him since, that Mr M had some doubts, possibly suspecting that a schoolboy was pulling his leg!
>
> But what ever doubts Mr M may have had, they disappeared after a little talk.

The outcome of Hamilton's meeting with his first publisher and the noting of his age, was to reduce future payments from five guineas per

contribution to four. As Hamilton commented, '...such was Mr M.'s graceful tribute to his youth and innocence.'

Towards the end of the 1890s Hamilton's work could be found in school childrens' papers produced by Trapps and Holmes. Soon afterwards, in the early 1900s, he was regularly producing short stories of between one and five thousand words which were published in other children's comics; his adventure stories could be found in issues of *The Coloured Comic*, *Larks*, and *Funny Cuts*.

It is at this point that we come across the first known entrance of Greyfriars onto the scene. This school appears in a story entitled *The Captain's Cure* in issue 47 of the comic *Smiles* published on the 19th March 1907. The school was still in embryo form, and little like the Kent college that was to rule the roost in the later *Magnet*. The boys featured in this first Greyfriars story were mainly in the senior forms, and little mention was made of the Remove (or Lower Fourth), which was to so dominate the later Greyfriars landscape. Conway was Captain of Greyfriars at this time. But good as the name Conway might be, how could he compare with the incomparable Wingate? Tom Lawrence of the Remove could have developed into a Harry Wharton, but this was never to be. Nevertheless, his name was not forgotten; although only a mediocre character, he was to become a prefect at Greyfriars.

Hamilton's style of writing improved rapidly. He was becoming a writer who had a good story line, who wrote with ease and considerable speed, and, above all, kept his young readers' attention from beginning to end. His list of pen names was even now of a goodly length; a few were 'Robert Stanley', 'Frank Drake', Talbot Wynard', 'Ridley Redway' (perhaps the forerunner of 'Ralph Redway') and the 'Rio Kid'. But all had one thing in common: they would fade into obscurity by comparison with 'Martin Clifford', 'Owen Conquest', and, above all, 'Frank Richards'. These would take over as if the others had never existed.

The publishers were not only lapping up Hamilton's work faster than he could write, but were calling for more. For this reason, in 1901 he took a course of typewriter lessons. He was an apt pupil, and quickly mastered the art to such an extent that he was producing many times his previous output. But his thoughts always rushed far ahead of his fingers; even at a speed of around forty words a minute he was unable to keep up with his rate of composition.

For some time, Hamilton had been writing freelance for the Trapps and Holmes empire, but he had also been busy for other publishing houses, such as Brett's, and Roberts and Pearson. So far, no one publisher had tried to claim him as their own. That time was now to come. In the same year, 1901, now armed with his typewriter, Hamilton

went forth to capture the juvenile market.

He had been writing intermittently for the Harmsworth papers for some time. Hamilton Edwards, the chief editor of their boys' papers, had probably been keeping an eye on his progress, and evidently was satisfied, since he called for more and more copy from the young Hamilton. Gradually ties became firmer; Charles Hamilton was now calling quite often on Carmelite House, the head office. By 1906 he could be regarded as being well-established there, and was writing regularly for a number of the Harmsworth Brothers' boys' papers. Around this time the firm changed its name to the *Amalgamated Press*. Among the most famous of their publications were stalwarts such as *The Boy's Friend*, *The Marvel*, *The Boys' Herald*, and, slightly surprisingly, *Union Jack*. They also published another popular boys' paper at that time called *Pluck*, a weekly with a yellow cover and full of adventure yarns. It was within these covers that the first mention was made of the boys of St. Jim's.

Jack Blake of St. Jim's was the title of that first story published in February 1906. Present in the school from the outset were Herries and Digby of Study No 6 in School House. There are two interesting points about these stories: first and most unusually, they were written under Hamilton's own name. Secondly, in contrast to Greyfriars, St Jim's had another house, the New House. This meant that there was the material for many plots based on rivalry between the two factions. Juniors in the New House included George Figgins and Co.

Nevertheless, the presence of two houses may have posed problems. In 1965 Charles Hamilton was interviewed for *Floreat Greyfriars*, a gramophone record made as a tribute to him and his work on the school since its birth. In his comments about the creation of a school, Hamilton made this remark:

> You see, in a story you have to cut out the unessential. If you put in four houses, it doesn't affect the action of the story, but it does add four housemasters unnecessarily to the scene. Well, nobody wants to know whether Smith minor was in Jones House, or whether Monson major was in Mr Robinson's House. They don't want to know all that—they don't want to be burdened with that—they want a story to read! So you cut out all the unessentials.

Here, possibly, is the reason why Greyfriars was to triumph over St. Jim's in terms of success in the commercial market.

But, for the moment the stage had been set for Jack Blake to be the hero, and Figgins the ever present foil; everything appeared to be straighforward for Hamilton to settle down and turn out many stories about St Jim's. To quote from his *Autobiography*, he had:

> Plenty to do—what with St. Jim's stories for Mr Garrish; serials for Hamilton Edwards; many thousands of words weekly for Trapps and Holmes.

One day, however, Hamilton was asked to come into Carmelite House to discuss a point about St. Jim's with Mr Garrish (who controlled *Pluck*). Instead he found himself being shown into the office of Mr Percy Griffiths, one of the editors in the firm. Mr Griffiths (acting on instructions from Garrish) started to discuss the launching of a new boys' weekly, to be called the *Gem.* And would he, Hamilton, kindly create a new school to fill its pages? The proposal took Hamilton's breath away.

But, for all the shock that the idea of producing a new school may have engendered, requests like this caused Hamilton small concern. There was always something going on in his mind; he was able to recall an idea that had been lying dormant for a while. It was just as well, for Percy Griffiths had obviously considered the matter settled.

When Hamilton had any thinking to be done, he could, as he put it, think better in a boat. As he recorded in his *Autobiography*, he went away and thought over Griffiths' request while floating in a boat. This little ritual was to persist; later, when he had his bungalow Appletrees built at Hawkinge in Kent, he had a small pond dug and tethered a boat there in which he could sit and think.

The outcome was the creation of his most endearing schoolboy, Tom Merry. The name may have sprung from a subconscious memory. According to the *Autobiography*, it was the name of a pen-and-ink artist of whom Hamilton had heard but never met. Tom Merry was meant to be a normal, healthy boy, the like of which everyone has known at some time or another. Next came the creation of the school, *Clavering*, followed by Tom's chums, Manners and Lowther. The rest of the characters were developed in rapid succession, unlike Greyfriars where the permanent schoolboys were still arriving five years after the first *Magnet*.

It does seem to have been a surprisingly heavy load to have placed on Charles Hamilton. An interesting opinion has been put forward by Chris Lowder of I.P.C. Magazines Ltd, who has spent a considerable time investigating Hamilton's relationship with the Amalgamated Press. He said:

> The real thing about Hamilton was that he was *the man* for the job. I'll explain what I mean: he was astonishingly prolific, even before the *Gem* and the *Magnet* came along. Indeed, it might be true to say that after they both got into full swing, he probably slowed down a little—in the sense that he set his sights on one subject, school

stories, and concentrated on that.

During the 1890s and early 1900s, he wrote all sorts of stuff—cowboy stories, adventure stories, sports stories, everything... every sort of subject he could get into a story that might run from around the 5,000 word mark up to the 20,000 word mark, and over.

The point is, he had to. It wasn't any 'Grand Crusade' to make school stories better, or anything like that—he just had to make a living. He discovered that he could write, and that editors, in this strange new market, which it was in the early '90s, accepted what he wrote, and actually paid him for it. This must have been a hell of a pleasant shock for young Hamilton.

In certain respects, I would liken Charles Hamilton to Edgar Wallace—not simply that both were prolific word-grinders (not necessarily a bad attribute), but that both *were recognized* as prolific word-grinders.

To quote Chris Lowder again:

Hamilton would probably have gone on writing a load of different stories for ever, but his speed and his invention, his creativity, were recognized by those at the helm of the Amalgamated Press who decided to channel it in one direction. I am sure Hamilton was perfectly happy to be channelled at this time. Apart from anything else, it meant a fixed income, instead of a haphazard one—a good week, then a lousy one, and so on.

CHAPTER THREE

Beginnings of the Gem and Magnet

Toil, says the proverb, is the sire of Fame.
Fragment 477—Licymnus

BY 1907 Hamilton manuscripts had assumed a particular shape, one that was, by any standards in that period, head and shoulders above other authors in this particular genre. As throughout his life, Hamilton reflected in his stories an astute impression of social events happening at the time they were written. He always wrote of Christmas a few weeks before the holiday, and always kept each of his weekly stories in its correct season. Hamilton was now typing his thoughts out at about fifty words a minute. Using single line spacing to save time and paper, he seldom had to type any page more than once. The finished manuscript was dispatched to the editor, who, after a brief glance, would send it to the printer for typesetting. The artist would be sent a proof marked with the passages to illustrate. In the meantime the galleys from the printer would be pasted up to await the block maker to convert the artist's efforts into the final items needed to complete the plates for the week's issue.

What more could an editor ask of his author? If the manuscript was accidently lost or destroyed, Hamilton would sit down and recreate the work; all that was be required was the effort of extra typing. Hamilton now had a Remington No 7; it made no bones about extra work, so why should its master? This lack of fuss and bother was typical of Charles Hamilton throughout his life.

Hamilton threw himself into the new venture and, armed with a new pen name, 'Martin Clifford', began the Tom Merry stories. By now he was effectively under contract, and had to produce the output demanded by Percy Griffiths. At first, the introduction of Tom Merry was delayed, as the date for the launch of the *Gem* came too swiftly for comfort.

The cover picture of *Gem* 1, published on 16th March 1907, showed a bulldog fighting a python. The story, *Scuttled*, was by an unnamed author; it may have been written by one of the editorial staff. The following week the *Gem* contained an adventure yarn by Nat Barr (real

name, Norman Goddard), and was entitled *On the Trail of the Grizzly*; it was good stirring stuff, but not Tom Merry. Then, in *Gem* 3, the first full-length story about *Tom Merry's Schooldays* appeared in print. The following extract will strike familiar chords with anyone who has read a Charles Hamilton school tale:

> "Tom—Tom—"
> Tom heard his name called, and saw Miss Priscilla Fawcett looking excitedly up and down the platform; and he promptly dodged behind a pile of luggage.
> "Tom—Tom—" But Tom was not forthcoming ..."

Not many boys could resist an opening like this. An adult was looking for her erring charge. Would he manage to stay hidden? The only way to find out was to read on. And read on the schoolboys did.

Young Tom Merry, they discovered, made his way to Clavering School on his own. As he walked from the station, he fell in with 'Honest' Jim Jones, a 'gentleman of the road', in other words, a tramp. Honest Jim, seeing Tom unencumbered by other school fellows, decided to indulge in a little daylight robbery, and tried to avail himself of young Merry's gold watch chain. Tom, however unused he may have been to fistic arguments, managed to escape from Honest Jim by the administering of a 'terrific slap on the side of his head'. Then, wisely, Tom took to his heels, and arrived safely at Clavering.

He was initially portrayed as a *spooney* lad. Perhaps 'over trusting and innocent' is the nearest definition of this; it certainly did not hint at the hero of the school he was soon to become.

Following this story, the next week's paper contained another adventure yarn, *A Secret Quest* by Lewis Bird (real name, Cecil Hayter).

However, in *Gem* 5, *Troublesome Tom* continued the Clavering saga, and described the integration process that all new boys had to undergo when first entering a new school. By now Tom was showing that under his polite exterior there existed a more manly heart and, although he was now in rougher surroundings than at home with Miss Priscilla, he was beginning to win friends.

Alternating again with adventure, Number 6 contained *A Britisher's Pluck*, a tale by Brian Kingston (real name, Percy William Longhurst); *Gem* 7 contained another Tom Merry tale, *Our Captain*, while the adventure story in *Gem* 8 was a *Tale of Buffalo Bill* by Mark Glover (real name, G. Clabon Glover). After *Tom Merry on the Warpath*, only *Gem* 10 continued the pattern of alternating adventure with school stories. This one was entitled *Treasure Trove*, and was by Lewis Bird.

Mr Percy Griffiths, the editor, now told Hamilton that he had decided that school stories should appear every week. In addition, the Jack

Blake stories in the yellow covered *Pluck* would be amalgamated with the Tom Merry adventures in the *Gem*. This meant, of course, that Clavering School would have to be closed down. A plausible reason was concocted: Mr Railton, the Head Master, was in the clutches of a money lender about to foreclose with the intention of to capitalizing on a coal field beneath the school. As a result, Tom Merry, Harry Manners, and Monty Lowther had to be transferred to St. Jim's.

Chris Lowder has commented:

> Here's where the old editorial control came into it, of course. The man who controlled that part of the old Amalgamated Press was H.J. Garrish. He had come to the firm at the very start of the boys' papers in 1893 as an editorial assistant, and was to make his way up to being, in the 1920s, a Director. He was also, at one time, in charge of the 'funny papers', like *Rainbow* and *Tiger Tim*.
>
> Under him were Percy Griffiths and Herbert Hinton. They would have been the ones to whom would have gone the task of gathering in the material for such a project as this. And, whatever their faults, it must be said that most old-timers remember them as both having exceptional talents in the editorial field—and this would tie in with the picture that has been handed down of Garrish, who was noted for his excellent choice in such matters. He had the knack of picking the right man for the job, whether it was editorial or freelance writing. I have no doubt that, despite what Hamilton says in his *Autobiography*, it was Garrish who picked him as the man to write the *Gem*, and, later the *Magnet*. By the latter part of this decade, 1900-1910, Garrish was getting to the point where he felt he could safely leave such jobs as interviewing writers and looking after the general running of the various papers under his wing to those beneath him in the Amalgamated Press power structure.
>
> Garrish certainly knew all about Hamilton, since the latter had written a lot of stories for him in the past. He also knew that Hamilton was freelancing around the firm, (for Hamilton Edwards, for instance, in the *Boys' Friend/Realm/ Herald* line of papers), and he must have known that, if he freelanced around the firm, he'd be freelancing outside the firm. Hamilton did a vast quantity of stuff for the Trapps and Holmes group of papers, Pearsons, and so on. Garrish would have known that here was a dependable chap: all you had to do was to turn on the tap and wait for the gush—which wouldn't be very long in coming.

The editor, as was usual in boys' papers, had a small section in which he discussed and answered readers' queries, recounted jokes submitted by them, set competitions, and advertised the following week's programme. In *Gem* 11 the Editor, in his *How Do You Do?* chat, made

the following announcement:

> The Terrible Three: as I said last week, the tales of the popular Tom Merry have met with such tremendous success that I have resolved to run a series of them EVERY WEEK.

By now Hamilton's workload was very heavy, although in his *Autobiography* he was to dismiss it lightly:

> Martin Clifford was now writing a double length *Gem* story every week. He was also writing serials for Hamilton Edwards; the Cliveden's Series was now running about that time in the *Boy's Herald*, and Hamilton, in spite of Persuasive Percy, (Griffiths) was still turning out huge chunks of copy for H.J. Drane of Trapps and Holmes. But it all came easily enough, and left him plenty of time for music and other things in which he delighted.

But, then, the *Magnet* was born.

The *Gem* had been running successfully for nearly a year in its original halfpenny format. It had rapidly attracted a band of steady, young readers to the ranks of those who already held allegiance to the Harmsworth papers. Even more important was the fact that the good, wholesome and well-written stories were generally accepted by parents as preferable to the 'tuppenny dreadfuls' that had been the main reading matter previously available for their children. The forty plus issues following *Tom Merry's Schooldays* saw the arrival of several additional characters at the newly created St. Jim's School. Mr Railton, the erstwhile head of Clavering, had taken over as House Master of School House from Mr Kidd, and now seemed quite happy under Dr Holmes's direction (who was described as the Principal of St. Jim's).

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, the famous swell of St. Jim's, was already an established member of the school. Hamilton delighted in recounting the story of how 'Gussy' came to be at Clavering, a result of taking up a suggestion from Garrish. It was a little act of diplomacy; he was able to make the point that editors can occasionally have their use for a writer, sometimes as a midwife to the birth of a great character.

It was about this time, while the *Gem* was increasing in popularity, that Percy Griffiths sprang his second surprise. Casually he announced to Hamilton that he was starting another new paper. He went on to add that it would be called *The Magnet.* After a pause in the conversation, during which Hamilton is reputed to have said only, 'Yes?', Griffiths continued, 'You will write the story. Can you do the two papers?'

Hamilton's answer was a simple 'Yes'. It was only afterwards that he began to wonder if his enormous capacity could keep up with the two

full-length stories required each week, a task that might have daunted even Hercules. But, glancing round at that moment, he discovered Hinton in the throes of merriment. The idea of one author writing the entire contents of two weekly papers (not quite true, as there was a short filler story in each paper), seemed to have overcome the sub-editor. It was probably this 'sudden irrepressible cachinnation' from the other side of the room that made Hamilton agree. He described the scene in his *Autobiography*:

> Glancing back at Griffiths, (he) saw the editorial visage wreathed in a grin. It dawned upon him that neither editor, nor sub editor, really deemed the thing to be possible.

The situation was a challenge to Hamilton. Anyway, he had said that he could do it. And, by now, he was showing the ability to switch from one set of characters to another with the ease of a chameleon. His instructions were to create a new school on the lines of St. Jim's. He thus had to produce a totally new cast of characters, and then, to round the matter off, he had to invent a new pen name.

Although Charles Hamilton had written stories under his own name, he had also used many pen names. One benefit of this was that he found it enabled him to identify himself with a particular series or type of story. 'Martin Clifford' was firmly established in his mind as the author of St. Jim's. Now he had to select a name which would best fit his idea of the new stories, one with which he could feel comfortable:

> He decided upon *Frank Richards*; Frank from Frank Osbaldistone in Scott's *Rob Roy* and Richards from his brother, (Richard Lionel Walter), pluralized into a surname.

The name of the school, 'Greyfriars', has never been discovered to have derived from any known place or school. It had, however, a nice ring about it, not harsh like 'Blackfriars' or even 'Whitefriars', but a typical Hamilton middle-of-the-road sound. Greyfriars was, and still is, a not uncommon name for a school. One is to be found in Yorkshire; one existed at Canterbury, close to the mythical location of 'Courtfield' and 'Friardale' in the county of Kent. Hamilton was not, at this time, living in Kent and did not have had any deep knowledge of the topography of its towns, villages, and their highways and bye-ways. This was to come years later when he moved first to Hawkinge, and then to Kingsgate, places where he was to pass many happy years.

At this point Hamilton decided to bring Billy Bunter out of cold-storage where he had been hiding ever since an unimaginative publisher had turned down this character. The publisher listened to Hamilton's description of this new creation, rejected it, and shortly afterwards

went down with his periodical when it failed.

William George Bunter was now ready to stretch his wings. Would they be strong enough to lift this leviathan up into the sky and into the annals of schoolboy fiction? Possibly only Hamilton was certain, though he relied on Harry Wharton to be the bed-rock of the saga. As it happened, Bunter's success was to be even greater than anyone could have dared to hope.

It must be understood that, although Bunter was an important character (the fat boy of the school), he was by no means 'cock of the walk' when he first made his bow. It was only later that he came to occupy a premier position. The opening story in the *Magnet* served as a vehicle to introduce Harry Wharton to his schoolboy public, and left Bunter in a minor role.

The first *Magnet* was published on the 15th February 1908, priced at one halfpenny. With its distinctive red cover, it made an excellent contrast with its stable companion, the blue coloured *Gem*.

The title story of *Magnet* 1, *The Making of Harry Wharton*, opened with a chapter called *Sent to School*. Immediately, as usual when Hamilton was writing, the reader's attention was gripped by the plot.

> "Send Master Harry to me!"
>
> Colonel Wharton filled his glass from the decanter, held it up to the light, and then slowly sipped the contents, a dark shade of thought upon his bronzed face the while.
>
> The colonel had dined, and he was alone now in the old, dark, oak-panelled dining-room at Wharton Lodge. A bronzed, grim-visaged old soldier was the colonel, but under the rugged exterior a kindly heart beat.
>
> The door of the dining-room opened, and the colonel set down his glass, only half emptied, and compressed his lips slightly as he looked at the boy who came into the room.
>
> A handsome, well-built lad, finely-formed, strong and active. Handsome indeed was the face, with its well-marked features and large, dark eyes. But there was a cloud upon it, a cloud that seemed habitual there, and in the dark eyes was a glint of suspicion and defiance. The whole manner of the boy was one of suppressed hostility, and the colonel realised it keenly enough without words being spoken.
>
> "You sent for me, Uncle."
>
> In the tones of Harry Wharton, too, was a half-hidden hostility and defiance, as if he knew that he had not been sent for in a friendly spirit, and was ready to meet anger with anger.
>
> "Yes, Harry." Colonel Wharton's voice was very mild. "Sit down, my boy. I want to speak to you."
>
> Harry Wharton did not move. The colonel raised his eyebrows.

"Sit down, Harry."
"I suppose you are not going to keep me long," said the boy doggedly. "I want to go out on my pony before dark—"
The colonel half rose from his seat, a flush of anger darkening his cheek.
"Sit down!" he thundered.
For a moment it looked as if the order would be disobeyed, but there was something in the colonel's face that impelled obedience. Harry Wharton slowly moved to a chair and sat down, but the sullen cloud was darkening on his brow.

Here was the central character described in minute detail, a boy completely unlike Tom Merry in the *Gem*. Whereas Tom was polite, friendly and sunny-natured, Harry Wharton was a headstrong lad, whose dislike of authority may have emerged when, after his father's death, he became a ward of his uncle, Colonel James Wharton. The colonel expected discipline from his subordinates, and required the same from his ward. Both Tom and Harry were intelligent, and both were full of fun and pranks at school. But, the important chemistry of pride and passion that had been left out of Tom's nature was there in full in that of Harry.

In the opening story, Colonel Wharton considered that Harry was getting out of hand, and, as the colonel informed him, he was being sent to the colonel's old school, Greyfriars. Here, he would learn to control his wilful ways and also improve his knowledge. Mr Pynsent, Harry Wharton's private tutor, had been having a terrible time while the colonel had been on active service in India. On his return, the colonel decided that rapid action was required. Accordingly Harry Wharton was to go to Greyfriars. Since Harry had given his word that he would go, go he did, but he never promised to 'toe the line'.

On his way to school Harry Wharton met Frank Nugent of the Lower Fourth, Wharton's form-to-be. The latter was returning to school after the holiday break and, also *en route* for Friardale, entered the train at Melthorpe Station. Wharton ignored Nugent's friendly advances, and continued to be surly and hostile until at last he managed to force a fight between them. It was a foolish move. Nugent quickly showed Harry Wharton that boxing should be approached scientifically and not like a bull at a gate.

After the fight was over, Wharton refused the hand of friendship from Nugent, and spat out, "I-I will give it all back to you some time!" But the next chapter showed that Wharton was made of the right stuff. After both the boys had tried to hire the only available hack outside Friardale Station to travel the two miles to Greyfriars, Nugent, the successful

passenger, offered a place inside to Wharton. Harry Wharton refused this, and started to walk, following the slow horse-drawn vehicle towards the school.

As Harry followed, he saw the hack approach the bridge over the River Sark. No sooner had it begun to cross than the driver had to pull over towards the parapet as a car approached rapidly from the opposite side. Wharton, realizing an accident was imminent, ran to see if he could help, but to no avail. The car, rushing onto the bridge, collided with the rear of the hack, and toppled it into the parapet, throwing Nugent into the river. Nugent was a good boxer, but a poor swimmer, and was in considerable danger. Wharton, realizing the difficulties in which his enemy was, dived in to save him regardless of the cabman's warning of strong currents beneath the bridge. After a struggle, Wharton was able to rescue the weakened Nugent.

If the readers of 1908 now expected Harry and Frank to become firm friends, they were disappointed. For a number of setbacks had to be overcome before this came to pass. But friends they did become, after Nugent had been attacked by a tramp and rescued by Wharton in the closing pages of the first *Magnet*.

Bunter, William George (barely recognizable when compared with his later development), made a brief appearance in this *Magnet* in Chapter Five, after Wharton had been knocked down by Bulstrode.

> As he, (Wharton), sat there, another junior belonging to the Lower Fourth came hurriedly into the study, and ran right into him. The newcomer was a somewhat stout junior, with a broad, pleasant face, and an enormous pair of spectacles.
>
> "Ker-woosh!" ejaculated the junior, as he sprawled on the floor over Harry Wharton's legs. "What's that in the way? What do you mean by having a dog in the study, you silly bounders, for a short-sighted fellow to fall over?"
>
> "Ha, ha, ha!" roared Bulstrode.
>
> Billy Bunter looked round as he rose, and peered at Harry through his big glasses. It was pretty clear that, big as his spectacles were, they did not assist his vision very much, for he had to put his head within a foot of Harry's to make him out.
>
> "My word, it's the new kid! Well, what does he mean by sprawling on the floor? I say, you new fellow..."

Thus Bunter made his bow onto the Greyfriars stage, and gradually over the next few months began to play a larger role in the stories. Soon issues were to be published bearing his name in the title, such as *Billy's Boom* (*Magnet* 11); *Billy's Competition* (*Magnet* 14); *Billy Bunter, Hypnotist* (*Magnet* 30); and *Billy Bunter's Raid* (*Magnet* 40).

During the first few years of the *Magnet* the detailed pattern of life at

Greyfriars was gradually expanded each week. On many occasions a new boy would have a week's story devoted to himself, and then slip into the background until called forth again by Hamilton.

With the *Magnet* safely launched, Hamilton now divided most of his time between the *Gem* and this new paper. Nevertheless, he was still supplying small items for other boy's papers. But the *Gem* was not neglected. A highlight of Autumn 1908 was the arrival at St. Jim's of one destined to become a major character, Wally, the younger brother to Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, better known to the world as 'Gussy'. It seemed that Wally's mission in life was to plague the living daylights out of Mr Selby, his form master, and to be a scruffy foil to the sartorial elegance of his brother and would-be mentor. As a typical youngster he could never see why anyone should worry about a little, or even a lot of, good honest grime, so long as it did not affect anybody else.

But gradually Hamilton found himself working more for the *Magnet* at the expense of the *Gem*. In due course, he was called into Percy Griffiths' office in Carmelite House.

> ...(Percy) handed him a partly-written manuscript. Looking at it in considerable surprise, Martin saw that it was a story about Tom Merry and Co. at St. Jim's which he had never seen before. As the creator and author of Tom Merry, Martin naturally had never expected to see a Tom Merry story by another hand. He looked at the typescript, and looked at the editor, who was as cheery and brassy as ever.
>
> The editor explained. A friend of his had tried his hand at a Tom Merry story. This man was a well-known newspaper correspondent (Harry Harper, one-time war correspondent) whose work Hamilton had seen in the *Daily Mail.* (his own particular newspaper). Apparently, Harper had a fancy for writing a school story. The man was quite a good writer in his own line, and I believe had some distinction as a war correspondent in those days of Lilliputian Wars. But his idea of a school story was appalling.

Charles Hamilton was requested 'to knock it into shape', so it could be published in *Gem* 77 (Second Series) under the title, *The Terrible Three's Air Cruise.* Sad to say, he agreed to this, thinking, as he put it, 'that it was only an isolated case'. Unfortunately this was not to be, since his rewriting of the story was taken as an 'acknowledged precedent' that he was prepared to let others use his characters. Although Hamilton received half the normal payment for the story, he suffered loss in the sense that he had allowed sole use of his characters to slip out of his hands.

Over the next year more stories turned up under the name of "Martin Clifford' which had not been touched by Hamilton at all. There was a

good reason; Hamilton had not supplied enough copy to keep the *Gem* going, and, if the paper was to come out, someone else had to write the stories; these authors were known as substitute or 'sub' writers.

In late 1909 even the *Magnet* was affected by the publication of Greyfriars stories by other authors, starting with one by Herbert Hinton, (*Billy Bunter's Windfall, Magnet* 87). Hinton was the sub-editor, who with Griffiths, had originally doubted Hamilton's ability to write both *Gem* and *Magnet* stories simultaneously. Since Hamilton had made no demur over other authors using Tom Merry and Co., it was too late now to cry *"Desisti!"* The gates of the *Magnet* were down and the bastion of Greyfriars breached; many years were to pass before the defences were repaired.

Chris Lowder has his own thoughts on the subject. In conversation in April 1973 he said:

> Of course, Tom Merry and Co., Harry Wharton and Co., weren't Hamilton's creations entirely. He simply dressed them up. They were, in fact, the sole property of the Amalgamated Press. Just because Hamilton, an eminently capable writer of the time, happened to have created their characters, fleshed them out, injected blood into their veins—by no means did it mean that they were his.
>
> This sounds cruel and heartless, I know. But this was how they worked then, (and still do now). All copyright was sold to the Amalgamated Press, Hamilton knew this. He knew what he was letting himself in for. He signed the cheques every week that effectively gave the Amalgamated Press control over his characters. And, he was quite happy to do so.
>
> And it's not as though the Amalgamated Press was some sort of wicked uncle. Not even the Powers-that-Were, I'll warrant, realized that these same characters would pass into legend. And certainly Hamilton didn't know or care. He was working for the moment, as we all are to this day.
>
> And, too, he knew all about 'sub' writers. It wasn't a new phenomenon, created specially to cheat Charles Hamilton. Good God, he *needed* 'sub' writers. Consider for a moment, how often Charles Hamilton used to repeat his plots: lost heirs, circuses, barrings-out, wrongful expulsions, fights for the Captaincy of the Remove, etc. This was done, you might be surprised to learn, for two reasons. Firstly, because there was only a certain limited area about which he could write. Not limited in the *small* sense, but in the sense that there were certain themes about which he *liked* to write, and about which it was recognized, editorially, that he could write more convincingly than others. It was no good, for instance, giving him an Edwy Searles Brooks theme, like a lost race or science fiction. For a start, I don't think Hamilton himself would

> have put forward such ideas. And, I do not think he would have been happy writing about them. Secondly: a purely technical aspect of *Boys' Papers*—the age limits—the majority of the readers, (and we are not talking about the 'fans' here), would have taken either the *Gem* or the *Magnet*, or both, for a certain length of time—around seven or eight years—and then dropped them for more adult papers—magazines, books, and so on. This is why, for instance, there are two *Wharton the Rebel Series*, (one in 1925 and the other in 1932-33). In fact, there would have been three. The third, *The Shadow of the Sack Series*, started in 1940. This was editorial policy, not something that Charles Hamilton controlled. It was felt that you could repeat themes every so often, because a new generation would have come along who would not have read the previous stories. Anyway, going back to the 'sub' writers—to a certain extent, they helped matters, especially during the great days of the 1920s, because it meant that Charles Hamilton did not write himself into the ground. I think that on the *Magnet* of the mid-1920s to the mid-1930s Hamilton did his best work *because* of the subs, not in spite of them, though this is not an opinion shared by many, as you must realize.

From a legal viewpoint the situation should have been in Hamilton's favour. It could be argued that copyright of a story, which, following normal publishing practice, was passed to the Amalgamated Press when their cheque had been accepted by Hamilton as author, referred only to the particular story for which it had been paid, and not to its characters. Until Hamilton had accepted payment to give his rights away on Bunter, Greyfriars and his other characters, he would still have been able to write new stories about them and sell these to another publisher. He had the right, too, if he chose to exercise it, to prevent other authors from using his characters, very much in the same way as, now-a-days, cartoon characters are copyrighted, and cannot be used by advertisers without payment and permission. Hamilton later was to refer in his diary to a 'verbal agreement' with the Amalgamated Press, one which may have involved payment for the use of his characters. It is interesting, though, that no evidence of this transaction has been found among the records of the Amalgamated Press.

The output of Charles Hamilton had now reached a steady stream of between 35,000 to 45,000 words a week. As he said in his *Autobiography*, "Generally, my speed on the Remington was fifty words per minute. It might rise to sixty or fall to forty, but fifty was the average." This tremendous output was now producing an income of at least £35 to £45 per week. Years later, he remarked to Charles Skilton that he had always written Bunter at 30/- per 1,000 words. This was more than

ample for his undemanding needs at the time.

With the publishing of Hinton's 'sub' story, the first upset with the editorial staff had come and gone. For Percy Griffiths it was the start of what was to be an established procedure. From now on he would be able to insert stories by substitute writers in the *Magnet* without further consultation with Charles Hamilton. Griffiths did not, however, write stories himself, or at least none which have been identified; he commissioned yarns from different writers and stockpiled them until they were needed. Before the *Magnet* and *Gem* closed, a considerable number of substitute writers had followed Harper and Hinton; many stories were written by the sub-editorial staff themselves.

The *Magnet* was now claiming a great deal of Hamilton's time as he established Greyfriars and its characters. Slowly, ever since the first issue, new boys had been introduced with painstaking thoroughness. For example, the Chinese junior, Wun Lung, arrived at Greyfriars in *Magnet* 36 (1908). Although he was often in the background of events, it was not until the 1930 *China Series*, that he was to be the central character of a long story.

Ionides, the Greek schoolboy, entered the Sixth Form in *Magnet* 49, only to be immediately involved in a clash with the majority of his peers, the exception being Gerald Loder, a case of like calling to like. Ionides was made a prefect by the Headmaster, Dr Locke. This was a mistake that the Reverend Head rapidly rectified when, within a few days, the Greek dandy was divested of rank and privileges. The Removites, with the help of a green stain supplied by Wun Lung, had caused Ionides to go to the Head's house and frighten his wife and child, for which he was accused of an irresponsible act, demeaning to his position of a prefect; the background to this was never explained to Dr Locke. Some weeks later Ionides accused Wharton of being a thief. This cloud was permitted to linger for six weeks until withdrawn in *The Cad of the Sixth* (*Magnet* 107). Another character in this story was Carberry, also of the Sixth, who was expelled for his part in this affair and in other deceptions. It is notable that Hamilton restrained himself from unnecessary sacking of established characters; from 1915 onwards, hardly anybody earned this ultimate penalty.

The Bounder of Greyfriars (*Magnet* 119) described the arrival of Herbert Tudor Vernon-Smith, aptly nicknamed the 'Bounder'. From the start he was drawn as a controversial character. The son of a rich father, wilful he might be, ever opposed to established authority, he was full of courage and skilled at most sports. Smithy soon joined the 'bad-hats' of the Remove. At first it was Peter Hazeldene with whom he 'chummed'. Not that he necessarily wanted to flout authority, but it

was more fun than being good. The Bounder always sought the limelight and, to achieve this, would risk lines, gatings, canings, and even, on occasions, 'the Sack'.

A lengthy list would be required to record every new arrival over the next 400 issues, until Tom Redwing was introduced as the last important permanent character in *Magnet* 517. His arrival is detailed later in this book.

Some of the notables who arrived at Greyfriars after Vernon-Smith included Alonzo Todd, the duffer of the Remove and cousin to Peter Todd (*Magnet* 125); Sammy Bunter who, as younger brothers can be, was a slyer version of William George (*Magnet* 144); Fisher Tarleton Fish, the cute American junior who, as Charles Hamilton tells us, owed his existence to an American 'drummer', or commercial traveller (*Magnet* 150); Lord Mauleverer who was to become a fine example of characterization, particularly when he took charge in various adventures (*Magnet* 184); Oliver Kipps (*Magnet* 268) and William Wibley (*Magnet* 322) who fell into a 'professional' category in that they were able to perform certain tasks, Kipps conjuring things from the air, and Wibley impersonating almost any individual with ease. The latter was to become a much used character right up to the end of the *Magnet*, just before which he had acted as a double to Sir William Bird in *Magnet* 1676-1682. This story of the Secret Service in war time could have heralded a series of adventures showing the Germans in similar guise to that of World War I, but, regretfully, the *Magnet* was to exist for only one more issue.

When Hamilton had run through his relations and friends as a basis for a new character at Greyfriars or St. Jim's, he turned to observing his fellow men. The chap sitting at a nearby table, or an acquaintance he met in the street, or even a conversation heard in passing, all these incidents were likely to be embodied into a new junior or master in his next story. Characters who appear once in a story and are never mentioned again always had a solid background that meant they lived for the reader, if only briefly.

Innumerable readers have asked Hamilton whether there had been a real Billy Bunter. His reply was that, "Like Ancient Gaul, Bunter was divided into three parts".

Bunter's extensive circumference was taken from Hamilton's first memory of the editor of *Chuckles*, a vast mountain of a man, Louis Higgins. He had seemed to overflow the editorial chair in which he reposed during their first meeting. The Owl's big spectacles were borrowed from a sister who, Hamilton remembered from his childhood, used to peer at him somewhat like an inquisitive owl. His celebrated

'Postal Order', it has been said, was based on a ploy of Hamilton's brother Alexander, who was often expecting a cheque which had been delayed, and on which he would try to borrow a pound or two. Other foibles of Bunter's came from sources such as a selfish man who remarked, "There's at least one thing I can say—I never was selfish!" That could be applied immediately to Bunter, as could the impenetrable fatuousness of an eminent but unnamed Victorian worthy.

Charles Hamilton now began to use his earnings to enjoy some of the other things in life. It was clearly a time when he began to feel more independent and confident in himself, and he began to distance himself a little from Carmelite House and its editors.

CHAPTER FOUR

Feeling his feet

We cultivate the mind.
We are lovers of the beautiful,
yet simple in our tastes,
without the loss of manliness.
Peloponnesian War—Thucydides

CHARLES Hamilton was now faced with something of a problem. For the past few years, writing had been a pleasant pastime. But now it seemed as though it might develop, or degenerate, into something very like work. He started to look more positively for the lighter pursuits of life. Jack would, indeed, have been a dull fellow if he had only sat at the Remington and pounded out words all day long,without the relief of a walk, or a bicycle ride, or a game of tennis.

Hamilton had been a keen opera fan for many years, and often was to be found at Covent Garden. In addition, he particularly liked to attend the Gilbert and Sullivan operettas at the Savoy Theatre. He also liked Mozart concerts where he could sit back, dreamily following the score and imagining that he was playing it himself. It was because he was capable of immersing himself so completely in the object of his attention that he found such ease in writing; he was able to report, rather than just make up, a story, because, in a sense, he actually was standing by Bunter's elbow whilst the Remove Master questioned him about some misdeed. As he said many years later to me,

"When I'm writing, I'm seventeen years old. I live at Greyfriars".

Such late, but enjoyable, nights, reduced time for work. However, by burning the candle at both ends, Hamilton (and 'Frank' and 'Martin') managed provide enough material to keep the presses rolling. In spite of this, Carmelite House was put in difficulties when Hamilton and, therefore, 'Frank' and 'Martin' all caught a cold sufficiently severe to stop the flow of stories for the *Gem* and *Magnet*. Percy Griffiths had a few stories in hand, since Hamilton, as he put it, 'was at that time writing as if for a wager'. Hamilton was keeping not only the *Gem* and *Magnet* supplied with copy, but also several other papers as well. He

had received an urgent request from H.J. Drane of Trapps and Holmes to write an 18,000 word story for one of their issues. Hamilton says that he wrote the story in a single day, a *tour-de-force* that he never repeated, nor wished to repeat.

Griffiths's remedy for lack of copy was to use more substitute writers to cover periods like that of the cold which had put all three of his most prolific authors *hors de combat* at the same time. The *Gem* was the first to publish stories from substitute writers, but neither did the *Magnet* escape. To add to Hinton's literary efforts came yarns by H. C. Hook and Edwy Searles Brooks (of St Frank's fame).

Although Hamilton had taken both the St. Jim's and Greyfriars boys for journeys overseas, he had not travelled to all the countries himself. When Tom Merry and Co. went to America in the *Gem* series of 1909, Hamilton had not been there, and, in fact, never did go. The same applied to the South Seas in the *Magnet* series of 1927 and 1938, and to the Egyptian series of 1932. But, with the use of guides and reference books, Hamilton was able to instil remarkable accuracy and atmosphere into the descriptive passages, helped by his command of languages.

By now his life was no longer entirely confined to the shores of England. At this time he was beginning to travel to France and Germany, visiting Nice, where he stayed for several weeks, and Oberammergau to see the *Passion Play*. He had experienced a touch of ill-health, and, after his upset with Percy Griffiths, decided to visit Paris in 1909 with the intention of combining business and convalescence. And, of course, what should be more natural than his St. Jim's boys should share the trip with him?

Accommodated comfortably in the *Etoile* part of the city, Hamilton enjoyed a change of scenery and typed away, taking Tom Merry and Co. on a visit to the French Capital. This series began in *Gem* 89 with the boys setting off on their journey. Owing to a sudden editorial intervention, the end of the story was changed to bring them home immediately to allow use of a story from a substitute writer the following week. They were then allowed to return to France in *Gem* 91, so that the story developed as Hamilton had originally intended. Fortunately, this type of editorial intervention did not occur very often.

Typically in this early period, stories in successive weeks of the *Gem* and *Magnet* had little relationship to one another. The French holiday adventure was the second long effort by Hamilton following the 1908 series of *Tom Merry Afloat* (*Gems* 27-31). The long series were yet to come into their own; later, when Charles Hamilton was in full flow, he might run a series for as many as sixteen weekly episodes. Two examples of the longer series were the Hollywood adventure of 1929

(*Magnets* 1092-1107), and the Mr Lamb series (*Magnets* 1660-1675). These started in late 1939, and continued over Christmas into 1940. Considering that each of the sixteen weekly episodes contained about 25,000 words, this means that each of these stories ran to 400,000 words, the equivalent of six full-length novels written in under four months. By any standards this was a prodigious feat.

Charles Hamilton was to spend several months during the autumn of 1909 in Paris, but he steadily produced the copy required at Carmelite House. Each week he would despatch his stories by post. At the same time he was also exploring the French Capital thoroughly. This was partly at the behest of Percy Griffiths who was considering the possibility of a French Edition of the *Gem* or *Magnet* whose hero was to be *Raoul.* Perhaps it was as well that these plans came to naught, for, had Raoul proved to be as popular as Tom Merry or Harry Wharton, not to mention a French Bunter created by the Master's hand, who can tell what demands might have been made upon Hamilton's output?

Regretfully, at last, Hamilton turned his back on Paris, and made his way towards Carmelite House and Percy Griffiths who was, by now, firmly in control. As was to be the case so often, Hamilton would sit in Griffiths' office, apparently listening while the editor ran through suggestions for plots or changes of policy. With the occasional 'Yes' to keep his editor happy, Hamilton would, in fact, be far away, concentrating on remembering a game of chess or a music score.

But, in spite of his apparent lack of interest in Griffiths's chat, Hamilton kept a corner of his mind open for any fertile idea; not every one of Griffiths's suggestions was bad. Charles Hamilton relates that, at one of these conferences, Griffiths suggested the idea of a story to revolve around Wharton's habit of playing with a loose button on his jacket as an aid to concentration. Hamilton wrote a story incorporating this theme in the *Magnet* in 1910. Years later he was surprised to discover just how many old readers had remembered the incident when a reference was made to it in an article in *The Times* in the 1950s.

The article, *The Occasional Thinker*, was dealing with the problem of mental concentration, and how it might have been achieved by people such as Hilair Belloc, Maurice Baring and G.K. Chesterton. The writer of the article referred to Desmond MacCarthy's essay on *Knights of the Pen* in which he had touched on methods of concentrating. Without naming 'Frank Richards', MacCarthy recalled a school story:

> Harry Wharton in the *Magnet*, had a certain loose button to toy with in exams ...but though he has plenty of loose buttons himself, they do not long remain the same buttons and he could never be sure that the magic one was merely loose and not entirely missing, when a case for concentration came along."

Hamilton had been back from Paris for only a few weeks when, in early 1910, he again felt wanderlust upon him. Discussing ideas for his itinerary with Percy Griffiths over a cup of coffee, the latter suddenly asked for the loan of £100, a large sum of money at that time. Although a little startled, Hamilton agreed, since he had money to spare. The following day he posted a cheque for the amount to Griffiths.

