

# THE LETTERS OF FRANK RICHARDS



## INTRODUCTION

By Eric Payne

This little book is published as the result of a suggestion from Mr. James Inghit of New York. Charles Hamilton was the most prolific of writers of stories for boys in his main career stretching from late-Victorian days until 1940. After the Hitler war, he became one of the most prolific of letter writers.

The letters we publish in this booklet were written mainly during the ten years or so which followed the end of the war. Every letter is a precious memory for its owner to whom it was written. We thank warmly those people who have kindly loaned us these valuable items for copying, especially so as every single one was volunteered. We fully appreciated that some of our friends might regard their letters as private links between the author and themselves. So we did not embarrass anyone by asking him or her to lend letters - it was purely a matter for the individual to decide for himself or herself.

Some of the people whose letters are published received a fairly large number, and we have selected from these the ones which we considered have the greatest general interest. I, myself, received a very large number of letters from the author, and only a selection of them is printed in this book.

It is fascinating to see how the tone changes as the years pass by. The author's outlook becomes more mellow. I fancy, too, that the author's answers were largely tempered to the mood of the letters to which he was replying.

For a while, readers were clamouring for more Greyfriar, yet Frank Richards was unable to write Greyfriar stories owing to what seemed like a dog-in-the-manager attitude of the Amalgamated Press. They did not want to publish Greyfriar themselves, yet they would not allow anybody else to do so. To us, the attitude of the A. P. seemed unreasonable, but we probably should not lose sight of the fact that we have never heard the A. P.'s side of the story, if there was one beyond sheer cussedness. The author's bitterness for a short time in the mid-forties was understandable, and it peeps through in one or two of the early letters published here.

But later the A. P. relented and the ban was lifted. There was no more bitterness. Everything in the garden was lovely, even though it is clear that he would dearly have loved to see Carcroft, for instance, surpass Greyfriar in the affection of his admirers. That was impossible, and one wonders whether he finally realized it.

Now the Grand Old Man's innate kindness and warmth of heart is shown at once, and the father figure develops in his letters to the crowd who are overwhelming him with their plaudits.

In his earlier letters he used the orthodox form of address, Dear Mr. Bloggs. Later it was the fatherly "Dear Joe Bloggs", and the occasional "my dear boy". As with his stories, his style of letter-writing was peculiarly his own.

Packed in with the warm memories of the letters of Frank Richards are old printed notepaper, dating from before the First World War (he must have had an enormous quantity of those old letterheads) and old envelopes re-used with economy labels, plus the mauve ribbon and the small-typed machine - and, of course, "dear Joseph Bloggs."

It is my sincere hope that this little book of the letters the author wrote in his old age will prove a welcome and much loved souvenir to add to your collection.



**This is the famous family photograph of the author, taken in his prime, not long before the First World War. The picture was reproduced in the Thousandth Number of the Magnet, in 1927. To the best of my belief, it was the only real picture of him which was ever published in any of the many papers which he made his own.**

January 18, 1945.

Dear Mr. Fayne,

I don't think I need tell you how pleasant it has been to me to read your letters. I thought when I read them that, like Gussy, here is a gentleman of "tact and judgment". But seriously, I thank you very sincerely for the very kind things you say about my writings. I have said before, but I will say again, that it is a real pleasure and solace to an old bean, now getting into the sere and yellow leaf, to know that his work had value in the eyes of his readers, and that he is still kindly remembered by them.

You tell me that you "hated" the poor stuff that supplanted my writing sometimes in the papers; but you did not hate it quite so savagely as Frank Richards and Martin Clifford did! It is still a very sore point with me: it was the use of my pen-names by other writers that led, more than anything else, to the final severance of my connection with the publishers. I have little doubt that the Magnet and Gem will reappear after the war is over: but they will be run on reprints -- or else on 'dud' numbers written by the A. P. hacks. Although it was, naturally, a heavy blow to me to part with the happy crowd of schoolboys who had been my daily companions for so long, it is a relief to have done with that kind of thing. But although I shall never again write Tom Merry or Billy Banter, I shall not be idle: I am now writing "Carcroft" for a publisher whose manners and customs are very different from those of the Amalgamated Press; and anyone reading "Carcroft" may be quite assured that what he finds under the name of Frank Richards will really be written by Frank and by nobody else. During the continuance of the War not much can be done; but some short stories of my new school are appearing in ME, and there is a happy prospect of publication on a wider scale when the war comes to an end -- which surely cannot be very long now.

I like your remarks on the subject of Trimble and Grundy -- mere echoes, it is true, of Magnet characters. You are right, too, in concluding that the genuine Martin Clifford took the Gem in hand again at the finish, and there was hope that the old paper would become itself again, when the war came, and knocked it on the head.

Frank Richards hopes -- as hope springs eternal in the human breast: -- that "Carcroft" may take the old place of Greyfriars, and that his old readers will like his new school. My own opinion is that Carcroft goes one better: and if my readers agree, then all will be calm and bright!

So you have come across that old article in Horizon? It is nearly five years old, yet I continually hear mention of it. I really do think that it was a fairly complete answer to George Orwell; and I subscribe whole-heartedly to your opinion that the man was an ass -- at all events, in his lucubrations on the subject of Frank Richards. In other matters he is quite a good writer, and his reviews in the 'Observer' are generally well worth reading.

I am more than pleased to learn that you liked the "Rio Kid". I may confess that I liked him very much myself; he came as a very agreeable change from my usual writing, and -- better than anything else -- the A. P. were kind enough to let me keep him to myself, and their wretched "substitute writers", as they called them, were never allowed to mangle him. I was rather afraid, when I introduced the Rio Kid, and "King of the Islands" into the Magnet, that the readers might "tumble to the

fact that all these authors were one and the same: but apparently few did.

Once more, thanks for your extremely interesting letter; and I shall hope to bear some day that you have seen "Carcroft" and like it better than either Gem or Magnet:

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June 21, 1945.

Dear Mr. Fayne,

Many thanks for your letter of the 9th. It is very interesting to hear that you are cataloguing a "huge collection" of Gems and Magnets. I am glad you had more sense than I had in 1940, when I handed over a mountain of old numbers in the paper shortage. Considering the number of forms I have seen since, that sacrifice was hardly needed! Luckily a couple of hundred or so were at a different address and out of my reach at the time, and these have survived.

Your school captain must be a penetrating lad: but I am particularly interested in this little episode, for I always had an idea that a reader who gave attention would spot the difference. But I imagine that in most cases the Gem readers fancied that Martin Clifford had gone off his form, and being bored with the stuff, simply gave it up. The circulation had dwindled very near vanishing point, when the poor old paper was given a new lease of life by reprinting Martin's old series from the beginning. The paper was practically taken over by the dud authors for some years before that. I think you are right that the final series was the best: Martin Clifford was very glad to get the paper back again, and he enjoyed writing those numbers. But for the War it would now probably be going very strong.

Sometimes it gives me a little shock even now to realise that Tom Merry and Billy Bunter and the rest are gone for ever. But one has to bite on the bullet: and it is not much use crying over spilt milk. I hope and believe that "Carcroft" will take the old place of Greyfriars. It may interest you to hear that another scholastic establishment has now come into existence -- Frank Richards is never short of a new school when required, and can produce one like a rabbit out of a hat! This time it is "Sparshoet School" -- and the stories are to be published in little 1/- volumes. Paper shortage limits the size while expanding the price: one can only hope that the reader will consider that quality atones for quantity -- or the lack thereof. It is rather a curious story: the publisher is an old Magnet reader who fancied the idea of publishing Frank Richards -- and being now in the publishing line, is able to carry out that idea! -- while Frank, being no longer held in bondage by the Amalgamated Press, is at liberty to supply the stories. At the same time he is contemplating a series of schoolgirl volumes by "Hilda Richards". I don't remember whether I have mentioned to you that I was the original "Hilda Richards" of the School Friend, author of "Bessie Bunter and Co." The paper was taken out of my hands after a short time -- one of my sorest recollections. It really does not seem right to me to get an author to set a thing going, and then pass it on to others, who had not intelligence enough to begin it. However I am so terribly afraid of becoming an old bean with a grievance that I try to dismiss all such things from my mind. But if Mr. Merrett's plan materialises, "Hilda Richards" will be writing again, and it will be all genuine this time.

Did I mention to you that I have written an autobiographical article for Hutchinson's SATURDAY BOOK? As this book is priced at 15/-, I always hasten to add that it can be obtained at the libraries soon after publication. Present-day prices rather scare an old bean like myself, who remembers buying a complete edition of Shakespeare published at 1/- in the early nineties. If you come across SUMMER PIE, I should like to hear your opinion of the Carcroft story therein when the spirit moves you again to write.

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August 9, 1945.

Dear Mr. Leckenby,

Thank you for your letter. Yes, I thought it was up to me to barge into the controversy down under: for, absurd as it may be to have one's existence made a matter of argument, it has a rather serious aspect. PIE circulates all over Australia; and "Sparshott School" will soon be following in its footsteps: and what are people to think when they see the name of Frank Richards in these publications, and are told by wise knowalls that, as Betsy Prig put it, there "ain't no such person". Mr. Leon Stone of New South Wales is very kindly sending me some A. B. C's but I have not yet received a copy containing the original reprint from GEN which began all the potter. The War Office have sent out a contradiction to the editor of GEN, to be printed in that paper -- and perhaps in the fulness of time I may see a copy of the same.

I am quite vague about the number of Magnets which were interpolated by the toads. They used to irritate me too much for me to keep them or even look at them. I had an impression of about thirty, or perhaps fifty. But, as Mr. Gander seems to think, the number may have been considerably greater, though I can hardly think that it ran to 100. There was none during the last ten years of the paper, and that is all I can say with certainty. The dud Gem ran to 200 or 300 I believe. There will never be any more of this kind of thing, for some time ago the Amalgamated Press agreed to give me an undertaking, in writing, that my pen-names should never again be used by their hacks, either Martin Clifford or Frank Richards, Owen Conquest or Hilda Richards. By the way "Hilda Richards" -- the genuine one -- will soon be seen again as Merrett's are going to publish "the girls of Headland House" by the charming Hilda.

In answer to your question, the excuse for using the work of other writers under my name was that I had too much to do and could not keep up the supply. This was true, in a way: no human being could have kept going the Magnet, Gem, Rookwood, Cedar Creek, Cliff House with Bessie Bunter, and the series in the Herald, all at the same time. But there was no need to start the last named at all: and any of the minor series could have been and should have been -- shut down, or rather, should not have been commenced. I did not realise, at the time, that the game was to get me to start things, to be carried on later by nameless scribblers, at a lower rate of pay. I always did what I was asked to do, and was a fool for my pains. But the time came when the dud scribes had so reduced the circulation of the Gem, that the pay-sheet could not carry decent fees. Had I been told this at the time, I would gladly have waived the question of cash, for which I never really cared. But I was just shut out, and that was that -- and matters going from bad to worse, the poor old paper could only be preserved by reprinting my old series from the beginning. Of course

I never had to complain of lack of work -- as fast as one series was taken away from me, another was started, and I was always producing my million and a half words a year. But, I never could get over the writings of others being published under my name -- it "got my goat" from the start, and is still getting it. The A. P. never understood that a series could only be carried on successfully by the same hand that began it. Once the characters were brought into existence, they fancied that any Tom, Dick or Harry, could carry them on. I have no doubt that if they had published music, and Beethoven had started the Nine Symphonies for them, they would have stopped him at No. 4 or No. 5, and employed a man, at a pound a week to carry on the series -- never dreaming that old Ludwig would be wanted any more. And they wouldn't have seen any difference between the first symphony and the last -- though no doubt others would. They could learn nothing from the failure and disappearance of one paper after another. I have dealt at considerable length with this question in my Autobiography, which, I am afraid, is the reason why it is held up -- publishers are much more wary than authors!

P. S. It may interest you to hear that Frank Richards has written a little comedy -- about 15 or 20 minutes radio time -- which is to be put on the air by the BBC. It is on quite different lines -- nothing to do with schools or schoolboys; dealing with a young man named George, the scene laid variously in Surbiton, Kenya, and the South Seas. I don't know at present when it is booked to emerge on the atmosphere; but no doubt this will be announced in due course in the Radio Times. So if you are interested, there is an item for which to keep an eye open.

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November 4th, 1945.

Dear Mr. Fayne,

Thank you for your letter which was as welcome and as pleasing as ever. I could wish that we had been corresponding years ago.

So there was a time when you had a doubt whether I actually wrote the stories in the last year of the Gem. I assure you that I did write them - every one of them. Poor things but mine own, as it were, though my own opinion is that they were the best stories I ever wrote for that paper.

I was intrigued by what you said about the Greyfriars Herald. It is quite remarkable that you have the original Herald, published in the Kaiser's war. Hinton and I did it between us - I think it was his idea - and I wrote almost everything in it.

As you so rightly guess, I created Herlock Sholmes and Dr. Jotson, rather irreverently I must confess and I believe that readers liked them. The paper finished very suddenly owing to the shortage of raw materials, and caught us on the hop. Hinton had some H. S. stories in hand at the time, and these were published later in one of the other papers - the Magnet, I seem to remember.

I'm glad that you liked the Benbow tales. They were a complete change for me, and I enjoyed writing them. I think they went down well with readers, and I really forget why we sent Drake and Rodney to Greyfriars. It's a long time ago, and I have had a lot to think of since then. But the people at the top made peculiar decisions sometimes. I suppose we had a reason for linking Drake with Ferrers Locke. I know there were Greyfriars stories in the stock pile, and they were used

later in the Magnet, the Holiday Annual, and, perhaps, elsewhere. So everybody was happy, as Bob Cherry would say.

The Macdonald picture of Tom Merry is delightful as you so truly say. You must value it highly. Mac is a good chap, and he and I are good friends.

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January 9, 1946.

Dear Hubert Machin,

Very many thanks for your letter, sent on to me from the BBC. I am hearing from a good many old Magnet readers who listened in to my broadcast the other day: but your letter is particularly pleasant. When I read your description of me as the "creator of the finest boys' stories ever written", I almost went to the telephone to order a larger size in hats!

You seem to have a remarkably good memory for old Magnets and Gems. I note that you specially mention the "House-Master's Home-Coming". I think I liked that story best of all the Gems that "Martin Clifford" ever wrote! And you remember the "Greyfriars Herald" when it was only One Halfpenny! Times are changed since those days! Do you remember that wonderful detective, Mr. Herlock Sholmes - and did you guess that Frank Richards was the author thereof? It is hard to believe, in these latter days, that papers were ever published at halfpenny or penny. I had quite a shock when I learned that my "Sparshott" numbers were to be published at 1/- each. Yet I am told that the edition so far printed went off just as the old penny numbers used to go: Times are changed indeed!

It is very interesting to hear that you read some of the numbers to the boys in your class. I think I should rather have liked to be in such a class when I was a boy! I should have preferred, say, "Treasure Island" to the rule-of-three any day. I have since utterly forgotten what the 'rule of three' is, and why!

