

35, Westholm,

N. W. II.

Jan II, 1945.

Dear Mr. Bagley,

Thank you for your letter. My little spot of trouble with the A.P. is not really "wropt in myst'ry". There were many discordant notes over a long period--all on a single subject. For example, you have told me that you have written under the pen-name of 'Edgar Williams'. Now, suppose that one fine day you saw a story or article appear under that name, which you had never seen or heard of before. Probably you would hike off to the editor and inquire what the Hades it meant. Suppose further you learned that you had made your pen-name so popular, that any tripe or trash could be sold under it, and that the idea was to push off on the public as much as they would swallow, on those lines?

Can you see yourself getting a little cross? Just a spot annoyed? And suppose that ultimately you lost your patience and your temper to such an extent, as to tell a Director in plain English that such a practice was 'fraudulent'. ? Imagine the Directorial feelings on hearing such a word!

Juliet has asked, what's in a name? I assure you that ~~you mention the~~ mentioning the right name of a thing may sometimes have the effect of a doodle-bug. So that is that! Hinc illae lacrymae.

That I was heading for a tough time was indubitable. I have quite a lot of money invested in property round about where I live, when I am at home---unluckily on the S.E. coast---producing, during the war years, a fine healthy crop demands for War Damage insurance--and absolutely nothing else. Post-war days will be O.K., no doubt---but we are not there yet.

Indeed at one time I had little to sustain me but trust in Providence, and I am glad to say that this never failed me, in the darkest hours. I could write an article on this subject which might do some good, in these days of doubt. One thing after another cropped up, to see me through---the list would sound almost miraculous. Now things really are looking up at last, and Frank Richards is cheerfully prepared to begin life again at seventy--with better outlooks, in truth, than when he began first at eighteen. It turned out all right then---and I have no doubt that it will turn out all right again.

If ever, my dear chap, you get one of those fits of black depression to which writing blokes are sometimes subject, when editors seem uncommonly idiotic, and publishers impenetrably dense, you cannot do better than adopt my recipe---remember that we are in God's hands, and that this life, much as we are attached to it, and little as we desire to leave it, is after all only a journey to better quarters. I have found solace in this, and should like to pass it on to others who get a jolt at times.

However, I won't enlarge on this theme---it is altogether too nineteenth-century!

The last few years, I have had more leisure than I wanted---but I don't think I really regret it. Whether verses and music will turn up trumps in a financial sense, I do not yet know; but I do know what pleasure I have derived from them. Serious verse I never could write: I have tried often, but the gift just is not there. All my published verses have been in the same strain of the playfully ironic, in odd corners of various papers. "Barcroft Ballads" are in the same vein: a good many people have told me that they are entertaining, but this is not quite the same thing as a publisher's O.K. I am quite certain myself that a volume of School verse, with Frank Richards's name on it, would sell

like hot cakes---but where is the publisher whom I can inoculate with a similar happy belief?

As you say you would like to see samples of the 'Ballads', I enclose a couple of the briefest. Perhaps you'll tell me whether they strike you as amusing, or as a deadly bore?

Thanks for the suggested title for the AUTO. "Runaway Pen" is certainly good, and I have already put it down in my note-book. But the Auto must bear the actual name of Frank Richards---that is what is to sell it. Since the news got around, you would hardly imagine the mass of correspondence I have had on the subject---those paragraphs in the Evening Standard, reproduced in a Yorkshire paper, started a sort of deluge. All this seems to show that there is a public ready and waiting---yet at the same time, I cannot quite get it into my head that a lot of people really want to know about so unassuming an individual as my poor self.

Yes---one may be 'news' one moment, and vanished into deepest Lethe the next! I have been in the news before---and out again! Once upon a time, years ago, I had a few words in the Daily Mail on the subject of the Bachelor Tax---in favour of it, I may add---and I was quite astounded at the result. Letters, requests for articles and photographs, came falling like the leaves of Vallambrosa. It was at that time that my picture---younger then than now---appeared in the Daily Sketch. I did write one article on the subject, I remember---but Billy Bunter kept me too close to the typewriter for more. Another time, when the idea of putting Bunter on the films was mooted, a Daily Mirror photographer actually tracked me to my hair, producing a picture that duly appeared in his paper, which made me remark, like Charles the Second, "Odd's-fish, if this is like me, I must be an ugly fellow."

A few weeks ago I had a narrow escape from a similar visitation, a paper called "ILLUSTRATED" which I had never heard of, requesting permission to repeat the performance. But this time I made very polite excuses---I cannot rely on my game leg long enough for interviews, in these latter days. And so the poor dog had none, as it were.

It is very singular to have attention focussed upon oneself in this way. But you never know how long it will last---there are so many other news items to jostle you off the stage.

No, I did not write that list in the Holiday Annual. I never knew the exact age, height, or weight of any character, and never wanted to. All such details are quite superfluous. Every character of which I have written came from actual life, perhaps a little idealized: but when they leaped into the mind, they never brought superfluous details with them.

"Sexton Blake" was written by many authors, under their own individual names. The best I think were the numbers under the pen-name of "Pierre Quiroule". But probably there were a dozen or so: but the whole thing was above board---each writer used his own name of pen-name. There was no trickery as in other cases. "Jack, Sam, and Pete" was written by S. Clarke Hook---a very decent old boy I thought him: old, though I suppose that when I last saw him, he was not nearly so old as I now am. I am afraid he was a little careless in his style: but he could tell a story, which few of the others could. I remember an amusing incident at the Fleetway House in connection with the Hooks---there were two of them---and Hinton, then editor of a bunch of papers. However, I have no doubt that you have had enough chit-chat by this time: so will spare the paper.

Yours sincerely,

*Frank Richards*

(Charles Hamilton)