Having decided on his next trip, Hamilton included his sister, Una, and her new *fiancé*, Percy Harrison. The latter was a composer whose father was an artist. On the point of departure, this time for Belgium, Griffiths asked for a second loan, this time for £50. Another cheque was sent. Hamilton immediately forgot about it since they were leaving the following morning, and he was thinking of their travel plans; in any case, he was never very careful about money. The summer of 1910 saw Charles Hamilton with his companions making an extensive sweep through Northern Europe, by way of Belgium and Holland to Munich. But he was reminded of the loan when, arriving at Munich, he received a telegram demanding what had happened to the money. Apparently Percy Griffiths had not received it by the first post, and had sent the telegram off before the cheque arrived safely in the second post.

The next item on the agenda was to see the *Passion Play* at Oberammagau, which was, even then, something of a cult event. Hamilton admitted that, though the *Passion Play* was pleasant, he found it rather boring, and he sat through it only for his companions' sake. But he had an obvious admiration for Germany, or at least for the Germany that existed before the First World War. As he was to put it, "Germany disappeared a few years later, never to be restored."

Once returned to London from Munich, Hamilton settled into his flat, which was now in 56 Antrim Mansions in Belsize Park, North London. He also had to settle into the pace of Carmelite House again, and fulfil demands from all and sundry for copy for their schoolboy papers. Most pressure came from Percy Griffiths who had been having to use many substitute writers to keep his magazines running while stories were in short supply from Hamilton, his star writer.

Once things were running smoothly again, Griffiths sounded out Hamilton to see if he would stand surety for a loan which he wished to take out with a finance company. Eventually, a letter addressed to Hamilton at his flat came from Brundrett, Whitmore and Randall, a firm of solicitors in Holborn. Dated 28th February, 1911, the letter stated:

> Our client, Mr Percy Griffiths has requested us to reply to your recent letter to him, for which he is much obliged, and give some particulars of the loan he is seeking and of which he asked you to

> become surety. Mr Griffiths is not raising the money from a money lender but he proposes to take out an endowment policy in the Norwich Union Life Office. The policy will be for £500 maturing in 10 years time at premiums of about £46 per annum. On the security of this policy the Insurance Office will lend from £350 to £400 at interest 5% per annum...

Further details followed, indicating that two guarantors were required to protect the capital and interest, and requesting Hamilton to stand as one of these.

This letter shows that Hamilton had, by now, become an author with above average earnings, and, that, as a result, Griffiths recognized him as a possible life-line for his projected loan. It also shows that Griffiths did not have any collateral of his own and was considered a bad risk. After consideration Hamilton regretfully refused the request.

Shortly after this, Griffiths left the Amalgamated Press, and disappeared, it was said, to an overseas destination. It is probable that he fled the country to escape his creditors. There is no evidence that he paid Hamilton back the borrowed £150; it is possible, of course, that he intended to use part of the loan to tidy up outstanding debts. There is also no evidence to support the idea that he had been charged with fraud and was evading arrest.

Griffiths left many memories behind. Of these, the good far outweighed the bad. For all his faults, Griffiths had the drive to establish the *Gem* and *Magnet* firmly in the boys magazine market; in the office he had been known as 'Pushful' or 'Persuasive' Percy. The only disagreement that he and Charles Hamilton ever had was over the use of substitute writers. From Griffiths' point of view, they were necessary if he was to continue producing the group of publications now known as the *Companion Papers* when their author was ill or otherwise unable to produce his copy. (The Companion Papers at that time consisted of *Gem, Magnet, Penny Popular, Empire Library, Boys' Friend, Union Jack* and others. All these papers tended to advertise each others' current stories, so a reader of any one would be encouraged to buy the others.)

There was no argument that the *Gem* and *Magnet* were the weekly magazines that chronicled the adventures of Tom Merry and Harry Wharton respectively; they had no other function. Had any other story, whether written by a substitute or Hamilton, been published about any other school, or about a different subject, the line of continuity would have been broken. This would have meant a fluctuation in sales instead of the steady demand that had been achieved. The readers wanted to know about these characters and their schools, and nothing else. It should also be remembered that, despite the criticisms levelled against

substitute writers over the years (which continues even today), some of them took almost as much interest in St. Jim's and Greyfriars as did Hamilton himself.

It has already been mentioned that Charles Hamilton was a good artist. His only known drawing to appear in *Gem* or *Magnet* papers was in *Gem* 176. It is of major interest that Hamilton did a drawing at all rather than concentrating on writing, let alone that he should choose to use Arthur Augustus D'Arcy for his subject matter. The small quarter page drawing by 'Harry Manners' shows Gussy looking for his 'fiver'. His elegant fingers and thumbs are pulling out the pocket linings of his trousers. To his left a hat box resides on the carpet. Golf clubs lean against a chair near the window, underneath which is a roll top desk. A full length mirror (unusual in a junior study) is to the right of the window, and, behind the mirror, is a bookcase. Altogether it is a competent drawing, and compares well with the artists of the day, such as R.J. Macdonald. There is only one small, and amusing, slip; 'Harry Manners' initialled the picture 'C.H'.

On the 8th of June, 1911, Una Hamilton married her *fiancé*, Percy Harrison, at St. Stephen's Church, Hampstead. After the ceremony, the reception was held at the *Frascati* Restaurant in Oxford Street, London. There were 34 guests, and the bill for £31/15/- (£31.75) included the wedding luncheon, drinks, cigarettes and flowers. Generously and, no doubt, influenced by the example set by his Uncle Walter Trinder following his father's death, Hamilton took upon himself the duty of providing for his sister at her wedding.

In the summer of 1912 Charles Hamilton's bachelor days nearly came to an end when he visited Lake Leman in Switzerland, the cradle of the mighty River Soane. Here Hamilton made a lengthy stay, and, while relaxing in this delightful spot, he met again a young lady who was to be recorded in his *Autobiography* as 'Miss New York'.

He had already met her when staying at Nice and, later, at Monte Carlo; it is not clear exactly when this occurred They had become firm friends. From his account, she was a young lady who could not only talk intelligently, but also listen; it is not surprising that Hamilton found the time spent in her company easy and agreeable. She, too, seemed to like his company. They spent so much time together that Hamilton had to crowd his normal daily output into the morning to leave the afternoons free to spend with her. For all her fragile appearance this petite young lady was a champion walker. Hamilton, himself a good walker, had never before met one as good as her. Yet, despite the distractions, both the *Magnet* and *Gem* (apart from *Gem* 226) were written entirely by Hamilton this year.

After a most enjoyable interlude Hamilton went home to minor problems with his papers, only to return hot foot in response to a letter from Miss N.Y., who was now staying in Lausanne. She had suggested that he should step across from London to Lausanne, as in England 'one might ask that he should step over from Hampstead to Golders Green.' Hamilton rather liked this trait. Americans always gave him the impression of a more spacious life. Together they went happily around Lausanne and the outlying district for a number of weeks. It has been rumoured that, during this time, he went as far as buying a diamond engagement ring. But eventually Miss N.Y. told him that she would be joining an American party in Germany, intending to return home with them from Trieste. He was sorry at the prospect of being without her, even if the chance of a rest was attractive and comforting. Whether he ever 'popped the question' has never been revealed, although his natural shyness suggests that he probably never did.

Their friendship was not yet dead, however, for Hamilton's first visit to Venice was due entirely to Miss N.Y. Another letter reached him at Lausanne, where he had stayed on, inviting him to join her again. Upon her suggestion, Hamilton rapidly rearranged his plans, and travelled post haste to the romantic city of Venice to be reunited with her.

During their stay in Venice she whisked him hither and thither at break neck speed. Despite being dragged all over the place by this young lady, 'whose limbs of whipped steel had flashed up mountains and down again, reminding one of perpetual motion', Hamilton enjoyed their time sightseeing. But all things must come to an end, and, it was from this City of romantic waterways that Miss N.Y. travelled to rejoin her party at Trieste for her journey home; and it was on the dock side that they made their final farewells. A long time afterwards Hamilton received a letter from her with an invitation to visit her in the United States. Hamilton always longed to do so, but never did.

On returning from this latest holiday Hamilton discovered that Percy Griffiths had suddenly left the office, and that he was now under the editorial control of Herbert Allan Hinton. After the diminutive Percy Griffiths, this was a giant of a man. Griffiths had achieved his objectives by the use of persuasive, rapid talk. His unending 'Crusades to get the job done', had become watchwords in the editorial offices. Herbert Hinton had had a public school education, and, on Griffiths' departure, had stepped straight into command, following several years as second-in-command. He was distantly related to Alfred Harmsworth, the founder of the Amalgamated Press, but owed his promotion entirely to merit and capacity for hard work. His magnificent physique and reputed connections with the Kent Yeomanry had earned him the nick-

name of 'Trooper'. His contemporaries recall his smoking black cigars, and one can imagine the office thick with smoke after an editorial session.

Herbert Hinton, unbeknown to himself, was compared by Hamilton with George Figgins of St. Jim's. For, although Figgins was already an established character long before the two men met, Hamilton now felt that George Figgins had come alive. 'Figgy', the leader of the juniors in the New House, had a fondness for the girls, Cousin Ethel and Marie Rivers in particular. Unlike the easy going Bob Cherry at Greyfriars, Figgins would take offence if ever he felt left out of the girls' conversations, and would do battle on the spot if any of the girls were treated in a 'cavalier' fashion. However, Figgins was generally popular with all at St. Jim's, in the same way that Hinton was at Fleetway House, the new home for the Amalgamated Press from 1912. Added to the reputation that Hinton had for enjoying ladies' company, it is not difficult to see how Hamilton saw the relationship between the two characters, one very real-life, the other very real-fiction.

From Hamilton's point of view, Herbert Hinton was a vast improvement on the lately departed Griffiths. The office was less bustling and proceeded with less fits and starts, something for which Hamilton, at least, was grateful.

In 1912 Herbert Hinton, as editor of the *Magnet*, received a letter from a young reader. His name was George Richmond Samways; his letter commented on the pleasure the recent Greyfriars stories had given him, and he enclosed a poem he had composed. With full details of the youthful contributer's interest in the Companion Papers, Hinton published the poem. The first verse went:

You ask me why I never find
The labour of the day tires
Because, good friends, my youthful mind
Is with the chums of Greyfriars.
I love St. Jim's, so full of glee,
I revel in Tom Merry;
But all the same I'd rather be
With Wharton and Bob Cherry.

Two more verses followed, in similar style. The last stanza was:

Dear Editor, if you but knew
The thoughts of each supporter,
And how your book thrills through and through
The globe in every quarter!
'Tis read by many a boy and man
On train-rides, trips and tram-ways;
And I'll support all I can
As sure as my name's Samways!

Young George Samways was, no doubt, pleased to see his poem printed in *Magnet* 249. His association was just beginning with the Amalgamated Press, and his story is told in Chapter Seven.

Hamilton's last trip abroad before the clouds of war gathered over Europe, found him with Una and Percy in North Italy. As well as his love of walking, Hamilton was also a member of the *Cyclists Touring Club* (No 7258), and had a permit to travel in Italy during 1914. This permit was valid only for three months, and had the following endorsement:

> This permit is personal and must be exhibited whenever it is asked for by the competent authorities and their agents. On demand, the holder is obliged to repeat his signature, for the requisite control.

From the fact that the document is unsigned, it must be assumed that Hamilton never had to produce it. Perhaps it was just as well, for the results of trying to combat petty administration in those difficult days were better imagined than experienced.

It was at Cadenabbia, during a halt in their tour, that they heard the first faint rumblings of the impending war between Germany and the Allied Powers. The declaration of war by Austro-Hungary on Serbia on the 28th July 1914 had set the world powers on the road to conflict. The succeeding declaration of hostilities by Germany against Russia brought the threat of total war closer.

Hamilton and his party packed their bags, hired a car, and moved to Bormio on the Austro-Italian border. Their intention was to reach the safety of neutral Switzerland as soon as was practicable. Travel was not easy in those tense weeks. The next move ground to a halt at Spondinig, a little village in the Austrian Alps. Anxious days passed in the tiny hamlet. During this time, Germany declared war upon France, Britain, and Belgium. Unable to travel, all the party could do was wait. The arrival of German soldiers at Spondinig Inn was something of a shock to Hamilton and the Harrisons.

In typical style Hamilton was just 'getting on with the job', fulfilling his daily quota by writing a St. Jim's story, when he was disturbed by a knock on the door informing him that the Germans had arrived, and asking him to wait there until called for interrogation. The officer in command posted an armed private in Hamilton's room to ensure that he did not attempt to leave.

More concerned for his sister's safety than at the prospect of a 'grilling', Hamilton tried to talk to the German guard. Slow English, accented German, French, and Italian produced no response. So, deciding to see how his sister was for himself, Hamilton made to leave the room. The soldier immediately came to life and presented his bayonet to Hamilton near his middle waistcoat button and too close for

comfort. Hamilton stepped back, and the rifle was raised. The momentary glimmer of life on the German's face was replaced by the earlier wooden look as Hamilton returned to his desk. Immersing himself in his work, Hamilton soon found himself back again in the leafy lanes of Sussex with his young friends of St. Jim's. The adventure they were sharing enthralled him, and he forgot his uninvited guest.

At last, needing to pin the manuscript sheets together, Hamilton had to open his suitcase. As his hand disappeared from sight, the bayonet suddenly came to life, and again made its acquaintance with Hamilton's waistcoat. This time the gesture was was even less friendly, until the soldier realized that a paper clip could never be construed as a dangerous weapon. Sheepishly he took the bayonet and himself back to their post by the door.

Eventually Hamilton was called for interview. The German officer was pleasant enough, and seemed satisfied that the party consisted of harmless tourists. The mood of friendliness was shattered when the Germans searching Hamilton's room discovered the typescript. The word *Zeppelin* was easy to identify without translation; the paper was obviously a report from a spy. Luckily, Heinrich, the waiter, could speak, and read English. The officer was not pleased when Heinrich, on reading the paper aloud, started to smile. Demanding explanations, he, too, was amused to discover that his 'spy' was only an author of boys' fiction. International relations were repaired, at least there.

The final joy to Hamilton was the German censor passing the story for forwarding to Fleetway House.

CHAPTER FIVE

Miss Hood and Hawkinge

Little friends may prove great friends.
Fables—Æsop

AFTER a long tiring journey Hamilton with Una and her husband arrived at Folkestone. Many people were fleeing from the threat of war. The French ports of Boulogne and Calais were choked with anxious parents keeping watchful eyes upon their children amidst the seething mass of holiday makers prematurely returning home. The sense of panic in France was becoming noticeable in the British ports.

Hot, tired and travel worn, the Hamilton party split up in Folkestone. Una and Percy returned to their home in Hampstead Garden Suburb. Hamilton, instead, hired one of the few remaining taxis to make his way out of Folkestone to find somewhere away from the bustle of the town; he needed somewhere quiet to write his copy.

The taxi driver eventually came to a small village called Hawkinge, some six miles from Folkestone, where they stopped at the little Post Office to enquire about a room. To his delight, Hamilton found they had one to rent where he would be able to write undisturbed. Accordingly he with his Remington and bags moved in; the taxi was paid off, and the following morning Hamilton started to catch up on his backlog.

The village of Hawkinge had few houses and cottages and only a small population. For Hamilton it seemed far enough from the coast to be safe from the war on the other side of the Channel. It was not difficult for him to settle comfortably into this sleepy and tranquil place. All woes and worries disappeared, and he could concentrate on his work.

The Post Office and General Store, where Hamilton was staying, was important for the community. Together with the School and the Church, it constituted one of the main meeting places for the inhabitants. Perhaps as a result he quickly got to know them. An early acquaintance was Edith Hood, a girl of about nine years old and a regular visitor to the daughter of the house; she also often met him out for his morning walk while on her way to school. Hamilton had always liked children, and they, in turn, always responded to the kindly way in which he

chatted to them, treating them like young adults. He showed interest in them and entertained them with stories of his travels. As Edith and the other village children became fond of him, he gradually took on the role of their 'Pied Piper'.

The fields and wooded tracks running up hills both in Hawkinge and the surrounding countryside provided long and interesting walks for Hamilton after a day's work. He revelled in the green and pleasant countryside. The air of quiet that pervaded the village was like music to his ears, and enabled him to work in an easy and convivial atmosphere. Thoughts of staying in Hawkinge for ever were running through his mind.

There was no space for other visitors to stay at the Post Office, so every few months Hamilton would join his sister in Hampstead Garden Suburb for a while before returning, gratefully, to his retreat in the countryside. After a time, he moved out of the Post Office into a smaller place nearby called 'Clyde Cottage' which he rented and later bought. Edith Hood continued to visit Hamilton in his new home after lessons had finished for the day

In 1921 Hamilton rented another cottage in the village which his sister and a friend with her three children could use for holidays. He later purchased a plot of land on a hill nearby, which used to be an orchard, and there he had built a bungalow which he called 'Appletrees'. Surrounded by trees and flowers, with a splendid view down to a road below, he set up his desk and typewriter to enjoy the view while he worked.

By 1921 Edith Hood, now aged 16, had become indispensable. For, although Charles Hamilton had a housekeeper who travelled with him and looked after his newly rented Hampstead house, his young friend was very capable and reliable at performing small tasks in Hawkinge.

Learning that his sister, Una, was expecting a baby, Hamilton asked Edith if she would be prepared to go to Sandgate in Kent, where he had bought a cottage, to help as nursemaid to the future arrival.

In due course a letter was sent by Una to Edith's mother, asking for permission for her daughter to become nursemaid and for her to take Edith to the cottage at Sandgate. According to Hamilton, his niece was born on the 23rd February, 1922 in Hampstead and named Una (Harrison). She also became nick-named 'Bimba' by her uncle; this term of endearment may have come from his knowledge of Italian in which 'bimba' means a 'little girl'. After her birth the family moved to Sandgate for a holiday. Edith Hood had arrived there before them, and she started on her task of looking after Una with all the enthusiasm of a seventeen-year old. Hamilton, in common with most uncles, adored

the new baby; she was particularly near to him, the first child of his dear sister.

After several weeks in Sandgate, the Harrisons returned to Hampstead Garden Suburb taking Edith Hood with them. Edith's duties as nursemaid were pleasant. Walks in the nearby parks, first pushing a perambulator, and later a push chair, filled many happy hours.

Charles Hamilton often came to see them. He rented Number 3 Midholm in East Finchley where, with his housekeeper, Mrs Beverage, to look after him, he would stay for weeks at a stretch. Since this was no distance from his family, who lived in Number 39, he was able to have many a talk with Edith, and mention how glad he was to see his young niece in such capable hands.

Ever a man of impulse, Hamilton would depart after a few weeks, either to Hawkinge, or perhaps on a swift visit to France. But he would always return before Christmas to share it with his sister and her family. He also always brought his Remington so that Greyfriars and St. Jim's were certain of their daily quota. Although in 1920-21 Hamilton only wrote a total of 20 *Magnets* and 40 *Gem* stories, he was, nonetheless, busy with other projects, the *Greyfriars Holiday Annual* and *Rookwood* to name but two; these are described in detail later.

Hamilton was now a seasoned traveller. Following the need at the end of the First World War, he applied for a passport in 1920. This was, as his passport says, '...Given at the Foreign Office, London, on the 14th Day of October 1920', when he was aged 44. His profession was described as 'Author and Poet'. His passport photograph shows a serious-faced gentleman wearing pince-nez glasses, a cleft chin plainly visible. His broad forehead is covered by a scholarly, neat hair-cut, brushed straight across to the right. Written with a thick nibbed fountain pen in black ink is the signature, 'Charles Hamilton', firm, tidy, and without flourish.

Various trips were recorded in this document from 1920 to 30th July 1926. Apart from one entry to France *via* Calais, he seemed to have favoured Boulogne-sur-Mer as his port of entry. The passport was renewed on the 14th October 1924, again in 1926, finally expiring in 1930. It was not renewed thereafter.

Hamilton mentions a problem with his eyes on holiday in the 1920s. Never forthcoming at the best of times, he dismisses the matter with one word—*accident*. Although he called it such, it was an accident only in the sense that Nature had picked him rather than somebody else. Dr Wylie-Smith has noted that Hamilton suffered from the fairly common condition of cataract in which the lens of the eye progressively becomes opaque. However, Hamilton was never the man to cry over

spilt milk, and he had started to use purple typewriter ribbons which were to become characteristic of his scripts. The purple seemed to be easier to read than black when checking the results of his labours before despatching them to Fleetway House.

After the expiry of his passport, travelling around Europe was at an end for Charles Hamilton, and the beginning of an improvement in the Greyfriars stories, but partly at the expense of the St. Jim's tales.

In 1925 the Harrisons moved to a larger house in Park Drive just a little from the centre of Golders Green, North London. The extra rooms provided much needed space for staff and visitors, as well as for Una, now aged three and a half. From Edith Hood comes a description of Una's day nursery, painted in a washable cream distemper, the wood a rich mahogany colour. Beneath the animals stencilled on the walls, pride of place went to the vast dolls house occupying one corner. From the windows the swathe of Golder's Hill Park gave the illusion of a country home.

Despite her lack of years, baby Una was expected to keep her room and possessions tidy. Nearby was Edith's room, should her ward need attention during the night. The veranda off the day nursery made an ideal spot for Edith to sit and watch her charge. Tea parties presided over by Una were often given, the youthful hostess pouring out the tea into her very own cups.

In 1927 *The Nursery World* published an article describing the duties involved in the care of an infant. The authoress (probably with a little help from Hamilton) was Edith Hood, the charge, Una Harrison. Edith Hood finished her article:

> It is hardly necessary for me to say that I have grown very fond of her, as she has of me, and it will be a very sad day when she leaves the nursery. Although she is four and a half years of age, she has had no illness or child's ailment of any kind, and is an extremely healthy, bonny girl.

Edith was soon to leave the Harrisons to become housekeeper to Charles Hamilton. His present housekeeper, Mrs Beverage, had been finding her health no longer up to the job of looking after the world's most prolific boys' author. Before long Edith Hood would make her move to a post that was to last for more than thirty years.

Now that 'Appletrees' had been completed, it made a good centre from which Hamilton could visit with his sister and niece various Kent resorts, Folkestone, Dover, Margate—and Kingsgate.

The beauty and remoteness of this corner of Kent had always attracted Hamilton. The small seaside village of Kingsgate had been originally known as Bartholomew Gate and guarded a pass through the

cliffs to the sea. Situated between Margate and Broadstairs, it has an air of seclusion missing from its neighbours. The lack of bustle, essential to the creator of the havoc of the Greyfriars Remove, was enough to sow the seed of attachment between Hamilton and Kingsgate.

In Percy Avenue Hamilton found a charming cottage-style house for sale. This peaceful cul-de-sac runs gently down to the cliff top, the house being some one hundred and fifty yards from a pleasant view of the quiet bay beneath the cliffs. Not being a through road, it did not attract much of the holiday crowd. 'Rose Lawn', as he named the house, provided ample space for his housekeeper, as well as for Una and her daughter when they came to stay for holidays.

Just before the household moved from 'Appletrees', Miss Hood had ceased to work for the Harrisons, and returned to Hawkinge to assist Mrs. Beverage. For a time both ladies worked together and moved with Hamilton into 'Rose Lawn' in 1928.

When the older lady fell ill, Edith had to step into the breach. Although it was an unexpected responsibility, she quietly and efficiently coped with running the house. Later, when the housekeeper retired to 'Clive Cottage' given to her by Hamilton, Edith took over without a ripple to disturb the even tenor of the house.

Later a family who had bought a house across the road from Hamilton had a cat. This cat decided to move into 'Rose Lawn', and bring her family with her. Edith Hood remembered that:

> I used to keep taking them back, but the mother cat kept fetching them over again. Then something happened to the lot; and the second time, she only brought one kitten, and I found them in the cupboard in my little outhouse where I did the washing. This one we called the *Ugly Duckling* at first. It was a grey tabby and we were meant to have that kitten, you see; we couldn't have any of the others—but that one was all right for us.

The cat moved in and was later named 'Sammy'.

Kingsgate had, unknowingly, taken into its bosom a most unusual and unique author, now known widely by his pen names but hardly recognized by his own. He had, as we know, a retiring personality, and this may have become more marked with age. Moreover, his developing eye problems encouraged his inclination to merge into the background. People might see him on cliff-top walks or on a hike up the nearest hill. On occasions he might be seen posting a manuscript at the sub-post office at the top of his road. But, in contrast to Hawkinge, Hamilton made virtually no impression on Kingsgate.

CHAPTER SIX

Rookwood School and John Nix Pentelow

We class schools, you see, into four grades:
Leading School, First-rate School,
Good School and School.
Decline and Fall—Evelyn Waugh

WE HAVE to go back several years to examine the changes that were happening in the editorial offices of the Amalgamated Press, and which directly affected Charles Hamilton's work on the Companion Papers.

In 1915 Herbert Hinton was given the job of persuading Hamilton to create yet another school for the Amalgamated Press. They already had the excellent St. Jim's and Greyfriars, but now required an establishment to embellish the green-covered *Boy's Friend* which had been put under Hinton's control. The school was to be somewhat different from St. Jim's and Greyfriars, but was to be written, as Hinton expressed it, 'in the inimitable manner that caused Hamilton's lucubrations to be lapped up like milk!'

The school to which Hamilton now turned his attention was named 'Rookwood'. This school was created with two 'Sides', Classical and Modern, and was attended by Jimmy Silver and Co. To some extent it may have been modelled on the Thorn House School in Ealing during Hamilton's youth. Hamilton said in later life that Rookwood and Jimmy Silver and Co. were particular favourites of his. Right up to his death he was still penning stories about them, most of which appeared in the post war *Billy Bunter Annuals.*

The pen name he chose as author of these stories was 'Owen Conquest'. With the new name came another change of style, sufficiently different not to be recognized by the majority of *Gem* and *Magnet* readers as that of 'Martin Clifford' or 'Frank Richards'.

The first Rookwood story appeared in *Boy's Friend Library* 715 (New Series) dated 20th February 1915. Entitled *The Rivals of Rookwood*, the story opened with a rousing description of Jimmy Silver's joy-ride to Rookwood School. On the cover was a picture of a lively race between

two carriages, one driven by Jimmy Silver, the other by the local carrier. Trouble was in store for Jimmy and his companions as a result of this escapade, but, as usual, Hamilton contrived to extricate his youthful hero with his customary aplomb. The artists for Rookwood in the *Boys' Friend Library* included R.J. Macdonald and later G.W. Wakefield who provided eight years of his engaging pictures for the delight of the readers. Other artists filled in when the main two were unable to participate.

As a character Jimmy Silver lies somewhere between Harry Wharton and Tom Merry. He is bright and breezy like Tom, but has a hint of Harry's quick temper. Jimmy's particular friends are Lovell, Newcome and Raby, together known as the 'Fistical Four'. This contrasted neatly with 'The Terrible Three' at St. Jim's and 'The Famous Five' at Greyfriars.

Jimmy was the leader of the Classical Fourth at Rookwood; his Housemaster, Mr 'Dicky' Dalton, was a younger, fair-minded version of Mr Quelch. Among the chief adornments of the school was Valentine Mornington (a latter day Vernon-Smith), who, although a well-drawn character, hid a touch of malice beneath the exterior of the 'Dandy'. The ubiquitous and necessary Fat Boy was Reginald 'Tubby' Muffin; Teddy Grace was the practical joker; Adolphus Smythe, the 'Nut' of the Shell; and Kildare, the stalwart Captain of School. On the Modern Side Tommy Dodd and his pals, Tommy Cook and Tommy Doyle, were under the irascible control of Mr Manders, their Housemaster. That grim visaged academic (who managed almost never to express the slightest humour) gave the Three Tommys more trouble than even Mr Hacker caused to Hobson and Co. in the Shell at Greyfriars.

The following extract from the Rookwood story in the *Boys' Friend* 1177 dated 29th December 1923 shows how Hamilton used a chance encounter in the Latcham Junction station buffet with Billy Bunter to bring in his other schools:

> "Fancy meeting you chaps!" said Bunter. "Quite a pleasure!"
> "Oh, quite!" assented Jimmy Silver politely, though he did not quite see where the pleasure came in.
> The Fistical Four knew Bunter—too well to want to improve the acquaintance any farther.
> But Bunter was evidently in a friendly mood. He drew a chair to the Rookwooders' table.
> "Waiting for a train?" he asked.
> "That's it."
> "Same here! I've got an hour to wait."
> "Hard cheese!"
> "You see, I'm going to call on my old pal, D'Arcy of St. Jim's," said

> Bunter. "He's got a magnificent place in Hampshire. Lord Eastwood is always keen to see me. That's D'Arcy's pater, you know!"
> "Noblemen have queer tastes sometimes," remarked Arthur Edward Lovell.
> Bunter decided not to hear that remark.
> "I've got a couple of days to fill in," he said. "I'm going up to Scotland for the vacation, with a Greyfriars party—Wharton and Sir James Vivian, and some more fellows. After that I've got to put in some days at Lord Mauleverer's place. I'm really a bit puzzled to know how I shall fit in all my engagements this vac. Still, I can manage a few days with you somehow, Silver, if you like."
> "About time our train came in," remarked Jimmy Silver, deaf in his turn.

In 1923 Harry Wharton and Co. did go to Scotland, and Bunter went part of the way, stopping short of seeing the Wraith of Lockmuir (*Magnet* 830). He also managed to get his cake free from Jimmy Silver by using his ventriloquism for a joke on the American schoolboy, Texas Lick. The art of using several of the schools in the same story was part of Hamilton's skill, but it is hard to find many references to Rookwood in a Greyfriars story, apart from football and cricket matches.

The Rookwood stories were only part of the *Boy's Friend*. They ran to about a mere 8,000 words each week. But it still meant that Hamilton was now writing regularly about three schools and, with his other commitments, was producing around 45,000 words every week.

The war had now dragged on for a year, and the general feeling was that it would continue for some time. For several months Herbert Hinton had been engaged in answering questions, almost accusations in some cases, from his readers on why he had not joined up to defend his Country. He made much play of receiving a number of white feathers, the traditional mark of the coward. This was probably good 'journalese' and playing to the ever growing gallery, rather than a strict statement of truth. However, after five years in the editorial chair, Hinton relinquished it to enlist in the Coldstream Guards and receive a commission as Captain.

The time was ripe for a new person to take the chair, John Nix Pentelow, born in St Ives, Huntingdonshire, in 1872, succeeded Hinton as editor of the *Magnet* and *Gem* when he was 44 years of age. A prolific writer of all types of story over many years, he was, in particular, an expert on cricket and a regular contributor to *Wisden*, the cricketomane's *Vade Mecum*. Sadly, he suffered from deafness and would not use a hearing aid. This, of course, led to many one-sided conversations and discussions, invariably won by Pentelow; it was impossible to argue successfully with an editor who was hard of hearing. He brought with

him something that previous incumbents had lacked. He had a deep and intimate knowledge of St. Jim's and of Greyfriars, and was able to quote from memory the characteristics of most of Hamilton's schoolboys. In addition, he was able to write sharp but enjoyable school stories based on other peoples' creations.

Pentelow wasted little time in preparing the ground for a *Greyfriars Gallery*. The portraits were to be drawn by C.H. Chapman; the potted biographies were to be his own work. It is probable that Hamilton was not even consulted. Had he been, he would probably have considered them in the nature of a series of articles, while he kept busy with his weekly stories.

In Pentelow's 'My Readers' Page' (*Magnet* 459), in an advance comment about the coming Christmas issue No 461, he mentioned the inclusion of:

> ...a very special attraction in the shape of a portrait sketch of Harry Wharton, accompanied by an article dealing briefly with his career at Greyfriars and forming something like a biography of one who has become a popular character wherever school stories are read.

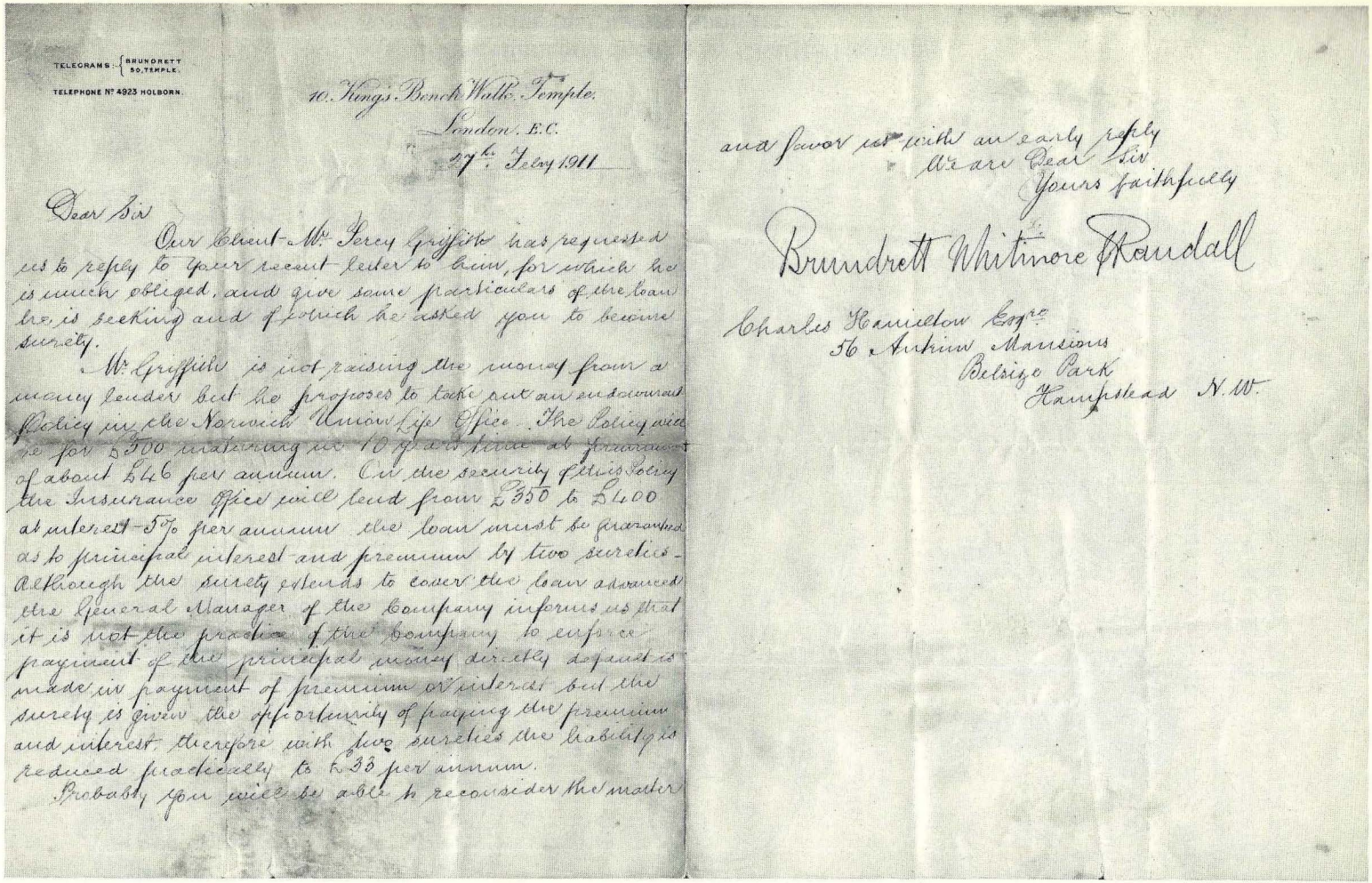
These few lines were all that preceded this fascinating and popular *Gallery*.

The *Greyfriars Gallery* started with a full page article on, naturally, Harry Wharton. This ran to one thousand words. It was no mean task to describe a mythical schoolboy, who, until eight years before, had not existed. The portrait of Harry was by Chapman and was, perhaps, a little disappointing. The strong handsome features were reduced to something pale and shadowy; he was one of the crowd, rather than the Captain of the Remove. On the other hand, Pentelow's analysis of Wharton was full, detailed and accurate. He recorded Harry's arrival at school, his friendship with Nugent, as well as adding many minutiæ which demonstrated admirably his knowledge of the *Magnet* and Greyfriars. The article ended:

> No perfect character, this Harry Wharton! He has his faults, but they are venial ones. His temper is too quick, but he generally holds it in leash; he is capable of sulking, but he does not often sulk; he is proud, but pride is half a virtue. And against all that may be set the fact that he is utterly honest; he is a staunch friend, a generous foe; he leads by right of capacity, because the spirit of leadership is in him, and he does not fear to be unpopular if he is only sure he is right!

Pentelow had made a good start, so much so that Hamilton himself should have been pleased at this graphic description of one of his

1. Miscellaneous doodles by Charles Hamilton
2. Crocodile by Charles Hamilton.



TELEGRAMS: { BRUNDRETT 50, TEMPLE.

TELEPHONE No 4923 HOLBORN.

10. Kings Bench Walk. Temple.
London. E.C.
17th. January 1911

Dear Sir

Our Client Mr. Percy Griffith has requested us to reply to your recent letter to him, for which he is much obliged, and give some particulars of the loan he is seeking and for which he asked you to become surety.

Mr Griffith is not raising the money from a money lender but he proposes to take out an endowment Policy in the Norwich Union Life Office. The Policy will be for £700 maturing in 10 yrs at time of Insurance of about £46 per annum. On the security of this Policy the Insurance Office will lend from £350 to £400 at interest 5% per annum the loan must be guaranteed as to principal interest and premiums by two sureties - although the surety extends to cover the loan advanced the General Manager of the Company informs us that it is not the practice of the Company to enforce payment of the principal money directly application is made in payment of premium or interest but the surety is given the opportunity of paying the premium and interest therefore with two sureties the liability is reduced practically to £35 per annum.

Probably you will be able to reconsider the matter and favor us with an early reply

We are Dear Sir
Yours faithfully

Brundrett Whitmore & Randall

Charles Hamilton Esq.re
56. Antrim Mansions
Belsize Park
Hampstead N.W.

3/4. Letter from Brandrett Whitmore Randall dated 17th January, 1911, requesting Hamilton to stand as surety.

PROPRIETORS,
HOLBORN & FRASCATI LTD.

Oxford Street,
London, W. 8th June 1911.

C. Hamilton Esq.

To The Restaurant Frascati.

Telephone
No. 316 GERRARD.
2 LINES.

Telegraphic Address,
"FRASCATO, LONDON."

This Establishment contains Spacious Salons for Wedding Breakfasts, Family Dinner Parties, Masonic, Club and Society Banquecs, Smoking Concerts, Cinderellas and Balls.

To 34 Luncheons.	6/-		10	4	-
" 18 Bots. No. 116. Moet & Chandon '04.	13/6		12	3	-
" 6 " " 171a. Sparkling Muscatel.	6/6		1	19	-
" 14 " Lemonade.	6			7	-
" 12 " Ginger Ale.	6			6	-
" 34 Coffees.	6			17	-
" 12 Teas, Bread & Butter.	6			6	-
" 12 Cigars. Intimidad, Panetelas.	7			7	-
" 100 " Larranaga, N.P.U.	10		4	3	4
" 20 Cigarettes.	1			1	8
			1	1	-
		£	31	15	-

No. A2755
Restaurant Frascati,
HOLBORN & FRASCATI LTD. Proprietors
London, W.
12th June 11

Received from C. Hamilton Esq
the sum of Thirty one pounds 15 shs.
£ 31. 15. 0
C. S. Clark
Cashier

ONE PENNY

Cheques should be drawn in favour of the Restaurant Frascati,
and crossed London City and Midland Bank.

5. Receipted invoice from the *Frascati* restaurant, 8th June 1911.

Serie A – Stamp. Mod. N. 73 (Gabelle)

Dogana – *Douane* – *Custom House* – Zollamt Volterra | *Sezione di* Volterra

(GIGLIA)

Permesso di circolazione per Velocipedi esteri – Permis de circulation pour Vélocipèdes étrangers
Permit of circulation for foreing Cycles – Zirkulationserlaubnis für ausländische Fahrräder

(Valevole per tre mesi) – (*Valable pour trois mois*)
(available for three months) – (gültig für drei Monate)

N.°

Ciclista / Cycliste / *Cyclist* / Radfahrer:

Nome e cognome – Nom et prénom – *Name and surname* – Vor und Zuname: Charles Hamilton

Domicilio – Domicile – *Residence* – Wohnort: Londra

Società cui appartiene – Société à laquelle il appartient – *Society to which he belongs* – Verband dem er gehört: Cyclists Touring Club

Tessera – Carte d'identité – *Ticket of recognition* – Legitimations Karte: 7208

Firma del Ciclista – Signature du Cycliste – *Signature of the Cyclist* – Eigenhändige Unterschrift des Radfahrers

Velocipede / Velocipide / *Cycle* / Farrfiad:

Qualità – Espèce – *Kind* – Gattung: bicicletta

Marche e numero di fabbrica – Marques et numéro de fabrique – *Marki and No of machine* – Marken und Fabrikanummer: Sunbeam

Altri distintivi – Autres signes – *Other sings* – Andere Kennzeichen:

Rilasciato come – Emis comme – *Issued as* – Ausgest llt als: (1) 1°

Permesso – Permis – *Permit* – Erlaubnis

Addì – Le – *On the* – Am: 2 giugno 1914

Riscosso centesimi – Perçu centimes – *Collected centimes* – Eingenommen centimes: 0.25

2-GIU 14

NOTA — Questo permesso è personale e dovrà essere esibito ad ogni richiesta delle autorità competenti e dei loro agenti. A richiesta il titolare dovrà fare la sua firma per gli opportuni confronti.

NOTE — Ce permis est personnel et devrà être produit toutes les fois qu'il sera requis par les autorités compétentes et par leurs Agents. Pour les contrôles éventuels, sur demande, le titulaire peut être tenu a répéter sa signature.

ANNOTATION. — This permit is personal and has to be exhibited whenever it is asked for by the competent authorities and their Agents. On demand the holder is obliged to repeat his signature, for the requisite control.

ANMERKUNG — Diese Erlaubnis ist persönlich und muss vorgewiesen werden jedesmal dass die dazu befugten Behörden und ihre Agenten es verlangen. Auf Anfrage muss der Inhaber seine Unterschrift wiederholen für die erforderlichen Nachprüfungen.

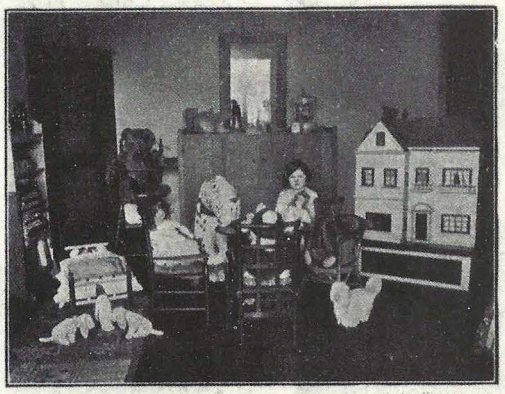
(1) 1.° o 2.° (1) 1er ou 2me (1) 1st or 2nd (1) 1te oder 2te

– 22 p 64.

6. Charles Hamilton's *Cyclists Touring Club* certificate.

A London Nanny's Nursery

These charming nurseries of little Una Harrison are delightfully described by her Nanny, Miss Edith Hood



Dismal Desmond occupies a very prominent position among this large group of favourite toys

Photo: Vandyk

MY nurseries, although placed in London instead of in the country, have a lovely outlook and wide views over Golder's Hill Park. When we have to be indoors, most of our time is spent in the day-nursery, a large bright room on the first floor next the night nursery, though there is no communicating door. The walls are cream washable distemper and the paint is a rich mahogany colour. Figures of animals and suitable "motifs" are stencilled on the pale coloured walls. These can be charming when the colours are well-chosen, and in our case they are faintly tinted and give an airy lightness to the room. My little charge, aged four and a half, has woven many quaint stories round these figures.