I feel a little spot of sadness sometimes, thinking that I shall never write again about Greyfriars and St. Jim's and Rookwood. All these schoolboys were very real to me, as they seem to have been to many of my readers, and it was a blow to part with them all. However it is a case of "le roi est mort, vive le roi!" I find it just as interesting to write about Turkey and Co., at Carcroft, and Plum and Co. at Sparshott, and Harry Trent and his friends at Oakhurst, and Tom Bright at Ferndale. Most Magnet and Gem readers are now, I suppose, "old boys": but I shall hope that some of them may take a liking to the new characters that play their part therein. I was very much flattered when I received a letter the other day from a reader who confessed that he was sixty, but still a keen reader of Frank Richards! Long may he wave!

No, your "esteemed letter" is not of "terrific" length! Wathah not! I have read it through twice with great pleasure, and can only thank you very sincerely for the kind things you say. I am very pleased that my broadcast inspired you to write to me. Indeed, if broadcasting brings me many such agreeable letters as yours, I think I shall tell the BBC, that, like Master Benedict, I "must always be talking."

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October 1, 1946.

Dear Jack Overhill,

Many thanks for your letter. It is very kind of you to say such extremely pleasant things about the stories I have written. As you tell me that you write yourself, this is all the more flattering. Writing is rather an uphill business in these days of paper shortage. A great deal of what I have written since the end of the War is still held up by want of paper. I believe that many quite good books are turned down by publishers, simply because they cannot find the paper on which to print them, so you must not be discouraged by that kind of thing. For example, it is more than two years since I wrote my "Autobiography", and it was bandied about here and there, and has only just found a publisher willing to spare paper for it. And at this very minute, a Manchester publisher has over 400,000 words of my copy, which he has nobly paid for in advance, and which he cannot find paper to print as yet. So if you find that "the editor regrets" or "the publisher cannot see his way", very likely it is only that worrying paper question all the time!

It is very pleasant to read that your boy followed in the parental footsteps as a reader of the Magnet. By the way, the old Gems and Magnets you possess are worth taking care of. Back numbers are growing very rare, and are much sought after, and quite absurd prices are often offered for them. I heard the other day of a collector giving 12/6 for an old double-number of the Gem called "The House-master's Home-Coming". Usually they fetch about 1/- each.

But you mustn't say that when you reached "adult age" you were "growing out of boyish fiction." It is quite true that "Greyfriars" was written primarily for young people: but it was designed for people of all ages, and there is a good deal in it that is overlooked by the boy and more appreciated by the adult. Many of my readers confess to such ages as sixty and sixty-five: I have lately heard of one of 80. It is, in fact, a deluge of letters from old readers, almost all now adults, which has determined me to resume writing "Greyfriars", which I had regarded as dead and gone.

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December 2nd, 1946.

Dear Jack Overhill,

It gave me real pleasure to read your letter. Congratulations, my dear boy! I shall place an order in good time for the "Snob", with my bookseller, and shall look forward to reading it. I hope most cordially that the options on your other books will be taken up.

The writing business is not all beer and skittles, and it is always pleasant to hear of a spot of luck coming to any wielder of the pen or tapper of the typewriter.

As it happens, I have a book coming out about the same time - that is, in the spring - as it has been decided that Greyfriars is to be revived, and this will appear, not in numbers, but in volumes of novel length, published at about 6/-. Let us hope that "The Snob" and "Billy Banter of Greyfriars School", will run neck-and-neck in the Best-Sellers Stakes!

No, my dear boy, I can't ask you to call, for the lamentable reason that I am too old to see visitors. Don't think this ungracious: I always have to make the same reply. I just love reading letters from old readers: but at my age an old Johnny has

to be assembled like an engine for interviews. But if you'd like to hear my dulcet voice, it will be audible on the radio on December 23rd, at 8 a. m. short wave.

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February 25th, 1947.

Dear Jack Overhill,

You must forgive this rather late answer to your letter of December 11. I hardly know how the days go, they pass so quickly. That is what comes of getting back to Greyfriars, and rolling Billy Bunter off the typewriter again!

I was deeply interested in the story related in your letter. You had a hard row to hoe: yet you seem to have pulled out in a very happy way. It is strange how fortunes differ. I found everything easy in youth - I wrote my first story at a little over seventeen, it was accepted at once, and more asked for; and this good luck went on for fifty years, so that I came to take it as a matter of course. Then came the bump that had been waiting for me all the time! Life ran on easy lines till I was nearly seventy - at that age, everything went; papers closed down, nothing left but a taxation hang-over, and the problem of living through the War on an income of Nothing a Year! You had it in youth. I had it in age! I suppose we all get it some time or other. And the only thing to do is to bite on the bullet, trust in Providence, and keep going! On the whole I think you had the better luck, for you tell me that you have a boy and a girl, God bless them.

You seem to have a wonderful memory for the old papers. If I ever forget anything about them, I think I shall drop you a line and ask!

Did I tell you that I am now writing Greyfriars again? The first volume comes out in a few weeks, published by Charles Skilton Ltd., 50 Alexandra Road, London, S. W. 19. Book form in these days - the Magnet is gone for ever.

I have been continually astonished by the interest taken in the revival of Billy Bunter. I should never have dreamed that so many people had even heard of him. If you read the Daily Herald or the News Review you may have seen the articles on the subject. Even our local reporter blew in one day for an interview for the local paper - having heard that W. G. B. had come to life again. They sent me some reprints of his article, and I enclose one, as it may amuse you. Don't bother to return it - I have a dozen.

How things change in a long life! You wouldn't notice it much as a lad of forty-four: but it amazes me sometimes. For example: in the Daily Mail of January 18th, Norah Alexander had an article on Bunter. Imagine my surprise on getting a letter on the last day of January from a man on the Gold Coast who had read the article, and so got in touch with me! B. O. A. C. had flown out that issue of the Mail, he had read it, and written to me on the 25th, by Air Mail. Young people now take all this in their stride. But I can tell you that it would have made us rub our eyes in the 1880's. Distance seems to have ceased to exist, when a London newspaper is read in West Africa a few days after publication.

You interest me very much by what you tell me of your writing. Good luck to you, and may publishers' doors be flung wide open. These be tough days for scribblers, with paper worth its weight in gold - if there were any gold - and cuts in this, and cuts in that, till we feel as if we were getting the Chinese sentence of "death by a thousand cuts". O for the happy 1880's when there weren't any planners!

Thank you, my dear boy, for an interesting letter.

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14th May, 1947.

Dear Herbert Leckenby,

Many thanks for the Collectors' Digest. Not merely excellent, but eccelentissimo!

It looks now as if "Billy Banter of Greyfriars School" may be along in June. I have just seen the proofs of Macdonald's pictures which I like very much. Frank Richards is now planning the second volume.

By the way, you may be interested to hear that another publisher will probably be producing "Billy Banter's Christmas Annual" in time for next Christmas. There will be a miscellany, containing stories by Frank and Hilda Richards, Martin Clifford, Owen Conquest, Ralph Redway, etc., with some verses and cross-word puzzle, and so on - all the work of my own fair hands! It is not settled yet whether it may not be called "Frank Richards" Christmas Annual, but, as our old friend from Stratford remarked, "What's in a name?"

Speaking of cross-words, the idea has been mooted of "Frank Richards" Cross-word Puzzle Book. This, if it materialises, will contain about two dozen cross-word puzzles in English, and one each in Latin, French, Italian, German, Spanish and Portuguese, by way of variety. I have always thought that cross-word puzzles in foreign languages would be very useful to students; indeed I think they might very well be used in schools. It will be an interesting experiment anyhow. Perhaps you may have come across my Latin cross-word puzzle in "Modern Boy" about a dozen years ago, or the French one in an early Greyfriars Annual. I was quite surprised by the interest the readers seemed to take in them: especially the Latin one which evoked a great deal of correspondence.

What you tell me about those old numbers of the Realm is extremely interesting. "King Cricket" brings back happy memories. All the world was young when that story was written, and I remember how I enjoyed writing it. It is very pleasant to read that you liked it. "Cliveden" was in the Herald, and it lasted, I think, quite a long time. I remember my talk with Hamilton Edwards, when the series was mooted, as if it were yesterday; and it must be forty years ago. Father Time seems to step on the accelerator sometimes!

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June 4th, 1947.

Dear John Robyns,

I am very glad that -- after twenty-five years -- you made up your mind to write to me, for your letter has given me very much pleasure. Many old readers have told me of a troubled boyhood in which they found some solace in my humble efforts to entertain, and perhaps you can guess how very pleasant it is to me to know that sometimes I may have brightened days that would otherwise have been cloudy.

It is very amusing to think of you greeting your friends with Bob Cherry's "hallo, hallo, hallo!" Bob seems to have been rather a favourite, and really I think he was a good and thoroughly healthy fellow, not at all a bad model for any boy to take. I remember remarking in an article I wrote in "Horizon" a few years ago, that if any

boy had an inclination to become a Tchekoff, I hoped that reading the Magnet might turn him into a Bob Cherry -- and I still think the same. Lately I have been writing "Greyfriars" again, after a long interval, and "Hallo, hallo, hallo!" echoes once more down the Remove passage -- so real to me that I seem to hear it as it clicks off on the typewriter.

At the present moment I am "Martin Clifford" once more, writing of Tom Merry and Co., a book which is to follow the Greyfriars book later in the year. Since the war I have been writing Sparshott, Headland House, Topham, Carcroft, Oakhurst, Ferndale, and other things -- but it is just joy to get back to Greyfriars and St. Jim's. I can only hope, my dear boy, that a new generation of readers will like them even half as much as you seem to have done.

The picture enclosed in your letter is really remarkable. Is it a copy of an old Magnet illustration? -- I seem to recall it from an early number. I used to draw a little; but not within miles of this.

You mustn't feel "timid" about writing to Frank Richards, who likes taking a day off sometimes to read and answer letters from old readers. And your letter has given me so much pleasure that you really must not let another twenty-five years elapse before you write again.

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July 3rd, 1947.

Dear John Robyns,

Thank you for your letter of June 12th. It was very pleasant to read that your little girl of ten likes the old Magnets, bless her little heart. I hope the little dear may like the Bunter book which you tell me will be coming to you.

"Billy Bunter" is now definitely fixed for August, after so many delays caused by the fuel crisis. One has to be patient in these days; but I shall be very glad to see it at last. I wondered a good deal how Greyfriars would "go" in book form; but the publisher, who came to see me a week or two ago, set all my doubts at rest. Indeed what he told me almost made me rub my eyes. He is budgeting for 50,000 -- of which 10,000 had been taken up by the beginning of June. Who would have thought it?

You can guess that this made me very happy. It isn't so much the success of the book, though of course that means a good deal to me, but knowing that so many people have a kind remembrance of Frank Richards. It is worth while to be old when the younger generation are so kind.

If by chance you are a film fan, it may interest you that Moore-British News came down the other day to put Frank Richards into a picture. It will be a longer film than the Pathe Pictorial last year, and Macdonald, who did the pictures for the Bunter book, comes into some of the scenes. They expect to release it about the end of the year.

Did you ever hear that Frank Richards used to write songs in his earlier days? One of these, a duet called "Tell me, What is Love?" will shortly be republished by Ascherberg's, who originally published it more years ago than I want to remember. It has been out of print for at least thirty years, and it will be quite curious to see it about again. After this, I shall expect somebody to dig up the stories I wrote in 1890!

Yes, I certainly know Mr. Eric Payne, as a "pen-pal", and have had some very pleasant letters from him. But the picture of Tom Merry you refer to cannot have been my work. I had only one picture in the Gem, and that featured Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. It was in a very early number -- before 1909, I think.

A film producer called on me yesterday, with a proposition to film the Bunter book. Isn't that curious, when it is not even published yet, and won't be for five or six weeks to come? I liked him and his ideas very much, but I wonder what would be the public reaction to Billy Bunter on the silver screen.

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July 17th, 1947.

Dear Tom Johnson,

Many thanks for your letter with the enclosures, which I have read with the greatest interest. I did not know that I was waking up a musical genius!

It was pleasant to come upon your photograph in "Merseyside Musicians". A very genial countenance, if I may say so: and as pleasant as your letters.

"In Praise of the Duet" specially interested me, as my venerable piece which Ascherberg's are reviving is a duet, though not an instrumental one. Words by Frank Richards: music by Una Hamilton: my youngest sister. It may interest you that my sister was a student at the Royal Academy of Music, in its old Hanover quarters in those days. I am myself a mere dabbler in music, though never at a loss for words!

I have inquired for several of the pieces in your list, and looking forward to their arrival. It is very curious and interesting to me to note the very varied occupations and professions of old Magnet readers who write to me. Yours I think must be an extremely interesting one. I can guess that interruption of over five years was something of a jolt: my experience was similar in a way, as the War years were mostly idle so far as writing was concerned: but music is a progressive art, and it cannot have been easy to carry on from the point where it was left off. I remember a story of a violinist in the other war: his sergeant asked him why he was down in the mouth, and he explained that, with years of war service ahead of him, he wouldn't be able to keep up his practice, and what would his playing be like when he came back? To which the sergeant answered: "That's all right: you won't come back!" Which must have been very comforting!

I shall hope to hear some of the fairy stories you mention on the air. Fairy tales have had a charm for me for seventy years and will always have, I think. I have done many myself, for home consumption, and have sometimes toyed with the idea of making a volume of them, but there is always something or other to take up one's time. My sister's little girl used to march into my study, when she was tired of playing, seat herself in the armchair, and say "Tell me a story, uncle:" and Uncle had to play up: sometimes very much to the detriment of Tom Merry or Billy Bunter. This little dear is now over twenty, and thinks not about fairy tales, but such weighty matters as the Reconstruction of Europe! and Woman's Place in Politics! I still prefer fairy tales myself.

Do put me wise next time you broadcast. I should be delighted to listen in. I have not broadcast myself since last Christmas, when I gave the wide world the interesting information that Billy Bunter was coming back. This was on the Pacific

and African Services. I should certainly be very glad to read one of your published short stories. On musical subjects, no doubt. I treated this subject once in a short story -- not very seriously, I am afraid; it was 'The Case of the Lost Chord'; Herlock Sholmes being engaged to discover what had become of it! But perhaps you never made the acquaintance of that wonderful detective!

In your article on Radio Music you remark that you are not wholly in favour of opera on the air. The reasons you give are good; nevertheless, I should guess from this that you are not yet middle-aged, even if you had not told me. More years ago than I want to remember, I was a very keen opera-goer, and I never missed Melba or Tetraxzini if I could help it. In these latter days I don't go beyond the garden fence; and what should I do for opera but for the BBC? The radiogram is a very poor substitute. "Action, dress, and scenery" count for a good deal, no doubt; but after all the music is the thing; moreover, I have only to close my eyes while listening-in to recall the scene. I have often thought myself very fortunate, since one must grow old, to have grown old in the age of radio -- it has brought to me very much that I should have missed sorely. I should like to see the BBC extend its operatic programmes, with perhaps a little more care sometimes in the selection of singers. But one must not be too critical of a great blessing. So, my dear boy, when next you write on radio music, you must remember the old beans who are no longer able to get about, but who still want all they can get of Wagner, Verdi, Berlioz and Saint-Saens. Neither do we always lose a great deal by hearing without seeing -- a plump middle-aged lady in such a part as Gilda is better heard than seen; and I remember a "Samson" at Nice where the scenery was so grotesque as to spoil the whole thing.

