

Mandeville,
Kingsgate,
Kent,
July 23 1943

Dear Mr. Gander,

Thank you for your letter dated June 9, which I was very pleased to receive. Yes, your letter with the further copies of the S.P.C. came along after I had written to you.

You are right in thinking that I was responsible for the Billy/Wally Bunter numbers in the two papers; so I hope you will like them.

I can only partly endorse your remarks on Mr. Pentelow. I think he was pretty good when he was content to write his own stuff. But when he borrowed mine, I could not help thinking that he was pretty bad! But perhaps this is only an author's natural prejudice: the fact is, it ~~unpleasant~~ gets one's goat to see another writer monkeying about with one's own scenes and characters. Even if the chap did it better than oneself, one could hardly be expected to think so.

About the penname of 'Hilda Richards' I must explain a little further. About the close of 1918 the A.P. had the idea of a schoolgirl's paper somewhat on the lines of Gem and Magnet, and asked me to invent a group of characters and begin the series, to set the paper going. This I did under the pen-name of 'Hilda Richards', ---presumably a sister of Frank of the 'Magnet'. To my great disgust, the paper was taken out of my hands after the ~~sixth~~ sixth number, and carried on ever afterwards by hack writers, who had the nerve to use not only my material but my pen-name. Of course I had plenty of other writing to do, and it made no difference financially: but ~~adding~~ that was not the only point to be considered, from my point of view at least. One does not like to be made use of in that way. Later on I had rather a row with the editor of the paper about it:---but perhaps I had better not reveal that Frank Richards sometimes loses his temper!

I had some copies of Hinton's paper "School and Sport", but I am afraid they went to the salvage along with old numbers of the other papers. Yes, the stories I wrote for it were afterwards published in the Boys Friend, at that time edited by the Magnet editor. You see, it was in this wise: after Hinton left the A.P., he started his paper with rather insufficient financial backing, and I gave him "first publication" of the numbers for nothing, retaining the copyright. If his paper had continued to exist, I should not have used them again: but after 'School and Sport' had joined the great majority, I passed them on to the A.P.--there was no object in leaving them buried in a dead publication.

Yes, there was a change in the control of the Gem and Magnet in 1920. That was when Hinton left. The next editor continued to edit the paper still the paper shortage in 1940 knocked ~~them~~ them on the head. This editor was--and is---one of the very best: the sort of editor an author sees in visions but seldom meets. He is now a captain in the Home Guard: which is perhaps more useful at the present time than editing papers: he was in the last war from the first week till the Armistice.

The "editorial serial" you mention in 1919 was wholly fictitious, so far as I read it. I do not know by whom it was written: whoever he was, he had a fairly lively imagination, and was certainly not brought up at the feet of George Washington!

That "invitation" from the Editor in 1915 was one of Hinton's bright ideas. He was not really a bad chap, but he seemed to have a sort of blind spot on the subject of "meum and tuum": he seemed unable to understand that an author's ~~work~~ work was his own, and that others were not wanted to meddle with it.

The matters referred to in your postscript are rather a mix-up. Hinton was not first editor of the Magnet and Gem: the first editor was a chap named

Griffith, who wandered off to New York in 1910: Hinton succeeded him. Hinton left the A.P. in 1920, and went later to Odhams: it was there that he edited the "Children's Zoo" paper that you mention. I think he had edited the "Children's Newspaper" at the Fleetway House earlier, but am not sure. Pentelow edited the Magnet and Gem while Hinton was away in Flanders in the latter part of the War, and the Boys Friend was taken over by a man named Eves. When Hinton came back, he had all three papers till 1920: after that date, they passed to Mr. Down, latest and best of all the editors: but the Boys Friend was later taken over by another man who succeeded in washing it out of existence about a year later. The A.P. were always very decent in one matter: if a man went to the war, he was booked to get his post back, if he survived to claim it. Eves, I suppose, must have been left like Othello, with his occupation gone: possibly that was why the 'School Friend' came into existence about that time; he was the first and only editor of the same, till the paper shortage washed him out. But I am afraid I have no good word to say for this chap, as I still cannot help feeling a little sore about the way he got me to set 'Bessie Bunter' going, and then pushed me out. However, it is an old story now.

Now for a few remarks on No. 13 of the Story Paper Collector, which you kindly sent me with your letter. The article on 'Richard Randolph' by 'Cymro' is really the limit, a little beyond, and then some! It is quite correct, as Cymro says, that Richard Randolph, alias Pentelow, had the ineffable nerve to write a good many 'Gems', and call himself Martin Clifford while doing so, but Cymro's claim to detect his numbers is considerably unfounded. He gives a list including a story of Manners minor, and the 'Levison Reformation' series, which he fancies were written by Pentelow: but which actually were written by the genuine Martin Clifford----that is, myself--moi qui vous parle! I am rather flattered by his remark that the author showed a "streak of Puritan blood", and that his writings "might have been preached from the pulpit of one of our churches": and I must claim this credit for myself.

As I have mentioned, I did not think much of Pentelow as an imitator: he was good so long as he kept to county cricket, but in the Gem and Magnet his performances seemed to me rather like those of a bull in a china-shop. In the story you mention about Courtney, he even killed the poor chap off, which really was most exasperating. But he was not at all a bad chap. One day when I was prepared to get very cross indeed, he began the talk with the remark "Do you know, I've tried and tried again to get your style, but I don't believe I ever shall--how the dickens do you do it?" So what could I say after that?

With kind regards,

Yours very sincerely,

Frank Richards