

December 30th, 1950.

ROSE LAWN,  
KINGSGATE-ON-SEA,  
BROADSTAIRS,  
KENT.

Dear Frank Snell,

Many thanks for your card and the delightful snaps of Timo. What a little duck he looks. I am very glad to have these, and they now have an honoured place among my pin-ups.

Now about the masterpiece, which I am returning to you herewith, with the agent's letter and the two photographs. I must say I like those medals.

I have read the synopsis and the three chapters not once, but twice, armchair and pipe complete. First of all I will say that I like the story; especially the descriptive spots about Bideford, which reveal an intimate acquaintance with the place, and, I should say, a love of it. The religious atmosphere pleases me very much in the story; though I would not venture to say that it would have the same effect on the general reader in these heedless days.

There is undoubtedly a certain public for this kind of writing, and a numerous one; but the serious treatment of serious subjects does not possess an universal appeal in such flibberty-gibbet times as these.

You have quite a good narrative style. Perhaps a spot too diffuse in places; it is always wise to remember the counsel of sage old Polonius; that brevity is the soul of wit. Not an unnecessary word should ever be used; even the Christian name of a character need not be mentioned unless required for purposes of the story.

I like your Mr. Reed very much. Am I right in guessing that he is a real person, and numbered among your own acquaintances?

I think you might pick a more impressive name than Wilson for an impressive character like Joe's employer--such as Sylvester. A suitable name for a character gets him across to the reader's mind more effectively than yards of description.

In the same way, "Harry Branscombe" might be called Henry, as more elderly and suitable. Of course in real life

his friends would call him Harry up to ninety; but you have to think of the effect on the reader, in whose mind such a name as Harry is naturally associated with youth. For the same reason "Milly" would be more convincing as "Mildred" or as Mrs.

As I have promised to be quite frank, I must go on to say that, while your chapters are certainly well-written, they smack of the amateur.- the beginner feeling his way. This is quite unavoidable in a young writer, and if you keep on, it will sort itself out in time. To be able to write, one must write and write and write and write: there is no other way--- no happy short cut or Golden Road. At the same time you should observe the style of writers who interest you--not for the purpose of imitation by any means, but only to ascertain in just what the interest consists. I think that you will find that most writers who rouse your interest are concise, and generally let the characters explain themselves by their own talk. Tastes differ widely in these matters: but my own view is that there should be a good allowance of dialogue, all of which must be pithy and to the point. Every incident, and indeed every remark, should help on the story: fiction cannot afford to be so inconsequent as real life. Real life is the rough ore from which the pure gold of fiction is extracted, leaving the dross.

Just a little more care in detail. "Had done" on Page 4 won't do; nor "emersed" on page 6; nor the change of tense in the fourth line on page 7, nor "earlier on" on page 14. Little things like this give away the beginner.

But on the whole, my dear boy, very good. There is a freshness about it that I like very much. Practice and observation will eliminate the little weaknesses, which after all are only minor ones. So there you are!

With kindest regards, and best wishes for  
the New year,

Frank Richards