

35 Westholm,

London, N.W. II.

Feb. 28, 1945.

Dear Mr. Bagley,

I hasten to acknowledge receipt of the QEB WRITER, which I was glad to get: though I do hope you did not have a lot of trouble in scrounging it for me. I have the paper sent to me regularly: but my own copy was given away at once. As you may guess, there are numerous relatives and connections who like to see these things: and in point of fact I placed an order for a dozen copies with my bookeller, but was unable to get even one. It seems to have gone out of print even more rapidly than Summer Pie. I am in doubt whether to attribute these happenings to war shortages or to the superlative attractiveness of Frank Richards!

I wanted very much to keep a copy of Summer Pie with Eric Hiscock's article on my unworthy self: but a boy in the Navy wanted one so much that I could not but send him mine: and so the poor dog has none. But I did secure a copy of SYNOPSIS with the abridged version. No second copy is to be had--this periodical also has already gone out of print. Periodicals in these queer times are here to-day and gone to-morrow.

I have just finished a spot of work and am taking a day off. What a thousand things there are to do in a day off! There are no fewer than seven books I want to read: innumerable letters I want to write: cross-word puzzles half-done and calling out to be finished: three translations in an unfinished state each of which I am eager to get on with: yet after breakfast the piano called me with such an irresistible call that everything else went. My A.P. leg is less troublesome this morning, which brightens life considerably. I mean my game leg: I generally call it my A.P. leg because it lets me down.

Many thanks for the letter enclosed in yours, from Master Copping: a queer epistle indeed. As he refers to the date 1914/15, the time must have been in Hinton's editorship. This poor fellow was killed in a railway accident on New Year's Day this year: so one must not feel sore with him: and at one time, indeed, we were very friendly. Yet what is one to think of an editor who ~~go~~ opens a Competition, inviting amateur writers to imitate the style and use the material of an author who trusted, as a matter of course, to his sense of honour and fair play? This was done not only without my consent, but without my knowledge: and by such means, hacks were enlisted to take over my work: Copping appears to have had bad luck, but I heard later of several who had better, and who seem to have got regular employment in stealing my stuff and pinching my pen-name. I don't think it is surprising that I rowed with the A.P. at last---what surprises me now is that my patience was able to hold out so long. I have had experience of a good many publishing firms: but never of any other that practised such methods, or anything like them.

I note what you say about an Agent. But I am afraid one would worry me. Also, I can never make up my mind to "submit" anything, as it seems to be called. I do not mean to say that I regard my works as prizes for which publishers should rush. Still, if a publisher wants them, he can say so. Actually I am a very modest old bean. The other day I was asked to write an article by an editor who seems to be the very nicest fellow on earth, the very flower and crown of all editors: so kind, and so generous, that I would willingly write my head off for him. The subject of the article did not attract me---it was about myself. But I have done it: and in sending it along to him, I felt bound to point out that I did not, myself, think that it was any good. So that does not sound like conceit, does it?



You can be very interesting on the subject of books. I have read twice what you have said in your letter on the subject: and shall probably read it again three or four times. It had not occurred to me that the lady lifted by Shaw from Smollett, might have been lifted by Smollett from an earlier author. But it is quite likely: and now the idea is in my mind, I shall keep an eye open for that lady! I don't quite know why these things interest one so much: but they undoubtedly do.

No doubt Sherlock Holmes was modelled upon a Professor of Doyle's student days, if Doyle said so. But the main idea must have been lifted from Edgar Poe. My own detective, Ferrers Locke, was "modelled" on a Director of the Amalgamated Press, an incisive clear-cut sort of man, now dead, for whom I had a great respect. But the main idea derived from the unavoidable source---through Sherlock Holmes to Dupin. But I was more original in creating a Schoolboy Detective: in a way, I flatter myself, in which it has never been done before or since. The idea may be called impossible: but I believe I made it appear quite possible and indeed normal.

Both Carcroft and Barcroft! The school about which I am now piling up copy, all ready for any publisher who may desire to make a fortune after the war, is called Carcroft. But in writing the Ballads I thought that a spot of alliteration would be useful. So Barcroft came into existence merely because, like Shaw's favourite adjective, it began with a B.

An odd thing is that, while I am really and truly modest about my prose, which has sold in quantities like Pelion piled on Ossa, I have no such doubts about my verse, of which I have never been able to sell more than a mere trickle. Perhaps this is like a mother's special affection for a defective child: like Milton's preferring Paradise Regained to Paradise Lost. However that may be, I do think my Barcroft verses "SARC" are as good as Gilbert, and that Gilbert would have written them had the idea occurred to him. So far I seem to be alone in this opinion---which I persist in regarding as "splendid isolation".

In the same way, I believe there is a public ready for my cross-word puzzles in Latin, French, Spanish, and Italian. I cannot, so far, get any editor to agree with me:--agreeable fellows as they seem generally to be. But I go on composing them.

My dear chap, if you are thinking of taking up the study of Latin, go in and win. Your remark upon a good English vocabulary helping you out is very well-founded. An observation of old Benjamin Franklin on this subject is interesting. He suggested approaching the dead languages through the intermediary of modern ones, instead of the other way about, as a more attractive method. It is certain that every French, Italian, or Spanish word you know, will help you in Latin. In this matter, I can let you into a golden secret-----no charge! Try composing cross-word puzzles in the language you desire to learn. You will find that those hunts in the dictionary, and those excursions up and down the grammar, acquire an unexpected interest: and you will find a vocabulary gradually fix itself in your memory without effort. And do not doubt that there is good stuff to be found as a reward. I do not believe that poetry, in our sense of the word, could be written in Latin at all: at all events it never was. But apart from that, there is great stuff--especially in Horace. But don't begin with Horace--begin with Eutropius, then Caesar, then Virgil and St. Augustine. Horace must be waited for, but he is worth it. Likewise Cicero, whom you may like when you get to know him. But for goodness sake don't call him Kickero----for the "new" pronunciation of Latin is an offence so rank that it smells to heaven!

Yours sincerely,

Charles Hamilton