But I am running on too long. Once more thanks for sending me the articles, which I return herewith.

=====  
August 11th, 1947.

Dear Tom Johnson,

Many thanks for your letter with the poem and story, returned herewith. I like your verses very much. You say I am to see "how bad" the story is: but you don't do yourself justice. It is very pleasantly written. But -- if I may say so -- that "returned brother" wouldn't do! He is such a very old acquaintance that he must be considered as having served his turn. I remember a popular song of about fifty years ago called "After the Ball" of which a few lines linger in my memory:

Too late the truth, dear,  
Since I have learned,  
He was her brother,  
Lately returned.

It is time that that brother disappeared into the Ewigkeit. I am sure you won't mind my saying this; for the little story is so pleasantly written that I liked it, notwithstanding its prehistoric theme.

I have been able to get some of your musical works, though some appear to be out of print. My depleted eyesight does not allow me to read music in these latter days, so I had to wait for a friend to come in and play them over to me -- which

made a very pleasant evening. I had "Spotlight", "Lucky Boys" and the Scherzo. By the way, it may interest you that another friend, who teaches music in London, came in and heard the last-named, and took a fancy to it. She is a lady now getting on in years, who was a pal of my sister's at the Royal Academy of Music in the long, long, ago, and has been teaching ever since. She told me that she wanted a piece for two pianos for some pupils, so I made her a present of your piece -- and by this time I have no doubt that it is being hammered and thumped by vigorous young hands!

Yes, you are right about the music in the old Greyfriars Annual. I think it was the 1921 volume that had a song about Arthur Augustus D'Arcy in it, with the music written by my sister under the name of Owen Dell. She also wrote the music of "Tell me, What is Love"; which Ascherberg's are now republishing. The music to my other songs in the Annuals was written by my brother-in-law, under his pen-name of "Jeff Lytton". My sister at the moment is lending me an expert hand with a song of which I have produced the music as well as the words, and with which I hope to dazzle the public one of these days. But it is a long, long way to the Tipperary of Tin Pan Alley! Want of paper afflicts the Charing Cross Road as much as Fleet Street.

I am not surprised to hear that you have many things still in MSS. The paper famine seems to grow worse instead of better. Last year I had no fewer than six series going on happily -- but the paper famine has cut them off in the bloom of their youth. I wonder how the paper is found for the Bunter book. But for that, I should feel rather like dropping the typewriter over the cliff into the sea, and applying for a job as a Bevin Boy! But the demand for the Bunter book has been a great comfort. I never imagined, or even dreamed, that thousands of copies would be taken up months before publication, and I could hardly believe my ears when the publisher told me he was planning for 50,000. The old Magnet used to sell 75,000 weekly at 2d. But 50,000 at 7/6 does really seem like something from the Arabian Nights.

It is rather intriguing to hear that you have in mind a suite written round Greyfriars School. Why not? I should be very pleased to see it. I cannot quite understand why there is such a rush for the Greyfriars book -- but there it is; and might not the same thing happen in the case of a Greyfriars Suite?

Perhaps you may have seen my Bunter Song in one of the Annuals. We are now planning to republish this separately, -- on the tail of the Bunter book, as it were! I should like to hear something more about that suite, if you carry on with the idea. I should rejoice with my whole heart if you made a hit with it.

Do you chance to be a reader of the Manchester Guardian? There was a very amusing article in the issue of May 27th, on the subject of Frank Richards and Greyfriars. It is an extremely good paper, and now that it has come my way, I take it regularly. It doesn't say much for metropolitan enterprise, that the best newspaper in the kingdom is published in Manchester. But undoubtedly it is so.

November 17th, 1947.

Dear John Robyns,

It is very kind of you to send me the "Argus" cuttings, and the issue containing Peter Black's rejoinder to my letter to him. The fact is that I liked his article, notwithstanding a few inaccuracies, so I sent him a few lines; and I have had a very pleasant letter from him in reply. It has been a very agreeable episode, for which

I have to thank you, my dear boy.

And I am still more pleased by your letter this morning, giving me the name and address of a young man to whom I can send a copy of Bunter in Braille when it comes out. This really is very, very good of you. Such an affliction, in one so young, is a terrible thing, and I do not wonder that you feel a deep sympathy for him. It seems to me wonderful with what courage people so afflicted face the inevitable, and make the best of it. I cannot help thinking that the inventor of Braille was one of the greatest benefactors of mankind: and that every Christian should feel it his duty to help on this good work by every means in his power. A Greyfriars story is, of course, the merest trifle: but the widow's mite was not despised. I have put Mr. Davis's name in my list: and I shall hope that he may at least derive a few minutes' entertainment from it when he receives it. I have always had a keen interest and sympathy in cases of blindness, partly perhaps because of an experience in very early days. When I was a boy, my little sister, owing to eye trouble, had to have her eyes covered for a period, and I used to read aloud to her for several hours a day. It is more than half-a-century since, but I have never forgotten the impression it made on my mind.

"Billy Bunter's Birthday Present" will probably be published in Braille early next year, and more stories will follow. It has now been suggested that my book should be printed in Braille when circumstances permit, and both the publisher and myself have willingly given our consent: but the quantity of paper required would be so great that it does not seem to me feasible in the near future.

Thank you once more for your kind action.

-----  
17th November, 1947.

Dear Herbert Leckenby,

Thank you for the ever-welcome and ever-interesting C. D. and your letter therewith. It is very good of you to promise me Robert Whiter's sketch, which I shall be very glad to have, and which will in due course adorn my study wall, next to the photograph of a delightful little kid with a gorgeous smile which came from a Birmingham reader. I note on your cover that Robert hasn't dis-remembered about Bunter's checks as our artist did!

I must thank you specially for your extremely pleasant and gratifying article headed "The Event of the Season". The last paragraph caused me to lean back and think. As a rule my thoughts turn to the future, not the past; I don't know why, unless because I am a born optimist. But this time I couldn't help running over in my mind the intervening years between the first number of the Magnet and the first Greyfriars book - thirty-nine years in all! What has - or rather what has not - happened in that space of time? Two big wars, and a few little ones; and a world so changed and unstable, that hardly anything seems as it used to be - except Billy Bunter! It hardly seems possible now that Frank Richards, when the spirit moved him, could pack a bag and a typewriter, and catch a train or a boat - writing a few Magnet chapters in Paris, a few more in Lausanne, and finishing the story in Venice, - no permits or visas, not always even bothering about a passport! I hear people now sometimes speaking of the "bad old days", but I can't help thinking that the world went very well then. And think of newsprint at £10 a ton, and as much as you wanted! They were



jolly old days when the Magnet and Frank Richards were both young. Actually, I had been writing for less than twenty years when the first Magnet came out. Curiously enough, I don't feel a day older while sitting at the typewriter - though when I get up, I am reminded at once that Time has marched on!

I liked Eric Payne's article too. I had an idea that it was going to be critical; but if this be criticism, it is a very agreeable medicine; and the patient can "take it", and even ask for more! Mr. Payne as a critic reminds me of Byron's pirate chief - "He was the very mildest-mannered man that ever scuttled ship". Only on one point I demur - Mr. Richards DID feel that it was a great occasion - for him it was a tremendous occasion. Mr. Richards was feeling, when he wrote that story, like a schoolboy just let out of detention into the fresh air and sunshine. But no schoolboy was ever so glad to get off for a holiday, as Mr. Richards was to get back to Greyfriars.

John Shaw puts his finger on this in the following article. John is, as Alan Breck used to say, a gentleman of much penetration. One or two passages in his article really made me wonder whether he is a mind reader.

I was glad to see the mention of Thomas Johnson's "Greyfriars Suite". This really is one of the greatest compliments I have ever received. You can guess with what pleasure I heard this played over. It is good stuff from the first bar to the last; and the first movement especially brought pictures before my mind almost like a film. I have tried over several of Mr. Johnson's published works, and I like the "Greyfriars Suite" best so far.

On the whole, I think this is the best C. D. though perhaps this view may be founded upon the circumstances that it is so agreeable to me personally. It is always good. Long may it wave!

-----  
December 5th, 1947.

Dear Tom Johnson,

I was very pleased to get your letter of the 23rd, and you will excuse a little irregularity in replying -- put it down to Bunter. Of course I should have been glad to hear good news of the Suite: but things move *lentissimo* in these days, and if ever one perceives a sign of allegro it is certainly non troppo. You can guess how delighted I should be to learn that you had backed a winner, so to speak; and I shall hope to get that good news sooner or later, and in fact have little doubt of it. But patience! The slowness of these dronesome days is rather exasperating to an old bean like myself, brought up to activity in the nineteenth century: but you wouldn't notice that so much, as you are not old enough to remember the times when things were got done -- actually done and not merely discussed.

Yes, I saw the notice in the C. D., and was very pleased to see it there. Do you know, my dear boy, you have paid me a great compliment in this composition, and the more I think about it the more I appreciate it.

I am glad to hear that you have now received your Bunter book. Reprinting is going on as fast as the paper supply permits, and I hope that in the long run everyone who wants Bunter will be able to get him. But O for what the dear old Daily Herald calls the "bad old days" -- when you only had to phone for all the newsprint you wanted, at £10 a ton!

You may have heard of a chap in the entertainment line named Frank Vosper -- Magician! He wrote me a very jolly letter the other day about the Bunter book: so I asked him to exercise his magic powers in conjuring up a few tons of paper from the vastly deep! But I'm afraid it won't work!

I think I told you that I have been writing some Greyfriars stories to be published in Braille for the use of the blind. This has brought me in touch with an old Greyfriars reader at Brighton who lost his sight in the War, poor boy. Now what do you think is Frank Richards' latest activity? Actually I am studying Braille, in order to be able to write him a letter. It is a very interesting thing, though rather tough going at first. No doubt you have come across Braille -- a system of dots punched in thick paper for finger-reading. Easy enough for the Braille printer -- but the very dickens for writing by hand. I have devised a system of punching the dots on thin cardboard, and I think the result will be legible for a Braille reader. I expect to be able to write the letter in about a month, which isn't too bad, as I am rather an old dog to be learning new tricks.

No doubt you keep your eye on the Third Programme. They have given us some good things. I can't say that I like Plato's nasty muck in English, and I shut it down very soon after turning it on last evening. It is a curious thing that people generally can't be high-brow without being nasty too. But on Boxing Day they will be giving us Verdi's Otello, and I am looking forward to hearing that again. The BBC are a real blessing to an old fellow who cannot get beyond the garden gate: though sometimes I feel like spraying them with Sanitas. I have a rather mixed opinion of Verdi: but somehow I always live up at the quartette in Rigoletto; and often, when I have to rest my eyes, I just close them, lean back, and go over in my mind Melba singing Ah fors è lui or Caro nome. What a singer she was! I liked her ever so much better than Tetrizzini. Isn't it a curious thing, too, that one can get all the high soprano notes in one's mind, while one couldn't get within a yard of them with the voice? There are some things in Otello that are sort of embedded in me, like "Ora e per sempre" and "Nium me tema". I wish I still had the score -- but alas, I gave it away about forty years ago. But I find a good memory an invaluable asset, in these days when one cannot get anything, or hardly anything, in books or music.

Did I tell you that the second Greyfriars book has been written, and is now with the printers? It is called "Billy Bunter's Banknote", but is chiefly about "Smithy". We hope that it will appear in the spring! Hope springs eternal in the human breast!

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April 5th, 1948.

Dear John Robyns,

I am taking you at your word, you see, for here is the old "new" camera! If you could get some films for it, it would be a boon and a blessing: and certainly you should be rewarded with a picture of Lady Jane and her daughter Tinker Bell. Lady Jane is the most amusing old creature you ever heard of. She doesn't really belong to me, but to the people in a bungalow near: but one day she walked in and made my acquaintance, and thereafter declined to go home! Every time she was taken home, back she came: and finally, when the kittens arrived, she brought them over, getting them into a window one at a time. Luckily her owners took it all very good-

distancedly. They gave me one of the kittens, the other two being given away at a distance: and Lady Jane having made up her mind to stay with her daughter, here she is. Her real owners come to see her sometimes, but though she is very polite to them, she has quite settled that she lives here, and won't have any nonsense about it. She is a lovely old lady, black and white; and Tinker Bell is so like her, that they are not easy to tell apart, now that the kitten is growing up. I used to like dogs much more than cats, and perhaps I still do, but Lady Jane and Tinker are really delightful animals. I should very much like to send you a photograph of them under the fir tree in the garden. The old lady was named Paula: but I re-named her Lady Jane because she is such an entertaining old aristocrat. If she is offered yesterday's milk, she gives it one disdainful sniff, and walks away like an offended dowager. And the expression on her face when she is offered corned beef is worth a guinea a box. Of course she doesn't know anything about Mr. Strachey and what he fancies that the population can live on! Fortunately she is fond of fish, of which we can get any amount from Broadstairs.

Here I am running on about cats! Still, if I began on dogs I should probably run to the length of a Magnet.

Did I tell you that a musician in Cheshire has composed a "Greyfriars Suite"? It really is good stuff, as I was able to judge by the copy he sent me, and I am having records made of it to play on the radiogram. One of the things I never foresaw was that Greyfriars would ever be set to music: though I did a Banter Song that you may have come across in one of the Greyfriars Holiday Annuals. But this chap, Johnson, is really good, and I am looking forward to the records.

Now, my dear boy, you must not let my "new" camera be a bother to you. Please don't take a lot of trouble about it. But I should be very pleased if a film did materialise.

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June 9th, 1948.

Dear Ian Whitmore,

I was very pleased to receive your letter. It is very pleasant indeed to hear that your head-master thinks so much of Frank Richards and his writings. I wish I could see that window where the old Magnets are displayed!

The poor old Magnet is dead and gone now, and will never be revived, and old numbers seem to be getting scarce. But I hope that the new Greyfriars series in book form will be like the poet's little brook, and go on for ever! I am now writing the fourth volume, and this morning shall be doing Chapter XXV, about Billy Banter, who is making a trip to South America by South American Air-Ways.

I am very interested to hear that you have collected about eighty old Magnets. But you mustn't give too much for them, my dear boy. Dealers sometimes ask high prices, which in my opinion at least the old numbers are not worth. 1/- a copy is fair, as the Magnet would cost that if it could be published now, owing to the great increase in costs of production. But I wouldn't give more than that.

Certainly I shall be very pleased to send you my autograph, and I enclose it with this letter.

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July 11th, 1953

ROSE LAWN,  
KINGSGATE ON SEA,  
BROADSTAIRS,  
KENT.

Dear Eric Payne,

Many thanks for your cheery letter this morning. It is a real pleasure to know that you enjoyed the Greyfriars play on Tuesday, and that the boys liked it too. I agree that it was an improvement on the earlier plays: in fact I couldn't agree more! This time it was not an adaptation from a book, but a play specially written by my own fair hand, which I confess that I like ever so much better in every way. Garold Gampson seems to me very good as Bunter, even if not quite exactly our fat old friend as we know him: while I thought that Quelch's part was played very well indeed--though he did overlook the trifling circumstance that "um" slides before a vowel! The Oldest Inhabitant spent a very happy half-hour watching the performance: and I am very glad indeed to know that his pleasure was shared at Surbiton.