Nursery Tea-Parties

My mistress, believing that the white walls and furniture so often seen in nurseries are dazzling for a child's eyes, has chosen dark furniture to match the paint. There is a low cupboard, with two shelves on which the toys are kept, a table and chairs, and armchair for me, and a large ottoman in which many of the dolls sleep. A guard stands round the fireplace and we have a coal fire during the cold weather. There is also an electric radiator to be used in emergencies. A small, gate-legged table, standing about two feet high, and little chairs to match, are used for the tea-parties which my little charge gives in the nursery. She is very fond of giving parties and, being an only child, sometimes even asks her mother's friends in to tea. We all enjoy her parties, when she pours out the tea in her very own cups, and really manages extremely well.

We have glass doors opening upon a verandah, around which a high wooden fence has been built for safety. In the summer this is covered with a climbing rose and jasmine, and the scent of the flowers is delicious when the doors are thrown open. I sometimes take my easy-chair and needlework basket out there, and have a really delightful afternoon, mending the little frocks while my charge is having her dancing lesson, or being taken for a motor-drive. Our verandah overlooks the garden, which, although not large, is pretty and well filled with flowers, which are a mass of bright colour in the summer. There is a summer-house, as well as a swing and a see-saw, in the little bit allotted to us.

Our nursery is filled with toys. The high chair which Baby has now outgrown is relegated to Big Teddy. Little Teddy sits on a stool in the corner. They both growl; but Big Teddy makes by far the more noise. There is a model bedstead, which we make every morning, with real blankets and sheets, where two dollies sleep—the long-clothes dolly and the dolly who can just say "Mamma." The model farm is such a great favourite that we keep it for wet afternoons, when we cannot take our walks. Then we have the pram with the two hoods for the twins, and I must not forget to mention our white cat, which crawls and miaous when he is wound up.

Training in Tidiness

The night-nursery faces north, as there is, unfortunately, no south room available, and is decorated in pale yellow and blue. My charge sleeps alone there in the little oak bed which has lately replaced her cot. She has also her own suite of furniture to match, in which all her clothes are kept. It is part of my duty to see that she keeps these tidy, and once a week regularly we tidy the drawers, folding the clothes neatly and smoothing out her party frocks.

My own room is next to the day-nursery, but quite within hearing of my little charge should she need me during the night, our three rooms being so well placed that Baby calls them "Our Flat."

It is hardly necessary to say that I have grown very fond of her, as she has of me, and it will be a very sad day when she leaves the nursery. Although she is four and a half years of age, she has had no illnesses or child's ailments of any kind, and is an extremely healthy, bonny girl

7. Miss Hood's article, 'A London Nanny's Nursery', published in *The Nursery World*.

"A P DAYS"

OH, joyous art that grants you with the pen
To illustrate the 'joys' of other men
Come quickly to the call of Fleetway House
From moor and fen, from happinness and 'grouse.'

• • • • •

A room is vacant that did once hold three
But now 'tis empty of such company
As pleased the hearts of editors and men
And winsome lasses well-known to the den.

• • • •

An air of gloom hangs heavy o'er the place
No sign of life is there; no friendly face
Reveals itself when we peregrinate
Thither with the words "Old bean, you are late!"

• • • • •

In other words your colleagues two have left
For rest and pleasure so that we're bereft
of both; how really paradoxical
And yet how true if somewhat fanciful.

• • • • •

great
C.M. is gone but/P.M. is here
To gladden hearts and dissipate the fear
That we are all alone and on the shelf
Reminded of one thing--and that's one's self!

• • • • • •

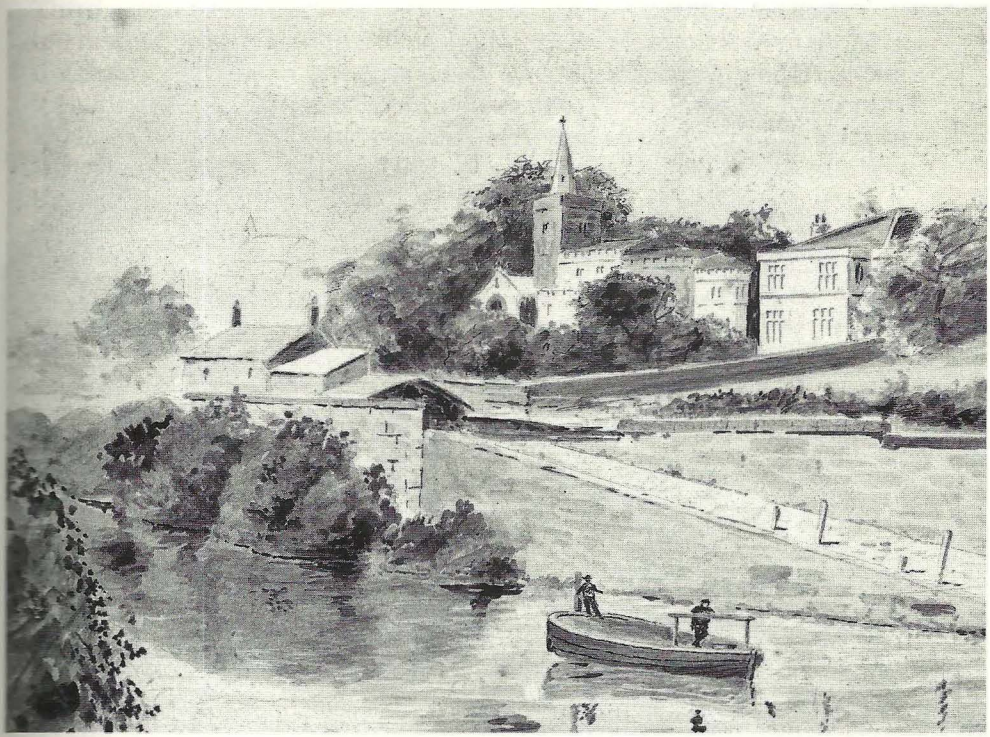
But brighter things than holidays remain
That's when we see you in the Home again
And Magnet sketches by the hour you'll do
And Orange covers with a splash of blue.

• • • • • •

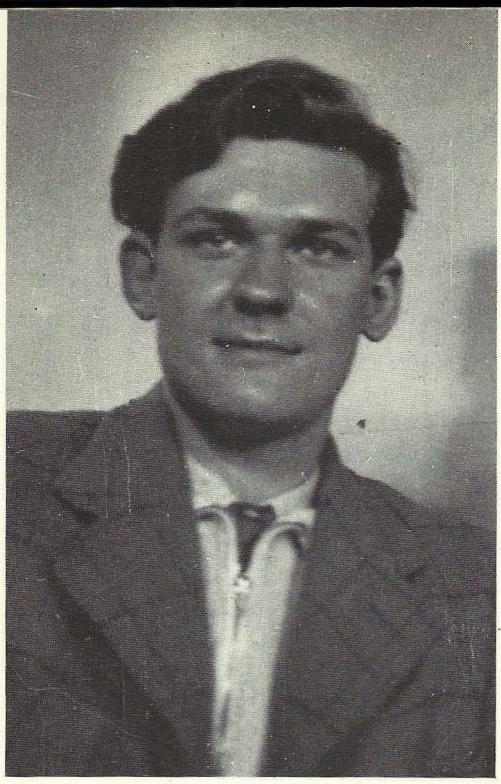
But Meantime, to blend the hours [redacted] sunning
So that the hand should not lose its cunning
I send some work (say you, it's like my cheek)
Hoping to see the same--and YOU next week!

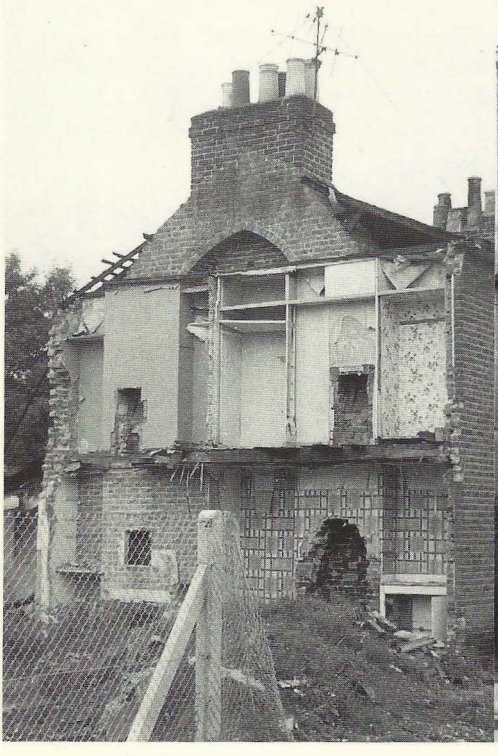
• • • • •

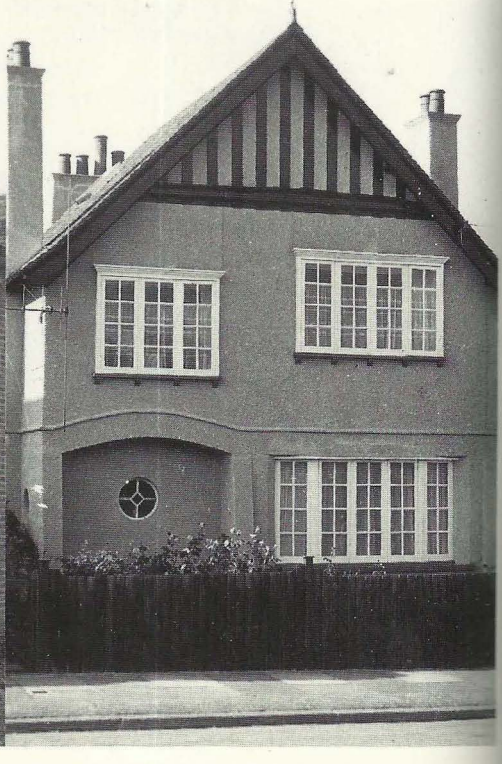
8. "A.P. DAYS", poem by Hedley O'Mant, c 1930, sent to Leonard Shields.



Cartoons and drawings by Leonard Shields from the 1900s.
9 (left). Artists.
10 (right). Rich men.
11 (bottom). Unfinished drawing of the Mexborough area.







12 (top left). Hamilton's picture of the author at the May 1950 meeting.
13 (top right). Hamilton delighted in drawing weird animals, like these ostriches.
14 (bottom left). Remaining inside wall of 15 Oak Street indicating room size.
15 (bottom right). Rose Lawn, Kingsgate, Kent. Charles Hamilton's last home.

creations. There was no adverse comment from him against any of the *Gallery* portraits.

Two weeks later, in *Magnet* 463, the microscope focused on Bob Cherry. The fair-haired, blue-eyed Bob is more easily recognized in Chapman's portrait; one can easily imagine his cry of 'Hallo, hallo, hallo!' in the usual stentorian tones. His sunny temperament, as well as his prowess as a boxer, are commented upon. Pentelow sums him up thus:

> A little rough at times in his breeziness, but never a bully—staunch as steel, generous to a fault—that's Bob Cherry.

Around this time the Amalgamated Press was making an astonishing offer to their readers. In *Magnet* 464 original sketches by Chapman, Macdonald, Hayward, Briscoe, Cummings, Jones and Lane could be obtained by sending 'three coupons from *Magnet* 464 and three from *Penny Popular* 221, plus a penny stamp for postage.' I wonder how many readers had been able afford to buy two extra copies of each magazine to obtain an original sketch?

There was no particular order in the appearance of the characters. Third, in *Magnet* 465, was George Wingate, the Captain of School. His life history was related in full up to that date. Mention was made of the his defence of Rosina, the circus girl, who, it transpired, was Dr Locke's long lost daughter; also of his attachment to Paula Bell, the pantomime leading lady who had charmed his heart. Regretfully he had to leave her amidst the snow to return to Greyfriars and education while she went off to conquer the West End.

After the fourth part the series appeared weekly with the occasional *lacuna* when a week was missed. In the end the *Gallery* ran for one hundred and two articles. In them were described the backgrounds and characters of one hundred and eighteen schoolboys, masters, Cliff House Girls, local tradesmen and relatives. It was, undoubtedly, a mammoth task which Pentelow had undertaken. The research was meticulous, revealing his intimate knowledge of the subject. No one could have done a better job. There were to be later *Galleries*; there had been earlier attempts, but none had the scope or imagination of Pentelow's, and none dealt with so many characters.

The last folio in the *Greyfriars Gallery* was published in 1919 in *Magnet* 571. (Even Pentelow must have got tired of his Herculean task.) Entitled *The Rest of Them*, Pentelow listed some seventy characters who had appeared fleetingly in the *Magnet*. Had this series appeared later, one of them, Cedric Hilton, would have deserved an article to himself, but he had not yet risen to the sub-stardom he achieved under 'Frank Richards' in the mid 1930s.

Pentelow had started an advance campaign in the *Magnet* and *Gem* in 1917 about a similar feature about St. Jim's. He wrote:

> Letters urging upon me the desirability of starting this feature have simply poured in since I inquired my readers' opinions on the subject. The thing will have to be done. These character sketches are not easily written, I can tell you. The writer knows all the characters well and has a pretty good memory; but hours of hard, though pleasant work have to be put in over old volumes before a sketch is written. Don't be impatient, then! (*Gem* 476)

It seem that the readers were impatient, for in *Gem* 484 Pentelow again raised the subject:

> I hope to start the series sometime before long; but it is not easy. The artist has to get forward with his work; and the articles themselves entail a vast amount of labour. The man who writes such a series as this must know the stories from the outset, must have studied the characters as though he has lived with them. So, have patience! As soon as maybe, but not for a few weeks yet I fear.

As Pentelow said to his readers, he had taken on another formidable task but, as he had succeeded with the *Magnet*, and had now promised the *Gem* readers something similar, the die was cast.

On the 12th January, 1918 Pentelow began the *St. Jim's Gallery* in *Gem* 518. Warwick Reynolds was commissioned to do the portraits for this series. His precise style was suited to the full length pictures he drew with his characteristic skill.

The first St. Jim's subject was, of course, Tom Merry. Depicted in his cricket whites, Tom is a pleasant figure, smiling at the artist, obviously relaxed and at his ease. As in Wharton's biography, a detailed description followed painting the picture of a happy schoolboy, carefree, with many friends and few enemies.

Pantelow observes of Tom amongst other things:

> If you never do anything that Tom would not do, you need not worry about doing all the things that he does.

Next came the Hon. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. His portrait was of him standing in front of a mirror trying on one of his many fancy waistcoats. Pentelow evidently regarded 'Gussy' as someone rather special, for at the end of this biography he wrote:

> Simple, yet no simpleton—proud without a touch of snobbery—brave and tender-hearted—a very humane boy, and yet a great gentleman, in the best sense of the word.

The *Gallery* did not appear every week. Sometimes there would be two

or three blank weeks and, then, quite unexpectedly, the *Gallery* would reappear for two or three consecutive weeks.

The boys, staff (and 'Towser', George Herries's bulldog) were described in detail in the course of forty-one 'weekly' parts. One other subject was included: Cousin Ethel, the only 'outsider' to grace the St. Jim's Gallery. Reynolds drew a picture of a sweet looking girl, rather more immature than as she had been described by Hamilton.

Herr Otto Schneider was the subject of the Gallery in *Gem* 581. The St. Jim's German master was, as it happened, the last to appear in this series. Suddenly, without warning and very much in mid-stream, it came to an end. The work that Pentelow expended on these potted biographies had resulted in some remarkably good portraits, which, like those in the *Magnet*, were never bettered in later issues.

We now reach a point where controversy was to break out; it has continued almost without slackening to this day. It concerned a substitute story by Pentelow, which appeared in *Magnet* 520 published on the 26th January 1918. This one story was the cause of more readers' letters to the Editor than any other before or since. Today, now it is known to be a 'substitute' story, fuel has been added to the original sense of outrage; passionate argument, dissent and misunderstanding continue unabated.

It seems that the Directors of the Amalgamated Press felt that readers might be confused between two characters in the Greyfriars saga. At Greyfriars there was Arthur Evans Courtney, a scholar in the Sixth Form and a great friend to George Wingate. At Highcliffe School, a few miles away, there was Frank Courtenay, leader of its Fourth Form. Although both had considerable followings, the Directors felt that confusion would reign unless one or other left the scene. Pentelow was ordered to arrange the removal of one of them. Two decisions had to be made. Was it to be Greyfriars or Highcliffe who would lose their Court(e)nay? Pentelow, it appears, favoured the Greyfriars Sixth Former. In this he may have been helped by the Directors. Much more difficult to decide was how it should happen. Courtney could leave the school, leaving the field clear for Courtenay. He could, perhaps, just fade into the background, never to be mentioned again. Or he could die.

Pentelow decided on the last option, and began to write the final yarn about Arthur Courtney. The current series by Hamilton was introducing a new character, Tom Redwing, to the Greyfriars Remove. In the yarn *In Another's Place* (*Magnet* 517) Vernon-Smith took a small boat out to sea against the advice of his chums. A storm blew up and the Bounder, in the boat on his own, was swept out to sea, and then back towards the cliffs and the rocks beneath. A voice hailed him from a ledge on the

cliff, directing him towards a patch of calmer water where Tom Redwing, who had been giving the instructions, was able to jump into the boat and give assistance. Despite the loss of the boat, Tom managed to help the Bounder ashore.

From that moment grew a firm and eventful friendship. This tale of the arrival of Tom Redwing was designed as a five-part series. In it the Bounder contrived to introduce Tom to Greyfriars under the name of 'Clavering', a curious use of the old Hamilton school name. Redwing wished for nothing more than to slaughter Germans whom, he believed, had been killed his father at sea. In the midst of this tangle, Pentelow cleverly turned Hamilton's story into a side issue.

Suddenly, in *Magnet* 520, the series was interrupted with a sub-plot entitled *A Very Gallant Gentleman.* It described how Arthur Courtney saved the worthless life of Rupert Valence, another Greyfriars Sixth Former who could only be numbered amongst the shadiest of black sheep at the school. In so doing Courtney tragically lost his own life. Part of the motivation behind Courtney's action was that he was in love with Violet, Valence's sister, and would count no cost to save the look in his lady's eye.

Readers were shocked and appalled. A few weeks later (*Magnet* 528) Pentelow's 'Editor's Chat' remarked on the great number of letters received on the subject of Courtney's death. Perhaps cynically, he replied to comments that '... Mr Richards must have penned it with streaming eyes' as follows:

> I am not sure about that; I think not. But I can answer for it that he did not write that chapter with his tongue in his cheek; it would never have got home on those who read it, as it undoubtedly did, if he had done so.

It does not seem that Hamilton was ever consulted about the removal of Courtney. Although he was not writing many Greyfriars stories at the time, he would have taken unkindly to the idea of one of his characters being so completely extinguished.

Half way through the *St. Jim's Gallery* John Nix Pentelow left Fleetway House. His legacy was a fascinating and complete *Greyfriars Gallery* and an equally interesting, if incomplete, *St. Jim's Gallery.* The wonderfully controversial editor had finished his work in this field.

Following Pentelow's retirement, Herbert Hinton returned as Editor for a second term of office. Since Hamilton had always been on the best of good terms with the affable Hinton, he was again happy to call in at Fleetway House. It was largely through Hinton that Hamilton went to the Army Recruiting Offices to 'join up for King and Country'. He was examined on the 11th September 1917 by the Enlistment Medical

Officer at Mill Hill, North London. The certificate with which he was issued stated:

> ...having been medically Examined under the Military Service Review of Exceptions Act, 1917, and found Permanently Totally disabled for Service. Signed by E.V.Bellers, Colonel Commanding 57th Regiment.

At the age of forty-one Charles Hamilton had offered his services to his Country, only to find that his health, in particular, his eyesight, had let him down. What might have happened, had he been accepted, is a matter of conjecture.

St. Jim's was now celebrating the tenth anniversary of its creation and, despite the work involved with the *Magnet* and Greyfriars, Hamilton had not disregarded the *Gem*. Far from it: St. Jim's had always been his first love, and he spent just that little bit more time on its development. The reason that St. Jim's was more complete when it first appeared in *Gem* owed much to the fact that Jack Blake and Co. were old friends transferred from *Pluck*. The school had been given time to settle into its own style during those early days and had already gained a large number of readers. Thus, when the Clavering Boys made their journey to St. Jim's, and Tom Merry came to the school, a basic format and readership had already been established.

New boys did not abound in the *Gem* in the same manner as in the *Magnet* which was still increasing the cast of the Remove Form. The *Gem* had also been running for almost a year at a halfpenny before doubling in price, if not in content; during this time it had solidified the shape and content of St. Jim's.

The *Magnet* had Wharton Lodge for a Christmas setting. True to the Hamiltonian sense of the season, the *Gem* could, and did, rely on 'Laurel Villa', Tom Merry's home at Huckleberry Heath, although, more likely than not, Eastwood House, the seat of the Earl of Eastwood and Gussy's aristocratic home, would welcome a festive party for Christmas. Eastwood House compared favourably with its opposite number in the *Magnet*, 'Mauleverer Towers', the seat of the Earl Mauleverer. This was a perfect setting for tales of phantoms and spectres, and for yuletide adventures.

The *Holiday Series* in the *Gem* were too short in the early days of the 1910s to be as effective as the later ones. Most of them only ran for two or three weeks; the first to set the scene, and safely (or not) deliver the boys to the centre of the action; the second to solve a mystery or find a treasure; the third to defeat the villain, perhaps regain their lost transport (always a popular Hamiltonian end theme), and return safely in time for the start of next term.

Typical examples of these early Holiday Adventures are *South Seas Treasure Hunt* (*Gem* 173-175), and *Tom Merry's Trip to the Congo* (*Gem* 190-192) An even shorter series was the search for buried treasure in Italy (*Gem* 275-276).

In contrast, more Greyfriars stories were set at school than overseas until 1914, but, sadly, the overseas trips suffered the same short comings as those in the *Gem*. In *Magnet* 217-218 the boys searched the slopes of Mount Vesuvius for a clue to treasure. This, together with the Switzerland Series in *Magnet* 123-124, constituted nearly all the foreign excursions in the first six years of the *Magnet*.

It seems that an agreement was made between Charles Hamilton and the Amalgamated Press in 1920 on the subject of the copyright of his work for them. Hamilton made no mention of this in his *Autobiography*, but briefly did so in his diary in 1949 when the *Dick and Doris* characters were set to appear in the comic *Merry-go-Round*. It has been rumoured that Hamilton received an *ex gratia* payment of £3,000 in return for his relinquishing any future interest in his creations. So far this has not been confirmed.

What is known is that, since 1888, all cheques issued by the Amalgamated Press had a standard statement printed on their backs. This required the payee's signature before the cheque could be cashed. Effectively, it gave sole ownership of any published work covered by that payment to the publishers.

Now that both *Magnet* and *Gem* were doing well, and Rookwood in the *Boy's Friend* was gaining in circulation, it only remained for Hinton to launch the *Holiday Annual*. There is a measure of surprise that it took eleven years for this book to appear, bearing in mind that it became a money spinner for the Amalgamated Press.

The *Holiday Annual* was to be a yearly offering of the best of all three schools presented in a yellow covered volume. In addition, there were to be other short stories and articles together with a cover picture by Warwick Reynolds and one advertisement on the back cover for items of interest to schoolboys, such as 'Meccano' outfits.

Hamilton wrote four new stories for the first *Annual*: two St. Jim's yarns, *The Wandering Schoolboy* and *Out of Bounds*, one Greyfriars, *Ructions at Greyfriars*, and one Rookwood story, *Rivals of Rookwood School*. In addition to this fare, *Magnets* 173-174 were reprinted with the new title of *Fighting for his Honour*, as well as a host of amusing articles, many by G.R.Samways. It was published in September 1919; like most annuals of this type, it was dated for the following year, 1920. The entire run was soon sold out, even though the price was a steep 6/- a copy. (No doubt many uncles and aunts were persuaded to

contribute at least in part to this as a special Christmas present.)

In the following years Hamilton wrote stories specially for the *Holiday Annual*, many of which appeared in no other publication from the Amalgamated Press. Over a few years, however, the editorial policy changed, and more reprinted stories began to appear. In spite of this, the number of copies printed and sold attained an average of sixty to seventy thousand a year, and reached a peak of one hundred thousand. It was a considerable proportion of the competitive and lucrative market of boys' Christmas Annuals.

The *Holiday Annual* continued to be a very popular item at Christmas and was a yearly occurrence until December 1940 (dated 1941). It had a mixed career, being originally printed on thin paper with a total of 360 pages. As more and more items were reprinted from the *Gem*, *Magnet* and other comics, the profits must have been considerable, sufficiently so, that with the 1933 issue (dated 1934), the price was reduced to 5/-. Regrettably, the number of pages had by now been reduced to 256 pages, and was further reduced to 232 in 1938 (dated 1939). Nevertheless, this was the only annual to be issued by the Amalgamated Press that contained almost exclusively material from Charles Hamilton and supported all the major Hamilton schools. The 1920 (dated 1921) *Holiday Annual* cover was illustrated by R.J.Macdonald, and the 1921 (dated 1922) by E.E.Briscoe. Not every cover drawing was signed after 1927, but most covers were shared between these artists.

Hamilton's output, already vast, grew further, once his feet were no longer straying far from home. In the seclusion of Hampstead and Hawkinge, he settled down to revise his activities. Apart from his three schools, Greyfriars, St. Jim's and Rookwood, Hamilton had not been idle in other spheres. New ideas flowed in an ever increasing stream, in particular, a series involving the unfairly outlawed cowboy, the 'Rio Kid', who, in adventure after adventure, had to escape the pursuits of Captain 'Mule Kick' Hall and Sheriff Lick of Packsaddle. Hamilton's descriptions of adventure in America were remarkably well drawn, first in the new *Popular* and later in the *Modern Boy*. So well received were they that they were reprinted, albeit abridged in some cases, in the *Boy's Friend 4d Library*, as well as in the *Greyfriars Holiday Annuals*. For these stories Charles Hamilton's pen name was 'Ralph Redway'.

Another character, very popular in the late 1920s and through the 1930s, was 'Ken King of the Islands'. Assisted by his mate, Kid Hudson, they roved the South Seas in Ken's ketch, *Dawn*. From friendly trade with the natives to desperate encounters with renegade Dutchmen or crooks like 'Dandy' Peters, Ken King and his crew sailed on their weekly adventures in the *Modern Boy*. For these yarns, and for *The School for*

Slackers, Hamilton used no pen name, but his own. *The School for Slackers* was an enjoyable series about a headmaster, Jimmy McCann, who, on taking over as Head of High Coombe School, decided to stop the slacking that was endemic in the school. This labour lasted many weeks, and, even then, was never entirely completed, though a partial victory was achieved for McCann. Indeed, as recently as 1960, in *Billy Bunter's Own Annual*, Mr McCann, or the 'Blighter' as he had been dubbed by now, continued to stick grimly to his self-appointed task.

The *Magnet* and *Gem* had been running in tandem for several years now. Since their launch they had risen in price from the original half penny to one penny, and then in 1918 to one and a half pence. These price increases had not always been accompanied by a corresponding increase in pages, which had varied from twenty pages up to thirty-two including the covers. The exception to the rule, was the 'Double Numbers' issued at Christmas and at Bank Holidays; these reached up to fifty-two pages.

The price was to go up yet again in 1922 to two pence. At the same time, a two-colour cover was introduced. The *Magnet* now had an orange and blue picture on the cover. N° 770, the first of this type, featured Billy Bunter as a ventriloquist making an idol speak to two kneeling terror-struck natives. The natives had been threatening mutiny aboard the coastal steamer taking Harry Wharton and Co. from Lagos in West Africa through the Gulf of Guinea, and on to the Congo. This change of cover took place during the course of the *Captain Corkran* Series, in which the Greyfriars chums accompanied the Captain to search for ivory in the Congo.

With the higher price the content of the *Magnet* was increased to twenty-eight pages. For this extra outlay the reader had a free photograph of a 'Famous Football Team', longer Greyfriars yarns, and increased coverage by the *Greyfriars Herald*. The latter were articles, mainly by sub writers, about aspects of life at Greyfriars School, and were contained in the centre pages.

As it had been with the *Magnet*, so, too, it was to be with the *Gem*. On the 11th November 1922 out came a new issue with red and blue on the cover. The *Gem* also was in the middle of a series, *The Cardew Cup*; half of the 'new' *Gem* was taken up by this tale of St. Jim's. In addition, there was a tale by Anthony Sharp about a new detective 'who brings terror to the criminals of the Underworld'. There was also, free, a 'real' photograph of a famous sportsman. The rest of the space was taken by various articles, in all a bumper issue of twenty-eight pages.

Herbert Hinton had controlled the destinies of the *Magnet* and *Gem* until 1921. Then, like his predecessor, Percy Griffiths, he made an

error which was sufficient for the Amalgamated Press to dispense with his services.

He wrote and claimed payment for, a story called *Bunter's Baby.* (*Magnet* 652). In fact he had copied out passages from previous Hamilton stories to produce a readable tale, but certainly nothing original. Immediately after leaving Fleetway House, Hinton started a rival magazine called *School and Sport.* Using the information gained at the Amalgamated Press, Hinton circularized readers of Fleetway House magazines and entreated them to take his paper. Somewhat cheekily, he even approached Hamilton to write for him, who was prepared to do so and promptly created another school, 'St Kit's' under a new pen name, 'Clive Clifford'; the stories appeared in *School and Sport.* But even the Hamilton touch could not ensure the life of the new infant; after twenty issues, it disappeared in May 1922.

In the spring of 1925 Charles Down, now the *Magnet* editor, issued the first *Schoolboy's Own Library,* with the plan to continue with two numbers every month. Schoolboys on holiday that summer must have been delighted with the new format. Priced at four pence, they were small pocket-sized books of some sixty pages and forty thousand words. They were reissues of stories culled from the *Magnet, Gem, Popular,* and, in due course, from the *Nelson Lee Library* and other companion papers. These were abridged, sometimes heavily, to fit the format. The cover was attractive with a red and blue painting of a highlight of the story. Inside there was an ink drawing over the title and a centre page illustration. Most issues contained a two or three part series from the *Magnet* or *Gem,* condensed into the available space. In later numbers the longer series were reprinted in up to four issues in the *Schoolboy's Own Library.* This was an improvement since it avoided over-pruning of the original story by the Editor.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Fleetway's Greyfrairs

Imitation is the sincerest form of flattery
Fables—de la Fontaine

IN OCTOBER 1981 I was invited with Brian Simmonds, a member of the *Friar's Club*, to visit George Richmond Samways at his home in Dursley, Gloucestershire. (The *Friar's Club* is a group of enthusiasts interested in the work of Charles Hamilton.) It was a chance to talk to the last remaining member of the Fleetway House editorial office that published the Amalgamated Press papers, and was particularly important because Samways had been there during the period when the papers developed and kept going during World War I. Although he had been employed only as an editor throughout his seventeen years there and had little contact with Hamilton during that time, he had an intimate knowledge of the Hamilton manuscripts and the handling of substitute writers. He also had a friendly comradeship with his other colleagues and observed many interesting facets of life in the Amalgamated Press offices.

Born on the 14th January, 1895, Samways was educated at King Edward VI School, Witley, Surrey. After the death of his father, his mother opened a newsagent's shop in Eastleigh, Hampshire.

"...she sent me a copy of the first *Magnet*. As soon as I read it, I fell for it immediately. It was wonderful, like a new world, and I suppose at that time I thought it could have been a real school. The masters censored our letters, but writing to my mother 'Thank you for the childrens' paper, will you please send it every week?', the master concerned saw no harm in 'childrens' paper' and the message got through."

As parcels were not opened, he got his *Magnet* each week.

"As soon as it arrived, I would sit on the window seat in the music room and read to a group of about fifty boys, while one boy kept sentinel in case a master came along. Had I been caught with offensive contraband in my possession, I would have been flogged in a manner unheard of today. What put the masters against the *Magnet* was one

boy had left a copy lying about, and on the cover was a picture of a master being caught in a booby-trap. Of course it was shown to the head who was absolutely horrified! The ban wasn't lifted for years.

Considering I was a very frightened little boy, I must have had remarkable courage to have the *Magnet* every week, and took a terrible risk reading it to my school chums. I rose from an obscure little boy of no account at all to quite a personality.

Of course, I never considered becoming a writer of *Magnet* stories—it never occurred to me. It was just sending a poem that ended with my name that set me off. I owed that to Herbert Hinton who said in his 'Editor's Chat', 'I've had a poem sent to me by a reader from Southsea. He doesn't ask me to publish it, or whether it is good or bad as many writers do; and I have pleasure in publishing it because I think it very good indeed.'

That set me off, and I did a series by candle-light in my bed-sit on *Greyfriars Lyrics* and later *St. Jim's Jingles.* Each poem portrayed one of the Greyfriars or St. Jim's characters. After this, sometime in 1914, I was invited by telegram from Hinton to go up to London. I went up one Friday and was shown into his office, Room 69. With Hinton was Maurice Down. Right away they said they were short of *Magnet* stories, and would I write one for them by Monday?

I said, 'I don't write stories, sir; only poems.'

'Oh', said Hinton, 'But you know the characters—you can do it. We'll loan you a portable typewriter and some paper. You go and get yourself some lodgings, and bring me what you have done on Monday morning.' And with that, he dismissed me.

Well, I wandered down to Kennington Road and turned into a cul-de-sac. The last house had a notice about apartments in the window, so I asked if I could have a room.

I locked myself up in this room, and sat at the typewriter. I was in such a state of mind I couldn't think of an idea for a story. I thought, 'This won't do at all', so went for a walk to try and clear my brain. Nothing came, so I went to bed with a prayer that I might be given an idea. When I woke I had the skeleton of a plot, so I just got on with it.

On Monday morning, I took in as much as I had completed. Hinton hadn't arrived. He never turned up before eleven o'clock, but Down was there. He read what I had done, chuckling from time to time, so, I thought, 'That's all right.' The story was called *The Reign of Terror.*

Down told me to finish the story. When I gave it to him, he wrote out a cheque for fifteen guineas. I'd never handled money like that before.

'Go back to Southsea, and send us some more stories', was Down's parting shot.

In 1914 I left Southsea altogether, and came to live in London, and joined the Amalgamated Press as a sub-editor, serving under Hinton and Down.

When I was writing about Greyfriars, I used to pick a character that Hamilton hadn't used too much, like Dick Russell. In this way I avoided gross imitation of Hamilton's style. It seemed the best way, and, in any case, I was out of sympathy with some of his characters. I never cared for Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, he never appealed, and so I didn't write about him. Perhaps my characterization wasn't good enough.

I wrote over a hundred *Magnet* stories and about fifty *Gem*. Amongst those credited to me in the *Gem* were some that had D'Arcy's name in the title. But those, *Gussy's Christmas Guest* (*Gem* 879), *D'Arcy's Dilemma* (*Gem* 903), *Gussy's Newspaper* (*Gem* 978) and *D'Arcy's Comic Opera* (*Gem* 993) I certainly did not write.

The *Magnet* stories against my name are nearly all correct, but I didn't write about *Teddy Tenniel, Artist* (*Magnet* 653), nor about Robert Ansley Severn in *Heart of A Hero* (*Magnet* 813). The latter was probably written by Pentelow.

One man, writing about me in the *Story Paper Collector*, said that my *Magnet* stories were quite good, but I couldn't write a *Gem* story for toffee. I've never heard such an absurd criticism, because one was the prototype of the other. If you could write about Harry Wharton and Co., you could write about Tom Merry and Co. If you can write about Billy Bunter, you can write about Baggy Trimble.

Pentelow didn't like my style at all, but Hinton and Down did. Pentelow said that I should write in my natural style, and not model myself on Hamilton. To this I replied, 'It is the readers we have to consider. We have to be as like Hamilton as possible.' He did not agree at all. You could pick out a Pentelow story, but I'm amazed why he was credited with writing *School and Sport* over the years. It wasn't until recently that they found out I wrote it. It was published in the *Boy's Friend Library*. (I received £40 for the 80,000 words.) There was, however, no excuse to say that it had been written by Pentelow, because our styles were completely dissimilar. It came out between *Rivals and Chums* and *The Boy Without A Name*. I remember them all coming out. They sold like hot cakes.

Room 58, overlooking Holborn Station, was where I worked with Willie Stanton Hope, Harold Twyman (until he became Editor of the *Union Jack*), Arthur Oldcroft, Noel Wood-Smith and the office boy, Edward Snow. Noel Wood-Smith was both a sub-editor and an inventor, a very gifted man who made a fortune out of his inventions. However, as he didn't get on very well with Hinton, he didn't write many

Magnet stories. Under the pen-name of 'Norman Taylor', he was a sporting writer for *Boy's Friend* and *Boys' Realm.*

Bound volumes of *Magnet* and *Gem* were kept in Room 60 next door to us. Here it was that young Edward Snow, the office boy, was browsing one day and realized Hinton had taken parts of old *Magnet* stories and welded them into a new tale. Claiming *Bunter's Baby* (*Magnet* 652) to be an original, Hinton received payment for it. Snow reported this to the Directors, as a result of which Hinton was asked to leave. I still think Hinton was wrongly blamed. He had to do something to get the *Magnet* out, but had nothing in hand, nor could I oblige at the time.

One of my stories was *The Mailed Fist at Greyfriars* (*Magnet* 424). The central character was Sergeant Burrell who was based on Sergeant Currell at my old school. He had been the Navy champion heavyweight. The slight change of name was the only difference. We used to have to sit and eat our meals in silence with the sergeant walking up and down between the tables. You were put on report if you did anything wrong.

Another time I used an experience from school life was when I wrote about Greyfriars under repair (*Magnet* 641). This was based on my school being sent to Littlehampton to live under canvas for a while.

As for how I got the inspiration for the plots—they just came. Although I was no good at plot construction, I never had difficulty with ideas. To me the plot did not matter in a school story, like in a detective story where it is all important. A lot of Hamilton stories had no plot at all, yet they are delightful to read.

All credit to Hamilton: his stories were clean and of a high moral standard. He also had a natural, light, sense of humour. The reason for his success was because he loved those characters; they were flesh and blood to him. Although we 'sub' writers, of course, wrote stories using his characters, he had created them, and that I could not have done.

Some of the sub writers had so little knowledge of the characters, that, when they were called upon to write a *Magnet* story, they slipped up very badly. But I think that people today are too pedantic, reading the stories as if they were classics. There were variations in Hamilton's writings as well.

I remember that Hamilton's stories would be placed in the manuscript drawer of the sub-editor's desk. When empty, the substitute writers were called upon to fill the gap. There could be many weeks without copy from Hamilton, and all the stories had to be 'sub', both in the *Magnet* and *Gem*. We would write five- or six-part series, all the while longing to hear from Hamilton.

I didn't care much for the stories where they went wandering around

the world. It did make a change, but I preferred the homely ones at Greyfriars. My favourite stories were about Talbot and Marie Rivers in the *Gem*. Hamilton made just one error when he was writing about the professor, Marie Rivers' father. He spoke about wider issues, like social problems and poverty, and I don't think this appealed to the average reader.

When I first met Charles Hamilton, he was about 40. He came into Hinton's office, and after introductions, they started talking shop. Hamilton had nothing to do with the Amalgamated Press staff. A freelance writer, he did not like 'sub' writers, although we weren't just jumping on the band wagon. At this period there were long gaps without Hamilton stories—the *Magnet* and *Gem* needed our contributions. We were just doing our job. He was, however, very aloof. Many of the Amalgamated Press staff never met him in all the years they worked there. After the day's work the staff went to the local pub. As far as I know, Hamilton never joined them. He always kept very much to himself.

John Nix Pentelow, working from Room 60, judged the *Story Writers Competition*. After nearly a year he named the winner, William Leslie Catchpole, who joined the Amalgamated Press after I left, and wrote many of the items that had been my concern. I read some of his *Greyfriars Heralds* and *St. Jim's Gazettes*—very well did he do them.

After I had been at Fleetway House for about a year, I wrote all the editorials although Hinton's photograph appeared at the top. Hinton was a magnificent man, a huge, athletic man—very good looking, who played Rugby for Blackheath. For some unknown reason, he was nicknamed 'Trooper' Hinton, by Gilbert Floyd, a writer. Although he had been to public school, he was not at all snobbish, but rarely revealed his true self to his staff. However, I found working with him on press night just how friendly he could be.

The story about Hinton being a coward and not joining up was a fabrication (to my shame, by me). I reported that he was in the West Kent Yeomanry, a brave man who, when he saw a fellow ill-treating a horse, thrashed him soundly. Most of this was made up. Later Hinton went into the Coldstream Guards. The point was that, although a brave man, he wanted to join the army in his own good time."

It is worth pointing out to the reader that at that time the *Magnet* and the *Gem* were regarded as contributing sufficiently to the national good for many of the Amalgamated Press staff to be granted exemption from enlisting; large numbers of copies were exported overseas and to troops in the trenches in France. It was a marked contrast with what was to

happen in World War II. Samways went on,

"Having been given a 'total exemption' by Lord Northcliffe, I was slow in enlisting. It was, of course, intolerable not to be in uniform. Sooner or later, you simply had to go, and so, in 1915, I joined the Royal Flying Corps as aide to General Foster. Talking in the hut one day about Greyfriars, I mentioned that I had written some of the stories. Well, as there was an article in *Lilliput* by 'Frank Richards' in which he said that he wrote all the stories himself, I was thought for a time to be 'pulling a long bow'.

After the war, I continued back at Fleetway House, working closely with Hedley O'Mant who had also been at King Edward VI School with Twyman and me.

Letters addressed to 'Greyfriars School, Kent', were, by arrangement with the Post Office, delivered to us at Fleetway House. The amount of post in the 1920s needed a delivery every two hours, and the full-time job of dealing with readers' letters was Clive Fenn's—questions like 'Why did they not grow up?', and 'Where was Greyfriars?' Fenn's answers were most attractive to readers. I'm sorry to say, but many of the letters were made up. You see, if we were short of material, or had an idea to put forward, we would write fictitious letters and replies. The column was extremely popular, and sometimes ran to two pages.

The peak circulation was in the 1920s and early 1930s, and the precise figures mattered to Hinton, for his salary bonus was calculated from it. He published everything I did because I could put myself in a boy's place. I knew, for example, how fond the readers were of sport. And, as this had not been exploited before, it made my stories popular.

I could tell from Hinton's behaviour how sales were going. When the circulation started to fall (the *Gem* especially), he would curse, calling them 'circulagger' figures. If they rose, he was all smiles. I remember him saying, 'I like that story of yours, Samways—they've gone up—lovely'. If the sales fell, he would have no use for me.

Not starting until 1 am, we worked short hours, and never Saturdays. I worked by electric light in my comfortable armchair at my roll-top desk. Our tasks included perusing readers letters for ideas for plots to pass on to Hamilton. Many were, however, ignored by him. As 'sub' writers, we were never given synopses, but left to our own devices. Stories were written to suit the time of year—in winter, you wrote about football, in summer, cricket.

Because Hamilton only gave his stories one word titles like *Spoofed* or *Captured*, the sub-editor would give the Hamilton story its title.

Hedley O'Mant once rejected a Hamilton story. Long after I had left the Amalgamated Press, Hedley and his wife visited us. In the course

of conversation, he said, 'I rejected a Hamilton story.'

Hamilton had sent in a really badly written story. He must have been ill at the time, and I think someone deputized for him. Whether it was his niece, or whoever it was, the story had no sparkle—it was rubbish. It was completely unlike Hamilton, and as Down was away, Hedley rejected it. The feud this engendered was so fierce that the Directors had to intervene to separate the combatants. After that, Hamilton and Hedley didn't get on at all. The atmosphere was terrible, a clash of personalities and much bitterness. I would have never dared to criticize, let alone reject, a Hamilton story.

Bunter Court, which was to become an important part of Bunter's background, was suggested to Hamilton by Hedley O'Mant in 1925. Hedley was a fine chap—very popular with the girls. Born in 1899, he served in both World Wars, as an RFC Observer in the First, and a non-operational Squadron Leader in the Second. He died after a long illness in the Middlesex Hospital in 1955.

