

35, Westholm

London N W II

Dec 12 1945

Dear Mr. Bagley,

Thank you for your letter a week or two ago enclosing the verses. I agree that verse is very difficult to publish: still, I never have much doubt of the outcome. When editorial brains seem uncommonly impenetrable,<sup>1</sup> I console myself by recalling the editor, about forty-five years ago, who 'did not see much' in Billy Bunter, and turned him down. I think I may say that BB had a little spot of success when he did appear before the public. I have no doubt that Barcroft Ballads would sell like hot cakes, especially among old readers of the "Agnat: so I must wait with patience for a publisher to see it also.

It is true that *verse* does not sell: but then, it is generally very bad verse. The "Bab Ballads" sold well enough: and Frank Richards has the temerity to place himself on a level, as a humorist, with Gilbert!

Yes, I have no doubt you are right on the subject of pen-names. I cannot think it quite fair on the public for a newspaper to own a pen-name, and cause various writers to write under it without the knowledge of the readers: there seems to me a very unpleasant element of deception in such a practice. The reader is entitled to know who is writing: or he may be paying his money for one man's work and being given another's---which is next door to fraud.

But a writer's own pen-name, selected by himself, is undoubtedly his own property, and such is my case. Indeed, after a good deal of trouble, I have a written acknowledgment from the Amalgamated Press that "Frank Richards" and "Martin Clifford" belong to me, and an undertaking that in future their writers shall not be allowed to use those names. I am not a man to look for trouble: but on this subject I am liable to get rather fierce: and I would be content with nothing less. Neither have I any doubt that I am entitled to substantial damages for the unauthorized use of my pen-name, not only without my leave but against my continual protests, by other writers employed by that firm. But I have at present more agreeable occupations than going on the ar-path and winning Pyrrhic victories.

The point you raise, about unscrupulous writers deliberately borrowing well-known characters in fiction, is very interesting. Some characters become a sort of public property: Gil Blas, and the Three Musketeers, are always with us: and Ruritania is always in existence in some region of fiction. In the lower regions of literature, Bulldog Drummond has been imitated and reproduced to as great an extent as Sherlock Holmes, and Captain Kettle is the father of a large family of lesser Kettles. But these are really cases of borrowing from the borrower. Sexton Blake is Sherlock Holmes: but Holmes was a popularized version of Edgar Poe's Dupin: while I suspect that Dupin, in his turn, was derived largely from an episode in Voltaire's Zadig. Captain Kettle derived, I think, many characteristics from Captain Cuttle. I have just heard a radio play in which a female character is lifted bodily from Shaw's You Never Can Tell,--the younger Miss Clandon, Dolly. But Shaw himself was a very active snapper-up of unconsidered trifles. The first time I saw Pygmalion performed---many years ago---I simply gasped. It seemed unbelievable that a

play-wright really could have thenerveto lift his work from an old author like Smellett in so barefaced a manner. You may find Eliza Doolittle in Peregrine Pickle: even her famous "Bluggy" is there, only more coarsely expressed--the same character in similar circumstances. ~~Man write to me~~ Our critics, I suppose, never read anything, and Shaw must have laughed in his sleeve. Then the most amusing episode in "Man and Superman" can be found in a French novel of Edmond About, if one cares to look for it.

R.L.S. was a great brigand in this line. His work is largely a mosaic of pinched fragments from other authors.

The present is no doubt a wonderful generation: but I wonder sometimes what the modern author would write, if his forbears had written nothing. Where would he go for his plunder?

No, I have no Agent. My sister wrote me the other day that I remind her of the chap in the old music-hall song:

I lay back on me piller,  
And read me Daily Mirror,  
And wait till the work comes round.

I think she is right: I seem to wait in a leisurely and contented manner for it to come round. But the fact is that a man who cannot see across a room, and has a game leg to nurse, cannot take very active measures. If the publishers want my work, they know where to find it: if they don't, there is still balm in Gilead: as a matter of taste, I ~~sh~~ would rather Horace than write Bunter.

But it seems probable that "Carcroft" may appear after the war, in a more bulky form than at present: and I have laid up a good deal of copy ready for that happy event. No doubt you have seen CHRISTMAS PIE--in which Frank Richards appears once more before the public. I like 'Carcroft' much better than Greyfriars: and shall hope that in the neat future, about a million readers of varied ages will share that taste.

Your mention of filing away 3000 Presscuttings makes my head swim. I have had heaps of such things, always lost or mislaid them, and seldom or never succeeded in laying my hand on one if I wanted it. It is the same with letters. Since the Evening News made my address public property last year, an unimaginable number of old Magnet's readers have written to me: it is a sheer impossibility to answer all the letter: and when I put one specially aside to answer, only too often it is not to be found when the necessary few minutes of leisure arrive. I admire the orderly mind that can keep all these things in their proper places: but despair of ever being able to imitate it. On the other hand, if I want a quotation, in one of half-a-dozen languages, I always know exactly where to go for it: my memory in matters like this is enormous and always reliable.

By the way, aren't you going to send me a copy of that February issue of the WRITER with the "interview in it"? I have ordered some copies from my usual quarter, but have been told that they are already out of print! Can that be the fact? I had one copy, but gave it away thinking that I could get some more---and so unless you can cough up one, I shall never be able to give it the twice-over. At the first reading, it seemed to me extremely good and readable: but when anything takes my fancy I like to give it a second or a third reading. However, please don't take trouble about such a little matter, if the supply really has petered out.

With kind regards,

Yours sincerely,

*Charles H. Matthews*