With kindest regards,

Very sincerely,

*Frank Richards*

July 10th, 1948.

Dear Tom Johnson,

I am quite ashamed of being so late in replying to your letter: but W.G.B. has finished his holiday in Brazil at last. You are quite right that your article in C. D. "read nicely": I liked it better even than in MS. It occurred to me when I read it over again, that you might do worse than try your hand at writing little articles for the Press, for you write in a very readable way, which certainly cannot be said for a very large number of writers in these days. It is true that it is not easy going, with space so severely limited as at present: editors often have to discard things they would like to publish, for that reason. Still, you never can tell till you try.

I liked the Punch and Judy Suite very much: and was pleased to see in your letter that more of your things are coming through. "After seven years" is at least better late than never: and after all it is not a new experience, for quite a long time ago, Jacob had to wait seven years for his reward: But I do feel a little disappointed about Arcadia. In fact I am almost tempted to describe both publishers as "arcades ambo", in Byron's sense of the words.

But nil desperandum: Shakespeare remarked upon the "thousand slights that patient merit from the unworthy takes", and as the philosophical French say, "C'est la vie!" I remember from the far-off eighteen-eighties a novel called "Mr. Barnes of New York". The author hawked this about to every publisher known and unknown, and was rejected everywhere: finally, he got it into print, and it proved a tremendous best-seller, and the machines could hardly keep pace with the demand. My own poor old *Bunter* was rejected in 1899 by an editor who fancied that he knew his way about: but has done quite well since. Things like this happen so often, that no-one should ever permit himself to be discouraged. The truth is -- *entre nous* -- that very few publishers know anything about what the public wants. I have been writing since 1890, and in all that time have met only one publisher who really knew his business, and that was not till 1946. What you have got to get through is a solid wall of stupidity: so your motto should be the words of King Henry V. "Once more unto the breach!"

Yes, if you record the second Greyfriars Suite, do please get me a set. I should just love to run the two over consecutively and compare them. It is curious how, when I play your Suite over, words come into my mind, and sometimes there is a vocal obligato to the record.

You may be quite sure that if music is to be used in the film, I shall put in a word for the Suite. The negotiations are still going on, but it seems a slow business. Lowe seems to be in Ireland one day and in Sweden the next. But film people seem to have little sense of time. They are always in a terrific hurry one day, and the next, prepared to let six months slip by unheeded. Once upon a time I should have been irritated by this: but in the placid seventies we learn not to expect too much -- not, in fact, to expect anything until it actually happens.

Film people are really astonishing. About ten or twelve years ago, Gainsborough Pictures asked me to supply a "scenario story", which I did: they sent me a contract and a cheque: after which -- what do you guess? Just nothing! By the time it was done they had changed their minds, and apparently did not mind in the least chucking their money away for nothing at all. Business on these lines is just

incomprehensible to my ancient and staid Victorian mind. However, I shall hope that our present producer is a little more realistic. I had a very pleasant talk with him when he came down here to see me about it, and he seemed very keen.

I hope you are keeping fit and enjoying life. We are getting rotten weather for this time of year: but what's the odds so long as you're happy?

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July 15th, 1948.

Dear Herbert Leckenby,

Many thanks for your letter with the C.D. There is an article in it by R. A. H. Goodyear which woke up a lot of old memories. Apparently we were reading the same old papers at the same old time! It is quite true, as he remarks, that the young reader could learn a lot of history from the old historical stories. Some of these were very well written, too. No doubt some of it was a little fantastic, as he says; but even so good an author as Scott is hardly to be trusted in historical details: one had to separate the wheat from the chaff. I used to like writing historical stories in my young days. Some of these were published in the 'nineties; though goodness knows what has become of them since. I think I told you about one, which was published by Stevens, in the Strand, I believe about 1897: a story of France in the sixteenth century.

I am just now concentrating my powerful intellect on the cross-word puzzle, which seems to me very ingenious.

Ronald Hunter's letter is very interesting. Lucky man to be rolling down to Rio!

I enclose the copy of "Billy Bunter's Birthday Present" in Braille. It looks a puzzle, doesn't it?

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December 15th, 1948.

Dear John Robyns,

I have to thank you for two letters and a delightful photograph. What a happy group! *Ti sei benedetto, non è vero?*

As you tell me that you like "anything" from Frank Richards, I am sending along another Christ Church Magazine, in which is an abridged reprint of my article in "Horizon" of May 1940. George Orwell's name has been left out, as not quite appropriate in such a publication.

Didn't I tell you about Sammy before? He is the delightfulest kitten that ever was. I hope to send you a picture of all three; but I begin to fear that I am no photographer.

I was very pleased with Elaine's letter, and I hope she received the little book back safely. It is very pleasant to see that you like the news of Tom Merry. Messrs. Campion tell me they hope to publish the books quarterly, which seems a little optimistic in these days of paper famine; but I shall hope for the best. Anyway the first volume "Tom Merry and Co. of St. Jim's", will be out about the end of January, and the second, "The Secret of the Study", in May or June. Just now I am writing a Rookwood story for "Tom Merry's Summer Annual", which is to come out in time for the summer holidays next year. "Hilda Richards" is awaiting her turn on

the typewriter to produce a Bessie Bunter book, which Skilton's will publish next year. So three authors are fairly busy these days -- Frank and Hilda and Martin. "Billy Bunter's Christmas Party" is booked for October.

I feel so happy to be going full speed ahead again, that I wonder whether the universe contains another such jolly spot as this planet. It is God's mercy that one is able to carry on so easily at such an age. I think I told you that one of the journalists told me he was coming again for a special article on my hundredth birthday. That is still a good way off: but I really begin to think that he will find me much the same.

You were rather lucky to get a copy of the Saturday Book 1945. It is out of print and cannot be got for love or money, as a rule: though subsequent numbers are advertised by the remainders people at half-price. Yes, I have a copy myself, which is often on its travels, as a good many people borrow it from time to time.

Best of good wishes for all the happy family, for Christmas and the New Year. Please give my love to dear little Elaine, and to Julie the adorable.

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February 12th, 1949.

Dear John Robyns,

Many thanks for yours this morning, with the Saturday Book. This is very kind of you, my dear boy; and of course I am glad to have it, but you really mustn't do these things! I am very interested in those old Red Magnets -- the one in which Levison left Greyfriars must be quite ancient.

I think I told you about the Tom Merry books. Now I am writing "Tom Merry's Christmas Annual", which will come out in time for Christmas this year. T. M.'s Summer Annual will be out in the summer. But things are rather at sixes and sevens here just now, as my house-keeper is down with the New Flu, and the old bean is typing with one hand and nursing with the other, as it were. Luckily we have a very good doctor, and a Good Samaritan is taking every care of her: but I have lots to do, and have realised what an utterly helpless critter a man is on his own in a house. I will write again later when the clouds roll by. Perhaps you have had influenza in your time? I had it in 1899, and it was beastly: but this new flu seems to be worse than the old variety.

Love to dear Elaine and the adorable Julie.

-----  
May 10th, 1949.

Dear Ian Whitmore,

Thank you for your letter. I am glad you listened in to the radio programme, and I quite agree with you that the parts were rather ineffectively played. Temple's part seemed to me good, and Dabney and Fry were not bad, but the Remove boys, I thought, were very poor stuff. It is nice of you to say that you are looking forward to the Tom Merry and Bunter books. Just at the moment I am giving them a rest, and writing "Felgate", -- a new school -- which will appear in periodical form later in the year, and take the place, I hope, of the old Magnet and Gem.

Best of wishes for your 'hols' at Herne Bay, which is one of the healthiest spots, I believe, on all this healthy coast. But please don't think me ungracious, my

dear boy, if I tell you that I don't see visitors. I get letters every day to the same effect, and in the summer, sometimes five or six in a day, and while I should love to see all my readers and chat with them, I just couldn't, or I should never be doing anything else. I have to reply always that we must remain "pen pals" -- and that, I hope, you will continue to be.

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 May 14th, 1949.

Dear Mr. Harlow,

Many thanks for your letter. I am very glad to be able to tell you that "Tom Merry" is now on the map again, as well as "Billy Bunter". Mandeville Publications, 26 Manchester Square, London, W.1, are beginning the publication of the Tom Merry books this month, and the first volume is due on the 18th. According to present plans there will be a new Tom Merry volume every two months.

Owing to circumstances over which I have no control, it is not possible to publish either Greyfriars or St. Jim's in periodical form. But you may be interested to know that I am now writing of a new school, called "Felgate", which will be published periodically, later in the year, by World Film Publications, 37 Grays Inn Road, W. C. 1. This, I hope at least, may to some extent take the place of the old Gem and Magnet: and a "Carcroft" weekly is planned for the near future.

Yes, Frank Richards is no longer so young as he was, but he is, I think, the happiest Old Boy in the kingdom, now that he is once more producing his 25,000 words a week. I really believe that there is nothing like a school story to keep one in touch with youth.

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 June 24th, 1949.

Dear Ian Whitmore,

Thank you for your letter of May 25th. Now I have just finished "Billy Bunter among the Cannibals", which will be published next Easter: and am taking a day off for correspondence, which is one of my most pleasant relaxations. Yes, I saw the article in the Evening News; it was the outcome of an interview. I liked it very much.

Now about Felgate. I think I told you that the publishers are World Film Publications, Ltd., 34 Grays Inn Road, London, and that they are publishing some Felgate stories in a mixed volume by many writers in the autumn. The title has not yet been decided on. The idea is to carry on Felgate in periodical form after this volume has appeared, and I have already written the first story, which is called "Trouble for Three". But it is not yet settled what the periodical will be called. About the characters, the chief one is "Skip" Ruggles. I must confess that he is plump. But nothing like our old fat friend Bunter. Other characters are Tom King and Dick Warren, of Study Four.

I have been busy with photography lately, as the publisher wants a new picture of Frank Richards for the jacket of the next Bunter book, the "Christmas Party" story.

I am very glad to hear that you enjoyed the last gathering of the O. B. B. C. I like the club's crest very much, and the motto certainly is a good one. The "Hollywood" series you mention is, I think, one of the best that appeared in the Magnet -- though it would be very much out of date at the present day.

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October 28th, 1949.

Dear Mr. Iraldi,

I was very pleased to receive your letter, along with the two books from Mr. Skilton for autographing, which I am despatching to you by the same post.

It is very pleasant to read in your letter that you still remember the old school-boy stories in the "Magnet", after so many years of absence. Both the Magnet and the Gem went "West" in the War time, and back numbers are getting very scarce in these days, though most of them can still be obtained from dealers. In these changed days the two series can be carried on only in book form, but you will be pleased, as an old reader, to know that the young people of the present day seem to like the Bunter and Tom Merry books, as much as their fathers did the Magnet and the Gem.

I share your enthusiasm for Jules Verne and Sherlock Holmes. I was a great reader of the former in younger days, and carried my enthusiasm to the length of inventing a submarine on the lines -- more or less -- of Captain Nemo's Nautilus -- resulting in a flood in the bathroom where the invention was tried out! It was later in life that I made the acquaintance of Sherlock, of whom I used to read in the old Strand Magazine, in the nineties it must have been. But I still read him, though I know him almost by heart now. I am afraid that my own "Ferrers Locke" was a near relative of my beloved Sherlock! When I sit in my armchair with a volume of Conan Doyle it takes me straight back to the days when all the world was young, or seemed so. How I used to look for the next number! And Jules! It is curious how early likings linger. You mention that you like Greyfriars better in the old format. Well, when I read "Vingt Mille Lieues sous les Mers" in French, I don't like it half so well as in English, which was how I read it as a boy. It must be better, I suppose, in the original: but that cuts no ice; I just want it as I remember it from long ago.

I hope you will receive the books safely. I am told that registered parcels for the U.S.A. must be left open at the ends; but I have wrapped them very carefully and don't think that they will sustain any damage.

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November 24th, 1949.

Dear Mr. Iraldi,

Many thanks for your letter of the 9th.

It is no secret now that Frank Richards and Martin Clifford are one and the same person. It was kept a secret once upon a time: but not since the old papers went West. I wrote the Magnet as Frank Richards, the Gem as Martin Clifford, and the Rookwood stories in the Boys' Friend as Owen Conquest. "Owen Conquest" is now reappearing again in the pages of "Tom Merry's Annual", published by the people who publish the Tom Merry books.

Now, my dear boy, as I thought you might like to see my Tom Merry stories in their book form, I am sending you one of them, which I hope you will accept as a present from the author. It should reach you soon after this letter.

Certainly I should be very pleased if you would write to me whenever you feel disposed. You will make allowances if replies are sometimes delayed, for an old fellow writing ten books a year is not always master of his time. When I finish a book, I take a few days off to catch up with correspondence.

With regard to speed in writing, I have always thought that the more swiftly a

With Milton at the portals  
 Of Heav'n itself to sing,  
 To soar above all mortals  
 On Shakespeare's mighty wing?

But these are dreams of glory,  
 That never can come true,  
 To write a simple story  
 Is all that I can do.

And if my tale give pleasure,  
 And ease the daily task,  
 And charm an hour of leisure,  
 Then what more need I ask?

-----  
 April 8th, 1950.

Dear John Robyns,

Many thanks for your letter and the delightful photograph enclosed. This is now among my pin-ups. I am glad you like Sammy. He really is a dear little animal.

Billy Bunter's Benefit is out now, so your copy should come along soon. Didn't I tell you about "Jack of All Trades"? Mandeville's are to publish him about the end of this month, along with a Tom Merry book, "Rallying Round Gussy". I like him so much that I have written several books about him already, though when the later ones will appear is still on the knees of the gods. Yes, he is the same character that appeared in the short story in the Annual, though that episode belongs to a later period than the volume that is to be published now.

Don't you worry about those films, my dear boy. I still have the last packet you sent me, unused. But I am very interested in the camera you mention. When I look into my view-finder I don't see very much therein, and results are largely a matter of luck. I am afraid that I don't know much about the Stereoscopic work you mention; but I was always a lad for learning new things, and it sounds attractive. Is there such a thing as a book of rules on the subject? Do send the camera along by all means, but you must enclose the bill with it: I mustn't let even Johnny give me things.

Now I am happy to tell you that the spot of bother I had with my old publishers seems to be fading out: they have asked me to write more Bunter for them: and anything in the nature of an olive-branch is welcome to an old bean who only wants to live in peace with everybody. So our fat friend will soon be appearing in a periodical form again. I am really glad of this, for I never tire of writing Greyfriars, and two or three Bunter books a year don't go very far. Still, as I said, my chief interest is "Jack" who is, as it were, my Benjamin!

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 April 14th, 1950.

Dear John Robyns,

The camera, safely arrived, is a little gem. I am in love with it already. I don't quite know what to say about it, for really and truly you mustn't do these things:

story is written, the better it is. I have never found the typewriter move as fast as thought. Once I tried to learn shorthand, to get up a greater speed, but had no luck with it. I have an average of about fifty words a minute on the typewriter, but it is hopeless to try to keep pace with the story as it unrolls in my mind. I have used the typewriter for hardly fifty years: I used to write with a pen in the nineties. It was about 1900 that I made the change; and ever since, I have blessed the name of Remington.

