

Manneville,
Kingsgate,
Kent.

April 24 1943

Dear Mr. Gander,

I was extremely pleased to receive your airgraph, followed by the letters with copies of the "Story Paper Collector".

Your doubt of the real existence of Frank Richards' must now have dissolved away. Frank is quite real, and going strong, though showing some signs of wear and tear: which is only to be expected in an old bean who began to write in the far-off year 1890. But your question as to whether "Charles Hamilton" is real or a pen-name, rather amused me. Charles is rather more real than Frank, as a matter of fact. To tell you a little secret which is no longer one, my real name is Charles Hamilton: both Frank Richards and Martin Clifford being pen-names. But I am so used to being Frank Richards that I feel as if I were born to that name: so much so, that now that I am writing my autobiography, I am writing it as 'Frank Richards'.

As for 'other writers working behind the name of Martin Clifford', that I am sorry to say is only too true. As you have had to do with printing and publishing, you will easily understand that a weekly paper could not be held up if the author of the weekly story happened to have a cold, or to go on a holiday. For this reason I agreed with the publishers that when I could not, for any such reason, turn in the copy in time, a "substitute writer", as they called it, should be allowed to fill the blank. Greatly to my surprise and dismay, the Amalgamated Press gradually interpreted this to mean that they were at liberty to employ any number of hack-writers, to turn out any quantity they chose of imitations of my work. This was later carried to such a length that for many years the 'Gem' was taken wholly out of my hands. I admit that I felt some satisfaction when this policy caused the paper's circulation to shrink so severely, that its existence could only be saved by reprinting my old series from the beginning. But I must make it clear that I never gave leave for my pen-name "Martin Clifford" to be used on the dud numbers. This I regarded, and still regard, as a deception: and it was done without my consent, and against my protests. I am sorry to say that there exist publishers who think more of the Golden Calf than of the Ten Commandments.

I am very interested in what you tell me about your hand-press and the production of the 'Story Paper Collector'. I have always been interested in printing: I remember in very early days I jumped at an offer of being shown over the 'New York Herald' office in London. That must have been early in the nineties, though I do not remember the precise year. I remember watching a compositor setting up type by hand, and "dissing" it, as they called distributing it. ---printing has advanced in Seven-League boots since that time! I had a small hand-press when I was a boy: it printed pages about half the size of the "Story Paper Collector", and I used to print my own wonderful works on it-----now fortunately lost to humanity! But I was always running short of type, and had to do a lot of spacing.

No, I cannot claim "Prosper Howard" among my many names. If you would like a list of my pen-names, here it is: Frank Richards, Hilda Richards, Martin Clifford, Owen Conquest, Clifford Clive, Ralph Redway. There have been others, but these were the chief ones.

About "other hands" in the Magnet, that unfortunately is also correct, but to a much lesser extent. I do not remember all you mention, as I never kept track of the dud numbers: but I remember 'Linley Minor', an utterly rotten number which I certainly did not write. I was so angry when I saw it that I came near having a row with the publishers. But I was specially attached to the Magnet characters, and determined that they should not go the same way as the 'Gem', and I became so exceedingly unpleasant about it, that the Magnet was left to

me, and for very many years before the end it was entirely in my hands. But when the dud writers were at work, they did not 'write to my direction' by any means--- I would never have anything to do with it: and to tell the truth, I lost my temper about it so often, that it is quite surprising that I have one left at all!

You are quite right about the wonderful way a typewriting machine helps one whose eyes have been dotted. Actually, I should have had to give up writing in 1926 but for the typewriter: it became too troublesome to use a pen: all my correspondence is typed. We owe many things to the U.S.A., but most of all, I think, the Remington---a name I shall ever bless. I began to use a Remington about forty years ago, and have never changed, except from No. 7 to No. 10.

Certainly I should like to have any other numbers of the S.P.C. that you can spare. I have read every number you have sent me, with the greatest interest. I do not object in the least to your giving my address to anyone who might like to have it. I will go through my remaining pile of Gems and Magnets and ascertain whether it contains any of the numbers of which you are in need: and shall be very pleased indeed to send on any I may find. As for "quoting me in the Story-Paper Collector," I don't mind in the least, if there is anything in my letters that you think would interest your readers.

J.N. Pentelow was temporary editor of the Gem and Magnet while Hinton and Down, the editor and sub-editor, were away in the last war. Both of them came safely home after the Armistice: and a few years later Herbert Hinton left the Amalgamated Press, started a paper on his own called "School and Sport", for which I wrote some school stories under the pen-name of 'Clifford Clive'. I see there is an article on this subject in No. 11 of the S.P.C. Those "Special Notices" alluded to in the article indicated that there was a little spot of trouble about, but I won't go into this. After Hinton left, Maurice Down became editor of the papers, and remained so till the end in 1940. He was---and is---a splendid chap: the sort of editor that an author may see in visions but seldom hope to meet. He was in the last war from the beginning till the Armistice, and is now a captain in the Home Guard.

I notice in No. 9 a column signed "H.L.", in which reference is made to the oft-discussed question of the ages of the schoolboy characters. This was rather an awkward question in the early days: but when it was realised that the series would run on practically for ever, there was nothing for it but to take the plunge and make Peter Pans of them. There were, as H.L. remarks, always crowds of new readers coming in, and they wanted to read about schoolboys, not about hoary grandfathers. Billy Bunter ought really to be somewhere in his fifties by this time: but I don't think he would be very popular in his fifties! So he remained between fourteen and fifteen: and if by happy chance he should reappear when the present war is over, he will not be a day older---it might be said of him as of Cleopatra---"Age cannot wither him, nor custom stale his infinite variety!"

With kind regards,

Yours sincerely,

Frank Richards
(Charles Hamilton)