Dick Penfold was the centre of a story, *Down on His Luck* (*Magnet* 226). As a result readers sent donations to help him. The Editor, of course, had to use his discretion. Depending on the age of the reader, he sometimes made the story appear true; other times he returned the money. Although it was rather cruel, in a way, Tom Dutton, a character in the Greyfriars Remove, was amusing with his deafness. 'I'm not really deaf, really—just a little hard of hearing', he would say.

As to the suggestion that Hamilton was underpaid for his work, I would like to say that, not only did he receive a higher rate than we did, but also he was paid an honorarium for each of his stories reprinted in the *Penny Popular*. Some of these were lumped together as Hamilton's, and I received nothing for them; I was very cross. The task of cutting the stories to length for the *Penny Popular* was Arthur Aldcroft's who first brought it out in 1912.

'Charles Hamilton 25 Guineas: George Samways 15 Guineas.' I've seen that on pay sheets, written in blue pencil by Hinton. That was the difference between a Charles Hamilton and a 'sub' story. Hamilton's stories had lots of 'Ow! Wow! Yarooogh!' All counted towards the thousand words; there wasn't much solid writing in them. On the other hand, Pentelow was too prosy. *Mason's Last Match* (*Gem* 198) was a parody of a Hamilton story. I did it and it took no time at all. Later, however, Hamilton did write more prose, less exclamations, and 'I say you fellows'. He must have made a colossal amount of money over the years. To say the Amalgamated Press were mean in their payments is quite wrong.

Edwy Searles Brooks was a very nice man who lived in South London.

I did not know him very well, for, like Hamilton he was a free-lance writer. Until a change of editorial policy led to an lot of new boys at St Frank's, (a move with which he did not agree), his stories were very much in demand.

The Fleetway staff were very clever. Twyman joined the *Sunday Pictorial* as well as writing many books about crime. Stanton Hope ran a 'Friendship Bureau' later in life. Yes, they were all capable people.

Maurice Down was keen on the *Holiday Annual.* Apart from a long story by Hamilton, I wrote nearly all of the 1928 issue myself. For this I was paid the enormous sum of £40. Because readers were always asking why the Greyfriars boys never grew up, I wrote an article and a poem about them becoming doctors, lawyers, soldiers, etc, in that *Holiday Annual.*

While I worked at Fleetway House, Hinton allowed me to acquire a large collection of original *Magnet* and *Gem* drawings. They were mostly by Chapman. The original artwork was about twice the reproduced size. Over the years, each time we moved, my wife said, 'You don't want to keep all those drawings, do you?' And each time I would throw away some more. They are all gone now. I'm afraid I never thought there would be an interest in the stories in years to come, particularly from grown-up readers.

The *Magnet* was printed 'over-the-water' in Southwark. I never went there. I used to telephone Garrard, the chief printer, but I never saw a *Magnet* being printed. The proofs came over; we were checking them all the time. We would eventually receive a press copy for the office.

I left the Amalgamated Press in 1930. One of the reasons was because I went to a football match with Hedley O'Mant who said, 'Look, Sam, I want to warn you. The supplements won't go on for ever. I've got information that they are going to stop.'

Of course, I panicked and looked for another occupation. In point of fact they went on for another ten years. As one of the pioneers I could have gone back. Instead, I worked really hard, taking work home most nights. At one time, I tried putting a limerick in the *Magnet* each week. The readers had to supply the last line. I'm afraid there was a poor response. I put heart and soul into it and became a successful 'solutionist', solving *Bullets* in the weekly *John Bull* and other competitions."

Before World War II many newspapers and magazines ran competitions for which there were offered substantial prizes. In the weekly *Bullets* competition the player was given a phrase and a variety of examples from which he could make a selection to compliment the phrase and

give a pithy line. As an example: the winning choice for the phrase 'For Services Rendered' was 'King Pinned On Cross'. In the early 1930s the top prize in *Bullets* was £750 each week.

Samways continued,

"I feel that Hamilton was comparable with Dickens in their choice of names. He had a most happy way with them, 'Billy Bunter', for example, 'Bob Cherry', too. I sometimes wonder if Hamilton was not a reincarnation of Dickens who had died in 1870. Hamilton was a very clever versifier, but, being engaged by his stories, it left little time for poetry. Those he did write were very good. But he wrote no great number. The secret of Hamilton's writing was that he lived the characters. I think he really enjoyed his work."

George Samways produced a picture of himself.

"I expect you've seen this photograph," he said. "The reason I'm all crumpled down one side is because I had been holding my first born on my shoulder. Then they took him away, and photographed me before I had time to get the creases out."

I had no doubt after the interview that George Richmond Samways had loved Greyfriars almost as much as had Charles Hamilton.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Substitute Writers and Gem Reprints

There is no substitute for talent;
Industry and all virtues are of no avail.
Point Counter Point—A.L Huxley

WHEN the work of 'sub' writers in the *Magnet* and *Gem* are examined, it becomes clear that, however much these writers believed in their characterizations, they always failed lamentably to write a story that approached Hamilton's own style. There were one or two who could occasionally give a reasonable imitation of Hamilton, mostly by lifting chunks of text from his stories. This did not sound well when the story was read in its completed form; the text was uneven. The sub-writers did not seem to have Hamilton's light touch in conversations or his imaginative descriptions. And, unlike them, he liked to pursue whatever point he had made by gently and humorously labouring the theme, as, for example, in the piece quoted from *Magnet* 705 below, he indicates that Bunter is still hungry after all his gorging.

In all, 303 *Magnet* stories by substitute writers have been identified and catalogued. Many of these writers were able authors in their own genre, but, when required to deal with a situation peopled with Hamiltonian characters, all fell by the wayside. George Orwell, the writer, pointed out that Hamilton had a simple style. Chapters began with a remark like, "I say you fellows", and then explained why Bunter made the remark, after which the story proper could begin. This would seem easy enough to imitate, but there the difficulties started; the 'sub' writers could not identify themselves with each character, as could the master. Compare these styles:

"Any more cake, you fellows?"
"No."
"Any more tarts?"
"No"
"Any more cream-puffs?"
"No".
"Then I think I'll turn in," said Billy Bunter thoughtfully.

How Billy Bunter could have found room for any more cake, tarts, or cream-puffs, if the supply had been unlimited, was a mystery. For half an hour at least Bunter's jaw had been champing steadily. Harry Wharton and Co were accustomed to his wonderful performance in the gastronomic line. But the Owl of the Remove had succeeded in surprising even the Famous Five.

(From *The Secret of the Caravan*, *Magnet* 705)

"My luck's dead out!"
Billy Bunter uttered the words almost savagely.
It was a half holiday, and the Owl of the Remove had set out on a treasure hunting expedition.
For upward of two hours he had explored the old smugglers' cave on the coast, but he had explored them in vain.
All that Billy Bunter had found was a broken clay-pipe and a cake of ship's tobacco These he cast indignantly into the sea. When Billy had set out from Greyfriars that afternoon, he had fond dreams of discovering an old oak chest containing doubloons, pieces-of-eight and so forth. He had left Greyfriars a pauper; he expected to return to it a millionaire. He had boasted to Harry Wharton and Co that he knew of a cave in which vast treasure was concealed; and he added that within a few hours he would be rich beyond the dreams of avarice! (From *Billy Bunter's Luck*, *Magnet* 701)

"Beroom! Boom! Crash! Wallop!
These sounds burst upon the tranquil air at Greyfriars and caused all who heard them to stop and gasp.
"Bang! Crash! Ting-a-ling-a-ling!.
That medley of noises had a jazz effect The din was horrible.
The uproar came from the quadrangle, and the persons responsible were very well known people at Greyfriars.
Harry Wharton, Bob Cherry, Frank Nugent, Johnny Bull and Hurree Jamset Ram Singh stood under the window of Study Number 13 and raised the echoes with their noise.

(From *Mark Linley's Trial*, *Magnet* 719)

The Secret of the Caravan (*Magnet* 705) is part of the Harry Wharton and Co. Caravan Tour Series. The gentle humour in this opening passage promises well of the story to come. In contrast *Billy Bunter's Luck* (*Magnet* 701) was written by George Richmond Samways. He knew the boys in considerable depth, but, as he said himself, he preferred to write about a little-used Hamilton character like Russell than to give the main role to, say, one of the Famous Five. He also knew more about sport than Hamilton, so his stories were often created round this subject. Samways' humour lacked the subtle touch that Hamilton

could instill in the story; he was an excellent writer but could not put the Hamilton texture on his plots.

Samways, however, contributed considerably to the Greyfriars saga in other ways. As he hinted in the interview recorded earlier, he was responsible for much of the minutiæ in the *Magnet* until the 1930s. These included nearly all the rhymes, the *Greyfriars Herald* articles, and countless schoolboy interviews. He also created Dr Birchemall, Headmaster of St Sam's, and star of the *Herald* in the mid-twenties. Samways should be complimented on his excellent humorous articles, wherein he displayed vast knowledge of Greyfriars. He drew up league tables for inter-school sports, and much else that enlivened the centre pages of the *Magnet*.

The third example from *Magnet* 719 was by F.G.Cook, a junior sub-editor at the Amalgamated Press. Cook was one of the less successful 'sub' writers, mainly because he did not know the characters of the juniors sufficiently. Little items in the story which follows this opening strike a sour note. The plot pivots on Skinner getting Loder to help him frame Linley for stealing a five pound note. Loder, as any knowledgeable Greyfriars reader would know, would help a junior of Skinner's type in a dangerous game like this only if he had no other choice. Skinner has nothing to hold over Loder's head and, although Linley had accidentally deluged the prefect with ink, Linley had already been caned for this. In addition Cook has Loder deal directly with Dr Locke, no intervention by Mr Quelch being allowed; in fact, the latter is hardly mentioned. These and many similar points cause the story to read in a hesitant style, unlike that of Hamilton. Cook also wrote 'sub' stories for the *Gem*; some thirty each about Greyfriars and St. Jim's are attributed to him.

Edwy Searles Brooks, the famous creator of 'St Frank's', 'Nelson Lee' and 'Nipper', also wrote as a substitute for 'Frank Richards'. H.Clarke Hook (son of Sydney, the creator of 'Jack, Sam & Pete') W.L.Catchpole and L.E.Ransome, winners of the *Greyfriars Story Competition* in 1915, are among the twenty-five or so writers who obliged in Hamilton's absence. Many were on the staff at Fleetway House.

After Herbert Hinton left in 1921, Charles Maurice Down took over as editor and served until the papers closed in 1940. He had been on the staff of the Amalgamated Press since the start of the *Gem* and *Magnet*. In common with the other editors he had to make sure he had a story well in time for each week, that the illustrations were ready, the layout completed and all gaps in the text covered. Then, serial stories had to have the correct next instalment ready and, above all, anybody away ill or on holiday had to be covered. His experience helped smooth away many problems of this type, and he proved the ideal choice to keep

the Companion Papers up to a high standard. Hamilton, now expansive in the new atmosphere, let it be known that Down was the basis for Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. The reader will remember that 'Gussy' was ever the perfect gentleman.

In 1931 the *Magnet* circulation was almost a quarter of a million copies per week. This included copies exported to the colonies and elsewhere overseas. Sales of the *Gem*, on the other hand, slumped to around 100,000 per week; it is clear now that the chief cause of this was the use of substitute writers.

Charles Down received many letters from *Gem* readers, each, no doubt, with his own rescue plan for the paper. One came from Eric Fayne, who was a keen devotee of Tom Merry, and had started a *Gem* fan club in his private school in Surbiton, Surrey, where he was head. He suggested that the circulation would improve if the early St. Jim's stories were republished. This idea was taken on, and announced to the readers in a double-page centre spread in *Gem* 1220 (4th July 1931) as 'YOUR EDITOR'S BIG PLAN'.

Following Eric Fayne's suggestion, all the early *Gems* from the first Tom Merry's Schooldays (*Gem* 3: March 30th 1907) were to be republished; the intention was to repeat the series to the point where the readers might complain that the material was familiar. The reprint issues ran from *Gem* 1221 to 1624. Initially the early *Gems* were reprinted in chronological order, but gradually odd copies were left out of sequence; these were sometimes a substitute story, sometimes a genuine Hamilton story. There is a large gap in the reprints from *Gem* 77 to *Gem* 95; as most of these were Hamilton stories, it is possible that copies of the originals were not immediately available, or the volume had 'gone missing'.

It seemed very logical at the time. However prolific Hamilton might be, he could not be expected to keep up the required quality over a long series of volumes. The use of 'sub' stories had initially alleviated the problem, but had brought about its own problems, and these had affected the sales of the *Gem*. A decision had to be made on whether to continue with substitute writers (and risk further falls in the circulation), or to revert to the format used in the first few copies of the *Gem*, when issues alternated between Hamilton stories and yarns of a different nature (and risk falls because the readers did not like this new but actually very old format). On balance, Eric Fayne's suggestion seemed the best: reprint the very old material, and get Hamilton to concentrate on one paper, especially as it seemed that his main interest had settled on Greyfriars.

It is always easy to criticize with the benefit of hindsight, but it was

an unfortunate change of policy, and resulted in the longest reissue of stories (404 consecutive copies) in any boy's magazine supposedly supplying new stories each week. Even then, certain facts should have been apparent. Hamilton had stopped travelling and was writing in earnest. His potential was quite capable of the required volume for both papers, as well as any thing else he might produce for other magazines.

Apart from the *Magnet*, most of Hamilton's output in 1931 was reprinted material, such as *Schoolboy's Own Library, Holiday Annual* (with little new from Hamilton now appearing within its covers), *Modern Boy* (Ken King of the Islands) and *Penny Popular*. Hamilton was, if anything, underworked. His ability was such that he could and did increase his output as required. Instead, when the *Gem* began the reprints, he appears to have cast St. Jim's from his mind and concentrated on the *Magnet*.

The circulation of the *Gem* increased for a while after the reprints began, more, perhaps, because of a new generation of readers than any other reason. What had escaped the attention of the Directors in Fleetway House was that the Hamilton stories had been read before by other boys and girls, now elder relatives of the new generation of readers. It is also true that, during the 1914-18 war, many of the troops at the front lines had been reading copies of the *Magnet* and the *Gem* sent from home. So the legend grew that the *Magnet* and *Gem* each had a five-year cycle before repeating identical stories.

A further confusion was caused by abridging the original stories, sometimes most infelicitously disturbing and corrupting the story line. Another sad error was that the coinciding of story with season did not always occur.

In retrospect we can see now that the experiment perhaps should never have been attempted. It was to last until the 1st April 1939 when new stories about Tom Merry and Co. by 'Martin Clifford' again graced the pages of the *Gem*, written with such fluency that Hamilton might never have paused at all.

CHAPTER NINE

The Golden Years

...of golden sands, and crystal brooks,
With silken lines, and silver hooks...
The Bait—J. Dunne

NOW that Hamilton was devoting nearly all his energies to Greyfriars, the 1930s were to be golden days for the *Magnet.* Admittedly he was still writing short stories for *Modern Boy*, stories which featured Len Lex, Ken King of the Islands, the Rio Kid, and the School for Slackers, but, in essence his time was devoted to Billy Bunter and Greyfriars.

The last substitute story, *Speedway Coker* in *Magnet* 1220, had bitten the dust. This final offering from M.F.Duffy completed the long list of issues which had not been from the Master's pen. From then on, from *Magnet* 1221 until the final issue, every story was written by Hamilton. This has been checked by W.O.G. Lofts against Amalgamated Press records.

Every character in the *Magnet* Remove Form had a firmly established background; his or her age, height, and weight were known; each study was allocated. Apart from rare occasions, only the occupants of Study No 1 in the Remove Passage varied over the years. New boys arrived, moved in with varying amounts of good will from Wharton and Nugent, and left at the end of the series. It seems certain that somebody, such as Samways, must have compiled a detailed record of the St. Jim's, Greyfriars and Rookwood ensembles, though none has ever come to light. This record was probably used by Pentelow to help in the creation of his *Galleries*; he may have even added to the information. I also firmly believe that Hamilton must have kept a record of such details. There are very few inconsistencies in his stories covering the three main schools and, however good his memory, I feel it is asking too much to assume that he did not keep a 'crib'.

Place any boy or member of the community in any situation, and the reader could forecast the outcome, such was the power of Hamilton's characterizations. Strangely, it seemed that the readers enjoyed knowing

who was the villain, how Skinner would react to Linley, how Coker would confront Prout, when Wharton's pride would reject friendship despite the opposite being the more obvious course.

The most famous character by Hamilton, William George Bunter, can be traced through its evolution from a fat, short-sighted but not entirely unpleasant schoolboy in 1908 to its final form in 1940 of a fatuous, greedy, untruthful youth from whom no food was safe. It might be thought that such an anti-hero would not attract the readers. But not for one instant did he lose his popularity after the 1920s, by which time he had become a key character. He was so popular with readers that in May 1937 the *Magnet* was sub-titled *Billy Bunter's Own Paper*, and continued with this title until Christmas 1939.

Much was made of the love-hate relationships (usually hate) that existed between the Bunter brothers and sister. Sammy and Bessie would fight tooth and nail to do Billy out of anything, while he would do likewise or worse by them.

To the astonishment of the world, however, the fat Owl did have another side to his character. It was not shown very often; the first time was in 1937, when this different William George was revealed in *Magnet* 1532. Billy Bunter was instrumental in the capture of some smash-and-grab raiders who had robbed Chunkley's Stores. As a result of this unusual public-spirited behaviour, he received £50 as a reward.

Hearing that his mother was unwell, William George has made his way home:

> "Why are you home from school?" asked Mr Bunter coldly. "I trust that this means no trouble at Greyfriars, William?"
> "Oh, no!" gasped Bunter. "Quelch gave me leave to come home."

Mr Bunter was having considerable money problems at the time, and he grimly suggested that Billy would have done better to stay at Greyfriars than expend money on the fare home. Bunter explained:

> "About Mums going to Bournemouth," said Bunter hastily. "You see, if the doctor says—I mean, if Mums can go—I say, how much would it cost? I say, could it be done on forty-four pounds?"
> Mr Bunter blinked at him. "I have no doubt," he said with grim sarcasm, "That it could be done on a less sum than forty-four pounds, William. Am I to understand that you have saved that amount out of your allowance at school?"
> "Oh, no!" gasped Bunter. "I couldn't out of half-a-crown a week, of-of course! How could I?"
> "Then for what reason, William, do you mention that particular sum?"
> "I've got it"
> "Wha-a-t?"

"Look!" said Bunter.

His fat, grubby hand came out of his pocket with a tattered notecase in it. The Owl of the Remove opened that notecase. From the interior he drew three ten pound notes, two five-pound notes and four one-pound notes.

Bunter attempted to explain how he obtained the money:

"You obtained this money by a smash-and-grab raid?" shrieked Mr Bunter.

"Yes, you see—"

"Unfortunate boy!" exclaimed Mr Bunter. "Is it possible—is it even remotely possible that a son of mine—"

Explanations succeeded at last:

"Oh, no! Nunno! Nothing of the sort! It was a reward!" yelled Bunter.

"A reward?"

"Yes. You see, they offered a reward of fifty pounds for information leading to the arrest of the smash-and-grabber and the recovery of the loot," gasped Billy Bunter, "and I—I spotted the man—"

Mrs Bunter interjected:

"It was very clever of Billy to discover the man and to earn the reward," said Mrs Bunter warmly. "A dear, good, clever boy—"

"I've got this left," said Bunter. "I—I wish it was the fifty. But—but I had to square a chap who lent me a quid for that cake, and Sammy had a pound, and some went—but it's forty-four pounds, father, and if that is enough to see mums through at Bournemouth—"

Doubts contemplated by Mr Bunter on what his son had in mind for disposing of the reward were now shelved and forgotten:

"'My own dear boy!" said Mrs Bunter, with a fond look at the fat Owl. "It is just like him! But nothing would induce me to..."

"Nonsense, Amelia!" said Mr Bunter decidedly. "This sum will meet the difficulty. The boy shall have his way."

"Oh, yes, mums!" said Bunter anxiously. "I came specially to bring it here before I spent any more of it."

"No, no!" said Mrs Bunter.

"Yes, yes!" said Mr Bunter.

"I won't touch it again," declared Bunter; "not a shilling—not a sixpence! But, I—I say, I—I came away without any dinner. I—I'd like some tea!"

Billy Bunter enjoyed that tea:

Perhaps, later, when he sat in the train for Courtfield, and thought of that tremendous spread in the Rag, destined now never to come

> off, he felt a pang; but if so, he drove it resolutely away. It was a tired, dusty, but cheerful Bunter that arrived at Greyfriars School just in time for 'calling-over'.

This particular episode shows William George Bunter in an unusual role, one he rarely demonstrates. It was also shown in the *Cora Quelch* series of 1915, when Bunter, in love with his form master's niece, was for a short time, a much improved fat Owl. The same occurred between this plump couple at Christmas 1916. But, as always, it was only a short lived change for the better, and perhaps this should have been expected. Basically, Bunter was a character best involved in some minor villainy. He could then appear at the crucial moment from under a railway seat to rescue an old gentleman, despite his normal lack of courage. No matter how often this ploy was used, the reader would read on, and by the end of the chapter Bunter would have recovered his nerve and announce to the world at large that 'pluck was his long suit.'

The Amalgamated Press editorial staff recognized which series were the most popular. The glowing letters received after the first *Harry Wharton Downfall* in 1924 led to an editorial request in 1932 for Hamilton to write another series with a similar background of rebellion. Hamilton obviously revelled in this task, for the character of Wharton was more complex and interesting than that of Tom Merry, his rival at St. Jim's, and his handling of such plots had become more expert with time. Over the life of the Magnet there were three great Wharton *Downfall* series. The term has been applied to indicate that it was Wharton against everyone else, going out of his way to alienate even those who were trying to help him. Friends like Nugent were ignored, as was Vernon-Smith who in one of his better moments offered good advice to the stubborn Wharton.

In the 1924 *Downfall* (*Magnet* 879-888) Harry Wharton received a telegram from his uncle and guardian, Colonel Wharton, asking to meet him at Ashford before he had to take another train. Putting his commitment to a football match first, Wharton missed the opportunity, as he later discovered, of bidding his guardian farewell. The rumour went round that Harry Wharton did not care for his guardian; the rest of the Famous Five were blamed for this, resulting in the inevitable rift. Perhaps Wharton should have known that it was Bunter and Skinner who were the scandal-mongers, but, by the time this was discovered, Wharton's stiff-necked pride had allowed affairs to go too far to permit apologies. Not only did Wharton distance himself from his pals, but he also alienated his good standing with his form master, Quelch, who relieved him of the Form Captaincy. When, at the end of the series, Wharton had chummed with the 'bad hats' of the Remove, he found

himself facing expulsion, a fate which was avoided only by the intercession of the Head Master.

This series lasted ten weeks, and set the pattern and standard for no fewer than three other series in which Wharton set himself against authority. To these must be added at least another two series in which new boys at the school were the catalyst for trouble between Wharton and Quelch. These stories illustrate some interesting points.

The seven-week serial, *Harry Wharton's Downfall*, started in *Magnet* 1255 in 1932 with a trivial incident involving Ponsonby of Highcliffe School. Soon Harry Wharton and his chums were having their first clash. The plot revolved around Harold Skinner's bicycle which was forcibly borrowed by Wharton, following Skinner encouraging Bunter to take Wharton's. It was then wrecked by Ponsonby who, of course, never did the right thing; he refused to pay for the damage. Skinner demanded £5 from Harry Wharton to repair his bike. Unwillingly Harry wrote to his uncle, the Colonel, for the cash. The reply asking if this was really needed was a hurt, particularly as Harry did not usually beg for extra pocket money. When the Colonel came to school to see him, it was only the efforts of Frank Nugent that prevented trouble between them.

However, while the Colonel was waiting in Study No 1, Billy Bunter crashed in, collided with him and scattered papers the former had been reading. After a touching scene in which the Whartons patched up their misunderstanding, Colonel Wharton returned home. While Bunter was afterwards lighting the study fire he half-burnt a paper which was recognized by Harry as being in his uncle's hand; he took it from the Owl to return to his uncle. In doing so, he caught sight of the remains of a sentence, 'Certainly no man can be expected to bear for ever the burden of a thoughtless, selfish, utterly ungrateful nephew...' Presuming this to refer to himself, he took umbrage and decided that, rather than accept anything more from his uncle, he would enter for a scholarship. The resultant need for hard study for the Founder's Scholarship created problems for Wharton as Form Captain and had an adverse effect on the Remove Football Team.

The Colonel's letter was, in fact, to Major Cherry about the latter's nephew, Paul Tyrrell. By the time the situation had been clarified, Harry Wharton had let Vernon-Smith displace him as Form Captain, and the rest of the Series was concerned with various battles between new and old Captains.

Finally the Bounder stepped out of line, as a result of which the entire form was detained for the remainder of the term. All ended well when Vernon-Smith resigned his office, confessed his fault, and helped Harry in his re-election.

Each *Downfall* has its particular highlight. In the one under discussion the best passage was the meeting of reconciliation between Colonel Wharton and Harry (Magnet 1259). Bunter had told the Colonel about the letter.

> "And this is all?" asked Colonel Wharton. He crumpled the fragment of paper, and threw it into the fire. "That is all?"
> "Ye-e-es."
> "Good gad! And, but for that meddlesome boy, Bunter, you might have continued in your error—the mistake might never have been explained. It is a mistake that you ought never to have made, Harry—and one that could have been explained at once, but for your obstinate and foolish pride."
> "I-I know! Oh, uncle, I-I-I'm sorry! I've been an ungrateful brute, and-and all the time—" Wharton choked.
> "Come, my boy," the colonel's voice was gentle now. "You have acted foolishly, and hurt me very deeply, but—"
> "I've been a fool!' muttered the junior. "They all said it must be some horrible mistake—I couldn't see it—I never dreamed—I-I suppose I was obstinate and sulky—if I'd only taken Franky's advice—and they all said the same, and I wouldn't listen—"
> His voice broke. "Let us be thankful that the matter is cleared up," said Colonel Wharton. "Let us forget all about it, my boy. I will dismiss it from my mind—and you must do the same. Now, my taxi is waiting. Your Aunt Amy is anxious to see you—she knows nothing of this, and need not know—the whole thing must be forgotten. Come!"
> "You-you want me to-to come home-after—" Wharton stammered. "It would serve me right if-if—"
> "Nonsense! I tell you the whole wretched thing is to be forgotten at once. Pack up your things. Hurree Singh will come with you. The taxi is waiting, and you know—" the Colonel smiled, "I cannot afford to keep taxi-cabs waiting these days."

The next *Downfall* was, perhaps arguably, the greatest of them all. At first sight, two similar stories in one year might appear to stretch the theme too far, but, this magnificent twelve-week series, *The Rebellion of Harry Wharton* (*Magnet* 1285-1296), was to prove that the readers could not have too much of a good thing.

From the first page Gerald Loder was the arch-villain, contriving to make Harry Wharton rebel against authority while hiding his own part in the affair from the eagle eye of Quelch. This perhaps was easier than it might have been, since Quelch had been holding Loder in some degree of esteem for the only time in that blackguard's praefectorial career. Succeeding in his persecution, Loder alienated Wharton from his chums by causing suspicion to cloud their judgment.

In the fine story, *Nobody's Pal* (*Magnet* 1293), Wharton lost the friendship of the elegant and perspicacious Earl Mauleverer, his last supporter in the Remove. 'Mauly', in his inimitable style, tried to prevent Wharton rebelling against the authority of Quelch on every occasion, even stopping Harry going out of bounds with Cedric Hilton, a Fifth Former. Outraged, Wharton accused Mauleverer of interference, and tried to get his Lazy Lordship to fight, unsuccessfully at first. The ensuing scrap was stopped by the Captain of the school, George Wingate, no doubt to Mauly's relief.

Wharton was summoned before Quelch to explain what he had been doing out of bounds, as had been reported by Loder. Harry realized his narrow escape, and tried then to apologize to the Schoolboy Earl. But Mauly said:

> "You've nothing to tell me—nothing I want to hear, at any rate!"
> Lord Mauleverer paused a second. "Sorry I butted into your bizney. It's a mistake I don't often make. Rely on it, it will never happen again! Can't do more than apologise for mistake!"
> He walked on.
> "Mauly!" muttered Wharton huskily.
> Lord Mauleverer walked on, without turning his head.
> Wharton stood looking after him for a moment or two. Curious eyes were upon him, but he did not heed them—did not see them. He turned away at last. It was over, and he knew it; he had worn out the patience of his last friend, and now he was left alone! The scapegoat of Greyfriars was now the friendless outcast of the school.

One of the climaxes was the demotion of Gerald Loder from the praefectorial body. It was a superb study in characterization in which Loder told one lie too many in the august presence of his headmaster—and Bunter was there to prove the truth of Wharton.

Ralph Stacey, Wharton's cousin was the 'star' of a series in 1935, *Harry Wharton's Double* (*Magnet* 1422). It was another fine example of trouble at school in which Wharton's double was to be the cause of many accusations against the Captain of the Remove. However, Stacey's propensity for shady pursuits eventually caught him out despite Harry's pride and wilful temper.

A similar theme was used in 1938, when Gilbert Tracey (note the similar name) tried all manner of escapades to bring about his own expulsion. These culminated in the locking of Quelch and Bunter in the punishment room ('Punny'). When Tracey received his just deserts, and is, in turn, locked in 'Punny', the mayhem caused by the 'Mysterious Night Raider' made one of the most amusing anecdotes ever told by Charles Hamilton.

These two series have almost identical endings. Both anti-heroes have rough edges knocked off them; they decide to play the game and accept school life with its discipline. Hamilton always worked by the rule that everybody had some good in them. Apart from Ponsonby of Highcliffe, no characters in any of his schools were villains all the time.

The other great genre of Hamilton was his *Holiday* series. These in the 1930s reached a zenith, ranging from the long *China* series to the short one about *Portercliffe Hall.*

The *China* series in 1930 was one of the best and most enjoyable, in which Wun Lung, the Chinese junior, became the target of Tang Wang, the Mandarin of Canton. When danger threatened his life at Greyfriars, it was decided to take him back to his father in China, escorted by Ferrers Locke, a Baker Street detective. The action flowed thick and fast; all efforts to kill or capture Wun Lung or the Greyfriars boys were eventually defeated. The atmosphere of China and stops *en route* built up a fascinating picture of a huge country peopled by pig-tailed coolies and war-minded mandarins, who, like Tang Wang, were often head of a Tong (*Magnet* 1175-1186).

Harry Wharton and Co. went to Africa in 1931 when Mr Vernon-Smith, who had to attend to business interests in Kenya, took his son and selected friends on a visit. In typical fashion Hamilton produced a native Kikuyu called Kikolobo who attached himself devotedly to the Greyfriars party after Smithy saved his life. Lions, snakes, slave traders all appeared amid a real feel of the jungle (*Magnet* 1228-1236).

The *Egyptian* trip in 1932 was sponsored by Lord Mauleverer, and revolved around the Golden Scarab of A-Menah, part of an ancient collection of artefacts in Mauleverer Towers. A long overland and sea voyage brought the boys to Cairo, where they met with Hassan the dragoman and Mr Maroudi, a rich Egyptian business man. Kalizelos, a Greek intent on stealing the Golden Scarab, provided the danger. The descriptions around the Pyramids and on the Nile were superb (*Magnet* 1277-1284).

A glorious summer series in 1933 brought the Greyfriars boys into the counties of England on a hiking tour. Every series needs a plot, and in this one the *Holiday Annual* contained a secret message; it was, incidently, a quiet bit of advertising for the *Annual.* The message was sought after by Ponsonby and his fellow nuts of Highcliffe School. In this series the boys covered many miles, and met with many adventures in small rural villages; it gave this series a happy and pleasant feeling (*Magnet* 1331-1340).

A shorter series set in England in 1935 was the enjoyable *Portercliffe Hall* adventure. Fisher T. Fish in the lead role, supported by his

'popper', Hiram K. Fish, surprised the Famous Five by taking them and others for a holiday at Portercliffe Hall in Kent, all expenses paid. Anything presided over by the Fish family was bound to have deep waters flowing somewhere. True to form, ghosts, sovereigns and robbers kept the plot moving swiftly; in addition, much was contributed by Chandos, the butler at Portercliffe, a great character in typical Hamilton style. It took little imagination to feel that you were in the house and grounds of Portercliffe Hall (*Magnet* 1434-1439).

The last main series in 1939 took the Famous Five onto the River Thames in a boat called the *Water-Lily*. Rather like the *Hiking* series, the boys unknowingly carried something with them. This time it was to be booty from a robbery hidden in the locker by 'Shifty' Spooner, a thief who used the boat as a base. Like the *Hiking* series, it had Ponsonby attempting to 'borrow' the *Water-Lily*, just as he had tried to steal the *Holiday Annual*. There was also an adventure with a tramp, one Alf 'Opkins; this brought home to Bunter that cooking breakfast for the Famous Five might be bad enough, but it faded into insignificance when forced to do the same for a tramp, particularly when the boys did not believe him when they returned. This last holiday before the Second World War started took the view that all was right with the world. Everything was there to contribute to an idyllic English sense of pleasure: hot summer days, the occasional downpour, warm evenings, peaceful relaxation after a day at the oars (*Magnet* 1643-1650). How quickly it all was to change in the real world!

All these series contain that Hamilton touch of style that transported the reader to 'fresh fields and pastures new'. If you knew the Thames, you could identify the places through which the boys passed. Dickens could rivet the reader with his descriptions, and Hamilton was only too happy to follow that master's example.

In the *Texas* and *South Seas* series (*Magnet* 1573-1582 and 1589-1598, respectively) Hamilton featured two of his creations from other magazines, the Rio Kid and Ken King (King of the Islands). Both of these were regulars in *Modern Boy*, the former in stories under the pseudonym of 'Ralph Redway', and the latter in yarns by an author called Charles Hamilton. Despite this, few readers recognized that 'Redway', 'Richards' and Hamilton were one and the same, no matter what they may have claimed later.

Some readers did guess the connection between 'Frank Richards' in the *Magnet* and 'Martin Clifford' in the *Gem*; others profess to have made the link with 'Owen Conquest' and Rookwood as well. This should not have been too difficult. The co-operation needed between three different authors to write properly interlinked series would have been

too complicated to organize effectively; with just one, it was easy.

Among the big Series the season of Christmas demands a special mention with its variety of settings like Cavandale Abbey, Mauleverer Towers, Wharton Lodge, and Reynham Castle and Polpelly. At this last place, one of the best Hamiltonian Christmases ever was spent (*Magnet* 1452-1456). The story griped the reader in a way rarely found; even Dickens would found the following hard to better:

> The dusk deepened to dark.
>
> Only the leaping firelight illumined the old dusky hall, casting strange lights and shadows on the ancient oak of the walls and the floor.
>
> Wharton rose from the chair at last, with the intention of lighting the candles. As the trip into the smugglers' cave had been abandoned, he expected his friends to return much earlier than had been planned.
>
> A faint sound caught his ears as he rose, and he glanced round quickly. He felt a sudden thrill as he realised he was not alone in the shadowy hall.
>
> It was not old Dan'l; he would have heard the wooden leg stumping on the stone flags if the ship's cook had come up the passage to the kitchen. With his back to the fire Harry stared along the great hall to the deep dusky shadows at the farther end.
>
> His teeth shut hard.
>
> Dim in the shadows, but visible in the uncertain leaping of the fire—silent, strange and ghostly—the figure of the phantom of Polpelly stood before his eyes.
>
> It was the figure and the face of the old sea-captain in the portrait; the Elizabethan garb to the last detail—the pointed beard and trim moustache, the harsh, strongly marked features and the bushy eyebrows.
>
> Wharton felt the blood run to his heart with a chill...

Of course, Dickens would have done it differently. One stylistic difference between the two authors is that, in moments of high drama or intense description, Dickens often unconsciously wrote in blank verse, sometimes for many pages on end; this style may have resulted from his practice of reading his works aloud to the public. The most famous example probably is the description of the ride along the coast and the coming storm in *David Copperfield.* Hamilton used nothing as complex. He did not depend on the sound and rhythm of the words, but relied on placing little items of information next to each other to build up the atmosphere. The effect on the reader is equally telling.

From the middle of the *Muccolini Circus* series (*Magnet* 1484) the 'filler' story was discontinued, and from this date the whole of the

Magnet was written by 'Frank Richards', except for the Editor's chat entitled *Come Into the Office, Boys and Girls*, and other similar items. The *Greyfriars Herald* continued to appear in the centre pages. After George Richmond Samways left the Amalgamated Press, William Catchpole wrote most of the *Greyfriars Herald* and the 30 poems, *The Stately Homes of Greyfriars*, each one about the home of a Greyfriar's boy, such as *Wharton Lodge* or *Bunter Court*; for the *Gem* he wrote the item *Just My Fun—Monty Lowther Calling.*

The school magazines were 'edited' by the boys, by Harry Wharton in the case of the *Greyfriars Herald.* Even when the Greyfriars Chums went to China in 1930, he continued as usual in the editorial chair. However, realism came to the fore in 1938 when the *South Seas* series was published for Wharton wrote in his editorial:

> I shall be unable to continue my duties as editor of the *Greyfriars Herald* while I am thousands of miles away; as nobody seems anxious to take on the job during the hols, I have decided to let Fisher T. Fish have a shot at it.

Fish's editorial policy appeared to be none, except to chatter incessantly in *Your Editor Calling* about how much of a live-wire he was. He continued in his temporary post as Editor of the *Greyfriars Herald* until the middle of October.

With such attention to detail, it was no wonder that the *Magnet* became so real to its readers that belief grew in the actual existence of *The Old School.* Many editors, both past and present, had to evade the question from readers on the reality and location of Greyfriars. Every few weeks yet another letter would come asking the whereabouts of the school. These were always answered, '...in Kent, near to the sea...', which left plenty of options.

CHAPTER TEN

Disaster looms ahead!

...at my back I always hear
Time's wingèd chariot hurrying near...
To his coy Mistress—Marvell

THE year of 1937 saw the thirtieth anniversary of the *Gem*. With regard to its cover, it is interesting to note that a greater number of artists was used for the *Gem* than the *Magnet*. During its *blue* period, so called from the cover colour, artists like A.H. Clarke, Hutton Mitchell, R.J. Macdonald, and Warwick Reynolds drew nearly all the *Gem* illustrations, until Macdonald became the regular artist from mid-1910. This continued until he enlisted in the Royal Navy during World War I, at which point Reynolds took over until his return.

The situation was different for the *Magnet*. It is now agreed that Hutton Mitchell was the illustrator for the first thirty or so numbers, after which Arthur Clarke occupied this post for a time. Although the latter produced work of higher quality, he unfortunately tended to make all the boys look alike, an aspect which detracted from his work.

In 1911 C.H. Chapman took over and stamped his own style on the Greyfriars boys, especially on Bunter, who had varied between striped and checked trousers; under Chapman he became the familiar, rotund, check-trousered Fat Owl. Leonard Shields joined the team in 1928 and, with Chapman, drew nearly all the Magnet illustrations until its demise in 1940.

The *Magnet* seems to have fared better then the *Gem* with regard to art work as a result of more sensible control of the artists. This raises the question that, if one author could write most of the stories, why could not one artist have been used for most of the illustrations? It should have resulted in a better sense of continuity.

During the mid thirties the *Magnet* had been going from strength to strength on new material, while the *Gem* was suffering from reprints of old stories. As discussed earlier, perhaps not surprisingly the circulation of the latter began to fall; this became obvious over the period from 1936 to 1938. This was commented upon in readers'

letters, including one from Eric Fayne (of whom we heard in Chapter 8) in which he requested that 'Martin Clifford' should write a series of new stories for the ailing *Gem*, Following this up, the editor, with the agreement of the Directors, arranged for a new series of St. Jim's stories; this was announced in April 1939 (*Gem* 1624).

Set in Venice, the *Black Box* series (*Gems* 1625-1634) caused Charles Hamilton no difficulty in background details, since all he had to do was cast his mind back to his visit there with Miss N.Y. in the 1920s. Hamilton had not written at any length about St. Jim's for many years, yet it was as though his pen had never dried out. Not only did he pick up the threads, but he did so in such a way that the charm of St. Jim's shone forth again with series following series.

During the ten exciting instalments of the *Black Box* series Tom Merry and Co were in constant danger from Pawson, Lord Eastwood's man. The boys then returned to school for the *Secret Passage* series (*Gem* 1635-1640). Fatty Wynn of New House had discovered a secret passage into School House, and the scene was set for a grand series of inter-house rags.

Tom Merry and Co. next went deep into the heart of the South American jungle, battling against jaguars, alligators, and bandits, to name but a few of the hazards they were to encounter (*Gem* 1641-1646). Arthur Augustus D'Arcy had taken a number of his friends there to find his brother, Lord Conway, who was missing after vanishing into the jungle.

The last series (*Gem 1647-1663*) was extra long, and ran for seventeen weeks to the final issue. It revolved around a new character, James Silverson. His avowed aim in life was to disgrace Tom Merry and engineer his expulsion from St. Jim's. Week after week, his failed attempts made fascinating reading, particularly as Tom Merry knew, but could not convince Miss Fawcett, his guardian, of the truth. Eventually Harry Manners caught Silverson at his roguery, and Tom Merry had the cloud lifted from him.

Unlike the *Magnet* with its cover-to-cover Greyfriars stories, the *Gem* was still hampered by supporting yarns. That both were written by Hamilton did not make any difference, for the *Benbow* stories of the school aboard a ship were reprints from the *Greyfriars Herald* of 1919, and the dated, albeit pleasant, plots and characters weighed little against the stalwarts of Greyfriars, St. Jim's, and Rookwood.

The other short story each week was about *Cedar Creek School*, which was supposed to be about the school days of 'Frank Richards' in Canada. Sadly, this does not rate among Hamilton's best efforts. As the two 'fillers' took twelve pages between them, this left only twenty-

four for the St. Jim's story. Hamilton wrote better when not too constrained by length; 30,000 words seems to have been his favourite, not the 16,000 allowed him in the later *Gems.*

About this time D.C.Thomson, a Scottish publishing house, had been gaining ground on the Amalgamated Press by use of a format consisting of six or seven light-weight stories on a wide range of subjects, all humorous or amazing in their plots. Invisible boys, men from Mars taking over the earth, or super athletes were just a few examples. Although the format was not dissimilar to the A.P.'s *Modern Boy,* it was a quite different type of story. The Thomson pieces were written by uncredited authors; no bye-lines were ever given or have been to date. The stories, although not badly written, lacked the deeper and more intense quality found in the A.P. stories. They required a less effort to enjoy whereas the *Magnet, Gem, Modern Boy* and others from the A.P. required more thought from the reader.

D. C.Thomson had surveyed the comics and weekly papers bought by the youngsters of the 1940s. The surprising result was that their *Wizard* comic took the top place. This vindicated their approach; they had gauged the young readers' requirements more accurately than had the Amalgamated Press. Right down at the bottom of the list appeared items from their rivals, the *Children's Newspaper, Boy's Own Paper, The Scout,* and only a little way above them, the *Magnet* and the *Gem.*

In the early months of 1940 the circulation of the *Magnet* fell to a danger level of 41,660 copies per week. The *Gem* was even lower at 15,810. The Amalgamated Press had a hard decision to make. Due to the onset of World War II, there was now a considerable paper shortage and the number of the boys' papers had to be reduced. The circulation figures must have been discussed in the Board Room in March or April or perhaps as late as May 1940, when the Directors decided that only the strongest should survive. Out went the *Magnet* at the start of the latest story featuring Wharton, Hacker and Quelch. Incorporation of the *Magnet* into the *Knockout* did not continue the story from that last issue, but replaced it with a two-page cartoon strip story by Frank Minnitt based on the Greyfriars characters of Quelch, Bunter and little else. The A.P. *Triumph* was incorporated into the *Champion,* The *Boy's Cinema* disappeared entirely; the monthly *Schoolboy's Own Library* held out until June 1940 before that, too, was lost. The *Children's Newspaper* survived, but out went the *Detective Weekly.* The *Thriller* was another to be closed down, leaving few survivors of the heyday of the Amalgamated Press.