Ferrers Locke undoubtedly borrowed from Sherlock Holmes, like every other detective character that has appeared since Conan Doyle wrote. There are some authors who seem to lay waste the whole ground, as it were, leaving nothing but gleanings for writers who follow. Conan Doyle certainly did this with detective stories: every one since, whether Sexton Blake, Peter Wimsey, Ferrers Locke, Dr. Thorndike, Monsieur Poirot, or any other, is simply a shadow of Holmes, and cannot be anything else. There is some excuse for the imitators, in the undoubted fact that Sherlock Holmes himself was borrowed by Doyle from Edgar Poe's Auguste Dupin -- he is, in fact, Dupin in a popularized form. Anyone might have done this -- but Doyle did it! And I suspect that Poe had some hints from Voltaire's Zadig in creating Dupin; so the ancestral line of the modern detective characters goes back a long way!

Many thanks, laddie, for the kind offer you make; but I have nothing to ask except that you continue to like reading my books, and that you drop me a line every now and then to tell me so.

December 16th, 1949.

Dear John Robyns,

Many thanks for both your letters. I was very pleased indeed to read what you have said about "Faith and Hope". I have had the book in my mind for a very long time: but hesitated to write it. Yet I could not help thinking that the testimony of one who has lived to a great age and has had many experiences, might be useful to others: and I can say with the utmost sincerity that that was the object I had in view in writing the book. Young people especially are easily led astray by foolish talk from elders who ought to know better, and a wholly materialistic view of life and the universe is, to my mind, the very worst thing that any boy or girl could learn. I have never been able quite to understand how any man can be content with life without faith; and all the arguments I have heard on the side of infidelity seem to me utterly puerile. I have tried to show that plain common-sense is on the side of religious belief: as indeed it is, whether I have been able to show it or not. I hope the little book will be published next year, and I will certainly let you know about it when the time comes.

I wish you all a very happy Christmas and all the best for the New Year, and send my love to dear little Elaine and Julie. May they both be very happy.

Frank Richards

Who would not love to wander  
With Keats in realms of gold,  
With Wordsworth muse and ponder  
Upon some lonesome wold?

com'd ...

but I wouldn't like to seem ungracious, so I shall let you have your way, and thank you for your kind thought. I must thank you also for the Stereoscopic book, which I have been reading with the keenest interest. As I haven't a stereoscope I cannot sample the slides, but they are in themselves excellent pictures. I can see myself becoming a stereoscopic addict, if Billy Bunter and Tom Merry give me time!

So you haven't seen the Tom Merry books? That is easily remedied, for I shall send you the two books about Tom already published, which you must accept from me in your turn. One good turn deserves another!

By the way, the lines I put in your book are from some verses I wrote once upon a time on the subject of my unimportant self. As you might perhaps like to see them, I enclose a copy.

"Jack of All Trades" will be published before long by Mandeville Publications, 55 Victoria Street, London, S. W. 1 -- the same firm who publish Tom Merry. They will be publishing a Rookwood book in the summer, too. Have I told you that I have nine books coming out this year? Not too bad for the Oldest Inhabitant?

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July 22nd, 1949.

Dear John Robyns,

Many thanks for your letter, with the enclosed cutting. I am very glad to see this, and I should have missed it otherwise, as I do not take the paper. It is a very pleasant spot of reading.

I am glad you liked the snap. The camera seems to behave itself a little better after adjustment according to instruction! I am hoping now to get Lady Jane and Sammy with the latest film you so kindly sent me. But they are very elusive and I wouldn't like to waste films. I don't quite know by what magic you extract them from nowhere: for nobody over here can get them for love or money.

I think I told you that the publisher wants to put me on the jacket of the "Christmas Party" book, and I have lately been undergoing photography for that purpose. I have sent him a selection of three, and don't know yet which will be the winner. I enclose a print of one -- depicting the Oldest Inhabitant lighting his pipe.

You will be pleased to hear that Edith is now almost her old self again, and the nurse leaves next week. She has been very good, and I think I shall miss her -- which is not often the case with nurses, I believe! Poor Edith has had a tough time -- six months of illness, three weeks in hospital, six weeks of nurse -- but it is good to see her looking well again. It doesn't seem fair somehow, as she is only half my age -- it is really I who ought to have the illnesses, doctors, and nurses. But these things always seem to pass me by.

I suppose it is very hot in Brighton. It is like an oven here -- about five hundred in the shade: more or less. But I seem to thrive on it. I am now writing the last chapters of "Billy Bunter's Benefit", which I expect will come out about next Easter. Did you ever come across "Wibley" in the Magnet? He comes to life again in this book.

Love to Elaine and Julie, and may I say Kay?

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August 12th, 1950.

Dear Mr. Iraldi,

Many thanks for both your letters. It is a real pleasure to read them, and if I were disposed to "swelled head", for they would certainly have that effect. Thank you, my dear boy, for the many kind things you say about my writings. I should have answered your earlier letter sooner, but there has been rather a "rush of custom" on the typewriter. Now, to take it first, I will reply to a question therein: Greyfriars is an imaginary place, but based upon several real places in various respects: Frank Richards having had a way of noting anything that came under his eyes at any time, for use in his stories; and such places as Friardale, Courtfield, etc., are undoubtedly real, though given new names. Towns and villages like these exist all over England, and especially in Kent, where you can walk a couple of miles from a thriving buzzing town to a village that has not even a water supply.

So you were surprised to learn that Frank Richards, Martin Clifford, and Owen Conquest were one and the same? All three are very busy now turning out their various wares for Tom Merry's Own annual. And Frank Richards has just published a book about a new character, "Jack of All Trades". I like this new character so much that I have already written four more books about him, which await their turn for publication. Probably it will not reach New York: but if you would like to read it, I will send you a copy with pleasure, as a present from the author. I should really like to know what you think of it.

About the old Magnet, there is a possibility that it may be revived, though it would have to be in a much reduced size at a higher price, owing to the present fantastic costs of production. This, I am afraid, may knock it on the head. However, I still hope to see it coming out again some day. In the meantime, I am writing a weekly Buster story for the "Comet", and as you might like to see this, and it must be quite unobtainable in N. Y. I am sending you a couple of copies by separate post. It is just a short story once a week: but it sort of keeps Buster going.

It is possible that my Autobiography may be published next year. The paper shortage, which has been such a spot of bother to authors and publishers alike, is practically over now, and everything is very much easier. But the autobiography requires some revision before publication, and I don't get a lot of leisure time these days. I wonder sometimes whether it is worth while, for after all, people may ask "Who the dickens is Frank Richards"? Will anybody be interested to know that he was collared by the enemy in Austria in 1914, that he was once nearly drowned in the Lake of Geneva, that he explored the crater of Vesuvius in 1909, and wasted lots of time and money in attempts to break the bank of Monte Carlo in the heedless days of his youth? -- that he wrote his stories with a pen from 1890 to 1900, and has typed them ever since, -- and so on and so forth? I just wonder!

The question in your postscript about the photograph is easily answered. Some time ago a paper called the "Feathered Friend" published my photograph, and I liked that one better than any that had previously been published, so I asked them to send me some copies: one of which I enclose herewith. I am afraid you will think that Frank Richards looks fearfully venerable: but you know, of course, that I must be fairly old, as I began to write sixty years ago. I wonder how many writers have written for sixty years, and turned out sixty-five million words in the time! Not a lot, probably.

Many thanks for your kind wishes, my dear boy. On the radio a couple of years ago I told the world that the new Bunter books were going to have as long a run as the old Magnet: thirty-three years! Just a little ambitious for an old bean over seventy? But you never can tell! Let's keep hoping!

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September 16th, 1950.

Dear Ian Whitmore,

I am afraid I am rather late in replying to your letter, which I was very pleased to receive. But you will excuse me, my dear boy, as I don't get a lot of time for correspondence in these days; with Billy Bunter, Tom Merry, and Jack of All Trades competing for the typewriter. One of my greatest pleasures is reading letters from readers over breakfast, which gives a cheerful start to the day; but it is now always easy to find time for writing. The "Felgate" stories you mention in your letter appeared in Raymond Glendinning's Book of Sport, and some more will appear in the same this year, about October. The Bunter book, "Billy Bunter among the Cannibals", has been delayed in publication, but will appear in a week or two now. "Tom Merry's Own" annual is coming out in October. Have I told you about "Jack of All Trades?" This is a new character, and the first book of the series was published by Mandeville Publications this year. But perhaps you have seen the notice of it in the C. D., as I note from your letter that you are a subscriber to that interesting little magazine. Also I am now writing a weekly "Bunter" story for a comic called the "Comet".

Do please excuse me for being so tardy in replying. I shall be very glad to hear from you again when you feel disposed to write.

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October 2nd, 1950.

Dear Jimmy Iraldi,

Very many thanks for your last letter. You couldn't have pleased me more than by telling me that you like "Jack". I just love him myself: and should like to be writing a book about him every month. But I fear that my readers, kind as they are, would pronounce that to be a little too much of a good thing! The second volume is scheduled for April next year, and I wouldn't send the cash for it yet, for there are limitless delays in these uncertain times, and it may be late. The lateness of publishing in these days is, as Harree Singh might say, terrific. However, Tom Merry's Own annual will be out this month, and "Billy Bunter among the Cannibals" will certainly appear on the 16th.

Your letter has put a new idea into my head. People keep on asking me why my books don't penetrate into the biggest and best market in the world, the United States. They overlook the fact that the school systems are so different, that a Greyfriars story would be very unlikely to appeal to the young American. But so kind and appreciative a letter from a resident in New York has put into my ancient head the idea that other books, not dealing with school life, might find readers on the western side of the Atlantic, and I have thought of suggesting to the publishers to make a move in that direction with "Jack". I needn't say how tremendously pleased I should be to have American readers. Now, my dear boy, next time you write, tell me whether

you think that a book like "Jack" would be likely to have any sort of appeal to the young American? -- and whether, -- if you happen to know -- there are any restrictions on the import of books into the U. S. A. In Australia there seems to be an import tax, which is rather hard on my readers there, though I must confess that they seem to tolerate it with equanimity.

If it wouldn't be a lot of trouble, could you send me one or two copies of boys' papers circulating in New York? I have not seen anything of such publications for a good many years now, and am rather curious to know what American youth is reading. I have heard that "Hopalong Cassidy" is very popular now.

I think you asked me in one of your letters whether the short stories in the "Comet" are new or old. Actually, the series started with moth-eaten old reprints: but last April I took it over, and it is now entirely new, written week by week. I very much like writing this series, it is a happy reminder of the old days of the Magnet.

Thank you once more, my dear boy, for a very kind and pleasant letter.

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October 11th, 1950.

Dear Ian Whitmore,

Thank you for your letter. Judging by your description of the haul you made of old Magnets, you are the luckiest "Canterbury Pilgrim" ever! I shouldn't wonder if there are many such finds to be made in remote corners, for there must still be great numbers of the old paper in existence, if one knew where to look for them.

I am very pleased to autograph the photograph enclosed in your letter, and return it herewith duly signed.

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October 30th, 1950.

Dear Jimmy Iraldi,

Many thanks for your letter. You are a good boy to take so much trouble. The picture you draw of "Young America" isn't very bright or encouraging from my point of view. It cannot be a good thing for a boy to read grown-up books; especially considering what grown-up books are like in these days. It looks to me as if there must be a very big opening in the U. S. A. for some enterprising publisher to put a good boys' paper on the market, and leave it to the young people to decide.

I am specially interested in what you have heard about young people not being interested unless in 'Rocket-ships, atomic weapons, jet-planes, and supersonic flying machines'. I persuade myself that this is the view of their elders, who are interested in such things themselves and fancy that the young people feel the same. It is true, of course, that all boys are keen on engines, submarines, flying-ships, and so on: I remember how I used to revel in Jules Verne. But first of all they want a story to read: human beings are interested in human nature more than in anything else. Supersonics have their place, but they come second.

Of course I am prejudiced, as I deal in human nature and not in planetary peregrinations. But here is a story from my own experience. Some time ago, when the Buster books were coming out, I had an opinion from a London editor of a boys' paper. He used almost exactly your own words, and was "sorry to tell me" that school stories were no longer read: that it must be supersonic speeds, jet-rockets,

and such things. Now this gentleman edits a paper which, when it used to publish school stories, had a very wide circulation, and was practically a household word all over the country. Now that it has become all supersonic, it has a very limited circulation, and may very probably disappear from existence altogether. The editor is quite unable to learn anything from this: he goes on his supersonic way regardless. At the same time, the first Buster book sold 40,000 copies at 7/6. Seven-and-six is a high price for a book, in a country so poor as this has now become. My supersonic counsellor charges only sixpence: but he has no hope whatever of selling 40,000 copies.

From this I drew the conclusion that while the adult head is full of supersonics, the younger generation still want an interesting story to read, though they are willing to take supersonics as an extra dish. If they read supersonics only, it is because no publisher has the intelligence to give them what they really want. And indeed isn't the popularity of Hopalong in your country evidence of this? From what I hear, the young American mind is turning back to cow-punchers and Red Indians: that is, to human nature: for even that is human nature in comparison with solar ships and moon-rockets.

Of course, I believe this because I want to believe it, like all of us: but I think it is true all the same.

We get much the same thing in radio. The producers keep on turning out sex stuff, which nine people in ten loathe: but their own heads are so full of it, that they take it for granted that the public want it. The public just don't: they listen to it because there is nothing else to listen to.

There are so many interesting points in your letter, that I shall have to write again to deal with the others.

-----  
November 11th, 1950.

Dear Jimmy Iraldi,

I hasten to reply to your query re "Herlock Sholmes". Yes, I am the author thereof, under the name of "Peter Todd", borrowed of course from the Magnet. They came out originally in the "Greyfriars Herald", but have been spotted about other publications. Every now and then I write a new one just for amusement, and one of these was put into T. M. O. I am very glad that you are interested, and your friend Mr. Bengis. Actually, I once had the idea of collecting these parodies into a little book, but like so many other bright ideas it came to nothing. So far as I recall, the first "Herlock Sholmes" story saw the light in 1915, and the series ran on till the war knocked out the paper.

Your letter was written on Election Day, I see. There was very keen interest in that over here. I wonder if you are right in thinking that "too much of a good thing" may be as bad as too little. I can't help feeling that I should like to see this country as prosperous as the U. S. A. America is, to me, an amazing country. Since Roman times, no one nation has ever been powerful enough to dictate to the world -- till now. Spain had a shot at it, and France, and Germany, and now Russia, -- but the amazing thing is that America is in that very position, and too level-headed to think of taking advantage of it. Has it ever occurred to you that the United States has turned over an entirely new leaf in human history? Fancy some European country endowed with America's present power? It would mean an immediate war of conquest.



I am, I hope, a Good European: but I am very thankful that this tremendous strength is on your side of the Atlantic. It is appalling to think of what would happen, if any European nation could do what America could do if she liked.

