

35, Westholm,
N. W. II.

Jan. I 1944.

Dear Mr. Bagley,

You seem to have a turn for writing interesting letters: your last is as full of substance as a Bacon essay, and I could easily write 10,000 words in reply to the various points you mention---however, I will be merciful, and won't!

I was specially interested in your mention of SYNOPSIS, which you tell me reproduced Hickock's article from Summer Pie. I am trying to get it and see their version, but I have little doubt that "sold out" will be the result, "das ist der ewige Gesang", as Faust remarked to Mephisto. Summer Pies are no more to be obtained than Mrs. Lovett's pies, though so much more toothsome. You do not mention whether you have seen CHRISTMAS PIE--but even that may now be out of print--it is quite weird how fast they go. Little Jack Horner would be unusually lucky with this Christmas Pie, if he put his thumb into it, for it contains a very luscious plum---no less than a short story by Frank Richards.

It was quite a novel and happy experience to see oneself in print again after so long a rest. The prospects of the Autobiography are somewhat uncertain at present: but as everything always works out for the best in the long run, I have no doubt that ultimately the public will get the benefit---or otherwise---of this magnum opus. I can only thank you very sincerely for your kind offer to help in the matter of ~~reproduction~~ reproductions from the old Magnet numbers: some of these, of course, would be very useful: but there is a lion in the path. The A.P. does not seem to look with a favourable eye on the Autobiography: why, I do not know. It may seem strange that Frank Richards, after having written for the Company from 1895 to 1939, would find a spirit of hostility in that quarter. But such is the melancholy fact--which, however, does not disturb my equanimity to any great extent. I was, in fact, a little surprised when you told me that ~~no~~ permission has been obtained for reproduction in the WRITER article. The A.P. have always been very courteous in such matters, as I think I remarked. But it is a sad circumstance that they do not love me any more: and I doubt very much whether permission could be obtained for reproductions of Magnet pictures to adorn the pages of Frank's memoirs. But now that you have put the idea into my head, I think perhaps I will ask them.

Yes, I certainly---like all other punters---had bad luck at Monte Carlo, in a financial sense---but considerably enriched my experience, of human nature and sub-human nature. I think it was worth while: especially as Monte, from what I now hear, is now only a shadow of its former self---small stakes, and counters instead of hard cash, on the tables. I used to visit, and revisit, and re-revisit, the place, like a moth going back to the candle: but in the long run the result was always the same. I have very strong doubts whether the bank ever was "broken" except for publicity purposes. Whenever I have seen a player raking in huge winnings, there has always been some little dubious circumstance which gave the impression that he was a "stooge" put up to make the mob believe that it could be done. I think the Monte chapters in my book ought to have some interest, at least for people who fancy that money is to be made at roulette.

I was very pleased indeed to hear that you were interested in the chapters I sent you. Perhaps it is my inborn modesty and diffidence, but I find it hard to realise that anyone really wants to read about Frank Richards and

his utterly unimportant proceedings. It was Eric Hiscock who suggested that I should write it, and this brilliant young man is so full of good ideas, that I have no doubt he was right in thinking that the autobiography would make an interesting book. --so in such matters I bow my head to superior wisdom. But to tell the truth---a thing I sometimes do!---I would much rather write "Carcroft". I have dealt so long with fiction, that facts come a little strange to me---perhaps I ought to have gone into the law! My final conclusion is that my biography would make an interesting book if Hiscock wrote it! But I don't dare to suggest that he should take on so thankless a task. You tell me that you read the sample chapters with great interest. The remainder will, no doubt, be up to sample. -- But do you think that an ordinary member of the public, unconnected with writing, would feel the same interest? Honest Injun?

You see, I know that I can write a good school story: on that point, as our old friend Gilbert remarks, there is no possible probable shadow of doubt, no possible doubt whatever. But I wrote my first school story in fear and trembling. And this is my first autobiography.

I quite agree with you that Frank Richards was better than Martin Clifford, and both better than Owen Conquest. Most readers who write to me take the same view, though there are exceptions. The fact is that I "lived" Frank Richards, and never felt quite the same about the other two.

As for "competitors" in my own line, I don't think I ever had a real one: but the number of wretched imitators who started up in every corner of the publishers' office, fancying that they could do my work as well as I could do it myself, was astonishing. J.N.P. was the most scandalous case, and I sometimes feel sore about it even yet. It was a source of discord during thirty years, and I am glad that it is over--though of course it was a blow to me ~~more~~ to see Billy Bunter, after so long a career, dead and buried.

Yes, I think I have come across that story of our hero and the tiger, though in a varied form. But I have never been in any such difficulties myself: for a whole story was always floating in my mind when I began to write. It really is an odd process, which I do not quite understand myself: once you get going, the characters seem to walk and talk of their own accord, as if the breath of life had been breathed into their nostrils: the author has little more to do than to record their sayings and doings. Sometimes it almost seems like writing to dictation. But everyone, I think, does not find it the same: I have heard of authors who "make up" stories, painfully adding brick to brick. I have always thought that such painful writing must make painful reading. Of course there must be a spot of revision and a few emendations: but it does seem to me that the story, to be readable, must come a happy whole, like Pallas from the head of Jove.

I have been busy, the last year or two, on my volume of "Carcroft Ballads". No doubt you have observed that publishers are frightfully shy of verse? If you ever hear of a publisher who is reasonable on this subject, pass on the glad tidings.

With kind regards,
Yours sincerely,

Frank Richards

Charles Hamilton.