Since the introduction of the *Knockout* in March 1939, a *Billy Bunter of Greyfriars* two-page feature had been running; it consisted of twelve

pictures by C.H. Chapman with captions underneath. Some weeks the illustrations had been drawn by another hand (Frank Minnitt), but ceased in this form after a twelve-week run. During those first twelve weeks the subject of a number of the pictures had been based on *Muccolini's Circus* (*Magnets* 1481-1490), now renamed *Tomsonio's Circus.*

When Frank Minnitt took over completely after the first twelve weeks, it was with a casually drawn cartoon strip of small pictures. The characters were pale ghosts of the original Greyfriars personalities. Bunter was portrayed as an average fat boy, constantly getting into trouble for the most trivial reasons with a farcical version of Mr Quelch. It was not Greyfriars as the readers had known it, and it seems that the A.P. must have been aware of their reaction and tried to reassure them. Two weeks after the demise of the *Magnet*, a new combined title of *Knockout and Magnet* appeared on the 1st June 1940 issue with a forlorn statement at the top of the page: *This is Magnet too, Billy Bunter and Greyfriars.* It was not enough; the fact remained that the old *Magnet* had been reduced to two pages of cartoon strips and no further space had been allotted for Greyfriars stories. Later in the *Knockout* and then in the *Valiant*, the drawings were done by A.T. Pease whose more robust and humorous style suited the fat Owl of the Remove better than that of Minnitt.

The final indignity for Charles Hamilton was the introduction of Jones Minor as a strip cartoon character. Jones Minor appeared fleetingly in the *Magnet*, and then had vanished into the reference book long ago. Nevertheless, Jones Minor or Smith Minor was to become the named schoolboy in all future adventures in such comics, such as the *Valiant* (1963). To further rub salt into his wounds, Hamilton received only a small sum for the use of his Billy Bunter creation. He was also unable to exert any control over the use of his characters, though, to be fair, only Bunter and Mr Quelch were used extensively, with few references to Toddy, Wharton, Cherry and the others.

In a similar way to the *Magnet*, the *Gem* was merged with the *Triumph*, in which Hamilton was permitted space for a small story. These stories continued amongst other stories, such as those of 'Mad Carew', an ace wartime flyer who had been well established in the paper before the arrival of the boys of St. Jim's. The *Gem* went down and the *Triumph* continued; such was the way of 1940. However, with Tom Merry and Silverson in the fore, the *Gem* went out, not with a whimper, but a bang!

On the 18th May 1940 in the issue of *Magnet* 1683 no mention was made in the Editorial that the same fate faced this perennial. Readers were even urged not to miss the next week's offering, *The Battle of The*

Beaks; in the current issue Harry Wharton in *The Shadow of the Sack* had started yet again a familiar slide into hot water against authority, this time against Mr Hacker. However, Hamilton had remembered from the previous series (*Wharton The Rebel*) that Quelch had once lost faith in Wharton too quickly, so, when Wharton faced Quelch to explain his apparent involvement with Mr Banks, a disreputable bookmaker at the *Three Fishers Inn*, Quelch was careful to say:

> There was an occasion once, when I lost my trust in you, partly owing to an unfortunate misunderstanding, partly to your own stubborn temper. This misunderstanding was cleared up, and I resolved at that time never to be misled in the same way again.

This promised a new plot, with no uncharacteristic disbelief between trusted head boy and his form master. It appeared that the new series was to be Hacker against Quelch, not the two masters against Wharton.

Sadly *The Battle of The Beaks* never appeared in the newsagents. Without any warning the *Magnet* ceased to grace their counters. Nor did the stories known to have been written: *Bandy Bunter*, *What Happened to Hacker*, and *The Hidden Hand*. These had not only been received by the Amalgamated Press, but Hamilton had been paid for them. Many keen Hamiltonians have sought them in Fleetway House without success; like the ghost at cockcrow they vanished, never to be seen again. Had Hamilton been asked to rewrite these stories at a later date, he would have been quite capable of so doing. And then we could have found out what did happen to Hacker. Instead, there only remains mystery and regret for the lost conclusion to the *Shadow of the Sack*.

The final published circulation figures for the *Gem* were 15,810 in comparison with the *Magnet's* 41,660. Analysing the costs for that *Gem* produces an interesting conclusion. Hamilton was paid £1/10/0 per 1,000 words, i.e., £30 for the last issue, together with an honorarium for reprinted stories of Greyfriars, at say £2. At 2d per copy retail cost, the revenue from that issue would have been £131/15/0. After paying the author for his new story, a balance of £99/15/0 remained to pay costs of production, distribution and recovery of overheads. Presumably there would have been some advertising revenue, but this cannot have added much. The *Gem* had become a considerable drain on the Amalgamated Press.

By comparison, the last issue of the *Magnet* should have earned the publishers £347/3/4. With much the same production costs, and allowing for extra payment to the author for the longer story, there could scarcely have been much of a surplus there, either. It was a far cry from the Golden Days of the 1930s with circulation figures around

a quarter of a million, and a weekly income of about £2,700 for the publishers. The profits must have been substantial, but now both *Magnet* and *Gem* had become millstones around the neck of the Amalgamated Press. They had to go.

It is known that Hamilton had to buy his own copies of the *Magnet* and the *Gem*. This is not entirely surprising since the Amalgamated Press bought each story outright, and the sheer nuisance of sending a copy of a weekly boys' paper to each author would have been too much. Perhaps he was given a current copy when he went to Fleetway House, but, in essence, he bought all the copies that comprised his own collection. This may explain why there were no stories by substitute writers piled untidily in his cupboard at 'Rose Lawn'; why should he wish to buy somebody else's work? As I was to discover when I visited his study after his death, it was evident that he held the copies he had of the *Magnet*, *Gem* and *Modern Boy* in no particular esteem. Various series of the *Magnet*, like those of the *Sahara*, *Congo*, *Courtfield Cracksman*, *Flip of the Second Form*, *Harry Wharton's Downfall* (1932), *Jim Valentine*, *Smedley*, *Portercliffe* and *Valentine Compton*, were all from the Golden Period, but were tattered, often torn, and loosely tied with string in little bundles. Mostly, as in the case of the *Modern Boy*, the copies had been folded back to where his story began with the copy number written large on the top of the page in heavy black pencil. His *Magnet* copies were folded back to page 3 where the story started, with the number written above the title in the same heavy black pencil. Covers were removed from copies that had not been illustrated by Chapman or Shields, suggesting that he did not care for certain artists, one of whom was Philip Hayward. True to what he said to me, there were no early copies of the boy's papers for which he had written; these had all gone for paper salvage in the first World War.

Hamilton may have received free copies of the *Greyfriars Holiday Annuals*, since he had more copies of some years than others. Similarly, when his work began to appear in book form, for which he was paid in royalties, he also received six copies of each book, many of which he gave away.

16. Charles Hamilton in the sitting room at Rose Lawn, May 1950. Oil painting by Norman Maurice Kadish based on author's original black/white photograph.

17. Two views of St. Jim's College, Sussex. Model made in Pyruma by author, based on plans in the *Chuckles* comic, 1920/21.

18. Greyfriars School, Kent. Model made in Pyruma by author, based on plans in the *Chuckles* comic 1920.

19. *Merry-Go-Round.* Rare No 1 of only four issues containing *Dick and Doris* picture story by Hamilton under the pen name of Frank Richards.

CHAPTER 11

No Income—only Income Tax

These things surely lie on the knees of the Gods.
Odyssey—Homer

IN 1940 Hamilton was approaching his sixty-fourth birthday. He was a fairly fit man for his age, apart from the eye trouble, the effects of which he had managed to offset with the aid of purple typewriter ribbon and the use of electric light which he preferred to daylight when working. Miss Hood, his house-keeper, was probably more responsible for his health than any other person. Hamilton enjoyed plain cooking, and did not care much for new dishes. Miss Hood remarked that she did not think he ate enough, and that he was 'not a great eater of meat'.

A quiet home life, a pipe of tobacco and small creature comforts seemed to be all that Hamilton now required of the world, and many a lesser mortal of similar age would normally have been looking forward to retirement—or at least, a slackening of previous effort. Perhaps Hamilton had been, but he certainly did not expect the complete shutdown which hit him when the *Magnet*, *Gem* and similar comics suddenly ceased publication in 1940. After surviving one world war and seeming set to survive 'that man' Hitler, the *Magnet* and *Gem* had struck a hidden rock in the form of falling circulation figures.

No longer was Hamilton extended to write the forty to fifty thousand words each week, as had been his usual task. Instead, he began writing short pieces for any publication that would use his type of adventure stories. Late in life though it was for him, he even created a new school called 'Carcroft' which went into print in *Pie* magazine. But these snippets could not disguise that fact that suddenly in 1940 Charles Hamilton found himself out of demand for the first time in his life. The constant call on his services had been shut off as if a tap had been closed. The typewriter which had rattled its way through millions upon millions of words would now, it seemed, lie quiet, and the grand old man could rest at last, alone with his dreams of Greyfriars.

It might have seemed a contented picture of retirement to the outside world, but this was far from the case. Apart from the shock it must have

represented to Hamilton, money was also a trouble, for he had never looked to the future. His generous habit of helping his sister Una (and later his niece and other friends), together with past frivolities, now meant his savings were small. To make things worse, it was clear that the tax man was going to be a trouble, as he had been to Mr Bunter in the *Magnet*:

> I have no idea, so far, how I shall meet my income-tax in July. Probably you know, William, that income-tax is now five shillings in the pound.

Alas, Hamilton was now in a position worse than Mr Bunter, for his tax bill had to be paid for the previous year, but now without the usual income coming in. He had always paid his bills regularly, not liking to keep people waiting, and not liking to be kept waiting himself. Now the tax man would arrive with his demands, and the money would have been spent. Like so many self-employed, for years Hamilton had paid his tax bills out of the following year's income. This practice, so safe in the past, had sprung its trap.

There were other troubles. In the early days of the war Hamilton had to move out of 'Rose Lawn' by request of the local authorities; he and many of his neighbours were considered to be too close to the cliffs where they might be exposed to shelling. He repaired to the Hampstead area again where there were plenty of houses to rent.

Apart from his tax troubles and the request by the authorities for him to leave 'Rose Lawn', Hamilton had been disturbed by an article in a magazine called *Horizon*, a monthly publication on the arts. Cyril Connolly, the editor, had commissioned a series of articles from a well-known writer, George Orwell (Eric Arthur Blair). The subject of Orwell's article in the issue of March 1940 was *Boys' Weeklies*, in which particular reference was made to the *Magnet* and *Gem*.

Orwell said about the *Magnet* and *Gem* that:

> A good many boys now regard them as old-fashioned and 'slow'. Nevertheless I want to discuss them first, because they are more interesting psychologically than the others.

He then summarized the general pattern of the weekly issues, and remarked:

> ...that the schoolboy characters are still the same as they were, long before the Great War.

Hamilton, in his reply to the article, did not take up this point, in spite of the changes wrought on Bunter over a period of thirty years.

Orwell continued:

> It is difficult to believe that a series running for thirty years could actually be written by the same person each week. Consequently, they have to be written in a style that is easily imitated—an extraordinary, artificial, repetitive style, quite different from anything else now existing in English literature.

An extract from the *Magnet* and *Gem* followed, illustrating a typical passage where Bunter for the *Magnet* and Gussy for the *Gem* expressed themselves freely about various misfortunes that they were suffering. In his reply Hamilton refrained from pointing out that only a small part of his stories were concerned with this type of activity.

Orwell suggested that the slang used in the Hamilton stories was taken from *Stalky and Co.*, and that this source supplied some of the names of the characters:

> ...such as Mr Prout. The name of Greyfriars is probably taken from Thackeray, and Gosling, the school porter in the *Magnet*, talks in an imitation of Dickens' dialect.

He continued:

> The *Gem* and *Magnet* probably owe something to the school story writers who were flourishing when they began. Gunby Hadath, Desmond Coke and the rest, but they owe more to nineteenth century models. In so far as Greyfriars and St. Jim's are like real schools at all, they are much more like Tom Brown's *Rugby* than a modern public school. Neither school has an O.T.C., for instance, games are not compulsory, and the boys are even allowed to wear what clothes they like. But without doubt the main origin of these books is *Stalky & Co.*

George Orwell then dealt with sex, which he said was:

> ...completely tabu, especially in the form in which it actually arises at public schools. Occasionally girls enter into the stories and very rarely there is something approaching a mild flirtation, but it is always entirely in the spirit of clean fun. A boy and girl enjoy going for bicycle rides together—that is all it ever amounts to. Kissing, for instance, would be regarded as 'soppy'. Even the bad boys are presumed to be completely sexless. Religion is also tabu; in the whole thirty years' issue of the two papers the word 'God' probably does not occur, except in *God save the King*.

In his examination of the Hamilton style Orwell was right on several points, and these were not challenged or commented upon by Hamilton in his reply. One point, in particular, was:

> ...one comes upon the real secret of the *Gem* and *Magnet* and the probable reason why they continued to be read in spite of their

> obvious out-of-dateness. It is that the characters are so carefully graded as to give almost every type of reader a character he can identify himself with... In the *Gem* and *Magnet* there is a model for nearly everybody."

Orwell defined the different types of characters with a fair degree of success, apart from putting Nugent into the same group as Tom Merry and Jack Blake (normal, athletic, high-spirited boys) instead of placing him with Harry Manners (a quieter, more serious group in which he had placed Harry Wharton, a serious error).

This last extract from Orwell's article has been quoted in a number of books and articles, for it summed up the views held by the writer:

> The mental world of the *Gem* and *Magnet*, therefore, is something like this:
>
> The year is 1910—or 1940, but it is all the same. You are at Greyfriars, a rosy-cheeked boy of fourteen in a posh tailor-made clothes, sitting down to tea in your study on the Remove passage after an exciting game of football which was won by an odd goal in the last half minute. There is a cosy fire in the study, and outside the wind is whistling. The ivy clusters thickly round the old grey stones. The King is on his throne and the pound is worth a pound, Over in Europe the comic foreigners are jabbering and gesticulating, but the grim grey battleships of the British fleet are steaming up the Channel and at the outposts of Empire the monocled Englishmen are holding the nigger at bay. Lord Mauleverer has just got another fiver and we are all settling down to a tremendous tea of sausages, sardines, crumpets, potted meat, jam and doughnuts. After tea we shall sit round the study fire having a good laugh at Billy Bunter and discussing the team for next week's match against Rookwood. Everything is safe, solid and unquestionable. Everything will be the same for ever and ever. That approximately is the atmosphere.

Although Orwell had read the *Magnet*, *Gem* and similar papers in his youth, it was clear that he was not conversant with way in which the ethos of the school stories had evolved over thirty years. In his article there were points of view which were, at best, debatable, at worst in error. After reading it, Hamilton sent a letter to Cyril Connolly pointing out that he was the author in question, and that he would like to reply. The editor allocated space in the May 1940 issue, and Hamilton, under his pen-name of 'Frank Richards' put a new sheet in the ancient Remington, and proceeded to answer Orwell's indictment.

The form of Hamilton's reply was rather like that of a lecturer addressing an intelligent student who had been misinformed, than of a writer coming to the rescue of his works. His opening remark is now

famous. He said:

> The editor has kindly given me space to reply to Mr Orwell, whose article on *Boys' Weeklies* appeared in *Horizon* No 3. Mr Orwell's article is a rather remarkable one to appear in a periodical of this kind. From the fact that *Horizon* contains a picture that does not resemble a picture, a poem that does not resemble poetry, and a story that does not resemble a story, I conclude that it must be a very high-browed paper indeed: and I was agreeably surprised, therefore, to find in it an article written in a lively and entertaining manner, and actually readable. I was still more interested as this article dealt chiefly with my work as an author for boys. Mr Orwell perpetrates so many inaccuracies, however, and flicks off his condemnations with so careless a hand, that I am glad of an opportunity to set him right on a few points.

This was the start of an answer couched in the terms of debate. By detailed analysis Hamilton picked up point after point with the skill of a practiced tennis player. To Orwell's remark that the boys were still in the 1910 period, Hamilton replied:

> His most serious charge against my series is that it smacks of the year 1910, a period which Mr Orwell appears to hold in peculiar horror. Probably I am older than Mr Orwell (*Hamilton was nearly 64, Orwell 37*) and I can tell him that the world went very well then. It has not been improved by the Great War, the General Strike, the out-break of sex-chatter, by make-up or lipstick, by the present discontents, or by Mr Orwell's thoughts upon the present discontents.

Orwell's comment that the stories could not have been written by one man was answered thus:

> Mr Orwell finds it difficult to believe that a series running for thirty years can possibly have been written by one and the same person. In the presence of such authority, I speak with diffidence: and can only say that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, I am only one person, and have never been two or three.

This was a tongue in cheek reply, for, although Hamilton did not say he wrote all the stories, the reader was led to believe that he did. At that time little was known by the public about the substitute writers, and Orwell could only have surmised that they must have existed. Hamilton continued:

> 'Consequently,' says Mr Orwell, cheerfully proceeding from erroneous premises to a still more erroneous conclusion, 'they must have been written in a style that is easily imitated'. On this point, I may say that I could hardly count the number of authors

who have striven to imitate Frank Richards, not one of whom has been successful. The style, what ever its merits or demerits, is my own, and—if I may say it with due modesty—inimitable. Nobody has ever written like it before, and nobody will ever write like it again. Many have tried: but as Dryden —an obsolete poet, Mr Orwell—has remarked:

> *The builders were with want of genius curst*
> *The second building was not like the first...*

To the charge of plagiarism, Hamilton responded:

> Frank Richards had never read Desmond Coke till the nineteen-twenties; he had never read Gunby Hadath—whoever Gunby Hadath may be—at all... Now it is true that there is a form-master at Greyfriars named Prout, and there is a house-master in Stalky named Prout. It is also true that the *Magnet* author is named Richards, and that there is a Richards in *Stalky and Co.* But the fifth-form master at Greyfriars no more derives from the Stalky Prout, than the *Magnet* author from the Stalky Richards. Stalky's Prout is a 'gloomy ass', worried, dubious, easily worked on by others. The Greyfriars Prout is portly, self-satisfied, impervious to the opinions of others. No two characters could be more unalike. Mr Prout of Greyfriars is a very estimable gentleman, and characters in a story, after all, must have names. Every name in existence has been used over and over again in fiction.
>
> The verb 'to jape' says Mr Orwell is also taken from Stalky. Mr Orwell is so very modern that I can not suspect him of having read anything so out of date as Chaucer. But if he will glance into that obsolete author, he will find 'jape' therein, used in precisely the same sense. 'Frabjous' also, it seems, is borrowed from Stalky! Has Mr Orwell never read 'Alice'? 'Frabjous', like 'chortle' and 'burble', derives from Lewis Carroll. Innumerable writers have borrowed 'Frabjous' and 'chortle'—I believe Frank Richards was the first to borrow 'burble', but I am not sure of this: such expressions, once in existence, become part of the language, and are common property.

Hamilton may have been mistaken about the use of 'jape' by Chaucer. The OED notes the earliest recorded use of 'jape' as being about 1460, distinctly later than the time of Chaucer, and it makes no mention of the use of 'jape' by Chaucer. Nevertheless, the fact remains that 'jape' is an old word in the English language.

Hamilton then went into the matter of sex in the *Magnet* and *Gem*:

> "Sex", says Mr Orwell, "is completely tabu." Mr Noel Coward, in his autobiography, is equally amused at the absence of the sex-motif in the *Magnet* series. But what would Mr Orwell have? The *Magnet*

> is intended chiefly for readers up to sixteen; though I am proud to know that it has readers of sixty. It is read by girls as well as boys. Would it do these children good, or harm, to turn their thoughts to such matters? Sex, certainly, does enter uncomfortably into the experience of the adolescent. But surely the less he thinks about it, at an early age, the better. I am aware that, in these 'modern' days, there are people who think that children should be told things of which in my own childhood no small person was ever allowed to hear. I disagree with this entirely.

The last observation from Hamilton on this point was:

> If Mr Orwell supposes that the average sixth-form boy cuddles a parlour maid as often as he handles a cricket bat, Mr Orwell is in error.

George Orwell's essay on *Boys' Weeklies* has been discussed and examined in detail over the years. A complicating factor is that there are two versions of the article, the *Horizon* version, and a longer one, written earlier, which can be found in a Penguin paperback, *Essays of George Orwell.* At the time of publication of the *Horizon* version no editorial comment made it clear that it was based on an earlier version. The extracts above are from the *Horizon* version

It is probable that Orwell was allowed a set number of words for each article. He had already written the longer version of *Boys' Weeklies* as it was to appear in the Penguin paperback; this had been completed in 1939 some months before the appearance of the shorter version in *Horizon* in March 1940. It would seem that he abridged the original article to fit the requirements of the *Horizon*; this is always a hard job, especially in this case when the original article was at least one-third longer than required. The effects of the excisions are small; in both versions Orwell concentrated mostly on the *Magnet* and *Gem.*

It is important to understand Orwell's background. He had been at Eton, and there had contributed to the college magazines and debating societies. He took a keen interest in people and politics, and, in this, was little different from his peers. When he left Eton in 1921 he joined the Indian Imperial Police and served in Burma. It seems that the next seven years changed his opinion of imperialism, and on leaving the police in 1928, he had become distanced from his original background.

Orwell turned his high intellect to describing the condition of the poor. *The Road to Wigan Pier* in 1937 is a good example, being an excellent account of the poverty he saw in Lancashire and Yorkshire. Like many people of his inclination of thought, he went to Spain to fight for the Republicans and where he was wounded.

With a political attitude which was distinctly to the left of centre, Orwell would not have been on the side of capitalists; Greyfriars and St. Jim's, with their air of privilege, would probably have been anathema to him. In a sense he was the perfect writer to attack the public school image, one who had experienced it at the highest level and, at the same time, saw its weaknesses. In his article on the *Boys' Weeklies* Orwell started splendidly in this vein. It is interesting to note, however, that, every now and then, he praised various parts of Hamilton's work like one professional acknowledging another. It is even more marked when the original article is examined; Orwell seemed to have to pull himself up every now and then, as if to say, 'I am criticizing this style of writing, not praising it'. He did a fine job of comparing the different magazines available to boys at the time. I wonder, though, whether he would have written quite the same article after he had seen Hamilton's reply in the *Horizon* of May 1940.

I understand from Miss Hood that George Orwell visited Charles Hamilton afterwards, and, no doubt, a lively but friendly conversation followed. It has never been reported anywhere as far as I know, but I do wish that it had been recorded and not lost to us, as is the case of so much in Hamilton's life.

When replying to George Orwell, Hamilton had refrained from answering the charge that God was never or rarely mentioned in the *Magnet* or *Gem*. Later, in 1945, Hamilton was asked to write a contribution for a current series in the *Saturday Book*. His article was entitled *'Boy's Writer'*.

Within the confines of his eleven-page, semi-autobiographical article, Hamilton told of his early days from the age of seventeen onward (as usual missing out those little facts that are of interest to the avid follower of his work). The items he did chronicle seemed to form a smoke-screen between him and his readers. But he did add something on the matter of religion and God:

> Most of (Orwell's) purblind criticisms were answered in my article in *Horizon*.One I did not touch upon. In all the long *Magnet* series, said George, there was no mention of God. This complaint was a little perplexing for I had gathered from Mr Orwell's works that personally he had no use for a Deity, though I hope I do him wrong. But surely it should be clear, even to George, that a work of light fiction is not one into which sacred subjects should be introduced. Religion, in a work of fiction, is out of place: either it looks like humbug, or it makes the rest of the story seem silly. Especially in boys' stories should it be avoided. It was a Victorian custom to put pills in the jam, and my own experience as a boy taught me that pills in the jam make a boy feel sick. All the more because I am a

> religious man, I carefully avoided putting religion into a boys' story. How well I remember my own feeling of utter distaste when I came upon it in the B.O.P. (*Boy's Own Paper*) and in Kingston and Ballantyne and other boys' writers of that distant day. It was a matter I took seriously even in boyhood: and I disliked to see it mixed up with football and cricket and practical jokes. I could never get the impression that the writer was sincere: such a subject, in a boys' book, can only be dragged in. One may pray oneself, and have a deep conviction that one's prayers have been answered; but to make a fictitious character do so with a like result seems to me utterly irreverent. Fiction is always dangerously near the edge of lying, and in such a case goes over the edge.
> It has always been one of my ambitions to write a book on religion (*See Appendix*), but if I ever do so, certainly it will not begin with 'I say, you fellows', or be published in weekly numbers. It was once asked, why should the Devil have all the good tunes? As reasonably it may be asked, why should he have all the wit and humour? Religion is attacked by the wits, and generally defended by the dullards. But the weapon of ridicule could just as easily be turned against the witty nitwits who are so much wiser than their maker.

Orwell's last major criticism had been answered, and not only George Orwell, but the vast ranks of *Magnet* and *Gem* readers learned for the first time Charles Hamilton's feelings on the subject of his faith.

It would not have been surprising. The readers of his stories could have no doubt about the moral standpoint of his plots. No doubt was left in the young mind that the right way, was the only way. Even Bunter, after absconding with Coker's tuck, had to pay for his sins before that particular story reached its conclusion. It was demonstrated that smoking was not only bad for a youngster's cricket or football pursuits, and lack of wind, but would most likely make the culprit sick.

After this flurry in the pages of *Horizon*, Hamilton retired from public view again, and concentrated on paying the tax-man. Tax-men are not ogres, but neither will they wait for ever for bills to be settled. They have the terribly practical idea that everyone should put aside sufficient of their earnings to be able to pay their tax, whatever happens in the future. As already noted, Hamilton had never looked to the future, for money for him was an item of 'easy come' and even 'easier go'.

When Hamilton moved out of his Kingsgate house, 'Rose Lawn', it entailed that he could neither let nor sell the property, even had he wished to do so. It now represented only a possible claim for 'War Damage Insurance'. In addition, many of his investments had fallen to an all time low; the Amalgamated Press shares, for example, had fallen from over one pound to as little as half-a-crown, a loss of nearly 90%.

Hamilton now spent much of his time in a small house in the Hampstead Garden Suburb area, and, in spite of all the problems, kept his head above water by writing the Carcroft stories for *Pie* magazine, which, somewhat to his regret, did not catch on as had the Greyfriars and St. Jim's stories. At the same time, he was prepared to write for any magazine, annual or paper to keep the money coming in. Hamilton believed in Wharton and Merry, and was waiting for them to reappear as soon as the good times came back.

CHAPTER 12

New Ventures

Time will not be ours forever.
He at length our good will sever.
Spend not then his gifts in vain.
Suns that set may rise again.
Song: To Celia—Ben Jonson

IT WAS now 1946. Hamilton had managed to weather the war years and was back in 'Rose Lawn', working at stories mainly about Carcroft and Sparshott. The latter was yet another new school, assuming the usual Hamilton shape complete with fat boy 'Plum' Tumpton, Tom Rake, Harry Vernon (it is interesting that Vernon appears again) and Barnes-Paget, the new Vernon-Smith. Sparshott, though amusing, did not catch on, but should certainly not be ignored in any examination of the post-war stories.

In the same year, a young man was setting up as a publisher. He had just got married and was on honeymoon at Oban in Scotland where he happened to see a copy of the *Picture Post* magazine dated 11th May 1946. Idly he glanced through it, and saw a three-page article entitled *Do you remember Billy Bunter?*

Charles Skilton was the young man. After reading the article he wondered whether Hamilton might write a Greyfriars story for him which he could publish as a hard-back book. He wrote to Hamilton outlining his idea, and was delighted to receive a prompt reply which was both friendly and willing to consider ways in which to meet Skilton's request. It is interesting that Skilton had only ever read one *Magnet*, '...which he started in the middle of a serial story, and, as he did not enjoy being landed in the middle of it, he never read any more'.

Negotiations were set in train by letter. There was an obstacle in the form of the Amalgamated Press who held the copyright on Greyfriars, St. Jim's, Rookwood and the characters created by Hamilton. Before Skilton could publish anything about them, permission had to be sought from the copyright holders.

Although Hamilton had ceased writing the *Magnet* and *Gem*, he had

met a number of the more important editorial managers of the Amalgamated Press, one of whom was Percy Montague Haydon, now in the position of Controlling Editor. Hamilton thought that 'Monty' would be able to help him obtain the necessary permission for Skilton to publish a Bunter book, if for no other reason than 'for old times sake'.

It is rumoured that Hamilton put on his oldest clothing, neat but worn, and arrived at the Amalgamated Press to see Haydon at precisely the appointed hour to ask for his assistance. Hamilton explained that Skilton had offered to publish a Bunter story in hard-back. Monty Haydon felt that the Amalgamated Press could bend a little towards their erstwhile favourite author, and the copyright for Greyfriars was released to Hamilton. Haydon probably thought that one book would not make much difference to the Amalgamated Press, and, in any case, he was a kindly man. But he clearly did not realize that his action would start the mills rolling again in a most remarkable fashion.

The title of the first hard-back had to be decided upon, and, of course, there was no choice: it had to be *Billy Bunter of Greyfriars School* by 'Frank Richards'. The contract between Hamilton and Skilton was signed on the 4th October 1946. Charles Skilton related a story about the contact to me, amusing for Charles Hamilton but perhaps a little less for Skilton.

When the contract was drawn up for the first book, Hamilton told Skilton that he had always written Bunter at 30/- per 1,000 words and he did not want to join the scramble for higher prices. He would be prepared to write his sixty thousand words for £90. At that time Skilton did not have the £90, so he said to Hamilton,

"Look, I'll put you on a royalty, and give you an advance of £30."

It was all he could scrape up at the time. Hamilton agreed to the arrangement. That shortage of ready cash cost Skilton about £1000 on the first book alone. Certainly somebody seemed to be looking after Hamilton, for all the other books published by Skilton were to be on a royalty basis as well, something that might not have happened had £90 been available the first time. Hamilton was later to describe the arrangement in his diary on the 21st Nov 1957; for the post-war Billy Bunter's Annual he was to be paid 5% on first 10,000, 7½% on the balance, and 10% on any cheaper edition.

Billy Bunter of Greyfriars School was published in 1947. In those post-war days the book was seized upon by young and old, by new and past readers in their hundreds and thousands. The first printing was for 10,000 copies, the second and third reprints added a further 15,000 copies to give a total of 25,000; all sold like hot cakes.

When I interviewed Skilton in 1973, he remarked:

When we published the first Bunter book it really went off like a bomb, and the difficulty was not really in selling it; it was producing enough copies. At that time there was a very severe paper restriction, and it was by no means easy to come up with the sort of tonnage I needed.

Monty Haydon of the Amalgamated Press was a very—suave is perhaps not the word—a very man-about-town sort of type. He lived down at Goring. I did meet him on a number of occasions at the Amalgamated Press, and he was very helpful in getting me 'black-market' paper for the Bunter books.

The following year we published *Billy Bunter's Banknote* followed by *Billy Bunter's Barring Out*, and both sold very well. In fact, we had to reprint *Billy Bunter's Banknote* in 1949, although the number of copies was governed by the paper shortage,

Later, with the easing of the paper shortage, the demand was dropping with the competition from more books coming on the market. There wasn't any exact competition with the Bunter books, though I suppose it was about that time that the 'Tom Merry' books (1949) started to come out; they weren't a conscious copy. We were printing 12,500 copies of most of our titles, but these were selling not nearly so fast as before. One factor was that the price of 7/6d was at that time thought to be rather on the steep side and other publishing firms were selling their children's books at around 5/-.

During the time he was writing for me, I did not have to suggest any particular sort of stories. I think he just put up ideas, and I said, "Fine, yes that's fine." As for how long did it take him to send me a manuscript—he could have produced them far more quickly than we could have issued them or the market could have absorbed them. I think it would have been a matter of simplicity for him to have written one a month, and I wasn't conscious of having to wait for a manuscript. It may have been six weeks or something like that, but, once the matter had been discussed, he would get on with it and produce the work.

I asked about his visits to Hamilton during their business meetings. Skilton recalled:

Well, I didn't see him all that often. I did go on a number of occasions. I once took a photographer friend with me and he secured some photographs. I was once ill-advised enough to suggest going on a Sunday, and this was firmly rejected as being quite improper.

I remember the first time he saw me he said to me 'You are very young, aren't you?', or words to that effect, which merely echoed what a publisher had said to him donkeys years before. I would have been about twenty-five years old at the time.

Another thing I recollect was his habit of striking innumerable matches and failing to light his pipe, so that he was surrounded by dozens of dead matches.

It was interesting that I had the books illustrated by Macdonald and not by Chapman, in fact at Charles Hamilton's express suggestion, for I knew nothing about the background of the illustrators, and he said to me, "Macdonald is the man to get."

Of course Macdonald was a better artist than Chapman. One might say Macdonald was an illustrator of the old school, but there was a great irritation among the fans when Bunter appeared in striped trousers in the first book, instead of his check trousers and whether this was Macdonald consciously improving things or whether he didn't know any better, I just don't know.

I met Macdonald on a number of occasions. He was living at Tewin in Hertfordshire when I first knew him, and I visited him there. I understand he also was badly treated by the Amalgamated Press, and that he had been for something like 40 years a freelance worker for them, never on the staff, but always regularly employed by them coupled with some sort of office accommodation; whether it was a desk I don't know, and one day he got a note left on his table saying that his services would not be required any more—which is pretty fierce.

Macdonald was a very charming man, and so was his wife. I didn't meet Chapman or have anything to do with him in fact, because Macdonald illustrated all my Bunter books, anyway.

Billy Bunter's Banknote was followed by *Billy Bunter in Brazil* and *Billy Bunter's Christmas Party*, which were both published in 1949, and followed with two more titles in 1950, and another two in 1951.

Bunter and Greyfriars, and then Tom Merry and St Jim's were slowly awakening after their six-year sleep, and so was Hamilton. Articles, letters, poems, short stories, long stories all flowed again from the reliable Remington, and work was almost back to normal. But a new factor entered into the story, and to relate something about this, it is necessary to go back to the last *Magnet* issued on the 18th May 1940.

CHAPTER 13

The Gathering of Collectors

Sometimes the new friends
Leave the heart aglow,
But it's when they're like the men
We cherished long ago.
Old Friends—P. Johnson

IN THE last *Magnet* (1683) Maurice Down, the Editor, wrote about a letter received from a Mr Gander, a newsagent in Manitoba, Canada. Gander's letter contained items of sufficient interest for Down to spend a third of his weekly news chat to it. An extract shows why:

> Enclosed with (Gander's) letter is a copy of the *Transcona News* in which is a paragraph telling of the unique display to be seen in the window of his shop. It consists of very early copies of the *Magnet*. These include No 1, dated 15th February 1908, six others dated at five-year intervals through the years since, and one more which is the current issue, All these copies are from Mr. Gander's vast collection.
>
> An interesting fact about the *Magnet* stories is that the characters introduced in the first few issues still appear in the stories today; also that the Old Paper has enjoyed great popularity down through the years, having circulated all over the world.

The Editor finished with the remark:

> Thanks, Mr Gander, for what you have done. My one regret is, however, that I am unable to pay a visit to Canada, and see your window display myself.

Mr Gander was William H. Gander, or 'Bill' to his many friends. He was born on the 29th September 1898 in South Norwood, England, and still thought of himself more as a 'Croydonian' and a Londoner than as a Canadian; he had been an avid reader of the *Empire Library* in his young days.

In March of 1911 Bill and his family left England for Canada and settled in Manitoba. There he continued his schoolboy education; he spent much time tracking down the English comics he used to get back

home, and was successful for all except the *Empire Library*. Bill later joined a printing firm at Portage la Prairie in which he learned the craft of printing, from the lowest job of type-sorting to the setting up of a page of a newspaper and controlling a printing press. In 1928 Bill acquired a newsagents' business in Transcona, from which he now sold his beloved British boys' papers.

Over a number of years Bill had managed to get together an almost complete collection of *Magnets*, now his major interest. To help complete the collection Bill published in March 1941 a small eight-page amateur magazine called *The Story Paper Collector*. The object of the magazine was to advertise his wants to complete his collection, but he filled the remaining space with articles about boys' papers, initially most of which were written by him.

The first *Story Paper Collector* had an article on the *Boy's Friend* by 'W.H.G.'; a 'Buy War Savings Stamps' advertisement; a note about the *War Illustrated* (a magazine supplied by W.H.G. 'at 10c plus postage 1c'); and another advertisement for science fiction magazines obtainable from the *School Book Shop* in Winnipeg, Canada. On the back page was a request for '200 scattered numbers to complete my *Magnet* collection and some 600 numbers of the *Boy's Friend* (New Series)'.

Issue No. 1 was neatly printed on a hand-operated 'Pilot' press on cream-coloured paper. Because Gander had only a limited amount of type, each page had to be broken up before the next could be compiled. An eight-page issue meant that he had to be busy for quite some time before the final copy was ready. The early issues went mainly to England, but colonial countries and America were not left out. The *Story Paper Collector* was well received wherever it was sent, and soon articles came flooding in to Gander from all directions, mainly about Hamilton stories.

The number of copies printed for the first issue would seem to have been about 50, but the ranks of readers grew and grew with each quarterly issue, until in 1943 Bill Gander reprinted a further one hundred and four copies of the first issue. Each issue was now running at about 200 copies which Bill dispatched at his own expense to addresses all over the world, in addition to editing and paying the cost of printing and paper.

Many of the collectors who received the *Story Paper Collector* were able to fill some of Gander's 'wants' for him, and this (and a free supply of articles) became the only way to help with production costs. *Story Paper Collector* No. 2 ran to twelve pages, and No. 5 was the first to have a coloured cover. Things went from good to excellent as more pages were added. Articles grew longer and later became three- and four-part

series. Then, in No. 19 (October/December 1944) Gander reproduced his first illustration taken from the cover page of the first *Champion* magazine.

At Christmas 1945 the twenty-fifth issue of the *Story Paper Collector* was published, and Bill Gander, as general factotum of this splendid little magazine, printed a comprehensive index to complete the first volume. The *Story Paper Collector* had proved its worth a hundred times over, and by now it was evident that the collecting circle would like to see the magazine appearing more often than quarterly.

There was another amateur magazine, the *Collector's Miscellany*, published by Joseph Parks in England, but it was not as consistently good as the *Story Paper Collector*, partly because of the latter's high standard of printing, and partly because Gander had such a vast amount of knowledge on the subject of boy's magazines.

In England in the city of York Herbert Leckenby, a telephone operator at a military exchange switchboard, was considering the possibility of starting a monthly magazine along the lines of the *Story Paper Collector*. He realized it could not have the professional look of Gander's magazine since he would have to produce it by typing and duplication, but he had an advantage in that he was already in contact with many collectors to whom he had been writing long letters in his microscopic handwriting.

For reasons of health Bill Gander had to slow down in 1946 which resulted in almost a year's wait before the next *Story Paper Collector* came out in 1947. In the meantime Herbert Leckenby and Maurice Bond brought out the *Collector's Digest* which appeared for the first time in November 1946. It was eagerly sought by collectors who passed the information on to others; there was no advertising campaign, only personal recommendation. Soon copy arrived to Leckenby from a keen band of enthusiasts. Many of these writers, all amateur authors, had already appeared in the pages of the *Story Paper Collector*. Such is the comradeship that exists between collectors that the two magazines grew side by side in compatible and friendly rivalry.

All kinds of exciting things were happening now in the collecting world. Hamilton was writing again about Bunter and Tom Merry with all the old favourites, and there were new stories featuring Carcroft School, Sparshott and Topham—all abounding with the usual japes, plots and villains so typical of his Greyfriars and St. Jim's stories. But none of Hamilton's new schools achieved the same popularity that had followed Greyfriars, St. Jim's and Rookwood. This slightly annoyed Hamilton, who put his usual skill into each yarn, and expected to bring countless new youngsters into his net.

Now that Hamilton had revealed himself, he was approachable *via*

Charles Skilton who forwarded many fan letters to him. Hamilton's letter writing, which had mainly been associated with publishers and business colleagues, suddenly started to escalate into a flood of answers to fans. Being a kindly soul, he must have made vast inroads into his writing time to answer each enquiry. Unlike many other successful authors, Hamilton did not employ a secretary to deal with his mail.

In 1948 two people met to discuss another idea to further the interests of the collecting fraternity. One was Robert Blythe, a life-long collector of the *Nelson Lee Library*. His first introduction to that paper had been when he read a story called the *Lighthouse Scouts* (*Nelson Lee Library* 527) which he bought due to his interest in the Scout movement. Blythe had been in the Army, and later became a stock-keeper for the Oxford University Press.

'Bob' Blythe contacted Leonard Packman who had been a reader and collector for many years, and they discussed the possibility of forming a club located in the London area. Enthusiastic collectors could meet monthly to exchange books, papers, ideas and enjoy the hobby together. Both agreed that it should be possible, and they informed the known collectors that the first meeting of a new club would be held at Len and Josie Packman's home in Archdale Road, East Dulwich, on the 29th February 1948.

The idea caught on. It could hardly fail, for the members that assembled in Len Packman's front room found a spirit of comradeship rare to find in those post-war days. Len was an established civil servant, a charming man and a gentleman who would have been a credit to Hamilton's writing, for Packman had modelled himself on the schoolboys in the stories. Bob Blythe, the co-founder of the Club (now called the *Old Boy's Book Club* or *O.B.B.C.*), was a tall, sparsely built man, looking somewhat like his own particular hero, Nelson Lee, the detective and housemaster of *St Frank's School*. The meeting was a great success, and word was quickly spread to gain new members, largely through the *Collectors' Digest* magazine, in which reports of the meetings were published.

By 1950 the O.B.B.C. had spread its net widely enough for a Northern Club to be established, and a year later a branch was opened in the Midlands. Visits began to be exchanged between branches, each branch making sure that the visitors were wined, dined and given a comprehensive tour round the locality before returning home; these trips and meetings were recorded in the *Collectors' Digest*.

Meanwhile Bill Gander's *Story Paper Collector* went from strength to strength; by 1950 it had printed hundreds of articles on all aspects of

boy's papers, including three sketches by a talented artist Robert H. Whiter. The sketches were drawn from pictures in *Holiday Annuals* and information gathered from other papers issued by the Amalgamated Press. The first sketch in the *Story Paper Collector* No. 26 (January/March 1946) was a pen-and-ink drawing of Greyfriars School. The second sketch appeared on the cover of the January 1948 issue depicting Rookwood School as seen across the quadrangle; the third, in the April 1948 issue, also a cover picture, was of St. Jim's, thereby completing the set of the three main Hamilton schools. It would have been possible, though difficult, to continue the idea with illustrations of Highcliffe school, and of Hamilton's latest Sparshott and Carcroft schools, but pictures were not easily available of these newer creations.

The *Story Paper Collector* in 1950 noted on the last page, that:

> This is an Amateur Magazine and it is mailed *gratis* to all who request it and who show continued interest by acknowledging receipt occasionally. This issue: 220 copies.

Bill Gander asked little of his readers, but even he had to draw the line when the requests rose to a record 315 copies in 1963. Bill was forced to ask that those who still required the *Story Paper Collector* to contact him quickly or they would be taken off the mailing list; the quantity fell afterwards to 290 copies, and later settled at about 265 per issue. Most copies of the *Story Paper Collector* were running to about 20 pages. With their many coloured pages, reprints of covers of early comics and a series of Christmas *Magnet* covers, it was becoming a mammoth task even for Bill's enthusiasm,

In 1965 Gander said in his editor's chat that the *Story Paper Collector* had received a request from the British Museum to be placed on his mailing list; in addition they would be pleased to receive any back numbers. Gander sent them all the spare copies he had, but there were gaps in the earlier numbers, so he asked the collectors if they could help by sending the missing numbers to the British Museum. The recognition by the British Museum of the *Story Paper Collector's* value as a record of children's reading matter is most unusual, and, to my knowledge, has been succeeded only by the *Friar's Chronicles*, another amateur magazine. In a style similar to that of the *Collector's Digest*, the *Friar's Chronicles* is the house magazine of the Friar's Club, a more recent club for devotees of Greyfriars, and is included in the subscription for membership. In this latter respect it is unlike the *Collector's Digest*, which is associated with the Old Boy's Book Club, but is purchased as a separate item.