However, that is a long way from our subject. Many thanks, my dear boy, for what you have already told me: and any further information you may be able to gather will be equally welcome. I am most deeply interested in the exhibition you mention by the New York Times. Tell me the date of the same, and -- if you can -- will you post me a copy of the N. Y. Times? I am most eager to read what they have to say about it. Your mention of "nursery stuff" is also very interesting. I am very far from feeling lofty about the nursery, for I think that writing for children of 8 to 10 is both useful and fascinating. To tell you a secret, some years ago, when my niece, who has lately been married, was a little girl, I used to write nursery rhymes and little plays for her to act with other children, and no end of fairy tales. Sometimes the little dear would march into my study, with six or seven other small people at her heels, and say "Write me a play, uncle" -- and Billy Bunter had to be laid aside on the spot while Uncle wrote a play. It has crossed my mind more than once to collect the fairy tales of those days, though I don't suppose it will ever be done.

I still hope to get away with my idea of paper-backs at reasonable prices. But there is a spot of the mule about publishers. More and more, people kick against high prices for books: and the publisher's usual reply is to put the price higher! The old Victorian idea was small profits on a big turn-over: but now the only idea is big profits on a small turn-over, -- which to my mind is the exact opposite of common sense. Tell a publisher that twenty books at 3/- will produce more profit than six books at 7/6, and you will find that he just cannot grasp such simple arithmetic. Nevertheless, I hope to get away with it some time.

January 12th, 1951.

Dear Ian Whitmore,

Thank you for your letter and your kind wishes. Yes, I have been very considerably relaxing over the Christmas period. I finished revising my Autobiography, which Skilton's are to publish, a week before Xmas, and immediately it was despatched to the publishers, locked the cover on the typewriter, and that was that! Now I am beginning the New Year full of beans: and only wish there were not so many delays in the publishing business. I have just heard that "Billy Bunter's Postal-Order", which was due at Easter, will be delayed about a month! However, I am told that two Tom Merry books will be out in April. I have lately invented a new proverb: Procrastination is the politeness of printers!

I had quite a pleasant surprise this week. The BBC have told me that my radio play, "Plus ca Change", which was on the air as long ago as 1945, is being translated into Portuguese for transmission to Brazil on their Latin-American Service. It will be given twice: on March 6/7 and 8/9. I shall try to listen in on the short wave: it will be quite interesting if I can pick up my play in Portuguese.

I am very interested to hear that you have increased your collection of Magnets to such an extent. 500 is a very good number: very nearly a third of the total issue. They are worth taking care of, my dear boy, for as old numbers grow more and more scarce, the value of surviving copies will certainly increase. I

have been told that the value of the collection I gave to the salvage in 1940 was over £100, -- though I learned this too late for the information to be useful.

I enclose a snap of my cat Sammy which you may perhaps like to have. Don't you think he looks a little duck?

February 22nd, 1951.

Dear Jimmy Iraldi,

I would have answered your very pleasant and cheery letter sooner, but have been right up to the neck in producing copy for Tom Merry's Own: now luckily completed and out of the way. Perhaps you wouldn't guess that copy for an annual to be published in October must be in the publishers' hands in February, in these leisurely days, to allow for the continuous delays and interruptions that plague the publishers.

Many thanks, my dear boy, for the American papers you have sent me. I am studying these with care and deep interest. My literary agent has been in touch with his representative in New York, who tells him that "Jack" wouldn't do for the U. S. A., as "American boys would not even comprehend it". I wonder whether he has it right: A curious thing is that, by the same post as that letter, I received another, from a Mr. Dryden, a producer in Hollywood, who expressed great appreciation of my humble works, and told me he wanted a Bunter Book for his boy, and tells me that the laddie "chuckles over Bunter" in old Magnets. Now, if a young American in Hollywood can "comprehend", why not others? So I shall not take that New York representative's verdict as final.

I like your account of the Baker Street Irregulars. The reading of the Musgrave Ritual is a really happy touch. It is curious how any mention of Sherlock Holmes gives me a touch of nostalgia half-sad and half-pleasant. He is so identified somehow with my youth, when I used to read him as he came out in the Strand Magazine; and somehow, I hardly know how, this stands out in my memory more distinctly than most other things. At one time I could almost have recited the "Adventures" word for word, so often had I read them. Remember Silver Blaze, and the importance of what did NOT happen in the night? Do you think that in the host of "detectives" that have cumbered the bookstalls since, in imitation of the Master, there is a single one that comes within a million miles of Sherlock? I don't. Conan Doyle laid that field absolutely waste, and left nothing even for gleaners. Some of the imitations are not too bad, though such stuff as Lord Peter Wimsey makes me want to cry. But the best of them are very, very faint shadows of Sherlock.

So Cyno "always wants to eat or go out?" I think he must be Sammy's spiritual twin! But Cyno has all the luck. I wonder what he would think of our meat ration -- eight pence-worth a week! And such stuff that even Sammy sometimes looks at me reproachfully when I hand it over to him! But when I am able to get him nice cod or halibut or sole, it is a pleasure to watch him eat, -- he enjoys it like Billy Bunter. And he says "Thank you" as plainly as a cat can speak.

Did I tell you that my radio play, "Plus ca Change" has been translated into Portuguese for transmission to Brazil? It goes over on March 6/7 and 8/9. I am going to try to pick it up: but the short wave is full of snags. I think I know just about enough Portuguese to be able to follow it, if I do get it.

March 30th, 1951.

Dear Jimmy Iraldi,

Many thanks for your letter, and for the papers. These papers are really a mine of information. I believe the only real way to know any country is to live in it but studying its newspapers is the next best way. I don't think I ever could get used to American spelling: but there is a sort of vigour about the writing that I like. I note among the books one about the Crusades, which seems to indicate that some American readers are not wholly engrossed by space-ships and the like.

I am sorry to hear that the "flu" came your way. I had a bout of it in 1899, which I have never forgotten, though it is a long time ago now. But these things seem to pass me by in these days, for which I am duly thankful. I hope I may "run across" the article you mention, London of the hansom cab days is only yesterday to me. About "Ferrers" Locke, it is hard to say just where a name comes from. They just jump into the mind to suit the character. Sometimes of course there may be a sub-conscious recollection at the bottom of it. When I evolved "Tom Merry" as a schoolboy's name, I had quite forgotten, if I had ever heard, that there was a black-and-white artist of that name. But there was! It is quite odd about names sometimes. A few years ago I was writing about "Sparshott School", and really believed that I had invented the name. But after it was mentioned in an article in "Picture Post" I was astonished to receive a letter from a school-master, telling me that one of his junior masters was named Sparshott, and didn't like it appearing in fiction! Now who could have guessed that "Sparshott" really was a name?

Glad you like the picture of Sammy. He really is a dear little duck. But about reproducing the photograph, it was taken by the Keystone Press, of Red Lion Court, London, and their permission would have to be obtained, as it is their copyright. I have no doubt they would consent, as I don't suppose their sales extend so far as New York, and personally I should be very pleased. If you care to ask them, their address is Keystone Press Agency, Ltd., Keystone House, Red Lion Court, Fleet Street, London, E. C. 4.

Certainly I shall be very pleased to send along the autograph. It won't go in an air letter, of course, so I will send it separately.

The play "Plus ca Change" is about a discontented young man named George, who discovers that all changes lead to the same thing in the long run. It was on the Home Service here in 1945. I had no luck in picking up the transmission to Brazil recently: the short wave beats me every time. But the BBC kindly sent me a copy of the Portuguese translation, so I was able to read it if not to hear it. No, I couldn't reprint the old numbers: the copyright is very tightly held. But they are all so "dated" by this time that they would hardly do for these days anyhow. And the paper supply is so extremely exiguous now, that nobody would dream of taking a chance. It must be hard for you to understand in your land of plenty, that on this side, authors have to wait and wait on the paper merchants. I wonder sometimes how books get published at all. At this moment I have half-a-dozen with the publishers, which may appear in a month, or three months, or six months, or goodness knows when. Job was the chap who ought to have been an author: he had the patience for it!

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~~Confidential~~

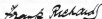
Rose Lawn Wigan, Lancs., Mer.  
Kingagete

Dec. 18th, 1958

Dear Eric Payne,

I feel that I must write just a line to tell you how much I have enjoyed reading your article on the Gem in the G.D. annual. It was like re-living a writing life of thirty-three years over again, in one pleasant hour. Many thanks, my dear boy, for that happy hour.

With kindest regards,



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March 28th, 1951.

Dear Ian Whitmore,

Many thanks for your letter, and for the photograph enclosed, which I am very pleased to have. I have quite a collection now of pin-ups of readers old and young, and am glad to be able to add this one to it.

The old Magnet "gifts" interest me very much, too. They recall very happy old days, when the dear old paper was going strong, and nobody had any idea that in a few years more it was to disappear for ever. It is very curious, too, for when the Greyfriars series began in 1908, it did not occur to me for a moment that it would run on, year after year, for more than thirty years. But when it had been going on for twenty years or so, I came to look on it as a sort of permanent institution, and couldn't have pictured myself not writing a Magnet every week. It was a real jolt when the War shut it down in 1940. But perhaps it was a blessing in disguise, for I certainly like writing the books much better than weekly numbers, and I think the stories shape better in them.

I am glad you liked the snap of Sammy. He really is a little duck. This snap was reproduced in the "Recorder" a few months ago. Sammy would be proud if he knew that he had been in the newspapers!

There was a very nice article about Greyfriars in the Manchester Guardian on February 19th, which was reprinted in the weekly edition on the 22nd. Herbert Leckenby reproduced most of it in the March C.D., so no doubt you have seen it.

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July 16th, 1951.

Dear Jimmy Iraldi,

Please excuse this rather blotched sheet: I began writing to another correspondent, when I discovered that it was the last air-letter I had in stock: so switched off, as I wanted to write to you to-day: and more especially to thank you for the papers you have sent me, and the copy of the Baker Street Journal. So if this letter looks a bit like a jig-saw puzzle at the beginning, it will get better as it goes on.

The Baker Street Journal is not only extremely interesting in itself, but the paper on which it is printed awakens admiring envy. We have almost forgotten, in this country, what it is like to have an adequate supply of paper: and really one has to make a sort of mental jump, to realise that things are going on normally in more fortunate countries. By the way, I have made some reference to Sherlock Holmes in my Autobiography: I am not quite sure that Holmes fans will approve of my tracing his descent in the way I have done: but we will hope for the best. Anyhow I am one of his most faithful admirers.

I see that your letter is dated May 20th. The days seem to whiz by. But I have been rather deep in the typewriter. Since that date a new Bunter book and a new Tom Merry book have appeared: and more of both are coming during the next weeks and months, as well as T. M. O. annual in October. Did I tell you that Bunter is going on television! We are working out the details now, and hope to get it all a-growing and a-blowing by the end of the year. I couldn't agree more with everything you say on the subject of slowness. It is a leisurely old world on this side of the pond. Sometimes Europe seems to me like a clock running down. One can only hope that the Americans will succeed in winding it up! If it isn't wound up in one way by U. S. A. it will probably be wound up in another by U. S. S. R.

Yes, I certainly did want to go to sea in 1885, and came near doing so. Not on any of your old tin tubs -- what I wanted to be was a ship-boy on the high and giddy mast! Possibly I might have found it tough! Certainly there never would have been any Bunter! Nevertheless, every now and then, when they tell me about paper shortage, high and higher costs of production, printers' strikes, rising prices of books, and the rest of the tale of woe, I cannot help thinking that that ancient Johnny knew what he was talking about when he said "O that mine enemy had written a book!"

Under the benign influence of the Baker Street Journal, I have been reading Holmes over again, for the umpteenth time. Strange how fresh it all still seems: as fresh as when I used to read it coming out in the Strand Magazine ever so long ago. By the way, is it really a fact that the first edition of the 'Study in Scarlet' is worth hundreds of dollars? If it be so, I shall regret having left my copy somewhere in the nineties, never dreaming how priceless it would become sixty years later. Indeed I shouldn't wonder if it may still be lying about somewhere among the lumber.

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April 12th, 1951.

Dear Mr. Webster,

Your letter of the 7th to Mandeville Publications has been passed on to me, and may I say that I had the greatest pleasure in reading it. It is always very pleasant to hear of an old reader who desires to obtain my books for his own boy, for I regard this as the highest compliment that can be paid to any author. The Editor

tells me that he has given the information you requested, so no doubt you are aware that the "Tom Merry" books are published by Mandeville's, and the "Greyfriars" books by Charles Skilton Ltd. So far three of the St. Jim's series have been published, and eight of the Bunter Books; and further volumes of both series are coming out this month. I have also published a volume about a new character called "Jack of All Trades". The Gem and the Magnet, I am sorry to say, are gone for ever: but I am sure you will be pleased, as an old reader, to know that the young people seem to like the old characters in book form, as much as their fathers did in the periodicals.

I have to thank you for a very kind and pleasant letter, and I should be pleased if you will accept the enclosed book as a birthday present for your boy, with the author's best wishes for his happiness and welfare.

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June 7th, 1951.

Dear Herbert Leckenby,

Many thanks for the C. D. A good number! I was glad to see your extracts from George Orwell's article in the Manchester Evening News. I remember reading this at the time, and thinking that it was very honest and decent of him to own up to an error. He made the same amende in his volume of essays, in which the Horizon article was reprinted. Although I couldn't agree less with any man's views, on most subjects, I believe that he was a very good fellow, and was very sorry indeed to hear of his early death.

I see by your note on page 159 that you have seen the allusions in the Press to Bunter on TV. This seems now to be taking definite shape, and I hope to have some news for you on the subject before long. There are many details to be worked out. But it does seem settled now that ere long a familiar fat face, adorned by a big pair of spectacles, will be peering from the TV screen, - to the satisfaction, I shall hope, of viewers old and young.

No doubt you have seen the references in the Daily Mail, in which our friend Jack Corbett of Birmingham was the prime mover, many thanks to him for that same!

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July 27th, 1951.

Dear Ian Whitmore,

Thank you for your letter of the 9th.

I am glad to hear that you have had so much luck in increasing your store of old Magnets. Your collection seems to be growing at the rate of Jack's beanstalk.

Yes, I agree with you that it will not be easy to get the genuine Billy on T. V. One can only hope that they will get a good W.G.B. for the role. According to the Press, any number of fat boys are now sending in their names to Lime Grove, in the hope of being selected. Among so many I shall hope that one really good Billy may be discovered.

Thank you very much for the photograph enclosed in your letter. I like it very much, and am very pleased to add it to the collection pinned up along the edges of the book-shelves in my study.

Do you ever listen-in the "Twenty Questions" on the radio? If so, no doubt you heard Billy Bunter given as an "object" last week. I had to laugh when the question-

master stated that he did not know whether Banter's author was alive or dead! You see, I knew quite well myself! So I put Mr. Horne wise on the subject, and this week he has passed on the happy news in his programme. If you have not heard it, and if you are interested, there is a "repeat" of the broadcast on Sunday morning at 11.30 in the Light Programme. I think Kenneth Horne always worth listening to: not so much for the programme, as because he has such a charming voice.

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October 10th, 1951.

Dear Donald Webster,

Thank you for your letter, and for the copy of the Liverpool Post, in which I was very much interested. I am very glad to hear that all is going so well with the new branch of the OBBC., and certainly I should be both pleased and honoured by becoming honorary President. I hope there may be many happy meetings in that cosy room. I am very interested in the Library, too, and should like to contribute the enclosed volumes to the same. I enclose also the autographed Gem you would like to have; a little tattered, I am afraid, but the best specimen I could find.

About that old serial "King Cricket", I have often thought of republishing it in book form, but I fear that it belongs too much to the past to interest the general reader. You see, it deals with county cricket of forty-five years ago, and all or almost all of the well-known players mentioned have long since passed on. An abridged version was published in the S. O. L. Now about those leaves in Vallombrosa. The quotation is from Book 1 of Milton's 'Paradise Lost': describing the host of Satan after the Fall. Here it is in full:

..... On the beach

Of that inflamed sea he stood; and called  
His legions, angel-forms, who lay entranced,  
Thick as autumnal leaves that strew the brooks  
In Vallombrosa, where the Etrurian shades,  
High over-arch'd, imbower; .....

Vallombrosa in these latter days is a holiday resort, and as near as I remember, about fifteen miles from Florence. There is -- or was in my time -- still a monastery there, but I seem to remember that only a few monks remained.

Best of wishes to the new Branch; and with kind regards.

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January 5th, 1952.

Dear Eric Payne,

Thank you for your letter. Yes, I know all about the Voting Contest, and it seems to me an extremely interesting idea. Certainly I shall be very pleased to autograph the photograph when you send it along. I will expect it about the Ides of March!

Yes, I am certainly very interested indeed to hear that Tom Merry books were presented as prizes, and very pleased indeed by what you say about the "Scapegrace of St. Jim's." To tell you a secret, I have read it twice myself since it was published, and liked it better each time. You had a narrow escape of getting

more cricket chapters -- Martin Clifford was very reluctant to drop the subject.

Tom Merry seems to be getting a little ahead of Bunter in these days. Not only are the new 1/6 books coming out in February, but we are now planning a new monthly magazine, to contain Tom Merry in company with Bunter, and either a Rookwood short story or a "Jack of All Trades" serial: not decided yet which. 1952 looks like being a very busy year for at least two authors, perhaps three!

Kindest regards, my dear boy, and best wishes for the New Year.

February 7th, 1952.

Dear John Robyns,

Thank you for your letter of January 12th. I see that you have heard about the cheap editions of Tom Merry, so you will guess that Martin Clifford has been very busy of late. Six books in three months isn't bad, even for Martin! They are not so long as the bound books, but a good length all the same. All future Tom Merry books will be in the cheap editions, and I think myself that this is a move in the right direction; it is high time that prices came down.

Now I am in the throes of installation of T. V. At the moment I am trying out a Bush, which seems to me good. By great good luck, it appears that the fees for BB on TV will just about cover it, so I consider that I am practically getting it for nothing! Which is a boon and a blessing in these tough times. I just had to see Bunter make his bow on the screen on the 19th, though -- to tell you a secret! -- I am looking forward to seeing cricket matches a little later, even more than I am looking forward to Bunter. Now that I cannot go to them, it is rather a catch to have them brought to me, like the mountain to Mahomet.

I have just heard from Chapman, that he thinks it will be a good show. He has been at Lime Grove on the spot. Active as ever -- but of course he is still only a lad of seventy-three!

I remember that old story you mention "Drummed Out". It is curious that one never forgets a story one has written. And there must be quite a number by this time, -- five or six thousand at least! And a few thousand yet to come, we will hope!

Love to Elaine, and kindest regards to all.

February 21st, 1952.

Dear Mr. Leckenby,

Perhaps you may have seen the classic features of the Oldest Inhabitant on TV last Monday? As you know, the Bunter plays began on Tuesday; and as a sort of preliminary canter, F.R. was put on TV on Monday evening. I sat back in my arm-chair, watched myself on the screen, and listened to my own dulcet tones, with a pleasure which - I hope - may have been shared by others. This is the first time I have appeared on television, and it was quite a joyous occasion.

I hope you will see the Bunter plays. The first programme, on Tuesday, seemed to me remarkably good, and the production was as near perfect as anything could be. Gerald Campion was Bunter to the life, and I half-expected Mr. Quelch to step out of the screen, he was so much alive. I had a very happy half-hour viewing, and am looking forward with much anticipation to the rest of the series. Who could



have foreseen this when Bunter was first evolved in 1899?

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1st March, 1952.

Dear Tom Hopperton,

For the love of Mike, not so many of your wild surmises: I have read so far in the new quarterly only the article headed "Vanguard Library". Having done so, I whiz to the typewriter to remonstrate.

The "protean author" did NOT think it wise to "camouflage" his activities; he never even dreamed of anything of the kind. So far from a "serious and deliberate attempt to add the Vanguard's scalp to his belt", that author had to guard with his left to "keep the whole outfit from being landed on him": and could have written every single number if he had liked - which he did not, having no time for it.

As for "competing with Philpott Wright", I never even knew his name, let alone his works. I cannot remember ever looking even once at a Vanguard number not my own - why should I? I was asked to write all I could for the paper, and did so - and did not care a single solitary boiled bean how the remaining numbers were filled.

Pat O'Neil was NOT an off-set to anybody or anything. As a spotter of secret history, my dear boy, your exploits remind me not of Sherlock Holmes, but of Herlock Sholmes.

Since these amazing discoveries of yours will be read by all our friends of the O. B. B. C., I think it only just that you should print this letter in your next number as an antidote.

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March 7th, 1952.

Dear Donald Webster,

Thank you for your letter. What I like best in your remarks about the Auto is that you did not put it down till you finished it. That means that it is readable -- a term that applies to very few autobiographies, if any.

My personal affairs in childhood and boyhood would hardly interest anyone; but even if I thought they would, I should not think of obtruding them on the public. I think that it is in the very worst of taste for any man to parade his personal affairs in public. His work, his travels, his adventures if any, his views of life, any spots of experience that may be of use to others, yes. But not his Aunt Jane and his Uncle George, or what he thought of his head-master, or what his head-master thought of him -- apart from the pain of recalling recollections of dear ones long dead. I began the Auto at seventeen because my writing began at that date; and the book is the life of a writer. So there you are!

I am very glad that you like the new 1/6 Tom Merry books which have replaced the more expensive editions. I am fed right up to the chin with high prices, and I think this is a move in the right direction. Also I am very pleased indeed to know that you liked Bunter on TV. I like him immensely myself. Many correspondents have written to me that he isn't quite Bunter: but my view is that the young people of today are entitled to their Bunter, even if he isn't exactly our Bunter. It is not much use looking for perfection in this imperfect world: and really and truly it is a good show.

I like those cricket verses you mention: good, if they are all like the one you quote. And I am glad that you are going to see "King Cricket" at last. I hope you won't be disappointed in it. I liked it very much myself when I wrote it -- it must be 45 years ago.

The Bunter plays on TV are all taken from the Bunter Books, not from the old Magnet. I made a special point of this, as in my opinion the stories shape much better in the books than they ever could in detached weekly numbers, in which there was endless though inevitable recapitulation. Of course there had to be much cutting to pack them into the half-hour, which did not improve them: still I think the result did the producer credit.

-----  
12th March, 1952.

Dear Tom Hopperton,

You say 'there appear to have been only about a dozen stories'. I really don't know how many stories I wrote for Trapps and Holmes, half-a-century ago, but certainly not fewer than a thousand. 'Frank Drake' was one pen-name among a good many. And when Percy did succeed in breaking me off entirely from that firm, I never wrote again for them under either my own name or a pen-name. In the Gem and Magnet I retained the same pen-names all the time: but H. J. D. had different ideas, as he was entitled to have if he liked. Then you say that I might have looked at the Vanguard to make sure that I was not traversing the same ground as other writers? Can you possibly suppose that a busy author could find time to do anything of the sort? For all I know, similarities may have cropped up: I did not know and certainly did not care. I had quite enough to do minding my own business: and when I had time for reading I read Horace, Keats, Dante, Shakespeare and Milton: most assuredly not the Vanguard!

As for H. J. D. being a 'vanity' publisher, I think that might apply to the books he published; certainly not to his comics, which were widely-circulated and very well paying propositions in their day. They were utterly unlike the so-called "comics" of the present day - it was before American trash invaded this country and vulgarised everything.

If there was a "marked change" in my work, I was unaware of it. Change is bound to occur: every writer gets better and better as he goes on, year after year, if he is capable of improvement at all. The early Gems and Magnets, for example, are very poor stuff compared with the Bunter books and Tom Merry books. But I never noticed any change while it was going on.

-----  
April 2nd, 1952.

Dear Jimmy Iraldi,

I am very glad you liked the Auto. Of course I could have made it ten times as long, but Casanova's day of memoirs in ten volumes are long over. Whether there will be a second, depends on ever so many contingencies: but I am very glad, at least, that you like the first.

Certainly, my dear boy, I shall be very pleased to autograph a copy for you, and when it comes along from Skilton's, will do so with promptness and despatch, and

it along to you.

O. K. about our friend Sherlock? I don't think that anyone who looked into the matter would doubt his American descent; though whether he had, as I suspect, a French grandfather, may be a debatable point. But if you ever read Voltaire's *Zadig*, I think you will be struck by that gen's deductive methods; though Voltaire makes only half a chapter of the same. But they were giants in the earth in those days; they did not need to pad out like their successors. I have often found in a single chapter of 200 years ago enough material to furnish forth a modern author for years and years. Shaw's *Pygmalion*, for example, originated in half a chapter of Smollett's *Peregrine Pickle*. I don't think the critics ever found him out, for of course critics don't read.

I can guess what a pleasure it must have been to have real genuine Doyles at your meeting. It is quite curious how thoroughly alive Sherlock Holmes still is. I believe the interest in him is greater now than ever it was. The truth is that Conan Doyle did a good job of work with him: the numberless imitations that have appeared since are fearfully watery stuff in comparison. I can still take Sherlock down from the shelf and read him almost as keenly as I did when he used to come out in the old Strand Magazine; but when I tackle Poirot, or Lord Peter Wimsey, do my eyelids droop? They do!

Right on the wicket: it was Rembrandt's picture at Amsterdam. So you have gazed on it too?

I confess that what I don't know about Niccolò Paganini would fill several lengthy papers for you to read out at the Ritualist meetings. But what you say about him interests me very much indeed, and I shall look him out. If you can recommend any book about him, which can be obtained on this side of the Atlantic, I should be very glad to hear of it.

Now I have just finished writing 72,000 words of *Tom Merry* for the paper-backs: and am taking a few days off. Afternoons devoted to catching up on correspondence: the pile on my desk is growing smaller by degrees and beautifully less: and the mornings to -- what would you guess? What would you think, laddie, if you saw a brand-new translation of Horace's *Odes* by Frank Richards -- in English *alcasica*? I am told that Horace has been translated three hundred times: but all of them that I have seen are mighty poor stuff: translated, I think, rather like Bottom the Weaver in the *Midsummer Night's Dream*. I am having a shot at it, anyway.

-----  
August 15th, 1952.

Dear Charles van Renen,

Many thanks for your letter. It is a real pleasure to receive so kind an appreciation from Sunny South Africa. I am glad to hear that you are a reader of the *Collectors' Digest*: a cheery little paper which I never miss. Also that you are devoted to Dickens, whom I rank next to Shakespeare in my list of the English classics. I have a cat, Sammy, who is named after the immortal younger Mr. Weller, -- which is really a compliment to Samivel, for Sammy is the delightfulest little animal that ever was! His picture appears on the cover of my *Autobiography*.

It was unlucky to lose your collection of the old papers as you did, -- mine also went in the War time, but that was because I handed it over to the Salvage when the Government appealed for paper. And have I not missed it since! Still, I confess

that I like my present books much better than the old weekly numbers: it seems to me that stories shape much better in book form: serial publication necessitates so much recapitulation. And I think I like "Tom Merry's Own" annual better than the old Greyfriars Holiday Annual, which was sadly padded out with reprints. It was a severe jolt when the old papers disappeared in 1940: but it often happens that what seems to be a jolt turns out to be a blessing in disguise.

Many thanks for your kind wishes. Frank Richards and Martin Clifford are getting a little deep into the sere and yellow leaf: but they keep in remarkably good health for their age, and I am convinced that they will both last as long as their readers want to hear from them!

-----  
December 15th, 1952.

Dear Eric Payne,

Thank you for your letter. I agree with Herbert that the article should have been left uncut: for one cannot have too much of a good thing. Entre nous, and speaking generally, it is true that some articles would be the better for a little judicious pruning: but in the present case I would not willingly have lost a single word. To tell the truth, you have made me think better of my own work than I did before, which is a very unusual experience. Yes, I read your extremely interesting article on Singapore, and you may see it referred to in my letter in the December C.D. I liked specially your reference to Bhanipur at the end, which was a spot of genuine sly humour which, when I came to it, made me laugh so suddenly that Sammy nearly fell off my knee.

Yes, my dear boy, by all means come along some time and see me, if you feel so disposed, a little later when the weather is not quite so inclement. Later on the winter of our discontent will be made glorious summer by the sun in Kent, as Shakespeare so nearly remarked!

It is very pleasant to know that the Bunter books are used as prizes. The "Beanfeast" story -- notwithstanding the Bunterish title -- has a serious side which is not without instruction to the young mind, -- though worked in, I hope, too deftly for the youthful reader to detect the pill in the jam.

Best wishes for Christmas and the New Year.

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December 20th, 1952.

Dear Eric Payne,

I cannot let another hour go by without writing to tell you how greatly I have enjoyed your article on the "Roamings of the Rio Kid". It is the very best article I have ever read in my life.

Thank you, my dear boy, for giving so much pleasure to an old man.

-----  
February 14th, 1953.

Dear Jimmy Iraldi,

Very pleased to hear from you again: so am glad you gave in to that yearning to write! You are a good boy to say that F. R. like wine, improves with age. To tell

you a secret, I couldn't agree more! Looking over some old Gems, and over the Gold Hawk books, I was quite struck by the difference; it really is tremendous. The author has become ever so much more concentrated; in the earlier works there was a diffuseness of which he was unconscious at the time, but of which he is only too conscious when he looks them over now. Really it is a pity that these books could not be made to pay their way. It was a rather heroic attempt to get back to something like pre-war prices, and the author was content to write them at pre-war fees; which don't amount to much in these days of soaring expenses and grinding taxation. However, I am told that the project hasn't precisely folded up; there is a possibility of resumption later.

Yes, I am very pleased with the new Bunter books published by Cassell's. They are a great firm, and extremely pleasant people with whom to deal. At the moment they have three books in hand; B. B.'s Brain Wave, B. B.'s First Case, and "Bunter, Behave!" The first two will come out during the present year. Perhaps it will interest you to hear that we are now planning "Billy Bunter's Own" to keep "Tom Merry's Own" company. Mandeville's will publish it, and I hope to see the first issue by Xmas this year. B. B. will of course be prominently featured; but the rest of the contents will differ wholly from T. M. O. Among other items, the "Rio Kid" will ride again!