Another side of Hamilton was demonstrated when he wrote some verse for *Poetry London 15* published in May 1949. Charles called the

nineteen-verse poem *Briggs Major Sarcastic*, sub-titled *Or the Value of a Classical Education*. It dealt with Charlie Grigson, a lad who managed to avoid learning almost anything while at school. The verses had a distinct touch of Gilbert about them and probably would have sounded well set to music by Sullivan.

> The case of Charlie Grigson was a sad one,
> His fate was hard, as you may well believe,
> He slacked and ragged—his record was a bad one
> From when he came, until he had to leave.
> With every lesson hammered into Charlie,
> 'Twas practically *ave atque vale*.

Several verses relate how Charlie Grigson went out into the world to earn a living and how he moved from job to job:

> One day he passed a navvies' gang, stone-cracking,
> He paused: "Is there a chance," he sadly said,
> "For one whose classic lore is somewhat lacking?"
> The ganger stared at him, and shook his head,
> And answered, "Not a hope! They always sack us
> Unless we know our Q. Horatius Flaccus!"

The last two verses complete the sad tale of Grigson:

> Alas! Poor Grigson. Old and worn and weary,
> Far from the reach of Learning's rich rewards,
> He eked out at the last a living dreary
> In London streets, between two sandwich-boards,
> Employed by some old unsuspicious geezer,
> Who knew not that he couldn't construe Caesar.
>
> The fate of poor old Grigson, sad and muddy,
> Should be a warning to all the chaps who slack,
> Who loathe their prep, and jib at earnest study,
> And when they can on lessons turn their back,
> His sad, sad fate down to disaster brought him,
> For want of all that Barcroft could have taught him.

Barcroft was the school that Charlie Grigson attended, failing miserably to absorb the normal amount of knowledge. The poem was credited to 'Frank Richards'.

The Old Boy's Book Club was now well established with a group of collectors spread over England and in the Commonwealth countries. Amongst the organizing members was Mr Eric Fayne of 'Excelsior House' in Surbiton, Surrey, and the headmaster of a private school; the reader will recall that he was one of the many who wrote to the Amalgamated Press to suggest ways of reviving the circulation of the

Gem. Also from the teaching fraternity came Roger Jenkins who at that time was rapidly building himself a reputation as an expert on the *Magnet*, apart from his knowledge of other Hamilton schools and diversifications.

W.O.G. Lofts, or 'Bill' Lofts as he is better known, deserves a note to himself. He had an interest in all boys' papers, and was at that time, a partial collector in that he preferred to research information, rather than just collect. Lofts joined up with Derek Adley, an accountant with a meticulous and tidy mind. The two men worked in tandem to dig out detailed information about authors and 'sub' writers; dates on which papers started and finished; who published a particular magazine and when the editor retired; what happened when the managing editor fell ill—everything that had the slightest interest to the periodical collector was grist to Bill Loft's mill. In following in the tracks of Herbert Leckenby's early information in the *Story Paper Collector* and the *Collector's Digest*, Lofts provided an endless stream of useful information.

Accountants, school-masters, civil servants, engineers, market gardeners, trades union officials, company directors, postmen and peers—they all joined in as one. The hobby came first, and even those who dealt in buying and selling the magazines were often keen collectors themselves. All gathered together under the banner of the Old Boy's Book Club, receiving either the *Story Paper Collector* or the *Collector's Digest*, (and in many cases both). From names that had thrilled thousands over a period of fifty years, Frank Richards and Greyfriars, Martin Clifford and St. Jim's had become welded together under the name of Charles Hamilton to bring new life again to those splendid stories of past years.

CHAPTER 14

Acceleration

A word, once sent abroad, flies irrevocably.
Epistles—Horace

THE word was spreading that 'Frank Richards' was alive, and not only alive, but well and kicking. So were 'Martin Clifford', 'Owen Conquest' and 'Ralph Redway', not to mention a rather shy person called Charles Hamilton.

Hamilton had become news. Now he was often asked to write articles for the popular press such as the *Daily Express*, the *Daily Mail* or the *Daily Mirror*. Even the *Times* and the *Telegraph* made him welcome within their hallowed pages. The latter generally asked him for something in Latin or Greek, ranging from a crossword to a translation, and once asked for a Bunter story in Latin. The response to this was *Bunteri Stultitiia.*

In addition he was doing work for an assortment of little publishers. It was not just stories about Greyfriars and St. Jim's; Hamilton had now created 'Felgate School', and this was being handled for him by World Film Publishers. Problems from the past affected some of these ventures. His immediate contact in World Film Publishers, a Mr Bagenal Harvey, inquired about the arrangements of copyright with the Amalgamated Press. Hamilton replied with some particulars of the 1920 verbal agreement when he had given up his rights on Greyfriars to the Amalgamated Press; it meant they could still restrict his use of certain characters. Bagenal Harvey was later to receive four stories from Hamilton for inclusion in a book called *Sportsguide.* Hamilton noted that Harvey 'likes the four stories: doesn't like the other man's boxing and rugger stories', to which Hamilton added, 'hear! hear!'

The A.P. kept presenting problems: John Bennett, Assistant Editor of the *Evening World*, proposed a Bunter serial, but the offer was dropped when Hamilton pointed out that 'the A.P. required twenty five guineas'. Hamilton's freedom with the use of Bunter was restricted to hard-back editions, and nowhere else. Wisely, in all this, he now left the handling of the money side to F.R.Steele, now his literary agent.

In other ways A.P. seemed benign. Hamilton had a letter from Charles Skilton which pointed out:

> Johnson (*A.P. legal department*) friendly *re* Hurford Janes radio, etc. (*B.B.C. programmes*). Johnson's amicability grows curiouser and curiouser—50/50 (*on fees*) fair arrangement.

On the same day Hamilton received a parcel from Josie, the wife of Len Packman (O.B.B.C.) with a copy of the *Housemaster's Home Coming*, a St. Jim's story, for his autograph. Charles was often asked to perform this duty which, as far as can be traced, he was always pleased to do.

Bessie Bunter of Cliff House School by 'Hilda Richards' was started by Hamilton on the 7th January 1949 for Charles Skilton. This was the first appearance of Bessie since her introduction in the *School Friend* on the 17th May 1919. Opinion is divided on how many of the *School Friend* Bessie Bunter stories were written by Hamilton. One school of thought is that only the first was original, while others believe the first six were by Hamilton. I think he wrote more than one, and six is a strong possibility. What is not in doubt is that Horace Phillips took over the writing of these yarns, and continued to use the Cliff House characters until 1921 when for the *Schoolgirls Own Weekly* he created a school of his own called 'Morcove' which was inhabited by 'Betty Barton and Co.'

Charles Hamilton finished *Bessie Bunter of Cliff House School* on the 1st February 1949, about twenty-two working days after its start. In that time he had written a total of sixty thousand words together with numerous other short works, letters on business matters and letters to fans. He was then aged seventy two.

Busy as he was, Hamilton was always unwilling to work on Sundays, a day that he preferred to spend quietly immersed in his favourite Greek or Latin books, with an occasional potter around the garden, and finally a relaxing tune at the piano. Throughout his life Sunday was sacrosanct, a day different from the weekday and treated as such.

As author, Hamilton received six copies of his books on publication. As soon as these arrived, he gave one to his housekeeper, Miss Edith Hood, autographed by either 'Frank Richards', 'Martin Clifford' or whoever was applicable. He then dispatched copies to friends, relatives and those who had written to him. In response to a request for a copy of *Billy Bunter's Barring-out* from a Mr A Goreing of 10 Sacred Heart Court in Malta, it was sent with compliments; with a typically generous gesture, Hamilton returned the money sent for the book.

Another name that occurred many times at this time in the Hamilton diary was that of Tambimuttu. This person acted as an intermediary for Richards at Mandeville Press, and had asked Hamilton to provide copy for the *Tom Merry Annual*; to his surprise he was asked to wait as

Hamilton had to do four stories first for Bagenal Harvey. There was now a queue of publishers wanting copy. But, when Hamilton promised to supply copy, he almost always delivered on time, regardless of the amount of work. On Thursday the 24th March 1949 Hamilton wrote to Tambimuttu in answer to the possibility of changing the title of the *Tom Merry Annual* to the *Martin Clifford Annual.* He replied,'...stick to *Tom Merry and Co.* Can't see A.P. legal action against author from whose work made millions!'

A friend close to Hamilton was Clive Fenn, the author of many nature stories in hard back covers as well as articles in magazines like *Our Feathered Friends* and *Aviary.* Since Fenn lived for much of his life at Isleworth in Middlesex, letters had to bridge the gap. Hamilton had written asking if Fenn would write a short story on a nature subject for his new *Tom Merry Annual.* An article from Fenn and a cheque from Hamilton changed hands without undue delay. Hamilton then resumed work on the *Annual* due to be issued at the end of 1949.

The first *Tom Merry's Annual* had sold well, but the Amalgamated Press insisted on a name change, and Hamilton's suggestion of *Tom Merry and Co.* did not go down well. A truce was established with a modification of the title to *Tom Merry's Own Annual* for all the following books. It was so little different as to make one wonder why the problem had arisen in the first case.

It may have been related to the uneasy atmosphere between Hamilton and the Amalgamated Press. He was still feeling bitter with them for dropping all contact with him in 1940, and constant references to this were to be made over the remaining years of his life. Perhaps Hamilton was a trifle unfair in this. The Amalgamated Press had partly released their copyright on his literary creations, although it appears that he had accepted payment for these in 1920. Geoffrey Franglen has commented:

> It is worth keeping in mind that Hamilton chose to remain a freelance. It gave him the advantage that he could come and go as he pleased with respect to the A.P., and it almost certainly meant that he got a higher rate of pay for his work in comparison with staff writers (in the same way that supply teachers and agency nurses get rather higher rates of pay than do regular teachers and nurses). Samways griped about the fact that Hamilton got distinctly more than he did, but he did not mention that Hamilton got paid only when he submitted something, whereas Samways, as a staff writer or sub-editor, would have got a wage of some sort each week. And, especially in those days, there was no feelings of obligation to grant favours to a freelance just because he had been working with an organization for some time. A contract between him and the

> organization would be for one job; once discharged, there was no obligation on the organization to consider him until the next time his services might be required. And, if his services were not required further because a magazine had folded, that was the end of the matter.

Hamilton's attitude may have been engendered by his financial state which was not as good as it might have been, had he been more careful. He had earned considerable money from the Amalgamated Press; if he had handled his finances prudently and been more fortunate with his investments, he would now have had a large amount of capital and might have felt less resentful towards his old employers. The extent of his past wealth was obvious; he had bought a number of properties over the years and had given several away, an example being 'Clive Cottage' which he gave to his first housekeeper, Miss Beveridge. There had been his many trips abroad. And he is reputed to have had significant gambling losses at the casino and on horse racing, though I am not convinced that the amounts he lost there were great.

But work kept coming in. John Swift of the B.B.C. asked for an article for the *Radio Times*; a fee of twelve guineas was quoted by Hamilton. Swift offered the standard fee of fifteen guineas to which Hamilton agreed with a comment 'copy by Tuesday morning' when he replied on the Saturday. Copy, surely enough, was dispatched as promised.

About this time a book called *Boys Will Be Boys* by Ernest Sackville Turner was published by Michael Joseph. It reviewed the reading matter offered to boys from about 1850 to the late 1940s; it was rather like an expansion of the Orwell article in *Horizon* discussed earlier. It was inevitable that Turner would examine the biggest influence on younger readers over the last three decades of his review, namely, Hamilton with his *Magnet*, *Gem* and other writings. It is interesting to note the influence of the George Orwell article in his chapter on Hamilton's work and his analysis of the stories. Turner did not condone nor support the statements in the Orwell article, but used them to open up other lines of investigation. His only major mistake was the inclusion of St Frank's in this chapter, though, to be fair, it was mentioned more as a model created from the Greyfriars and St. Jim's schools than because it belonged in this section. He gave a reasonable account of all the facets of Hamilton as far as was general knowledge at that time, and Hamilton, as far as can be ascertained from his letters to the *Collectors' Digest*, approved of Turner's approach. This book was written when the world of the boys' story was in vogue in articles in newspapers and elsewhere; it was to become a literary success.

Turner's *Boys Will Be Boys* was given a radio airing, and Hamilton

was asked by the B.B.C. to record a two-minute talk for the programme. He wrote, 'Come at 3 to 4, Monday April 11th 1949', and enclosed a draft script. On the 11th the B.B.C. recording car arrived, recorded and retreated, and a facet of Charles Hamilton was taped for posterity. The broadcast, *Boys Will Be Boys*, was heard at 9.30 pm in the Home Service on Tuesday the 12th April 1949. The programme had been well publicized in the *Radio Times*, and many adult ears were listening as 'Frank Richards' gave his two-minute talk. The following day's papers reported the programme in a friendly manner. The entire broadcast was reproduced in the magazine *Record* with a photograph supplied by Hamilton to the editor, G.H. Pothecary.

Billy Bunter now existed in another medium; he was to be found in a Braille version, something that may have been close to Hamilton's heart, for his eye-sight had been steadily declining. It was only because he was an accomplished touch-typist and used the famous purple typewriter ribbon that he was able to carry on very much as usual. He noted with touching humour, that he might bend down in the garden to stroke Sammy the cat, only to find himself caressing a cabbage.

Miss Hood had been unwell for a while, and she was sent to hospital for three weeks in April-May 1949. After the number of years that Miss Hood had always been at hand, Charles was no doubt delighted to record on the 10th May, 'E.H. Home from Hospital'. He also put a little tick against the entry! It would be well understood by any bachelor who had the luck to find the perfect house-keeper. Miss Hood remarked that Charles Hamilton was a very kind man, and that he would worry about her health almost more than she considered his.

A member of the old Amalgamated Press staff, Maurice Down, the last Controlling Editor of the *Magnet*, was in contact with Hamilton at this time. The latter was regularly sending him copies of his latest published works. Amongst the books that he sent was a copy of *Briggs Major Sarcastic*; possibly he felt that it could do with a bit of publicity. But in a letter to his agent, Steele, Hamilton mentioned, 'Don't like payments in arrears, A.P. etc'. As he seldom chased any other bills, it seems obvious that the relationship was strained, at least with the payments office. He was, however, still very friendly with Montague Haydon, and any complaint he might have was generally routed through Haydon.

In June Hamilton was asked by J.B. Allen if he would do a script for a series similar to *Todd and Annie* already in the *Knockout* comic; he suggested *Dick and Duggie* as a suitable name. Four days later Allen replied, calling the new venture *Dick and Doris*, to which Hamilton agreed. *Dick and Doris* appeared in due course in a publication called *Merry-go-Round*. Charles wrote twenty-five scripts for this between

between June and October which were designed to be turned into a series of cartoon pictures with captions beneath; he also included material for a special Christmas number.

The 27th September saw the beginning of the *Dick and Doris* strips in the *Merry-go-Round*, and another new idea seemed to have been safely launched. But a letter on the 7th October from J.B. Allen was noted in the diary, 'A.P. threaten *Merry-go-Round*'. He replied to Allen, 'Shock: don't send cheques as usual for *Dick and Doris* during uncertainty'. In all, only four copies of *Merry-go-Round* were published before pressure from the Amalgamated Press brought about its closure. J.B. Allen eventually sold *Merry-go-Round* to Hulton Press for possible use with their new *Eagle* comic to be launched the following year; what Hulton paid for the children's comic is unknown, and, in the event, the title was never used.

J.B. Allen now commissioned a twelve thousand word story about yet another new school. Hamilton responded by writing *The Fourth Form at Lynwood*, and dispatched it within ten days, surely a record for creating a brand new school, complete with boys, masters and local characters.

Earlier in the year, in July, Hamilton had written an article for Glyn Prothero to be included in a publication called *Aviary*; he wrote from his heart something that had always been close to his thoughts. It was entitled *The Crime of Cruelty*, something that his gentle nature abhorred.

In spite of these different types of writing, Hamilton had not exhausted the display of his diverse accomplishments. He now sent a bird crossword puzzle to Glyn Prothero for his *Aviary* magazine, commenting that 'Glyn should drop the *alternatives* as unfair to the solvers'. Later a letter came back from Prothero requesting 'more alternatives in crossword' to which Hamilton wrote back: 'Won't do alternatives'—and that was that!. Prothero later wrote to say that he was not using the crossword. He had as Hamilton put it: 'Chucked X-word'.

With money flowing in from his considerable output, Hamilton was now dealing in stocks and shares through Barclays Bank at Brentford, Middlesex. Short notes about this were entered in his diary, such as, 'Contract note 200 Clapham Stadium from Barclays Bank', and again, 'Ordered 300 Margates Estates @ 2/3d from Barclays Bank'. Whilst he was engaged in this way, he decided to ask the Westminster Bank to send him the deeds of 'Appletrees' which they had been holding for him. He then wrote to Haines, his solicitor at Folkestone, as a preparation to selling the bungalow which was now surplus to his requirements. As age crept on, he no longer felt like slipping down to a country home for a few days; home was now 'Rose Lawn' with Miss Hood to care for him.

He sent the deeds to Haines by registered post on the 3rd September 1949, and subsequently received the conveyance documents which he signed and returned on the same day. It would now be straight forward for 'Appletrees' to be sold at a suitable moment.

For a long time Hamilton had been considering writing a religious work, something quite short, in the region of ten thousand words. He completed *Faith and Hope* on the 28th September 1949 after starting it on the 6th September. Since his speed at the typewriter was an average of fifty words a minute, it would seem that he spent a considerable amount of thought on these words. As a result of a contact through Clive Fenn, he wrote to the Revd R.R. Borland at Christ Church Vicarage, Ramsgate, offering him the work. Part One of *Faith and Hope* was printed in that Church's parish magazine; a second extract followed shortly afterwards. *Faith and Hope* was not destined to be published more widely in Hamilton's lifetime, although it is not impossible that it may be at some time. Dr Franglen has commented:

> What comes across in *Faith and Hope* is that Hamilton was aware of moral values, which arose from his character and his Christian upbringing, but, as a Christian thinker about religion, he was untutored. While he mentions both God and Jesus, there is little that is specifically Christian in his piece. It could have been written by anybody, not necessarily a Christian, who had a belief in a 'Higher Being'.
>
> I find it interesting that Hamilton presented his MS to a CoE priest, although he had been reared as a non-conformist. Perhaps it was almost inevitable, if we assume that he had been touched by his mother's social climbing—non-conformism, even in the 50s were regarded as being somewhat lower class than CoE. On the whole, though, non-conformist publications were often more interesting and more widely distributed than those of CoE churches.
>
> I also find it interesting that he presented his MS to the Vicar of Ramsgate, not to his local parish priest at Kingsgate; it is clear from your investigations that the visit to Hamilton by Fr Borland was not pastoral, but one requested by Clive Fenn. It would seem probable, then, that the local CoE priest did not usually call upon Hamilton. My guess is that, despite the importance of Hamilton's ideas about religion to him, he did not attend church or chapel and did not meet regularly with those of similar faith in his locality.

A typical Hamilton reply to a letter of the 20th October from Raymond Richards of Manderville Publications referring to royalties for the *Tom Merry's Own Annual*, was, '...if not 30,000 (copies), boys no longer boys!' The *Tom Merry* Annual sold well, but is believed not to have reached the 30,000 mark. The boys of Christmas 1949 were not the

same as the boys of the 1930s, and the many boys' annuals now on the market were, in the main, cartoon strip types with few written stories. Truly it should have been '*tempora mutantur nos et mutamur in illis*' (times change and we change with them, a quotation attributed to John Owen, a Welshman of 1622), but, as Hamilton preferred the written word to the picture-story, everything remained the same as always.

Various references to 'Jack' were made at this time in Hamilton's diary. He had been thinking of a new character, and now decided to bring him forth. 'Jack Free' was a waif who had a gift for finding adventure wherever he set his feet. Charles Hamilton always liked to bring into his stories a lad, someone fleeing from adversity, or perhaps an orphan, who would take centre stage like 'Flip' and 'Skip' did in two *Magnet* series. The boy would be befriended by one or so of the Remove lads, and defended by them against others not so charitably disposed. Several weeks later, after a series of struggles, the boy would be united with long lost parents. Hamilton always supported the under-dog and drew such a character with deep compassion. He always liked to show that good will out in the end.

'Jack' was the same sort of character. As a nobody he captured the readers' hearts immediately, and his cheerful and friendly disposition helped to keep the plot going, for Jack never gave up. The first book was to be titled *Jack of All Trades.* In 1949 Hamilton was referring to it in most of his letters that he wrote to his many publishing houses. Manderville Publications showed interest in it for issue in 1950.

On the 4th November Arthur Southway of Beaconsfield, South Africa and one of Hamilton's overseas readers, reported that an article had appeared in the periodical *Outspan* concerning a certain chap named 'Frank Richards'. The Conan Doyle *Baker Street Irregulars* had nothing on the fans of Hamilton in those post-war days; any movement that stirred in the journalistic jungle was reported immediately to Hamilton. He was to mention the *Outspan* article to a number of correspondents; he must have been amused that Bunter and Greyfriars had established links in another part of the Commonwealth.

The year of 1949 closed on a busy note. Hamilton was engaged on producing copy for the next year's *Tom Merry's Own Annual*, which was to include the *Chums of Lynwood* and a short yarn, *Turkey's Letter Home* (part of the Carcroft Chronicles) together with a new Jack story, *Lodging for the Night.* He was also in the throes of starting the latest Bunter Book for Skilton, to be called *Billy Bunter's Postal-Order.* J.B. Allen later sent a cheque for £27 in payment for the *Chums of Lynwood.* He had published the stories in a pocket-size booklet priced at 3d, and mentioned, in passing, that he was suffering from a touch

of lumbago. In his reply Charles expressed sorrow and recommended the application of wintergreen.

But 1950 began with a disappointment for Hamilton, for he received a letter from Raymond Richards at Mandeville regretting that he could not help with publishing *Faith and Hope.* Hamilton must have thought it rather odd that almost anything he wrote sold like hot cakes except this small religious book.

Mr P. F. Bellingham called on Monday, the 6th January 1950. He was a very important man in the Hamilton household, for he came as an emissary from 'R.E.Typewriters' in Canterbury. His job was to service the Remington No. 7 and, no doubt, not before time, for he does not seem to have called often. What a superb machine that typewriter must have been! Although a spare machine stood at hand in case of breakdown, Miss Hood observed that it was hardly ever used.

In 1950 Hamilton was even more occupied than in 1949, and the freshly serviced typewriter seldom stopped at all. His limited eyesight held up under the strain of something like more than a half a million words that year, including his correspondence, which, in itself, was considerable. Gone were the days of the *Magnet* and *Gem* story every week, but his many different pursuits and the stream of letters kept him very busy indeed.

CHAPTER 15

I meet Charles Hamilton

When we encounter a natural style,
We are astonished and delighted,
For we expect to see an author,
and find a man.
Pensées—Blaise Pascal

IN MAY 1950 I was lucky enough to meet Charles Hamilton. I was in my twentieth year and living at Morden, Surrey, which was within three miles of Wimbledon where Charles Skilton had his offices. As described earlier, he had been publishing the Bunter books since 1949, and, since he was situated only a short distance away from me, I had been calling in to see him over a period of a year or so.

He always found time to have a chat, and show me the illustrations for the next issue of the Bunter books. The time he spared me out of his busy day was extremely generous, as I generally made no appointment, but descended out of the blue, something which might not have been tolerated by other publishers.

On one such visit in April 1950 I asked Charles Skilton if there was any possibility of visiting Charles Hamilton at his home at Kingsgate. He thought the matter over for a few seconds, giving me time to remark that I would like to take some pictures of my favourite author, if that would be allowed. Charles Skilton replied that he would write to Hamilton and request that I might go down to take some pictures on his behalf; he promised to contact him straight away.

I seemed to fly back home on my B.S.A. 'Blue Star' motor-bike, hardly daring to believe that I stood a chance to see the man who had penned those fabulous stories in the *Gem* and *Magnet*. I confided my secret hopes to no one for fear that it might come to nothing, although at that time I had a friend who was as keen a collector of the *Magnet* as I was.

The days passed on leaden feet while I waited to hear from Charles Skilton, and I began to believe that nothing was going to come of my hopes. I learned later that Charles Skilton sent a letter which was received by Hamilton on the 27th April and noted in his diary as,

'Maurice Hall photographs Whitsun', and that he had replied to Skilton, 'M.H. go ahead'. Further letters were exchanged. Skilton offered the 28th or 29th May (Whitsun Bank Holiday) to which Hamilton replied '29th Monday'. The day was fixed.

The Whit Monday dawned as a typical, overcast Bank holiday, a chilly sort of day. For me, however, it seemed bright, cheerful and just the day for the eighty odd mile run to the coast of Kent. My old school friend, Mavin Haswell, accompanied me on his motor-bike as far as Margate, but, as the invitation was only for myself, I left him to the joys of the 'Dreamland' Funfair.

As I drove the last few miles to Percy Avenue and 'Rose Lawn', I thought of Charles Skilton's remark to me when he said I could go,

"Don't stay too long—about half an hour is probably long enough".

Rumour had it that Hamilton had a bell push tucked underneath the carpet by the fender, and, when he felt tired of his visitor, he rang a bell which Miss Hood, his housekeeper, could hear in the kitchen. She would then come in and gently remind Charles Hamilton of another task he had to do; the visitor would then be gently ushered away.

This thought was on my mind when I turned my motor-bike into Percy Avenue, and cruised down the road looking for 'Rose Lawn'. Round the bend at the top of the road I could see the sea over the brow of the cliff at the bottom of the incline. Patches of pale sun were breaking through at odd moments, lighting up the otherwise dismal sea on that May day.

Then, there at last was 'Rose Lawn', an attractive detached cottage style house, (now marked with a blue plaque indicating it was a main residence of the author of Billy Bunter), green painted woodwork against white walls, a single large gate leading to a garage built onto the right-hand-side of the house. The same path led to the porch door, also on the right-hand side. As I rang the bell, I noted the time on my wrist watch, intending to excuse myself when the half-hour was up.

Miss Hood opened the door and smiled a friendly welcome. She obviously knew that Hamilton was expecting me, for, without delay, she ushered me into the front lounge, left me and retired to the back of the house.

The room into which I had been shown was comfortably furnished with an oak table and chairs, a sideboard and bookcases standing on the carpeted floor. Two armchairs flanked the fire place in which a bright coal fire crackled away. From the right-hand chair Charles Hamilton rose to greet me, and, with old world politeness, asked if I had had a good journey down. As he stood to shake my hand he seemed much less than the five feet six inches recorded in his passport; I

towered over him at my height of six feet. We all become shorter as the years roll by and I would think he was then about two inches or so shorter than his recorded height.

Introductions over, he bade me sit down opposite him, and gave me the chance to ask him a few questions about the *Magnet* and his famous schoolboy creation, Billy Bunter. His fresh complexioned face cheerfully smiled, his brow wrinkled in kindly fashion as I spilt out all the standard questions that most visitors must have asked times without number. As he answered my questions and posed a number of his own, he seemed like a sprightly youngster rather than an elderly gentleman. The conversation ran rather like this: I asked him,

"Did you keep all your *Magnets* right from number one?"

"I did for a while," he said, "Right up to the beginning of the last war."

"What happened, then?"

"Well they came round for salvage, you know—paper, metal, pots and pans. I didn't have much to spare in pots and pans, so I gave them all the *Magnets*, *Gems* and *Populars* that I had stacked up in the study."

"All of them?"

"All that I had at that time went out. Hundreds of them went for pulping. You may know just how short we were of raw materials at that time."

I was stunned for a few moments as I contemplated the act of giving away hundreds of *Magnets* and *Gems*. Even though it had been for the war effort, these items could never be printed again. At that time I had no idea that Howard Baker would eventually produce facsimile copies. The enormity of the act daunted my flow of conversation for the moment. Hamilton intervened with a question.

"What is your occupation?"

"I work as a sales assistant in the boy's department of a large department store," I replied, "Ely's of Wimbledon, not far away from Charles Skilton's office."

Ever ready to interest himself in other peoples' occupations, Hamilton asked me about my responsibilities in the store, perhaps comparing it with Chunkley's Emporium at Courtfield which he created for the Greyfriars tales.

When I expressed my surprise at his fantastic output at the typewriter, he turned and pointed to the Remington standing on a side table in the room. He remarked that he only felt his age when he was on his feet, and became seventeen again when he sat at the keyboard to type his next story. Hamilton asked me if I had seen his *Jack of all Trades* which was just about to be published. As he talked about the tale his enthusiasm for this new creation was very clear. Jack was an older

version of Harry Wharton, away from school, able to hold a job down and turn his hand to any task, but still retaining a link with the younger element. Jack was more suited to a book than to the *Magnet*, because he lacked sufficient companions for a long and involved series.

I dared to mention that I had suffered a long spell of ill health in hospital a year or two earlier, and, during that period of inactivity, I had borrowed a typewriter and created a school based on Greyfriars called 'Shafton College'. In Harry Wharton's place I had Harry Vincent; my Bob Cherry was called Robert Buckton; Mr Quelch had become Mr Sankey; Bunter the great and glorious Fat Owl of the Remove was reincarnated in the fat shape of Roger Crumpet, and so on. I realize now that I was worse than the most feeble 'sub' writer, but for that meeting I had brought along my first completed story of about 25,000 words, *Introducing Shafton College.*

Charles Hamilton took my script, scanned a few words here and there, and even turned over to page two before returning it. I got the impression that he was somewhat amused at my efforts, and perhaps a little flattered that his influence could reach out to me in hospital and encourage me to write a story after his example.

I asked his permission to take some pictures of him. I had borrowed a Rolliflex camera from my brother Denis. He said he did not mind and, quite at ease, posed in an armchair and at his beloved typewriter where he tapped out a few words to simulate his working conditions for me. The camera, a Mark 1, was rather a vintage model, and at that time flash was not as common as it is today; I found that the small circular coloured glass window in the room let in only a minute amount of daylight. Realizing I might never have the chance to photograph him again, I set the shutter at the slowest practical speed, and took a number of photographs while he quietly puffed at his pipe.

With one picture still left in the camera, I asked Charles Hamilton if he would like to take a picture of me, feeling that perhaps he would like to put me behind the camera's eye for a change. He examined the Rolliflex closely, telling me that he normally used only a box or bellows camera, and that only rarely. He then took a reasonable picture of me, proving that an elderly gentleman can always learn a new trick.

It was at that moment that I remembered Charles Skilton's warning about not staying too long, and found with something of a shock that it was well past the half hour suggested. I began to excuse myself when Hamilton commented that tea was about to be served and asked whether I would care for a cup with him. Of course, I could not refuse; I was happy to extend the visit for as long as possible. Miss Hood appeared with a tray of tea and some cakes and biscuits, and retired

to the kitchen. It crossed my mind to wonder whether the bell push really did exist under the carpet, and whether Hamilton pressed once to indicate a finish to the interview and twice for tea to be brought. Certainly Miss Hood had brought the tea without any apparent request from Charles Hamilton.

The meeting lengthened to one and a half hours. I felt completely at ease with this charming gentleman who found time to be interested in me as much as he allowed me to fire questions at him. Not for one instant did he show any sign of withdrawal or lack of attention to someone who, although a keen fan, was only a one member of the many thousands of such admirers throughout the country.

At last the time came to say 'goodbye'. He rose again, shook hands and wished me a safe journey home. He stood there with a friendly and mischievous smile on his face, the perfect picture of an elderly classical scholar seeing an important friend on his way.

I sometimes regret that I had not decided to write this biography in 1950, for then my questions could have been different. Imagine the questions: what school did you go to; was it like Greyfriars; were any of your masters like Mr Quelch; did you have a friend like Tom Merry? I suspect, however, that Hamilton's answers would have been evasive, for in all interviews he never revealed details about his personal background.

I leave this chapter to return to the main story, remembering Hamilton standing with a little black skull cap on his head, crumpled corduroy trousers, dark dressing gown, pipe in hand, an aura of his indefinable greatness wrapped around him like an invisible cloak.

Chapter 16

Autobiography and Television

An author ought to write
for the youth of his own generation,
the critics of the next,
and the school masters of ever afterwards.
F.Scott Fitzgerald

A NOTE by Hamilton in 1951 mentioned the 'easier six', a form of football pools. He recorded a few of the games: 'Sunderland v Middlesbrough, Brentford v Manchester City, Leeds v Preston'. He did not indicate whether he had staked anything; the shade of that Greyfriars character, Vernon-Smith, may have loomed over him at the mere thought. He did, however, have small bets on horse races and often won a few shillings although he did not appear to be a compulsive gambler, even if at this time he was earning more than sufficient money to have spent freely.

Another gamble was less successful. An autobiography should never be written in haste, but Hamilton did just that in the period after the war. In the first version of his *Autobiography* he apparently had hard words to say about the Amalgamated Press in the days of 1940. Aterwards in the revised version published later Hamilton admitted that he had overstated his case, and had toned it down. Although the published *Autobiography* remains interesting, pruning may have gone too far; it would have been fascinating if Hamilton had chosen to shed a little more light on the workings of the Amalgamated Press and the editorial control of the authors.

Charles Skilton, publisher of the Bunter books, commented:

> The first autobiography I ever saw was a pretty bitter sort of effort. He felt he had been very hard done by the Amalgamated Press. Exactly why, of course, I don't really know. It is true they suddenly cut off the magazines, and, no doubt, his source of income. This went on for a number of years, so that he may have felt bitter on that account, but I don't know of any particular reason, otherwise. However, they had seen the manuscript of his autobiography and were rather terrified that it would be published. I remember Athol

> Johnson, the solicitor of the Amalgamated Press, being very particular as to the text of what I was going to publish in the *Autobiography*.

These remarks about the first version of the Hamilton *Autobiography* are interesting because they show that Skilton was aware that the author was bitter against the Amalgamated Press, but not why. It would seem that in this first version Hamilton complained without being specific about his complaint—or was he? No precise reason was ever offered by Skilton to me or anybody else as to why the first version was not acceptable to him as a publisher. Interesting, too, is the comment that the Amalgamated Press were 'terrified' that this version might be published. I doubt whether Hamilton's account would have been libellous, even had it been somewhat acerbic.

But it is clear that this first version caused concern. Skilton received a letter from Hamilton on the 16th February which stated, '...spot of Chill in E.C.4 (Fleetway House). If enquiry, assure nothing in *Autobiography* to worry about.' Skilton replied, 'A.P. knows nothing of *Auto*', only to receive the answer, '...they knew in 1944/45, told M.H. (Monty Haydon), revising it for publication.' Charles Skilton's letter in March mentioned that 'Production of *Auto* going well' to which Hamilton made his last comment on the subject: 'Might let Haydon see the proofs—*the guilty flee when no man pursueth.*' Perhaps this reached Monty Haydon's office, for in May he wrote to Hamilton saying that the *Autobiography* was 'O.K.', and that Hamilton might use his full name.

Hamilton rewrote a number of other passages in his *Autobiography* since he had been advised that rewriting would be beneficial. In the end the book was composed largely of pieces relating to his life from the age of seventeen onwards, and his travels abroad; the long association with the Amalgamated Press was described in detail. But, with regard to his early life, he mentioned nothing of any note. The *Autobiography* was published in 1952, and again in 1962 when it was extended by the addition of an article by Eric Fayne.

The *Daily Mail* newspaper now came to Hamilton's attention for, as a regular reader, he was somewhat put out by something he had seen within its pages, He noted in his diary on the 29th March 1951, '*Daily Mail* has a fat schoolboy in the *Rufus* cartoon strip who says, "I'd weally like to treat Wufus, too, but I'm expecting a Postal Order"; answer "Here! Help yourself, Pooter."' Hamilton wrote to the editor, 'Stop pinching my stuff!' Over a week passed, and Hamilton wrote again, 'Plagiarism continues. Reader since 1896: no desire legal contention with favourite newspaper. But... cannot afford etc. Inform me whether giving attention to the matter!' This brought forth a reply from the

Strips Editor to which Hamilton replied succinctly: 'Keep off the grass', and there the matter rested. According to Laurie Lee in his *Introduction* to the Flook 1970 reprint, the Rufus cartoon strip originally arose from a suggestion by Lord Rothermere for story about a little boy with a magic uncle, which produced a synopsis under the name *Leftie and the Goop.* Staffman Humphrey Littleton changed *Goop* to *Flook* and his colleague, Wally Fawkes ('Trog') drew the pictures. The final version changed *Leftie* into *Rufus,* and the long running strip was born with George Melly writing the storyline.

A similar problem occurred elsewhere. On the 16th August of that year Hamilton received news from A.E. Gerrard about a letter written by a Mr W.P. Vickery of Bodmin in Cornwall. Mr Vickery claimed that he had been a 'substitute writer'. Charles Hamilton replied to Gerrard, 'Heard of O'Mant, Hook, Samways, never heard of Vickery. Hack writer employed without my consent—fraud—could not write without telling him what I think—person concerned in it dead.'

This implies that Hamilton felt that he had control of all writers used as substitutes. I believe this to be incorrect; in most cases he would have found out who had been involved only after he had failed to send his copy on time, and not necessarily in each case. This is shown by the fact that he claimed no knowledge of Vickery, but automatically assumed that he may have be used as a 'sub' writer. There is one 'sub' story with an unknown author, *The Prefect's Plot* in *Magnet* 937 (1926); it is possible that this was written by Vickery. It should also be remembered that 'subs' wrote many filler articles, and, apart from these, Vickery may have written for other of the Amalgamated Press papers. Vickery's claim may well be true; it otherwise would be a curious claim to have made.

A matter not challenged was the use of Bunter in a *Daily Mail* crossword puzzle in which a clue was 'something that Billy Bunter may never have'. The answer, *Thin time,* may have extracted a chuckle from Hamilton, but, perhaps more important, it illustrated that in Bunter he had produced a name and a character that was instantly recognizable in the English language.

On the 28th April Hamilton paid his income tax up to date, sending a cheque for £1,791 together with £9/8/- for interest on overdue monies. The latter sum probably covers two year's earnings as the interest is not a large figure. It also hints at the amount of money he was earning at a time when the average wage was around £400 a year.

On the 16th July 1951 Bunter was one of the subjects to be guessed in *Twenty Questions,* a popular radio programme. When he had been identified, Kenneth Horne remarked that he did not know whether the

author was still alive. He may have been surprised later to receive a letter from Hamilton in which he wrote '*J'y suis, j'y reste*' (Here I am, here I stay). Very truth, for the words were still tumbling off his typewriter at a prodigious rate.

A treat occurred for the Old Boy's Book Club on the 12th September 1951 when Herbert Leckenby, editor of the *Collector's Digest*, and Robert (Bob) Whiter (a founder member of the club) visited Charles Hamilton at home. Herbert Leckenby had travelled from Yorkshire to this corner of Kent to discuss a few points on the hobby. Each time Leckenby sent Hamilton a copy of the *Collector's Digest*, he received an acknowledgement and a chatty letter with all the latest news for inclusion in the next issue. Bob Whiter was a bike mechanic as well as being a talented artist who provided many drawings for the magazine.

Afterwards Bob Whiter wrote to thank Hamilton for his hospitality, and was delighted to receive a letter in return:

> What a cheery letter! I almost believe that you must be a reincarnation of Robert Cherry of the Remove! I am very glad indeed, my dear boy, that you were pleased with your visit, and certainly it was a pleasure to me.

In reply to another letter from Whiter, Hamilton mentioned how he used his experience of life in the stories (and incidently showed that he had not forgotten that Whiter was in the cycle repair trade):

> It is pleasant to read therein that you like the (Billy Bunter) *Benefit* story. I had a certain cycle-maker in mind when I was writing it, as perhaps you may have guessed when you came across Mr Parker (*Parker's Cycle Stores* of Courtfield).

In New Zealand Bunter was to be in a radio programme, and air-mail letters were exchanged between Hamilton and William Yates, the Director of New Zealand Broadcasting. The fee was to be split equally between the Amalgamated Press and Hamilton; years after the A.P. had severed relations with Hamilton, he could still earn money for them. But he was not doing badly himself, since he was now earning round about £2,000 a year. He recorded a figure for 1952 of £1,925/16/0, and paid his accountant the princely sum of 10 guineas for his services over two years.

The B.B.C. had been thinking for some time of presenting a Bunter series on television. They asked Hamilton to supply six scripts suitable for studio production. After acceptance this was followed by recruitment of actors to play the masters, schoolboys and, in particular, Billy Bunter. A veritable army of fat boys and those with round faces who could be padded out in girth gathered to read for the part of the Fat Owl.

Among the crowd was Rodney Bewes, later to appear in the T.V. series, *The Likely Lads*, in which he played 'Bob' to James Bolan's 'Terry'.

"(The refusal) was a great disappointment to him," said Joy Harington, producer of the Bunter series. "We were unable to use him, as rehearsals would have interfered with his grammar school work, and the B.B.C. was very strict about such things in those days."

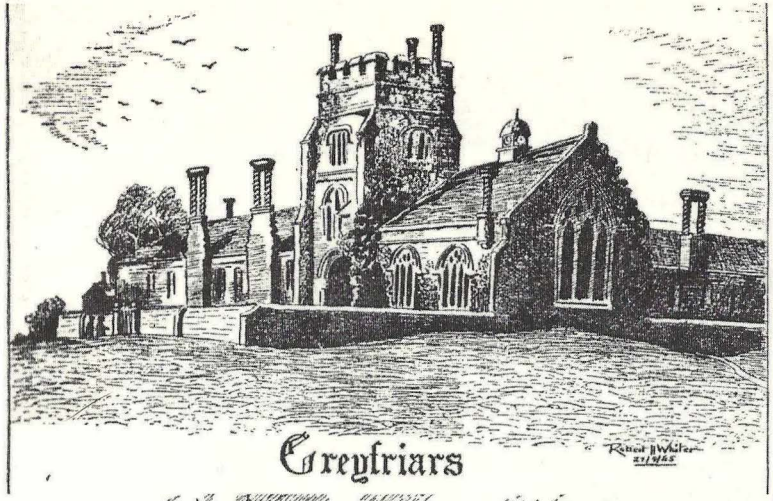
The Bunter part was eventually allocated to Gerald Campion, a professional actor of twenty nine. He was married with two children and tipped the scales at a healthy but not particularly overweight 11st 12lbs. The rest of his circumference came from the B.B.C. props and make-up department. Henry Samuel Quelch was played by Kynaston Reeves, Dr Locke by John Stuart, and Wingate, Captain of Greyfriars, by John Osborne, later famous for his play *Look Back in Anger*. Harry Wharton was played by John Charlesworth. Another actor to play Wharton was Anthony Valentine in the second series. Valentine became prominent in T.V. in the 1970s, when he played in the *Callan* series and later took the part of Major Mohn in the *Colditz* stories.

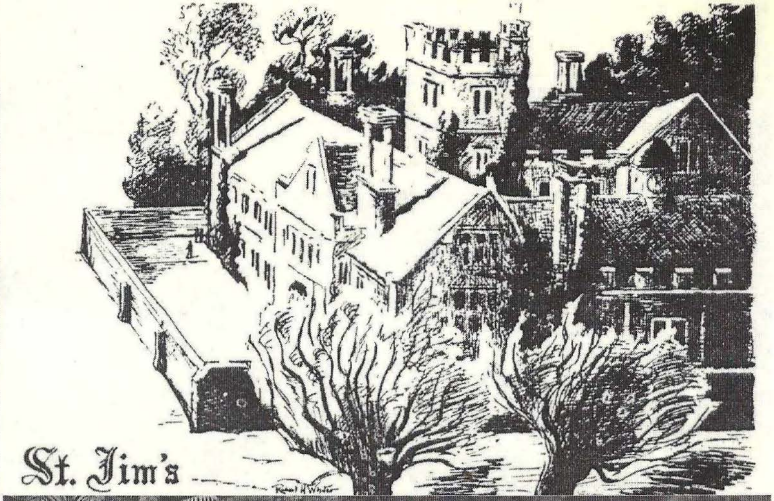
Dr Wylie-Smith recalls that, because of the Bunter broadcasts, Charles Hamilton was given a television set by the B.B.C., something in which he had shown no interest before. On Tuesday the 19th February 1952 at 5.40pm *Billy Bunter of Greyfriars School* came to life on the small screen. Hamilton watched closely as did thousands of other eyes. Young and old would have been judging the production from different standpoints. The young viewers were expecting to be amused by something new; the older generation were judging the actors against a mental image formed years previously when they had read the *Magnet* in their youth.

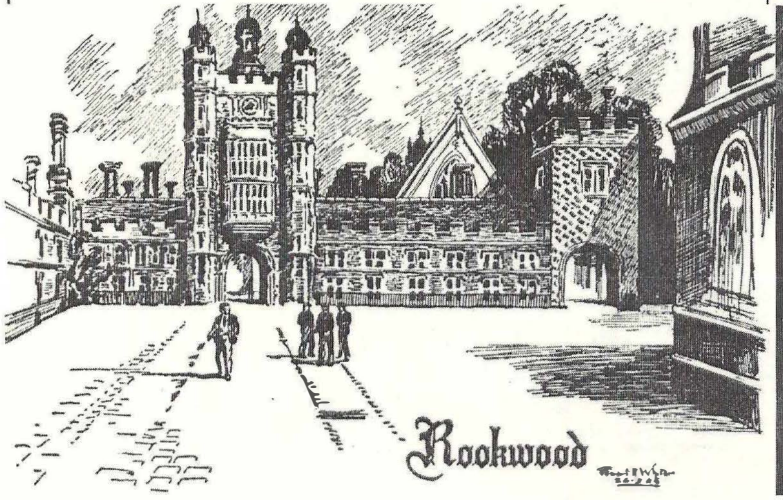
It has been said 'you can please all of the people some of the time, and some of the people all of the time, but you can't please all of the people all of the time'. This was the case for Joy Harington, the producer. The readers of the *Collector's Digest* were divided in their opinion of the opening programme. Herbert Leckenby, the editor, remarked:

> But, alas, as I sat there I did not find myself exclaiming, "Gosh, I take it all back. They're getting it across, that's just like Bob Cherry; that's Harry Wharton to the life; it's Greyfriars!"
>
> Am I being unfair? No, I don't think so; I didn't expect that they had managed to find boys who look just like the boys displayed in this week's *Radio Times* (illustrations from the *Magnet*), but I had a lingering hope that they had succeeded in coaching them to act something like them.
>
> The experienced seniors were not too bad. Kynaston Reeves as Mr Quelch did at times get near the Quelch we know; and there were glimmerings of Bunter in Gerald Campion's portrayal, although he

20. Advertisement for *Magnet* No 1, 1908.







Drawings by Robert H. Whiter. 21 (top left). Greyfriars School, Kent. 22 (top right). St. Jim's College, Sussex. 23 (bottom left). Rookwood School, Hampshire.

24. Old Boys' Book Club meeting c 1949. Back row l/r: L Packman, M. Haswell, R. Haswell, B. Whiter, the author; front row l/r J. Geal, Robert H. Whiter, R. Blythe and F. Keeling.

25 (top). George Richmond Samways with the author at Dursley, Gloucestershire.

26 (bottom). Charles Hamilton's travel containers for spirit, cufflinks, talc and vaseline: engraved silver top jars.

27. *Popular, Schoolboy's Own Library, Magnet* and *Gem.*

28 (top left). Charles Hamilton at work, author caught in mirror.
29 (top right). Charles Hamilton with pipe and book.
30 (bottom left). Charles Hamilton in silhouette.
31 (bottom right). The Hamilton pipe goes out.

Under Frank Richards
[illegible] author of Schooling stories + creator of Billy Bunter

ROSE LAWN,
KINGSGATE-ON-SEA,
BROADSTAIRS,
KENT.

March 26th.I95[illegible]

Dear Mr.Moncrieffe,

Very many thanks for a very pleasant letter. I am very glad that fifty years have not made any difference to your liking for thehappy family at Greyfriars School. But,my dear boy,you are by no means an "old" reader: I count them up to eighty,and should never really be surprised to hear from one of ninety-nine! But you do seem to have been a very keen reader,and I like to think of that classified index you made of the characters,and even of their football and cricket matches. Of course I had to keep such an index myself: but I never dreamed that any reader had done so.

No,Billy Bunter has not lost his ventriloquial gift,and I hope to be writing one of the books on that subject before long. And now I think of it--or rather,now that you have put it into my head----his cousin Wally may perhapscome along again some day. The books,of course,have to be written a long way ahead of publication,in these days of slow production. Justat present Frank Richards is taking a rest while Martin Clifford is up to his ears with the new paper-backed Tom Merry books. We are trying the experiment of issuing these at I/6: sort of trying to get back to something like pre-war prices. As you tell me that you were also a reader of the "Gem" in the old days,I am enclosing one of the numbers,in which it may entertain you to renew the acquaintance of Tom Merry,Arthur Augustus and Co.

Many thanks for your kind wishes. I am getting old in these latter days,but it has pleased God to give me amazingly good health for my time of life: and I enjoy writing Greyfriars and St.Jim's as much as ever I did. So long as my readers like reading about them Ishall be contented,and Ih hope that the Bunter and Tom Merry books will be going on for many years to come.

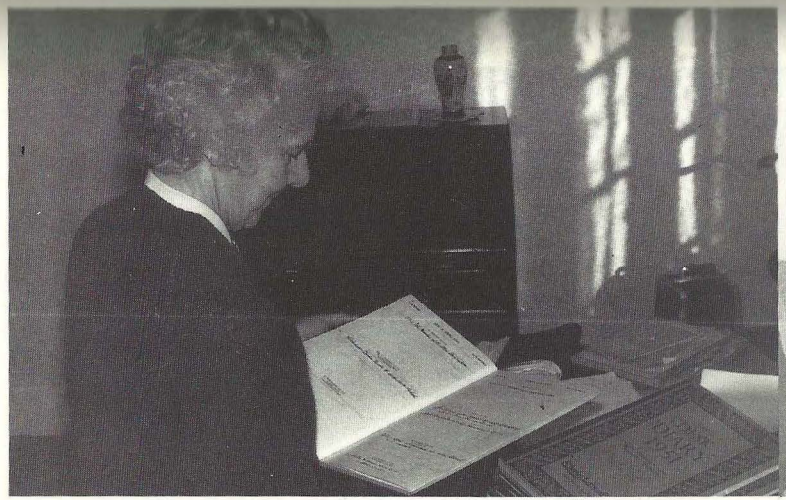
Thank you once more for a very pleasant letter,

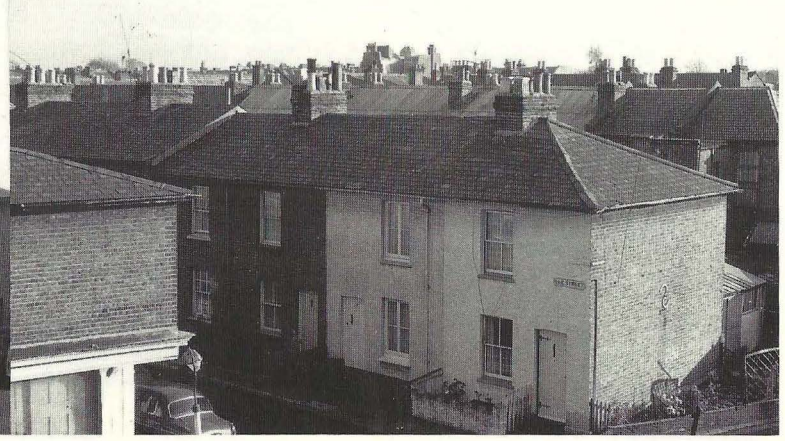
Yours very sincerely,

Frank Richards

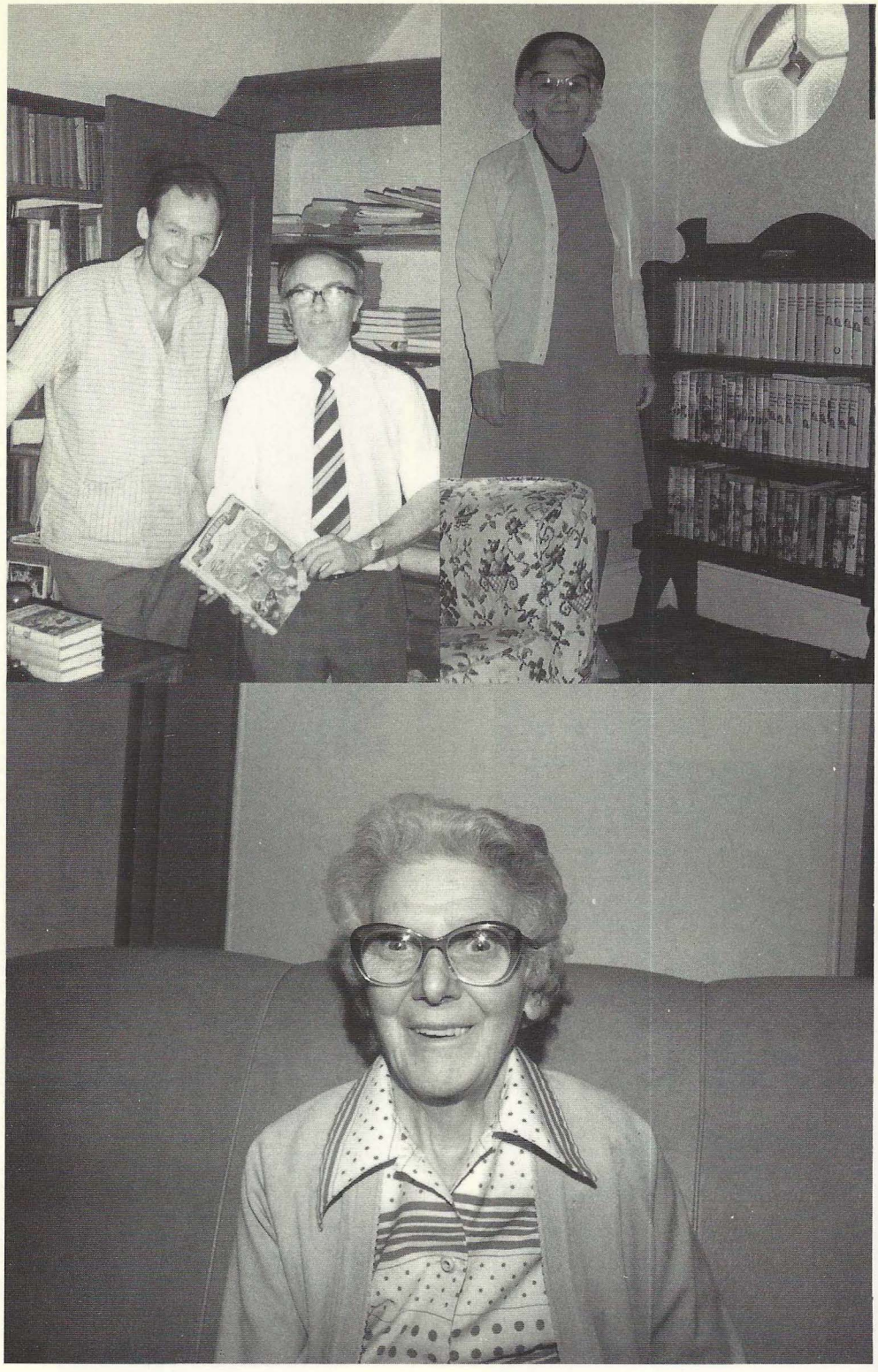
32. Hamilton letter in which he mentions his 'index'.

32. Hamilton letter in which he mentions his 'index'.





33. Miss Hood looks at a Hamilton diary in the Rose Lawn sitting room.
34. Miss Hood in Hamilton's study by his wall of reference books and No 2 Remington.
35. Oak Street corner shop before demolition. 36. Oak Street terraced houses before demolition.



37 (top left). Author with collector J. Kirkham, standing in front of the cupboard which contained Hamilton's *Magnets* and *Gems*, etc.
38 (top right). Miss Hood by Hamilton's oak bookcase containing most of his postwar editions.
39 (bottom). Last photograph of Miss Edith Hood before her death.

> was more like the early Bunter. But, oh dear, the boys. A colourless Harry Wharton, what we feared, a member of the chorus; an incredible Inky repeating a few of the familiar lines without the slightest expression; a Bob Cherry who said "Hallo! Hallo! Hallo!" now and again like a parrot; worst of all, a dreadful caricature of the steady handsome Wingate we had all visualized. However, don't let's be too hard on Joy Harington. She had been asked to do the nigh impossible, and the programme may improve as it goes on.

Other opinions were recorded in the *Collector's Digest*:

> You cannot get the genius of Frank Richards into the cramped space of a television screen (*Norman Smith, Leeds*).
>
> It didn't really come off. Only Gerald Campion as Bunter was at all successful. Kynaston Reeves was more like Hacker than Quelch (*Bob Whiter, Wood Green*).
>
> Bunter, to my mind, was quite good, though he could do with a bit more padding. Weak I think was Harry Wharton, who was too small, and never gave the slightest suggestion of leadership. I thought Bob Cherry good. Undoubtedly the show could do with a little more zip, but considering everything, I thought it was a success (*Eric Fayne, Surbiton*).

Press reports were also rather mixed:

> For me, Greyfriars School stories brought back a host of delights and youthful fun, but I wonder if they appeal to the youth of the present age. The playing was first rate and time will prove if Bunter still has his wide appeal. I hope he has (Alfred Willcox, *Yorkshire Evening Post*).

Leonard Mosly of the *Daily Express*, under a banner heading 'Boosted Bunter is a Bore, Futile—Dismal—Dated', dipped his pen in vinegar with a vengeance. Herbert Leckenby noted:

> His criticism was far different from ours...we lamented because, in our honest opinion, the B.B.C. had not succeeded in bringing beloved characters to life. Mosly maintained they were not worth bringing to life because they were dreary, outmoded, and impossible. If he really thinks so he's about the only man in Fleet Street who does.

Leckenby, however, was wrong, for yet one more major critic had a piece to say:

> Television has come in for a blast of hate over its Billy Bunter. It couldn't deserve it more. It is incredible they have gone to town on a show which no one who understood modern children would have

> touched with a barge pole. Anyway, this generation knows not Bunter as mine did. Months ago Bunter was suggested to Vision by an outside source. It was turned down. Suddenly it is taken on 'inside', heralded by trumpets, and given to a staff producer to handle. Take the silly thing off (*Collie Knox in the Daily Mail*).

Collie Knox had made two mistakes. One was in writing a vitriolic attack on the Bunter programme, forgetting that the author was alive and capable of responding, and the second to write in the *Daily Mail*, the paper that Hamilton had taken for almost a lifetime. It is hard to suffer fools gladly and Charles Hamilton, when roused, was not the person to do so. His diary note on the Friday of that week was short and to the point: 'Collie Knox's 'silly stuff' in *Daily Mail* re B.B. T.V. Wrote to the fool.'

A reply from Collie Knox arrived on Friday the 29th of February. Hamilton would be allowed to give his views on Bunter in the next *Daily Mail* article. That letter soothed the matter down, and the offer of a chance to reply was accepted by Hamilton. At the end there were no hard feelings, both sides having had their say.

The reason that the Bunter programmes had such a mixed reception may be due to two factors. The dialogue written by Hamilton was far too short for his voluble style; instead of thousands of words, he was restricted to hundreds. Worse still, his tremendous descriptions setting the scene were reduced to a pathetic background of cheap tawdry backdrops. Combine these factors, and it was no wonder that few enjoyed the presentation on T.V. One of the most famous school films, *Goodbye, Mr Chips*, was incredibly successful because of the casting of Robert Donat and Greer Garson. In addition, all outside scenes were taken on location at a real school, Sherborne in Dorset, and inside scenes were provided with good studio sets. Oh, that a Greyfriars film could be made under similar conditions!

Hamilton watched the opening show, and, apart from recording that it started at 5.40 pm, ended at 6.00 pm, and drawing a red line underneath the entry, made no other comment. Tuesday's entry the following week said, 'Second Bunter on T.V., The Report.' Again it was underlined in red, and again there were no comments. Miss Hood observed that "...he watched them but didn't approve of them, of course. They were not up to what he thought they would be. Bunter wasn't really Bunter as he had created him." Eventually on Tuesday the 18th of March, after the fifth programme Hamilton made a comment in his diary. He wrote, 'No 5 Bunter on T.V. Rotten (*underlined in red ink*). Leering idiot (*written in red*). Wrote to Joy Harington *re* same...'

It might have been thought that, with criticism from both the Press

and Hamilton, the B.B.C. would have ended the series and never have have repeated them. But a new pair of programmes was shown in 1953/54, both with evening repeats. It seems that the B.B.C. had received strong backing from the public for more Bunter plays. In 1955/56 two new series were launched (with mainly new casts) from scripts written by Hamilton in 1954/55. Bunter had caught on.

Throughout the T.V. series Bunter was performed by Gerald Campion. He settled into the fat circumference of that character, and gradually won success and acceptance. He later was the lead in the first Greyfriars play, *Billy Bunter's Mystery Christmas*, at the *Victoria Palace*, London, in 1958. This proved so popular that new productions, *Billy Bunter Flies East* (1959), *Billy Bunter's Swiss Roll* (1960), and *Billy Bunter Shipwrecked* (1961) followed at successive Christmas holidays. For a long period thereafter Campion continued as Bunter on television and in plays, until, perhaps fearing becoming typecast, he stepped aside for Peter Bridgemont.

Peter Bridgemont was most successful as the Fat Owl. His highlight was his appearance in *Billy Bunter Meets Magic* at the *Shaftesbury* Theatre. In this City Stage production, written by Maurice McLoughlin, Higgins, played by David Nixon, was a crook and amateur magician who made great play of causing food to disappear and reappear much to the astonishment of Bunter. Secret panels enabled Bunter to hide away in a Cornish smugglers' den, from where he was able to reduce everyone to a state of confusion, and bring the crooks to justice.

On the 17th July 1952 a letter came from Charles Skilton bearing news of an impending change in the publishing of the Bunter books. Skilton had decided to sell his contract for these to Cassells. When I asked him what had brought the matter about, he said:

> It was an urgent financial reason. The fact was that sales had slowed considerably. We couldn't print less because the production costs had risen to the point that we wouldn't have had the margin to continue profitably by issuing fewer copies, and, by this time, we had published eleven books, including Bessie Bunter, from which a lot of stock had accumulated across the range of titles. While it wasn't a very serious problem to anybody who was in a fair way of business, I had started my business with £50, and I had never had enough capital. The accumulation of the stock left me in a difficult financial position. Consequently I had to punt around, and find somebody else interested in taking the series off my hands. Cassells, in fact, were the only people interested, and that, I think, was because their accountant, a Mr Angell, was a Greyfriars fan, and he persuaded the Board of Directors that they should acquire the Bunter books.

Skilton further remarked about the methods of Cassells' sales distribution:

> The selling prices went up quite considerably in the later years, and that, of course, was because of a general rise in prices. I believe they reached 11/6d each in the end. But with a popular book a big publisher has got a distributing machine which will result in a bigger sale simply by reason of this machinery. A small publisher, by concentration, can sell more copies of a difficult book, but he won't sell more copies of a popular book.

In view of the evident success of the T.V. series, it is perhaps surprising that there were never any Greyfriars or St. Jim's products to be bought in the shops, such as a Bunter statuette. The reason was not for the want of suggestions from Hamilton, for on the 9th January 1951 his reply to a letter from Skilton noted that he had '...mentioned F.R. or B.B. Calendar, also B.B. Card Game'. A reply from Skilton was condensed to '...no calendar, try elsewhere.'

Skilton remarked on the subject:

> Well, mainly I wasn't very good at marketing. At all times I was run off my feet, working about eighty hours a week, and maybe I just did not get around to it. There were various approaches from other people to me, and these had to be referred to the Amalgamated Press. All of them, I believe, were, in one way or another, quashed by them.

His opinion of Hamilton was '...he was not what I would call a shrewd business man in some ways, but he was nevertheless quite inventive, with original ideas.'

So ended Charles Skilton's immediate contact with Hamilton, though the two men did not lose touch with each other, as Skilton still had control of the *Autobiography*. Probably Hamilton owed as big a debt to Skilton as Skilton did to Hamilton; both had benefited from the years publishing the Bunter books. There was little doubt Hamilton would have survived the dark days after the war without Skilton's intervention, but, from the moment the Bunter books were suggested, Hamilton's way was clearly mapped out.

CHAPTER 17

Running down, but still in harness

There is endless merit in a man's
knowing when to have done.
Francia—Carlyle

CHARLES Hamilton was still having trouble with his eyesight which, although not significantly affecting his work, limited him to few trips outside the perimeters of 'Rose Lawn'. Gone were the days of long walks, but this was not surprising at seventy-six. He had an advantage over his contemporaries in a similar state of health. When he sat at his faithful typewriter and wrote of Greyfriars, he actually felt he was there; when he typed a story of Ken King of the Islands, the South Sea breezes flowed round his head. He was able to become totally involved in the story he was writing. It was small wonder that his readers became as totally involved as he was.

The 15th of April 1953 saw Greyfriars 'nationalized' in an article by Anthony Powell in *Punch*. It was a lighthearted affair, and did not bring the big guns of Hamilton to bear on the writer, for Charles Hamilton thought it amusing and, no doubt, had a quiet chuckle to himself.

His gambling habit came to light again in 1953, for he had recorded the whole of one year's racing transactions as follows:

Balance of Capital	£9. 14. 00d	
July	14. 02d	Lose
August	3. 17. 06d	Win
August 11th	5. 00. 00d	Win
August 18th	18. 04d	Lose
August 25th	1. 03. 11d	Lose
September 1st	1. 15. 00d	Lose
September 8th	3. 00. 08d	Lose
September 15th	10. 05d	Win
September 22nd	10. 07d	Win
September 29th	14. 08d	Lose
October 5th	13. 02d	Lose
Balance	£10. 12. 07d	

Geoffrey Franglen has commented:

> My impression from the figures is that Hamilton was a careful punter, with the result that he did not lose much, but he did not gain much, either. As examples of his care, he evidently confined himself to the Flat and avoided the National Hunt where, though the returns can be higher, the risks are correspondingly greater. He waited a bit for the season and horses to settle down before starting his punting. Apart from the October entry (a Monday), all other entries are Tuesdays. My guess is that this was when he settled with his bookie for bets made the previous Saturday, the day when the races are regarded as being more predictable.
>
> It is interesting to speculate whether Hamilton used any horse racing 'system'. Looking at the modest size of wins and losses, I would guess that it was nothing exotic. As a long shot, I would image that he confined his betting to the top race course of the day, and risked about five or ten shillings on every race (of which there would usually be six), and placed his money on something like 'second favourites'. This would give a better return than first favourites when they came in, but, of course, they would be just that bit less likely to come in.

Hamilton's gambling has been much discussed, but it should now be evident that any suggestion of him being a compulsive gambler should be set aside. To Hamilton money was 'easy come and easy go', but not on the racing tracks or in other forms of heavy gambling. Like many other people he had premium bonds, and a good start in 1958 was a win of £25 in February. But the only gambling of any note in which he indulged, certainly in the latter part of his life, was in stocks and shares in which he appeared to have little success.

In essence, his money was directed elsewhere. When well into his eighties Hamilton took to recording the numbers of the £5, £1 and ten shillings notes that he sent in letters to his sister Una ('Dolly') or to his niece 'Bimba' when they were at Lancing, Sussex. In one year alone he recorded £80 as being sent; in 1958 the total reached £130. This did not include cheques, for which he kept a separate list. Only once did he record that one letter, and the banknote within, was lost. In spite of this, he continued to enclose money in his letters, a habit which even then belonged mainly to the older generation. In place of the myth of the compulsive gambler should appear the picture of a kind and indulgent man, whose first thoughts were for the comfort and support of his sister and niece, and who was ever open to assist someone in genuine distress.

A little thing shows just how much Hamilton was prepared to pay his way and help others: on the 11th March 1954 he sent a cheque for his

subscription to Herbert Leckenby for the coming year's issues of the *Collector's Digest*. There is no doubt that Leckenby would have let him have complimentary copies, if only for those lovely letters Hamilton sent each month.

Slightly earlier, on the 9th February 1954, Hamilton heard that a book called *The Treasury of Insult* had been published by Weiderfelt and Nicolson. It had been written by Mr Gilbert Harding, a television personality well known for his acerbic character. It made reference to the Greyfriars stories, complete with an extract from a *Magnet*. Hamilton immediately wrote to the publishers pointing out that he, as author of the stories, took exception to the quotation on the grounds that he had not written those particular words. Hamilton took up the position of injured author; he commented on the matter when he wrote to Herbert Leckenby, editor of the *Collector's Digest*, and again in a letter to Bagenal Harvey when he sent him four Felgate stories. Weiderfelt and Nicolson revealed that the writer, St. John Cooper (Edward A Boyce), had collaborated with Gilbert Harding on the book, and blame should not necessarily be attributed only to Harding. St. John Cooper explained to Hamilton from where the quotation had been taken. The answer did not satisfy Hamilton, and things had to wait until Herbert Leckenby came up with the explanation: the extract was correct, but had become nonsense through being taken from more than one section of the original piece. Hamilton's honour was now satisfied and an apology was accepted. This little episode is interesting because, in spite of the huge volume Hamilton had written during his life, it revealed that he could recognize when a quotation from his work was incorrect, perhaps because the style was wrong.

A more exciting piece of information came in a letter from George Foster, a friend of Hamilton. He revealed that Hamilton was on the list for a knighthood. The letter was couched in a friendly Greyfriars style, and warned Hamilton not to be too hopeful, 'for, like Billy Bunter's postal-order, it may not turn up'. The letter also contained enclosures from Downing Street. The news was leaked, for the *Sunday Despatch* afterwards had a headline saying 'New Year's Honour for Frank Richards', and things seemed to be going well for Hamilton. But the knighthood, like the fabled postal-order, ran true to form, and, although many saw their names in the Honours List, conspicuous by its absence was that of 'Frank Richards'.

On the 15th January 1954 Hamilton sent two radio plays to Charles Skilton for transmission to the South African Radio Company. The months rolled by, and Hamilton had probably almost forgotten about them, until on the 4th February 1955 he received a copy of a letter to

Charles Skilton from H. E. Dawes, the Radio Company Supervisor of Music and Drama, dated the 10th March of the previous year, 1954:

> It is with very much regret that we are returning, under separate cover and by surface mail, the 'Billy Bunter' radio plays which Mr Richards so kindly sent us.
> Our Juvenile Programme Organiser had hoped that these would have been suitable to broadcast in the Juvenile Programme and is very disappointed to find that, although the plays are very much in the tradition of the 'Greyfriars' stories, they are not modern enough as radio entertainment for young South African listeners.
> Please convey our grateful thanks to Mr Richards for taking the trouble to send us these scripts, and our regrets that we are unable, after all, to make use of them.
> With our appreciation for the trouble you have taken, and our good wishes,
>
> Enc. *Billy Bunter's Booby-Trap*
> *Billy Bunter Forgets*

It was rare indeed that anything that Hamilton wrote failed to find a publisher or presenter, and the surprise must have been great in this particular case. The scripts had not been sent 'blind', since Dawes himself had made an approach for them to be submitted on the 4th January 1954. A possible reason why the South African Music and Drama board's rejected the scripts may lie in the fact that there were no race divisions in the stories; Hurree Jamset Ram Singh was a prominent member of the Famous Five. Previously the *Magnet* had been sent to South Africa by the Central News Agency, but it is likely that it was read only by that section of the population which had British origins. But I do wonder why the rejected scripts took so long to be returned to Hamilton *via* Charles Skilton.

In Sydney, Australia, a boy's magazine, *The Silver Jacket*, had been running the Carcroft stories by 'Frank Richards' since October 1953, starting with the first short story, *Just Like Turkey*. This magazine was published by Beaconsfield Productions. Charles Hamilton's trust in the overseas post was not like that he had in the G.P.O. When he sent off three *Carcroft* stories to Mr Gorfain in Sydney, he registered and insured them for a value of £50. A cheque from the publishers for the stories of £47/5s arrived in December just before Christmas, a wait of three months for this one transaction to be completed.

Monty Haydon wrote on the 21st of May from Fleetway House pointing out that the B.B.C. should pay the Amalgamated Press for permission to produce the Bunter plays. Hamilton used five exclamation marks after noting this remark, and replied, 'Poss Texan T/V, I.T.A..

first', a reference to the possible use of a new cowboy character on I.T.A., rather than let the B.B.C. make a payment to the Amalgamated Press. After Haydon's letter and Hamilton's reply, no further action was taken by either side.

On the 18th November 1954 instructions arrived from Cassells which would affect both Hamilton and his readers. He noted in his diary, 'letter from John Lundell with 3 Bunter books to cut to 75pp'. His reply was 'by all means', and he commented that the *Banishing of Billy Bunter* had been based on the T.V. play *Billy Bunter Won't Go,* and that *Lord Billy Bunter* and *Backing Up Billy Bunter* had also been derived from T.V. versions. The cuts took Hamilton only a few days. A larger type face reduced the number of lines per page from 36 to 33, and the 234 pages per book in Skilton's time were reduced to 224 in the Cassell versions. The effect on the books was to reduce their content, and, as the cost of the books remained at 7/6d, the changes meant that these contents had become more expensive.

Following the tradition set by Skilton, Cassells continued to publish two Bunter books each year. After *Billy Bunter and the Blue Mauritius,* the last Bunter book published by Skilton, Cassells issued *Billy Bunter's Beanfeast* as their first offering. Also following the established pattern, R.J.Macdonald continued to draw the illustrations up to *Billy Bunter's Double,* the last before his death in 1955. The illustrations were then provided by C.H.Chapman, starting with *Backing Up Billy Bunter* and continuing to No 38, *Bunter's Last Fling,* the final book in the series. When the 21st Bunter book was about to be published and Hamilton had received his advance copy of *Billy Bunter Afloat,* he replied to Bryen Gentry, his contact in the firm, 'Pleasant to see Billy Bunter books at 21, not out. Shall hope to see score doubled before wicket goes down.' But, regretfully, the final number of Bunter books only reached 38.

A Bunter story was slipped into the 1955 *B.B.C. Christmas Annual* published by the Burke Publishing Company. Further repeats of the Bunter T.V. shows were broadcast on the 13th and 18th of December. All in all, it had been another successful year for Hamilton.

Maurice Down wrote to Hamilton on 2nd January 1956 to tell him that Monty Haydon and R.T. Eves had been made Directors of the Amalgamated Press. Eves had joined the Amalgamated Press in the 1910s, and had started as an office boy under Percy Griffiths who at that time was being assisted by Herbert Hinton and Maurice Down. In the space of those forty-six years Eves had risen from office boy to become a director. During that time he had founded the girls' *School Friend* magazine. In the case of Monty Haydon, his ascendancy to the

Amalgamated Press board had been expected, for he had been on the edge of power for a number of years.

Hamilton's niece, Una Harrison, married Mr Frederick Alexander at St. Peter's Church, St Marylebone, in June 1950. Hamilton treated the couple to a reception at *Frascati's*, and then sent them on honeymoon to Biarritz; unhappily, the marriage foundered and there were no children from it. Una later was to marry Mr Brian Wright. The Wright's first child was born on the 24th March 1956 and christened Una, continuing the family preference for the name. Two more girls followed, Felicity born in 1957 and Penelope in 1960. This was welcome news to Hamilton for, although he had a vast number of readers who seemed like his children, he missed the personal touch that can come only to parents (and uncles) with their own boys and girls.

The year ended with a repeat performance of *Billy Bunter's Christmas Box* on T.V. on the 24th December 1956.

A number of Bunter film strips had been produced as a commercial venture. On the 9th February 1957 a cheque was sent to Hamilton from the Amalgamated Press with his share of the royalty (£29) which was 50% of the money earned between 1st October and 31st December 1956. Over the whole life of Billy Bunter there had been almost nothing in the way of commercial 'spin offs', and these film strips were breaking new ground for the Amalgamated Press. But after this, further ventures into this market were turned down. However, in June 1957 an I.T.V. advertising campaign by the *Nestle* confectionery company used a cartoon film of Bunter and Mr Quelch in various humorous situations. Proceeds from this for Hamilton was £52/10/0; it indicated that a market could exist for the Greyfriars characters in commerce.

In spite of all the money coming in, Hamilton decided to sell the land opposite his house in Percy Avenue. He no longer had use for it, and its tennis courts were now hardly ever played upon. He was evidently pleased with the sale, for he noted it in his diary in large hollow letters, 'LAND', and sent the contract to Haines, his solicitor at Folkestone on the 15th March. On the 1st of May Hamilton received a cheque from Haines for £659, being the proceeds of the sale to a Mr Robinson. Later the land was covered with bungalows and houses.

In November the Lord Mayor's Show in London had a float in the parade from which Bunter beamed forth. Truly the Fat Owl of the Greyfriars Remove seemed to get almost everywhere those days, with appearances on radio, television, stage, and in newspapers, magazines and comic books.

The Christmas plans of the B.B.C. included broadcasting a talk by John Arlott, during which he was to refer in some detail to Hamilton

and his work. Arlott with his secretary called on the 20th November and, as was usual, sent the proposed script to Hamilton for his perusal on the 5th December. The script passed muster except for one sentence which did not please Hamilton; he returned the document with the sentence underlined for deletion. Five days later a letter from the B.B.C. said that it was 'too late to cut'; Hamilton replied, 'Wash it out'. The two sides then sat tight until the 18th December when a further letter from the B.B.C. stated that it was 'deleting offending passage: sorry', to which Hamilton noted: 'brevity the soul of wit'. He was to write to them a few days after the broadcast on the 27th December 1957, when he commented that it had been a '...pleasant talk in pleasant voice', the last a reference John Arlott. And on the same day he started to write a 4000-word story, *Lovell Knows Best*, for the next *Billy Bunter's Own Annual.*

Later, in March 1958, Bryen Gentry wrote and commented on the 22nd Bunter book, *Billy Bunter's Bargain*; his young daughter had pronounced it the best yet.

Hamilton's declining eyesight was becoming a serious problem. He was in his 82nd year, and the strain of writing and reading must have had an effect. His physician, Dr Ronald Wylie-Smith, his G.P. since 1945, found that he was still trying to read his Latin and Greek books when he called to see him. Dr Wylie-Smith remarked:

He was a very quiet man who invariably wore a black silk skull cap and a blue suit and white shirt and stiff collar in the style of the early twenties. He was very fond of Miss Hood and it distressed him considerably when she was ill. He did not have a wireless or television set until the B.B.C. filmed a documentary of his life. This filming caused excitement to the neighbours and some upset in the house which rather distressed him. On rare occasions his boyish humour and understanding of the young mind was shown by his expression of a few words.

December 1958 had a sombre note about it, for, with the wisdom that comes with age, Hamilton had his last will and testament drawn up. The will was signed on the 16th of December in the presence of G.A.Chapman, a solicitor from Margate, and his managing clerk, Cyril White. Also present was Miss Edith Hood, who was mentioned as a beneficiary to keep the tenancy of 'Rose Lawn' after Hamilton's death. After indicating his wish to be cremated, the next clause in the will stated:

> I desire to place on record my gratitude to my housekeeper Edith Elsie Hood whose unfailing care has preserved my life up to the present time and that the greater part of the household furniture

> and effects at Rose Lawn are her personal property she having permitted me to use these free of expense to me.

When signed, the will was dispatched to Haines, Bonniface and Franks, his solicitors at Folkestone in Kent.

In December the *Daily Telegraph* offered the winners in one of their competitions tickets to see the Billy Bunter show at the *Victoria Palace*, which this year was *Billy Bunter's Mystery Christmas.* By January reports on the play were filtering back to Hamilton. A letter from Charles Skilton, summed up the general impression:

> ...I did indeed see the Bunter play with my wife and daughter and we were all extremely pleased with it. The casting was excellent and the whole thing went over very successfully. There was a large and enthusiastic audience, and I hope that this does become an annual feature.
>
> ...I was mentioning this show to a man I met in the film world, Mr Philip Hudsmith,and later in the week had a long discussion with him in which I endeavoured to persuade him of the possibilities of a Bunter film. He seemed quite keen, but it is, of course, a question of finance which is even more onerous in this connection than in the publishing trade.

On the 30th of January 1958 Hamilton paid his income-tax, a sum of £263/4/9d due for the preceding half year's work, and then one day later he paid the surtax of £47/12/-. Possibly he felt that two cheques in one day were a little too much. That year was to be full of his normal daily business letters, visitors called, cheques arriving, and two Bunter books published (*Billy Bunter's Bargain* and *Billy Bunter the Hiker*). All went well for the industrious Hamilton although, by his own standards, he was slowing down.

Earlier, in August and September 1956, Hamilton had thought about writing Latin parodies, and mentioned 'B.B. in Latin' to Charles Skilton. Earlier work on a Latin story involving Billy Bunter (*Bunterus in Scholis*) may have been polished up and used in the *Times Educational Supplement* in 1961. He had at last been able to bring the Fat Owl into a most elevated area, although, perhaps, the number of Greyfriars fans who could read Latin was somewhat limited.

The Latin Billy Bunter came up again when R.G.Walford at the B.B.C. on the 21st January 1959 asked Hamilton to send the manuscript to Owen Reed at the Television Centre, Wood Lane; he had the idea that it might have a spot in the Childrens News Reel. It was dispatched the next day. But Owen Reed returned the Latin Bunter, and Hamilton noted a curt 'No go' in his diary. Pushing his evident disappointment to one side, he next day typed out *Bunter Up Against It*, some 25 pages,

for a new series of B.B.C. Bunter plays. The return of the Latin Bunter was only the third Bunter item ever rejected, the first being Hedley O'Mant's *Magnet* story, the second the South African Bunter scripts and now the Latin Bunter had taken a tumble.

Three newspapers then phoned Hamilton about the Latin story and its rejection, as a result of which the *Daily Express*, the *Daily Herald* and the *Daily Mail* published articles on the subject on the 26th May 1959. They all had similar titles, such as the Daily Mail's 'Bunter Fails in Latin'. It brought home to Hamilton that here was an Everest still to be climbed. This he succeeded in doing in June 1961.

The B.B.C. had decided to run a new series of T.V. plays, and Miss D.L. Ross of the copywrite department asked for seven new scripts, payment to be the usual 40 guineas per script. Later the quantity was increased to eight, and then nine were requested in a letter of the 17th April. Working steadily Hamilton sent eight Bunter scripts to Ada Wood by the 9th April, and the ninth on the 29th April. Ada Wood of the B.B.C. noted the speed with which they had reached her, and said, 'I would like to thank you again for complying with our request so quickly.'

A statement of account from Richard Steele and Son, Charles Hamilton's literary agent, arrived from Mrs Hope Leresche on the 27th May. It included an analysis of the royalties for the 1958 *Billy Bunter's Own Annual*, the sales of which were broken down as follows:

15,422 sold at 8/6d	£6,554/ 7/6d
2,323 (*export*)	£394/ 8/6d
giving totals of	
17,745	£6,948/15/ -d
Royalty on this was	£424/ 9/4d

Bunter on T.V. continued to appear taking up a fair share of Hamilton's viewing during July and August 1959, even appearing twice in a week beginning Monday 3rd August.

On the 28th August Hamilton was requested by the publishers, A & C Black, to provide biographical details for inclusion in their next issue of *Who's Who*. Hamilton, as usual, offered the minimum. The entry under 'Hamilton, Charles' directed the reader to the entry under 'Richards, Frank'. But the keen researcher found little there to gladden his heart, for all the information to be gleaned was,

> Richards, Frank (Pen-name); real name was Charles (Harold St John) Hamilton. Author of the *Billy Bunter* books and plays; b 1875 (*Author's note: incorrect 1876*) unmarried. Publications: over 30 books so far published, and about 45 plays on television, two new books every year (Spring and Autumn) and the Bunter Annuals for

> Christmas; Autobiography 1952. Recreations: chess; the classics, especially Horace and Lucretius; music, Address: Rose Lawn, Kingsgate, Broadstairs, Kent.

This information left out Hamilton's long association with the *Magnet* and *Gem*, the fact that the 45 plays included theatre performances and repeats. Any keen fan could have written a better *curriculum vitæ*.

On the 22nd October a letter came from Eric Fayne telling Hamilton of the death on the previous day of Herbert Leckenby, the editor and founder with Maurice Bond of the *Collector's Digest*. Leckenby seems to have some premonition of death; fearing for his health, he had been to London only a few weeks earlier to choose his successor, Eric Fayne. Leckenby had truly died in harness, for he retired feeling unwell from his post in the York military telephone exchange, and was found dead the following morning. It was not easy for Fayne to keep the magazine going, since Leckenby had worked from Yorkshire where he had all his records. But there was an advantage in that the *Digest* had been printed by the York Duplicating Services; this firm knew the job intimately, having already printed 154 monthly issues and seven annuals. The printing contract remained with them.

Latin still held a good deal of Hamilton's attention towards the end of 1959; he had written Latin versions of *Waltzing Matilda* and *The Man on the Flying Trapeze* a little earlier. He was particularly pleased when Mr Milner of the B.B.C. called at 'Rose Lawn' with a tape recorder on Monday 9th November, and selected some Latin parodies to be broadcast in the Light programme newsreel on the following day. The broadcast was then put back until Saturday, and Hamilton wondered what exactly was wrong with Latin, which was to him one of the most interesting languages ever devised. There was no inclusion, either, in the newsreel on Saturday night, but on Monday morning a phone call from the B.B.C. assured Hamilton that all would be well for that evening. Surely enough, in the broadcast was an item entitled, *Living Songs in a Dead Language*, which he enjoyed to the limit. Later on the following Friday in the *Pick of the Week* programme, the broadcast was repeated. Life, in terms of Latin, was sweet for Charles Hamilton at this time. Perhaps he remembered the quotation from the Horace *Odes*:

> *Dulce est desipere in loco*
> (Sweet it is to relax at the proper time).

CHAPTER 18

End Game

We rarely find a man
who can say he has lived happy,
and, content with his life,
can retire from the world
like a satisfied guest.
Satires—Horace

JANUARY 1960 opened with a number of calls on Hamilton's time, as shown from entries in his diary. He may have been even more busy than his diary indicated for he was to miss recording his activities for a number of days in this particular year. The *Evening Standard* wanted photographs for an article about him; the B.B.C. Television Centre wanted to send Miss Wakefield and a camera crew to record a programme; Osythe Leestor of the *Oldbourne Press* wanted Hamilton to write a space series; and he still had to write the Bunter books for Cassells, the Felgate stories, not to mention *Billy Bunter's Own Annual* and numerous smaller items for other publishers. And the *Daily Telegraph* had started the year with an article called *Father of the Owl*.

As we know already, it was not unusual for Hamilton to have a bet on a horse; it would seem almost inevitable when the horse was called *Billy Bunter*. But this Bunter must have been overweight, for he was a loser in the 4.15 pm at the Wye racecourse on Monday the 7th March 1960, and his creator lost his 5/- stake.

In June Sidney Morris, a lecturer in Education at the University of Birmingham, sent Hamilton some Latin mnemonics (memory aids). Hamilton replied the following day with some Latin preposition rhymes, and returned the mnemonics with his comments. Five days later a Norris wrote to say that he would be using Hamilton's rhymes in his teaching. The students little knew that Charles Hamilton had a small hand in their education.

Cassells were pushing ahead with the Bunter books. *Bunter the Bad Lad* had been published at the beginning of 1960; in hand and virtually printed was *Bunter Keeps It Dark*. Three other Bunter stories, *Bunter*

the Ventriloquist, *Bunter the Caravanner* and *Billy Bunter's Bodyguard* had been finished and sent to Bryen Gentry. The latter had told Hamilton that the next proposed title, *Billy Bunter's Island* (afterwards changed to *Big Chief Bunter*) was acceptable. Later, on the 16th of July, Gentry revealed that he was trying to set up a plot based on Bunter going to a Butlin holiday camp where he would make contact with Billy Butlin himself; Butlin was well-known for having brought holiday camps to a high level of success in Britain. Hamilton was delighted; 'Fascinating idea, B.B. *chez* B.B.' was his first reaction.

The arrangements took time; on the 5th of August Gentry wrote '...no contact yet with Billy Butlin'. Eventually on the 13th September Bryen Gentry phoned to say that it was all right to go ahead with the story; Billy Butlin had agreed to the idea. Hamilton wasted little time in starting. He received the contract on the 21st, and remarked as he returned the signed copy, 'B.B. at Butlins—winner?' Bryen Gentry informed Hamilton that a Mr Vinter of Butlin's would be calling with factual information for the book; Hamilton had never been to a holiday camp and certainly knew nothing about one on the scale of Butlin's. In October Hamilton wrote to Gentry to complain, 'Not heard yet from Vinter. Overlooked in perpetual motion of Butlinland. Billy all dressed up and nowhere to go!" Gentry replied that Vinter would be calling on the 2nd November. Hamilton answered with a Monty Lowther style pun, 'Vinter comes ... Spring be far behind?' As arranged, Harold and Peggy Vinter called on behalf of Billy Butlin, and discussed various aspects of the proposed book.

Billy Bunter at Butlins was completed on the 9th December 1960 and was sent to Gentry the following day. Cassells decided that they would bring it forward ahead of the three other Bunter books already in hand, and publish it early in 1961. (In fact it was to be published as the second of three Bunter books in 1961.) The manuscript had been sent to Billy Butlin for his approval.

Winifred West, secretary to Sir Billy Butlin, said in a letter:

> As (Sir Billy Butlin) was brought up in Canada, he did not have a copy of the *Magnet* until he was over in England. He was much amused at Billy Bunter's escapades and, when it was suggested that Frank Richards wrote a book about Billy Bunter at Butlins, the former thought the youngsters would each like a copy, thus he ordered enough for all the children. Obviously they were a great success.

After the book had been published, copies were distributed on the authority of Billy Butlin to all the children at the Butlin Holiday camps in 1962; each copy had printed on the inside of the title page,

'Christmas Greetings to all Members of the Butlin Beaver Club and the One Five Club... from Billy B', and each had a special dust jacket. The Beaver Club and the One Five Club were organized by the Butlin camp staff (known as 'Redcoats') to keep children happy during their stay at the camps and leave their parents some freedom. This Butlin book was the 29th Bunter book issued since Skilton started them in 1947.

Earlier, while waiting for a response from Billy Butlin, Hamilton had been asked by *Punch* to write an article about education as if he were 'Minister of Education'. Hamilton was never backward on giving an opinion when asked, and education in one form or another had been at the back of all his school stories since he started to write. Although the article was short by comparison with most things Hamilton had done, he took five days to type the 1,500 words before sending them to Bernard Hollowood at the *Punch* offices.

The article, *Frank Richards—Minister of Education*, was published on the 9th of November. This issue contained the fifth article of a series of ten, each a description by famous people on how they would handle the Ministerial post most suited to them. Yet to come was Stirling Moss as 'Minister of Transport'; Gwyn Thomas as 'Chancellor of the Exchequer'; and Nigel Kneal as 'Minister of Power', to name three out of the last 'cabinet' positions unfilled.The introduction to Hamilton's article briefly mentioned that he was 85, unmarried, had written 26 books and 35 television plays, together with various Christmas Annuals; it did not touch on his involvement with the pre-war *Magnet* in any way. It did, however, point out that 'Billy Bunter' was Hamilton's original creation. Also included in the introduction was a comment about Charles H. Chapman, (who illustrated the article), stating that he was still drawing, cycling and taking cold baths all the year round.

Hamilton's opening lines of the article were:

> *The Cabinet Room at 10 Downing Street,*
> *Mr Frank Richards, Minister of Education, loquitur.*
> "In taking up my office as Minister of Education I have pondered deeply on the need for far-reaching reforms in our educational system. I am convinced that Education need not be, as at present, a process of incarcerating young people in ugly buildings, with tired teachers and repulsive school books, and cramming reluctant young heads with generally useless knowledge."
> *He advocated,*
> "Bright-coloured jackets for all school books will in future be the rule. The boy who feels a natural sinking of the heart at the mere sight of a Virgil with its dull forbidding cover will brighten up very considerably as he looks at a vivid picture of Aeneas pushing his sword through Turnus. He may even be moved to open the volume

of his own accord to see what the row was about, A classic may become to him almost as attractive as a horror comic."
Hamilton also advocated the use of 'cribs'.
"My honourable colleagues will doubtless recall the difficulties they had, in their schoolboy days, in concealing their cribs from the gimlet eye of authority. These difficulties will not exist for the schoolboy of the future. His shining morning face will not be so often sicklied over with the pale cast of thought. He will carry his crib under his arm as openly as any less useful volume, fearless of the master's eye."
Then he turned to music, combined with Latin,
"Music, vocal, will take a high place in the curriculum. Every boy loves to kick up a row and why should he not? It is a natural outlet for exuberant energies that might otherwise be misdirected."
(Hamilton goes on to explain,)
"I am considering a plan for providing Latin versions of vigorous and tuneful popular songs which boys love to bawl, for use in school. What boy would not enjoy singing. or shouting, say *Waltzing Matilda*, even in Latin? Or one of Mr Gilbert's entertaining lyrics? This will enable him to realise that Latin actually is a human language with a kick in it, and by no means the dust and ashes he had supposed it to be. Something like this,"
Here the Minister of Education breaks into song to the tune of 'When I was a lad I served a term' from H. M. S. Pinafore.

"Versabar juvenis ego
Procuratoris in domo,
Verrebam muros et solum,
Osti poliebam capulum,
Poliebam plane capulum,
Et nunc praefectus classis sum.

Will not the most backward boy join joyfully in yelling the chorus

Osti capulum poliebat, et
Praefectus classis nunc floret?

And a spot of Latin will not only find admission into his thick head but will linger there."
Lastly the summing up.
"Such, in brief outline, is my proposed policy as Minister of Education. Whether it will prove popular with school-masters is perhaps open to doubt. But there is, I think, no doubt whatever that it will be hailed with acclaim by their pupils."

So ended Hamilton's ideas on how the Minister of Education should discharge his duties.

Hamilton's life was slipping away. Although he was still spending time at his typewriter, his output had visibly declined. He ceased to

record daily happenings in his diary, and now entered only the more important things. One such was a codicil that he had added to his will in April 1961, after one of the executors and trustees, Bertram Harry Boniface, had died. Hamilton then appointed Edith Hood in his place, to act jointly with the other executors. Another and more important codicil to the will was added on the 7th July 1961, when Hamilton altered part of the original wording from:

> I devise my freehold residence Rose Lawn Kingsgate aforesaid unto my Trustees Upon Trust that my Trustees should permit my housekeeper *Edith Elsie Hood* to have the use and enjoyment thereof during her life she paying all rates taxes fire insurance and other outgoings in respect thereof...

and put in its place:

> *NOW I DIRECT* that my Trustees shall permit my said housekeeper *Edith Elsie Hood* to have the *exclusive* use and enjoyment of my freehold Rose Lawn Kingsgate aforesaid during her life she paying all rates taxes fire insurance and other outgoings in respect thereof...

Hamilton sent the latest completed Bunter book to Bryen Gentry at Cassells in November 1961; there would be no more adventures of the Fat Owl of Greyfriars, for this was the final story that they would ever receive from Hamilton. Which is the final complete Bunter book written by Hamilton is still in considerable doubt. Hamilton's last diary entry seems to indicate that *Just Like Bunter* (referred to by Hamilton as *Bunter the Benevolent*) was definitely his, but this story, together with *Bunter the Stowaway*, *Thanks to Bunter*, *Bunter the Sportsman*, and *Bunter's Last Fling* all read like revised versions of old Hamilton plots. They may have been stories partly written by Hamilton, or even synopses of stories, but, to my knowledge, Hamilton wrote his stories without first mapping out initial guidelines. The only time he did any research was for stories set overseas, such as the *Famous Five in China*, when he would pause for a moment, consult a reference book on travel in the country, and continue to type the story. In these suspect stories there is an inhibited and constrained style, particularly in the speech of Quelch, Coker, Smithy and other characters.

Late in 1961 Charles Skilton received one of the last letters written by Hamilton, in which he commented that he had become 'blind, completely blind'. Certainly some of his latter letters had a considerable number of typing errors, unlike his earlier tidy style.

Charles Hamilton retired to his bed during December 1961 and, whilst Christmas drew nigh and the youngsters in the land looked

forward to their *Annuals* (so many of which had come from this man's gentle hands), his last hour approached. Dr Wylie-Smith could do little to prevent the end. Hamilton had reached beyond the age of 86, a good score by any account; his conscience was clear; he had never been deliberately unfair in his life; his generosity was a by-word; his morals such that, had everybody been blessed with morals like his, no war could have been possible.

He had always seemed small in stature in his later years, and the many hours spent at the Remington had rounded his shoulders. Perhaps some remembered him as a man who for many years kept his balding head beneath a black silk skull cap, and who later on wore corduroy trousers with bicycle clips to keep out the draughts. But, when he spoke in that quiet, humorous voice and told the listener about Greyfriars and St. Jim's, he seemed to become someone else, like the master story-teller that he was. Most will remember him as a man who was to the end a professional writer, a person who answered the question, "Don't you ever think of doing something better than this?" with the soft answer, "You see, there isn't anything better."

There certainly was not for him, for Charles Hamilton loved writing for the young. Certainly, none did it better than Charles Hamilton.

On the 24th December 1961 the worlds' most prolific boys' story writer died peacefully in his sleep at his home in Kingsgate, Kent. Miss Hood who found him in the morning called Dr Wylie-Smith who later was to record his death as being due to cerebral hæmorrhage arising from senile arteriosclerosis. Hamilton had requested in his will that there should be "...a special fee of ten guineas to some doctor to sever an artery in my body to ascertain that I am in fact dead and not in any state having only the semblance of death." At the time of year, when he had written some of the best of his schoolboy stories, Charles Harold St John Hamilton quietly passed away.

Hamilton was dead; long live *Greyfriars*.

CHAPTER 19

Tribute

For, as I like a young man
in whom there is something of the old,
so I like an old man
in whom there is something of the young;
and he, who follows this maxim,
will possibly be an old man in body,
but he will never be an old man in mind.
De Senectute

NEWSPAPERS following Christmas 1961 all paid tribute to the death of 'Frank Richards', in itself a tribute, for did Hamilton not say that he preferred 'Richards' to Hamilton? Seventy-eight were recorded in the national and local newspapers of the British Isles, from which the following extracts have been taken:

Kent papers.
The first cheque earned by an aspiring young author, who was to adopt the pseudonym of Frank Richards and become world-famous as the creator of Billy Bunter, was never cashed. (*This cheque was returned after being cashed.*) Today it still hangs in its frame at Rose Lawn, Kingsgate. But Frank Richards is dead. On Christmas Eve, just 69 years after earning that first five guineas he died peacefully in his sleep—*Kent Messenger.*
A small man, who perpetually wore a black skull cap and smoking jacket, his reputation was enormous. Daily he received letters from all parts of the world. His most prized letter was addressed to 'Frank Richards, Prince of Storytellers, London'. It found him.—*Chatham Observer.*

London papers.
Frank Richards would have been strangely pleased that his fat boy creation was shrieking and tumbling on through outrageous adventures after his death—*John Hallows, Daily Mail.*
The man who brought Billy Bunter yarroo-ing into the life of every schoolboy for half a century is dead—*Michael Wale , Daily Express.*

Billy Bunter's 'Dad' dies—but Billy chews on—*Paul Hughes, Daily Mirror.*

Forty-five years ago there were vague plans to put Bunter into films. The turrets and tuckshop of Greyfriars never materialised at Elstree. But since the war the Remove's consistent guzzling rotter has been one of the B.B.C's biggest draws, as portrayed by Gerald Campion—*Daily Telegraph.*

I don't know whether I can go all the way with Orwell in his admiration for Bunter as a literary character, but this retarded 15-year-old Falstaff cannot be denied his power as an anti-hero—*New Statesman.*

I telephoned him. There was no reply. Frank Richards, the author on whom publishers never called in vain for a total of sixty million words of copy, was writing no more—*Charles Skilton writing in the Times.*

So great was the torrent of words which appeared in print under this name that most people assumed 'Frank Richards' was a team of writers—*Daily Worker.*

Greyfriars is a national institution. It ranks with roast beef, and the Jockey Club and the practice of having a nap on Sunday afternoons. In many people's minds, it is almost as real as they are—*Charles Curran in the Evening News.*

Children who had never been near a public school unconsciously absorbed the sound values which Frank Richards taught them in an utterly painless manner—*The New Daily.*

Midland papers.

It would cause no disquiet if Billy Bunter and the boys of Greyfriars were fully reestablished as national heroes for the youngsters—*The Star, Sheffield.*

A Frank Richards story is always a joyous adventure to the lad who reads it...

(Richards), kept going right through the years of hostilities. When peace returned it was a matter of starting all over again at the age of 70—*Sheffield Telegraph.*

If Billy Bunter is not precisely one of the immortals, he is very near it—*Guardian-Journal, Nottingham.*

East Anglia paper.

By all the rules, (Bunter) ought to have become obsolete. Instead, he has risen from the two-penny magazine in the schoolboy's pocket to a place in the affection of adults. He has followed Alice and Peter Pan into a timeless and classless popularity—*Eastern Daily Press, Norwich.*

Northern papers.

More than any other writer, Richards created the folklore of the British school story, as inexplicable to foreigners as cricket or

Gilbert and Sullivan—*Edward Greenfield, Manchester Guardian.*
The wind of change is unlikely to touch Greyfriars. And that is the way that Hamilton, a modest, content man, would have wished it—*Liverpool Daily Post.*
It is rather sad to think that Quelch now may never have to deal with this wretched implausible boy again—*Yorkshire Evening Post.*
Frank Richard's typewriter is silent, but the boys of many generations to come will continue to be entranced and entertained by Bunter and his school friends—*Newcastle Journal.*

Irish papers.
'I never wait until I am in the mood for writing,' (Hamilton) once said, 'If you go to the bank for some money you do not expect to be told that the manager is not in the mood for banking to-day. Writing was my business.'—*Northern Whig, Belfast.*
Everybody has heard of him—the fat boy of the school, greedy, wildly untruthful, dense, treacherous and cowardly, but yet with something innocent in his nature so that it is impossible to dislike him—*Evening Mail, Dublin.*

Scottish papers.
There is Billy Bunter slipping along the Fifth Form corridor with one of Coker's pies. Alas the vigilant Henry Samuel Quelch, the eagle-eyed master of the Remove, taking time off from his *History of Greyfriars*, (he had got to about 1520, I understand), catches him. 'Bend over Bunter', and down comes the cane on the tightest trousers in Greyfriars—*D.W.Brogan, Glasgow Herald.*
And the reason why so many of us remember so much of his writings while forgetting many a better book is that none of us quite grow up. Ask any woman—*Ross Macmaster, Daily Record and Mail.*
One fascinating aspect of Hamilton's style is his use of extended qualifications. Bunter himself is fat, so therefore his brain is referred to as a 'fat brain', which even has 'fat thoughts'—*Partrich Murray (Curator of the Museum of Childhood) Edinburgh, The Scotsman.*

The 1st of January 1962 in Kent was very much as Hamilton had described it in his many *Greyfriars* and *St Jim's* stories. The county was wrapped in the mantle of winter, the trees heavy with snow, the roads hard packed with ice and more suitable for a coach-and-four, as often mentioned in Christmas tales in the *Magnet.*

The funeral was held at the crematorium at Charing, Kent. Gathered there were only four to mourn the man who had delighted and entranced millions in his life with his tales of Wharton, Merry, Silver and Bunter. But many had sent floral tributes; some of the notes read:

Billy Bunter and all your new friends at Victoria Palace.
A token of our love and respect from the Old Boy's Book Club, Northern Section.
The Directors of Fleetway Publications.
In gratitude for enchantment in youth, help in middle age: Maurice McLoughlin (*who had produced the Bunter plays for a while*).
With deep affection and sincere appreciation from 'Deedy' (*Miss Hood*).
In beloved memory of one whose like we ne'er shall see again, from Merseyside Section O.B.B.C.
In loving memory from Una (*his niece*) and Brian.
Norman, Kathleen and Mary Franks, Folkestone (*Hamilton's solicitor*).
In affectionate memory from the members of the London Branch of the O.B.B.C.
In grateful and loving memory from Eric Fayne.
In loving memory from Dolly. (*his sister Una*).
In affectionate memory from members of the Northern Section, O.B.B.C.
Sincere remembrance and many thanks for happy memories from Charles, Ella and Virginia Skilton.
With sincere sympathy from Dr and Mrs Wylie-Smith.
I first met Billy Bunter in 1912: Dr Edward E Oddie, 48 Riverway, Christchurch.

In passing it is sad to note that there was nothing from Hamilton's other brothers and sisters, an indication of the extent to which they had become isolated from one another.

Inside the crematorium the atmosphere was warm in contrast to the cold outside. Hamilton's sister Una was present with her daughter Una. Then in her 80th year, she talked to the other lady who had been so close to her brother over so many years. Miss Edith Hood, or 'Deedy'. Since that first day at Hawkinge in 1914 the latter had been in constant touch with the Hamiltons. The daughter, Una Wright, called 'Bimba' by her Uncle Charlie, was now a grown woman with children of her own, to whom she could tell stories of their illustrious and talented relative.

The only representative of Hamilton's great reading public was Eric Fayne. He had travelled many miles from his home in Surbiton, Surrey, to attend the cremation. His unwavering interest in Hamilton and his works for a period of over forty years had now swung full circle; the young reader of the 1910s was now paying homage to his boyhood idol.

The service came to its end. Quietly the coffin moved slowly out of sight to a place from where Charles Harold St John Hamilton would write no more.

CHAPTER 20

Bunter's starting again!

The world's great age begins anew,
The golden years return.
The earth doth like a snake renew
Her winter weeds outworn.
Hellas—Shelley

IN SPITE of the shock of Hamilton's death, the Old Boys Book Clubs continued their meetings, and Eric Fayne, as Editor of the *Collector's Digest*, continued to encourage the policy of minute examination of all aspects of boy's literature. But this did not mean that the memory of Hamilton was praised by everybody. A new critic appeared in the footsteps of George Orwell and his *Horizon* article. He was Frank Shaw who wrote an article about *The Man Who Made Bunter* in the *New Strand Magazine* for June 1962. Shaw had been a keen follower of Hamilton's works for the past forty years; before he starting his article, he had researched deeply into issues of the *Collector's Digest* for ten years and the *Collector's Digest Annuals* for five. He did not realize that such research was inadequate, and could give only an isolated glimpse of the author; it is little wonder that he fell foul of the *Collector's Digest* readers. He said in his article:

> Much is made, by his disciples, of (Hamilton's) erudition, but what Latin of his I have seen lacks distinction. And he would never tell anybody where he went to school.

Tom Hopperton in the *Collector's Digest* replied:

> Without actually saying so, our critic (Shaw) blandly leads the reader to suppose that he is a Latin scholar of merit, and that Frank Richards was not. This may be so, although I am not aware of any specimen of Mr Shaw's Latin available to form a judgment by. There is plenty of Frank's about, in such easily accessible places as the *Times Educational Supplement*, (30th June 1961), and where no one else seems to have noticed any inelegance or plain error in it.

Shaw replied later in the *Collector's Digest*:

> I said that Latin composition by him I had seen was undistinguished. That was correct. I have not seen it all. Better Latinists than I have, I know, praised his. On the evidence I have I can't move.

Hopperton dealt with the point about Hamilton's schooling:

> Unless (Shaw) labours under the delusion that a public school and education are synonymous, why drag in Richards' school? One of the most sackless louts I have ever met was at Durham School till he was nearly nineteen, and Thomas Cooper taught himself Latin, Greek and modern languages while slaving fourteen hours a day at a cobbler's last. I can't see that the school has any bearing in the matter, and I fancy that there is a certain amount of malarkey being circulated about Frank's early days. My own opinion, based on reading his works, is that, if we ever get the full story, it will show him to have been largely self-educated—and the more credit to him if this were so.

Shaw replied:

> I had said that he would not say where he was educated. I would not be so stupid as to say he was not well educated. His printed reply to my friend Orwell proves otherwise. I do think you claim for him too much erudition; may be he himself did.

Another point of discontent for readers lay in Shaw's statement that:

> (Hamilton's) stories are surprisingly scattered with quotations (did the first readers understand them?), but proved nothing but a wide reading and a good Bartlett.

Hopperton agreed that there were many quotations to be found in Hamilton's writings, and replied:

> Quotations are just as much an integral part of the style, but they are not so thick on the ground; they are not flourished under one's nose but blend naturally into the narrative and add savour to it. When Bunter watches a cake that he hoped to loot being locked in a cupboard and 'his eyes remained glued to it like the sad eyes of Dido to the departing sails of Æneas', is that to parade the author's familiarity with *The Æneid*? I think not: it is humorous by its incongruity, and effectively so. Most of his quotations, in fact, serve a similar function.

In his article Shaw made many observations that were not challenged by Hopperton, as, for example, when he said that Bunter:

> ...is a creation on a par with Conan Doyle's (Sherlock Holmes), a household word recognised by those who have never read about him, the inspirer of as keen a band of supporters as the Sage of Baker Street.

> The members of the O.B.B.C. poring over the texts as a Biblical scholar might study the Dead Sea Scrolls, or the Irregulars an alleged new addition to the Canon, can spot the substitutes at once.
>
> No boy was any the worse for reading Frank Richards. Bunter was wholly his invention; it took a hundred writers to make *Sexton Blake* and *Coronation Street* has nineteen writers. Truly was it observed that every boy has two schools, his own and *Greyfriars*.

In spite of its approach, Frank Shaw's article certainly helped to keep Hamilton and his works in the public eye.

In 1965 a new contribution about Hamilton came from J.S.Butcher, another old Greyfriars reader. He had been researching Greyfriars, mostly in the *Holiday Annuals*, *Magnets*, the Cassell Bunter books and other magazine sources of 'Bunteriana'. Cassells published his accumulated facts in a book entitled *Greyfriars School—A Prospectus.* There are a few sections in the *Prospectus* that are debatable, and arise from conflicting information in the *Magnet* and *Holiday Annuals*; some of the substitute writers must also have had an effect on the overall pattern. But, for the most part, the *Prospectus* was a most useful contribution. Within its 76 pages were lists of the schoolboys, each form being dealt with in some detail. The Sixth, Fifth, Shell and Upper Fourth all had short biographical details about their leading lights. The Lower Fourth, or Remove, was, of course, a different matter, and, as such, called up an enormous amount of extra detail. Each boy was given his study number, age, height, weight and a biographical note. The Third, and Second lower forms were dealt with in less detail, since in most cases the stories seldom mentioned them at any length.

The chapter on 'School Organisations and Miscellaneous Information' listed a wide range of items regarding the day-to-day running of Greyfriars School. Recorded were meal-times, lights out, passes out, reports, competitions and prizes, preparation, detention, school dress, medical care, after which details were given on prefects, studies, common rooms, fags, Old Boys Associations, and on the Library, museums, mail and the School Tuck Shop.

Next came the masters: somewhat surprisingly, very little was given in the entry about Mr Quelch who, surely, should have taken the lion's share of the space. In fact, Quelch had only six lines of information, the other masters less, some, such as Mr Hacker, being dismissed in as little as two lines. The domestic staff also had a mention, followed by notes on some of the principle relatives of the foremost characters, and a glance round the local villages and towns, neighbouring schools and local nobility and personalities. This all went to establish a worthwhile

record of the most famous fictional school ever created.

Mr Butcher also brought one item to life, the School's armorial bearing. This was drawn by Mr D.P. Simpson of the Classics department at Eton with help from the Royal College of Arms. The Greyfriars School motto, *Conamur Tenues Grandia*, is taken from the Horace *Odes* (I, vi 9), and translates as *Though slight we strive for greatness.*

The *Magnet* was dead. Copies still existed, mainly in collectors' hands. Out of the 1683 different issues printed by the Amalgamated Press during thirty-three years, a fair number of complete or nearly complete collections remain intact. One man, Howard Baker, realized that there was still a market for Bunter in its original form, and, with a forethought that matched and even surpassed that of Charles Skilton, set about obtaining the reproduction rights on the *Magnet* and *Gem* and other schoolboy papers.

William Arthur Howard Baker was born in the county of Cork, Eire, in October 1925, and had been a keen reader of the *Magnet* in his youth. He still has today a number of his original copies from the mid 1930s to the finish in 1940, although no longer in the mint condition collectors prefer. After serving in the armed forces during the Second World War, he became a free-lance writer. As a foreign correspondent, many of his articles appeared in German and Scandinavian magazines. He then became editor for Panther Books, and later editor of the *Sexton Blake Library* for the Amalgamated Press.

During his time at Fleetway House Howard Baker wrote a number of Sexton Blake stories under his own name and under pen-names such as 'Peter Saxon', 'Richard Williams' and 'W.A.Ballinger'. He suggested reprinting the *Magnets* in a facsimile edition to the Amalgamated Press, but they showed no interest in the venture. So, for a while, like Bunter 30 years earlier, the idea was left on ice.

In 1967 Howard Baker set up *Howard Baker Publishers* at 47 Museum Street, Bloomsbury in London. He had been negotiating with his old contacts at Fleetway House for permission to republish Hamilton's old stories in the *Gem, Popular, Schoolboys' Own Library, Holiday Annuals* and, of course, the *Magnet.* It was Howard Bakers' intention to publish in hard covers perfectly reproduced facsimile copies of the original editions, both in size and complete with coloured covers; he also intended that each volume would contain a complete series of stories taken mainly from the 'golden' period, 1923-1937. Eventually negotiations were successfully completed.

The first series chosen was the *Golden Scarab Egyptian* stories originally published in 1932 in the *Magnet.* Howard Baker described why he made this choice:

> The reason I started with that was purely personal. I wasn't reading the *Magnet* in 1932 but I read the *Schoolboy's Own Library* in 1940, when the stories were reprinted, but they were never completed. The first one came out *Southward Ho* (*SOL* 406), then the *Lure of the Golden Scarab* (*SOL* 409) and the last one died the death with the *Magnet* itself, so I started this whole programme. I thought now I'll find out how and what happened.

The first volume, Billy Bunter in the *Land of the Pyramids* came out in 1969, and immediately received rave notices from the newspapers:

> How Frank Richards would have enjoyed this bumper Bunter reprint. In it his characters live again—*Broadstairs Mail.*
>
> This volume will find its way into the libraries of universities throughout the country ... The sociological value is immense—*Financial Times, London.*
>
> The most ambitious and lavish so far. Predicting a stampede to secure this book—*Sterling Observer.*
>
> Vintage *Magnets* Billy Bunter's squeak still echoes and reechoes along the corridors of time!—*New Zealand Herald.*
>
> Howard Baker must surely take the prize for the best item of nostalgia of the year. Anyone who ever thrilled to the exploits of the Greyfriars heroes will find this book a treasure—*British European Airways Magazine.*

The first edition had a print run of 5000 copies, which were sold at £2/2/0 each. As the papers had forecast, it sold rapidly to old readers of the *Magnet*, and was given as Christmas presents to young readers of the current generation by indulgent relatives.

The *Collector's Digest* welcomed the book. The members of the O.B.B.C. took it to their hearts, and asked for it in their local libraries and book shops. Amongst the collectors a few were worried that these facsimile copies would devalue their collections of originals. This of course was absurd, for many collectors found these volumes handier to read, whilst protecting their original issues from damage.

Having satisfied his longing to know the end of the *Golden Scarab* series, Howard Baker now turned to what was the backbone of the *Magnet*, the stories related to those set at Greyfriars; his choice fell upon the classic story of 1932, *The Rebellion of Harry Wharton*. It was not the first time that Harry Wharton fell out with authority and in particular with Mr Quelch, but it ranked as one of Hamilton's best stories on the schoolboy *versus* schoolmaster theme. A total of twelve issues long, the *Rebellion of Harry Wharton* made a fine volume in its white, orange and blue dust jacket.

The *Bunter of Bunter Court* series was the next to be republished, both

volumes coming out in 1969 to complete the trio for that year. Howard Baker now had a band of enthusiastic readers who would subscribe regularly to an advance list of titles, and he was ready to publish a programme of forthcoming issues. After the *Bunter Court* volume came *Billy Bunter and the Terror of the Form*, the story of *Flip*, a waif befriended by Bunter, then followed the facsimile edition of the famous *Courtfield Cracksman* stories. This series was set both at school and on holiday at Wharton Lodge, giving a total of fourteen splendid reprints from the 1929-30 period. Both these volumes were published in 1970.

The *Greyfriars Press Editions* were announced in the Summer and Winter Catalogue for 1971, when Howard Baker started monthly issues of *Magnet, Gem, Holiday Annuals* and *St Frank's* facsimile volumes. He now had about 750 to 800 regular subscribers to his programmes of future issues, each programme lasting five to six months. About 2500 copies of the new issues were printed, many of which had already been sold to his regular subscribers in advance. In addition, Foyles, the booksellers in Charing Cross Road, held a semi-permanent display of current titles.

Howard Baker also had a remarkable set of Greyfriars models made by Robert Mortimer of Kingston-on-Thames, Surrey. Bob Mortimer, who was an artist and sign-writer, and a keen and enthusiastic follower of Hamilton's work. Bob described how he produced them, using drawings from the *Magnet*:

> I used to make them in batches of half a dozen. I traced them and enlarged them by squaring them up, a very old method. They were made up in proportion, so that the masters were taller than the schoolboys, about eight or nine inches in height. Of course, a boy like Coker would be as large as a master. I had help from my daughter, Roberta—she did the faces for me, as I was not so skilled at faces as I was at making the figures. In all, I made about 60 models, schoolboys, masters, members of the school staff, like Gosling,and many of the local characters, like Bill Lodgey of the *Three Fishers* and Sir Hilton Popper of Popper Court.

Bob Mortimer's models are now used to promote interest in new facsimile issues; they have also appeared in exhibitions of Hamilton's work in various city libraries over the last few years. The Charles Hamilton museum at Maidstone, Kent, has one of his models in their collection of Hamilton nostalgia. Ely's of Wimbledon held a special window display of the facsimiles and Greyfriars models, as a result of a suggestion made to them by Bob Mortimer himself; he worked there, making designs and prices tickets for the window displays.

Howard Baker has always demanded an extremely high standard of

work from the printing and binding companies producing the facsimile editions. He said:

> It is a trial and error procedure all the time, a constant battle of arguments with the printers. We've been through half a dozen or more during the time this programme has existed, though, ideally I would rather deal with just one printer, so we get to know each other and he knows what I want.
> At the moment we have a company called Per Fas Printers who are doing a splendid job, in fact the best we have ever had; I hope it will be a long association. You should have seen the standard, the quality, the appalling quality of the *Tyrant of Greyfriars*, for instance, and the *Cavendale Abbey*—they were absolutely dreadful copies, they weren't from the vaults of Fleetway House, they were begged and borrowed from all over the place from various collectors, and they were yellowed, they were black spotted—there were even traces of some people's breakfasts in the 1930s on the pages. But we managed to clean it all up. They did a wonderful job.

In the capable hands of Howard Baker the *Greyfriars Press* continued to issue one facsimile copy most months until 1975, when he added a special *Greyfriars Club* volume to the *Press* releases. The new volumes are issued in limited numbers and have a high quality binding; initially there were 500 signed copies each issue. Over the years this have gradually dropped to around 200 each issue. The *Press* volumes, at the lower end of the price scale, ceased at No. 100 in 1986. The current number of all Howard Baker facsimile issues have now exceeded 250 with the bulk of these being the *Magnet* with over 180 books. Howard Baker's opinion of the Hamilton stories was that:

> It sounds a bit priggish I suppose, but I think they did inculcate a higher standard in one's attitude and so on, than perhaps one would have picked up otherwise ...

Other developments from Hamilton's work still appear. Long after the first Bunter stage productions, John Robert Williams produced a musical *Bunter!* at the *Northcott Theatre*, Exeter, which opened on the 21st June 1988. This was a sparkling musical feast for all fans of the Fat Owl of the Greyfriars Remove. Excellent scenery was matched by a lively musical score with a near-perfect Billy Bunter in the shape of David Timson, with Patsy Rowlands as Mrs Kebble and John Griffiths in the difficult part of Quelch. A cast of local boys created the feel of a busy life at ancient Greyfriars School. The music was composed by Paul Knight, the choreography by Gillian Gregory (of *Me and My Girl* fame), and the book and lyrics by John Judd. There is an intention to take *Bunter!* to the West End.

The story of Charles Hamilton is still full of mystery, for much of his early life is unknown. But we do know that he was a tireless writing machine who had a gift of telling stories eminently suited to schoolboys, who, later in their life, found themselves rereading the stories and admiring the characters, plots and literary style with adult eyes.

Chris Lowder sums up this enigmatic character:

> (Hamilton) was unique. When you get right down to it, for the last 30 years of his life he was completely out of touch with reality, (crooks using a horse-drawn caravan as a getaway vehicle in 1960, for instance). He was writing about a world that didn't exist—and never existed, even in 1907.
>
> But this doesn't matter. He did write some superb stories. Within the framework he himself set up, he penned some powerful tales. And, within this framework, he was always honest. His characters acted as they ought to have done, given this unique set of circumstances. He was always true to his ideals (even though these same ideals are impossible), and this I think was one of the most admirable things about him. And he was very witty. By God, he was witty! He managed to get some cracking swipes at politics, *the nouveau riche*, the law—a host of things—into his stories.
>
> Critics tend to sneer at his style. If you took away all the padding, they say, there'd be nothing left. This is nonsense, of course. In any case, if you took away the padding, it wouldn't be Charles Hamilton. The point is, I think, Hamilton couldn't write about real people, not totally real people. What he did do was inject reality into unreal people, this making them giants. A not inconsiderable feat, and one which many more-lauded writers, 'real' writers...fail at ignominiously.
>
> His world is something that, at moments of great stress, or periods of gloom and despondency, we would like to sneak into, and forget about the rotten realities of life. And it would be nice to get away from it all and find ourselves in this world of fancy, where there may be dark clouds, but the sun will always come out in the end. A forlorn wish, of course. But that someone like Charles Hamilton can make us forget, if only for a while, those grinding problems and worries is, surely, something to be applauded.
>
> I always enter his unique world in the happy anticipation of pleasures to be savoured and cherished. To be always fifteen... to feel secure ... to forget about where the hell the next bit of freelance is coming from, and how in God's name I'm going to get enough loot together to go somewhere, or do something, or get some place. And I always come out of it refreshed.

APPENDIX

Faith and Hope
Hamilton's religious faith

The laugh that children are born with lasts
Just as long as they have perfect faith.
Dear Brutus—J.M. Barrie

I WROTE to the Revd R.R. Borland in June 1974; in his reply he gave me details of his first meeting with Charles Hamilton:

> I first met (Charles Hamilton) through our neighbour in Osterley, Middlesex, Clive R Fenn, son of George Manville Fenn. Clive wrote nature stories in the *Holiday Annual*, and knew Charles Hamilton well. When we moved to our parish in Ramsgate, Clive suggested that I should call on Charles Hamilton which I did. In the course of conversation after a visit or two, Charles Hamilton offered me his work *Faith and Hope*, and he said I could publish what I wished in our Parish Magazine. I selected two extracts... and Charles Hamilton was very pleased with them. I remember sending him quite a number of copies of these issues of the Parish Magazine so that he could send them to his friends.
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> As regards what I gathered about Charles Hamilton... he was a very gentle kindly person, who knew so well how to laugh at himself. He was nearly blind when I met him, and I remember him telling me how he bent down in his garden to stroke the cat, and found himself stroking a cabbage. He also said that, when he was writing his stories, he always put himself in the place of Frank Nugent, and when Frank Nugent had had a very energetic part in the story, Charles Hamilton forgot at the end of a spate of typing that he could not move so briskly as Frank, and his age quickly brought him down to earth.
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> With reference to his religious beliefs, I should say that he had a simple faith as reflected in his book *Faith and Hope*. His beliefs would be rather like that of a thoughtful schoolboy, such as Frank Nugent.

Charles Hamilton had a direct and simple approach to Christianity. In his MS, *Faith and Hope*, he considered the difficulty of providing

evidence about faith.

There are thinking people who fancy that religion is a matter of evidence like a case of John Nokes or Tom Stokes in a court of law. One ought not, perhaps, to smile at such foolishness, though it is hard to avoid doing so.

Religion is not a matter of material evidence, any more than other things of almost equal importance. The man who demands evidence of the faith that is in us forgets that he does, and must, accept countless other things without the evidence that would satisfy a lawyer, simply because he knows them to be true.

For example, every man knows that it is right to tell the truth and wrong to tell a lie. He may lie, but he does not suppose for one moment that it is right to lie. This knowledge is a part of us, born in us, like the belief in God. The most skillful barrister who undertake to prove in a court of law, by the ordinary rules of evidence that truth is right, and falsehood wrong, would have a difficult task before him. For where is his evidence, except in the heart of man and the Word of God?

Let us imagine that his learned friend on the other side maintained that truth is wrong and falsehood right. His argument would be equally effective. For there is no material evidence on either side. All we can say is, that we know truth to be right.

To the question, How do you know? the Christian can reply that the knowledge comes from God. The atheist can make no reply at all. He knows it, as a Christian does, but he can not trace the knowledge to its source. But he knows it without evidence of any kind, as we know all things of the highest importance to us, because it has pleased God to place the knowledge within us.

The man who should say 'I will tell the truth, if you prove to me, by the rules of evidence as practised at the Old Bailey, that the truth is right' is in an impregnable position, so far as argument goes. For no man can prove this matter of the commonest knowledge by the rules of evidence. Unless a man knows without demonstration and without evidence, that truth is right and falsehood is wrong, he is a hopeless case. In an everyday matter like this, we live by faith. Why should we not live by faith in God also?

Every man, whether Christian or Infidel, lives by faith without evidence, in such matters as truth, honesty, mercy, kindness; for not one of which can a word of logical argument be adduced. Is it reasonable, is it even sane, to omit from the list of instinctive beliefs the belief in God ?

Hamilton also considered the matter of superstition.

The human mind is so constituted that it cannot do without faith. It is not and cannot be sufficient unto itself. Man, not being an

animal, must believe in something outside himself. He has the choice of believing in truth or in falsehood, and there are some minds so erratic that they will choose the false in preference to the true, and so shallow that they will pride themselves upon their cleverness in so doing.

It would be laughable, if it were not so pitiful, to watch the mental antics of the unhappy unbeliever. He discards religion, satisfied that he is wiser than his Maker. But Nature abhors a vacuum, and his empty head is promptly filled by childish fancies in the place of the truth he has discarded. He reverses St Paul's process, and in manhood resumes childish things. He is under the necessity of believing something, and absurd superstitions take the place of religious belief.

He will not believe that God created Man in his own image, but he is prepared to believe that man emerged from some reptilian creature crawling in primeval slime. There is no evidence of it, and the idea is silly in itself, but that makes no difference for he will believe it, because his poor addled brain must lean on belief of some kind. He cannot believe in the miracle of the loaves and fishes, but he can believe that the giraffe's neck lengthened through reaching up to the high branches. He will find this foolery in Darwin, and put faith in it, and might as well put faith in Grimm or Anderson.

I have known a man who laughed at the idea of a Deity—but would not pass under a ladder because it was unlucky. There are people who do not believe in God, but believe in mascots. There is a very eminent gentleman whose religious views are, to put it mildly, far from orthodox, but who believe quite cheerfully in such idiocy as the poltergeist. He cannot believe in the Divine mission of Jesus; but he can believe in mysterious footsteps on stairs, and pictures that move by hidden agency on walls. Religion is not good enough for him, so he escapes to sheer imbecility This is a sound reason for keeping steadfast our faith in God. For where God goes out, His place does not remain empty. Where the light goes the darkness sets in; where the mind loses its health disease will enter; where faith in truth is lost, superstitious inanities will replace it. Your mind will not remain in a state of blank negation. You may believe and trust in God or you may leave your mind a prey to childish credulities and childish terrors.

Hold fast to that which is good.

Hamilton also expressed himself strongly about science and war:

Science in the saddle is as ludicrous and terrifying a spectacle as an idiot playing with dynamite. We slaughter one another in frightful wars that would have made the fiercest warriors of the Middle Ages shudder. Science cannot save us from them. It can

> only make confusion worse confounded. It can replace the musket with the rifle, the rifle with the machine gun, the machine gun with the bomb, the bomb with the atom bomb; and the atom bomb doubtless with something still more destructive to man and hateful to God. It can very likely wipe the human race off the earth. But it cannot make a single swindler honest, a single spiv industrious, a single tyrant merciful. In all matter of high importance it is helpless, and should be humbly silent. And it is a matter of very high importance for the swindler to be made honest, the spiv industrious, the tyrant merciful. That is the task of religion, and there is no help but in the Word of God.
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> Science can destroy the one hope of mankind, the one restraint on the powerful and wicked. But it cannot provide any new hope, or any new restraint. It can devastate, but it cannot build. It can, for the limited minds on which it is able to impose, empty the universe. and substitute a dreary desert for the presence of the living, loving God. But it can put nothing into the emptiness it has made; it can only leave mankind adrift like a rudderless ship.

This last extract from *Faith and Hope* states Hamilton's attitude with simple clarity:

> We need faith as a traveller needs a plain road. To discard faith, is to leave the well-marked tracks, and wander into muddy by-paths that lead nowhere. We may walk with God; or we may wander like lost children in the dark. If we give up God, sooner or later we shall give up all that comes from God. In stead, we shall find ourselves concentrating on worldly gain, on satisfying the body regardless of the spirit, and growing less scrupulous in the means we use to these unworthy ends. There is sin in all of us, and it is not always easy to keep it in control, even with the help of faith. But if we lose faith, we shall find in the fullness of time, that we have lost all that makes us different from the beasts of the jungle.

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All references to Frank Richards as author refer to Charles Hamilton unless otherwise indicated.

Centenary of Charles Hamilton

1876-1976

Sir William Wyland
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(photo: P.D.Hall)

Maurice Hall. an accountant, born in Surrey in 1930 is a founder member of the Old Boy's Book Club, London Branch.

His interest in Charles Hamilton's writing dates from 1938. when he first read the Magnet. Finding that he liked the stories. he collected back numbers and compiled lists of information. on the various weekly boy's papers.

In 1973. George Baker suggested that he should write this book about the Hamilton story. rather than talk enthusiastically about the subject. He gave considerable help on the project by reading the manuscript and suggesting various ideas.

Now retired through ill health. Maurice has at last reached his summit by achieving what seemed impossible at the time: a portrait of an enigma. Having access to Hamilton's diaries from 1949 to 1960. together with the help of the late Miss Hood. made a considerable contribution to finding out how Hamilton worked.

Maurice is also interested in photography. painting. and modelling. He owns a large collection of weekly boy's papers and is currently Chairman and Treasurer of the Friar's Club. a group of enthusiasts interested in the many and varied writings of Charles St. John Hamilton.