Yes, you are right about the "best-selling". Billy Bunter seems to be a name to conjure with. I can't quite make out why the Tom Merry books -- I mean the 7/6 ones -- have not scored a similar success: but of course a lot depends on the publisher and his methods. I keep on hearing from people who have never heard of the T. M. books, while everybody seems to have heard of the Bunter books, and there is now busy reprinting of the earlier volumes which had sold out. Just the name of Billy Bunter seems to work the oracle: in fact, the okayfulness is terrific, "Buntro duce et auspice Buntro", as Horace so very nearly said.

Yes, we have had a terrific storm here: a real, genuine, life-size, top-notch hurricane. Broadstairs and Margate look as if Hitler had flown over: but Kingsgate, tucked in between the two, almost escaped. We are seventy feet up from the sea-level here: and even the North Sea in a bad temper could not negotiate that. But the wind -- and did the house rock? My bed jumped under me, just as it used to do sometimes in London in the War time when the bombs were coming down. No real damage, however: only a few palings blown out, and the T. V. aerial left looking rather intoxicated. But it was a very bad business further up this coast: thousands of people flooded out of their homes, and hundreds drowned. We have had sunshine here since: but the cold is quite Arctic. It is the worst winter I have known since 1893. I hope you have it a little warmer in N. Y.

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December 28th, 1953.

Dear Charles van Renen,

Many thanks for your kindly greeting, which dropped in happily on Christmas morning. As you may guess, at my age I have to take the festive season much less exuberantly than of old: but I don't think it will ever cease to give me great pleasure to receive kind and friendly greetings from the younger generation. One does like to be remembered: and I confess to at least a half-belief that good wishes bring good

fortune. At any rate, here the Oldest Inhabitant still is, as cheerily as ever chronicling the adventures and misadventures of W. G. Bunter and Company, enjoying health which really can only be described as amazing at his time of life, and looking forward to the fourteenth "Bunter Book" which is to appear at Easter. I begin to think that I published my Autobiography too early! -- at all events, I shall have lots to add to it, if ever there should be a second edition.

There is at least one thing to be learned from a long life like mine: which is, that blessings come often in disguise, -- what seems at the time to be the K. O. often proves to be a leg-up. It was a severe blow to me when the old Magnet went West in the War time: but I have since found that I like writing books ever so much better than periodicals, and that the stories shape better in their new form. So I shall continue to believe with old Pangloss that everything is for the best in the best of all possible worlds!

With kindest regards, and best wishes for the New Year.

February 20th, 1954.

Dear Herbert Leckenby,

I rubbed my eyes when I read the alleged quotation from my writing on Page 41 of the C. D. I lost no time in looking at Gilbert Harding's book. I need not, I hope, assure our readers that the illiterate imbecility quoted by Harding was not written by me. If it ever appeared in print at all, it can only have been the work of a particularly stupid imitator; as I think Mr. Harding might have guessed, had he chosen to do. But I shall not believe, without proof, that the silliest of my imitators could make such a fool of himself. I have asked Harding's publishers for details to enable me to trace the alleged quotation; but have so far received nothing of the kind either from them or Harding himself. The matter is not yet at an end.

April 17th, 1954.

Dear Herbert Leckenby,

Many thanks for your letter and the C. D. I am extremely interested in your remarks on page 100 anent the alleged quotation in Gilbert Harding's book. If Ron has it right, as I suppose he must have, the "quote" is not genuine, as I suspected all along. To take dialogue from two different characters of different nationalities, and mix it, is not quotation. Any author's work could be made to appear absurd by such trickery. Even Shakespeare's. A mixture of remarks by Henry the Fourth and Shylock would produce:

How many thousands of my poorest subjects

Were in six parts, and every part a docat!

Would that be quotation or misrepresentation, if printed as a sample of Shakespeare's work? But I shall have to get a copy of the story before I can take the matter further.

Now to turn to a more agreeable subject, perhaps it may interest you to hear that I have lately written a 'Western' novel called "The Lone Texan", which will be published shortly in a paper-backed edition at 2/- by the Atlantic Book Company. It is about a cheery young cow-puncher called "Fresh", who cavorts around on the Bar-Seven Ranch: a new character whom I rather like. It was Eric Fayne's article on the

Rio Kid that set my mind wandering in the West again: and this is the result.

P.S. April 19th. I looked in at a TV play last evening called "It Never Rains!" There was a character in it named Bob, whose continual greeting was "Hallo, hallo, hallo!" This seemed sort of familiar somehow!

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May 4th, 1954.

Dear Herbert Leckenby,

Many thanks for the C.D. which came as a sunny spot on a rainy morning! The article on the "King Cricket" serial was specially interesting; to me at least. I remember that story so clearly, that it seems quite amazing that it is nearly half-a-century since I wrote it.

It is probable that a Bunter book will be serialised in Australia soon; and I like the idea very much. And I hear that "The Lone Texan" will be published at the end of May; which is quick work for these days, considering that it was written only last February.

Just now I am writing a new Bunter play for television, which I am told is to appear on the T. V. screen in the early summer.

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May 4th, 1954.

Dear Eric Fayne,

This is just a line to answer your query about the "Lone Texan". I have just learned that it will be published about the end of this month, by the Atlantic Book Company. Their address is 16 Barter Street, London, W. C. 1. I think I mentioned that it is in paper-backs at 2/-.

I am very glad that you are interested in "Fresh", and I do hope that you will like him as much as the "Kid" -- especially as the inspiration came from your direction!

Perhaps you will be interested to hear that I am now writing a new Bunter play for television, which I expect will go on the screen early in the summer.

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August 12th, 1954.

Dear Arthur Holland,

You will probably be surprised to get this letter; as yours to me is dated 1952. Somehow your letter got into the "Answered" drawer: and it has only just turned up, so I hope you will forgive me for this very tardy reply.

Many thanks for the cutting you sent me. I do hope that you did not think it was a lack of courtesy on my part not to have acknowledged it sooner.

Many, many thanks for the very kind things you say in your letter. You wouldn't guess what a pleasure it is to an old fellow just on eighty, to be so kindly remembered by the younger generation.

Perhaps it will interest you to know that I am now writing a series of "Carcroft School" stories for an Australian paper. It is called the 'Silver Jacket', published at Sydney. I get so many kind letters from your big island, that it was a real delight to me to be asked to write for an Australian magazine; and the editor tells me that his readers like reading "Carcroft" -- though they couldn't like reading it so much as I

like writing it!

Thank you once more for your letter and the cutting.

-----  
August 14th, 1954.

Dear Herbert Leckenby,

What an excellent article, "The Summer Term", in the C.D. this time! It brought back many summers quite unlike the one we are having now, when the rain it raineth every day, and the stormy winds do blow.

There is a spot of news: "Books for Pleasure, Ltd.", are to republish the Tom Merry and Rookwood books in a cheap edition, at 2/- or 2/6. I like this idea very much; it is always good news when any price goes down. My "Lone Texan" seems to have been held up on the trail, for he has not materialised yet; expected next month. Anyhow, Bunter will put in his accustomed appearance in September, in "Billy Bunter Does His Best", and the annuals will be along about October. And I have been lucky enough to secure that copy of Lucilius I have wanted so long; though so far the publishers are not falling over one another to secure what I have to say about him:

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November 16th, 1954.

Dear Herbert Leckenby,

Many thanks for your letter and the C.D. I am very interested to hear that there may be a sketch of my unworthy self in the December issue, by the master-hand of C. H. Chapman. If it materialises, I shall certainly keep it, for no-one could admire Chapman's skill more than I do.

The "Lone Texan" is out at last, though sure that guy hasn't been burning the wind on the trail! I was very pleased to read Eric's review of the same in the last C.D.; and pleased to add that the deplorable misprints to which he alluded are being corrected in the second edition. It seems to me a remarkable production for the price, for both printing and paper are very good, apart from the misprints, and it is as long as a Bunter book; and what do paper covers matter anyway? How often I have tried to explain to publishers that people buy a book for the inside, not for the outside. In France the most weighty classical works are published in paper covers: and why not here? How often books are hung up, waiting on the book-binders, who really are not needed at all. But I am glad to see that paper covers are making their way at last, and hope to see many more of them.

I have lately finished writing a "Carcroft" serial for the "Silver Jacker"; dealing with the perpetually attractive topic of a barring-out. Actually Carcroft, alone among my many scholastic establishments, has never had a barring-out so far. Now it is making up for lost time. I don't know whether you ever see Raymond Glendenning's Book of Sport annual. Felgate is there as usual. The next Bunter book, 'Billy Bunter's Double', is due in March or April, from Cassell's. Old readers who remember "Wally" may like to meet that interesting youth again.

Christmas is coming. I have given up counting my Christmasses; there have been so many of them. But I am always glad to see another. So I will wind up with best wishes for a happy Christmas to all old friends of the O. B. B. C., and all the best for the New Year.

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September 12th, 1955.

Dear Herbert Leckenby,

Many thanks for the C.D. I have been much entertained by the speculations regarding a grown-up Greyfriars. But I think that Harry Wharton and Co. are much more interesting at fifteen than they could possibly be at fifty-five; and their author rather wishes that he could follow their example, and keep on Peter-Pan-fully, as Inky might express it.

A reporter from a Sunday newspaper came down to see me on this very subject the other day: and between us we sketched out the future careers of the Famous Five. It was very amusing: but I think it will be a long time before Colonel Harry Wharton and Captain Robert Cherry, Retd. call on rubicund Farmer Bull at his moorland farm in Yorkshire, and meet there a writing chap named Nugent, a grey-haired prince called Hurree Singh, and a plump rosy stockbroker of the name of Bunter!

I liked W. F. Champion's article on Lovell very much. But I wouldn't agree that things would go on just the same if Lovell, Herries, and Johnny Bull were interchanged. I couldn't imagine one in the place of another -- Johnny in Study No. 6, Lovell a member of the Famous Five, or Herries still less. There are shades of character that have escaped the writer's eye. But it was a really fine article and I enjoyed reading it.

I have been getting letters on the subject of the "passing" of Martin Clifford. It does give one rather a jolt to break an association which began as long ago as 1906. But there are practical considerations which must govern both authors and publishers. Old readers, I am very happy to know, remember Martin with affection; but new readers know him not. Tempora mutantur: and alas! nos et mutamur in illis! There was a time when the Gem was far ahead of the Magnet, and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy more widely known than Billy Bunter. Now I am told that T. M. O. will not pay its way, while BGO continues to prosper. Martin has had to realise that the time has come for him to take a back seat, and leave the field to Frank. Luckily, they remain inseparable, and Martin will want for nothing that Frank can provide!

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December 20th, 1955.

Dear Leslie Rowley,

Many thanks for your letter and Christmas greetings. I was very interested to read in the C.D. about "Johnny Bull" and the copy of the magazine left behind in Japan. Still more interested, perhaps, to read in your letter in the C.D. about the old "Annual" you picked up in Tokio. It is very curious how the old papers turn up in the East -- from Shanghai to Singapore -- and now Tokio! Where next, I wonder! By way of a variation of occupation, I have lately written a story called "Schoolboys in Space", in which two fellows of Walcot School find themselves stranded on Mars! -- and I am almost tempted to make them come across a copy of the old "Magnet" among the Martian canals!

Thank you too for the kind things you say in your letter. So many old readers have been kind enough to tell me the same thing, that I do believe that I have done a little good in my time: which is a very cheering reflection in the sunset of life. I am very glad that you are still interested in the old characters, and hope you may continue so till you reach the ripe age of the author, -- which is looking a long way ahead!

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Dear Eric Fayne,

Many thanks for your letter, which interested me extremely. The point you mention ought, of course, to have occurred to me; especially as the rule is always carefully observed in the "Bunter" books: in which Bunter's name is the operative word, in all titles. Obviously the same rule should apply to Tom Merry: but somehow or other it escaped my attention: and I really am very much obliged to you, my dear boy, for putting me wise about it. Unluckily the two T. M. books now with the publisher have the titles "Cardew's Catch" and "Down and Out"; but I shall see whether something may be done. It is very kind and very thoughtful of you to spot this weak point and let me know about it. *Mea culpa!*

"Bunter the Hiker" and "Billy Bunter's Bargain" will both be out this year: the first of the two some time in the spring. I have lately completed the copy for the BBO annual in September: and there will be what seems to me the rather novel idea of a "Greyfriars sequence": a set of sequels one after another, and I hope that space will be found this time for Rookwood.

Do you ever see the "Felgate" stories in Raymond Glendenning's Book of Sports annual? An avid reader has suggested a full-length book about Felgate, and I have been turning it over in my mind.

I note the motto "Excelsior" on your letter. Lately I have been amusing myself in leisure hours by turning Longfellow's verses into Latin. But the unanimity with which publishers don't want Latin verses is quite remarkable:

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October 28th, 1958.

Dear Eric Fayne,

Many thanks for a very welcome and pleasant letter. It did not occur to me that you had seen 'Acta Diurna', and I am very pleased that you like my rendering of Sir Joseph. I find a great deal of amusement perpetrating these Latin parodies. In these latter days, stern necessity compels me to sit with my eyes shut, to rest those venerable optics, for a certain period every day. But the old nut simply cannot remain inactive; so when I am not thinking out chess problems, or devising new antics for Bunter, these verses emerge. I picked up the idea from Didymus in the Acta Diurna, and it has proved quite a happy resource. One of these days, perhaps, a volume of them will remain unsold on the bookstalls: I enclose a version of "Waltzing Matilda" which may perhaps amuse you.

I am glad you liked the story in BBO. To tell you a secret, -- tell it not in Gath, whisper it not in the streets of Askelon! -- it was written in the form of a "sequence" to give the contents-list a plumper look. At the same time I thought it rather a novel idea. You may have noticed -- I fear that many have -- that BBO rather resembles our old friend Cassius, in having a lean and hungry look: Costs of production, of course, -- *das ist der ewige Gesang der jedem an die Ohren klingt*, as poor old Faust remarked. I never see the annual without being reminded of a story I wrote a long time ago called "Thin Bunter". But one lives in hope that it will fill out in the fulness of time.

I like the photograph very much. Many thanks for sending it. What a cheery picture! It is now one of my pin-ups on the edge of a book-shelf in my study. I had

pleasure in the happy group. Evidently with you it is still "consule Flanco".

January 14th, 1959.

Dear Charles van Renen, Junior,

Thank you very much for a very pleasant letter. I am glad that you like the Greyfriars stories so much: and what you tell me brings to my mind a very happy picture of your father reading them aloud. I well remember the "India" series which you tell me you are now reading: I liked it myself and enjoyed writing it: and I think it still makes good reading, though India has changed very much since those days. I liked the "South Sea" series too, and hope that you will like it when you come to it. And I am very pleased to know that your father receives the new Bunter books as they come out. A new one is due at Easter, called "Bunter Out of Bounds", and later in the year there will be "Bunter Comes for Christmas": and as you tell me that you like the holidays best at Wharton Lodge, it will be just what you like: for that is where our fat friend turns up very unexpectedly. Quite unexpectedly: though really the other fellows might have expected it, knowing their Bunter as they do:

June 21st, 1960.

Dear Jimmy Iraldi,

Thank you for your letter: very pleased to hear from you again. I hope you will have a jolly good time on your trip to Europe: it sounds like a lovely programme that you have mapped out. The places you mention wake up many happy old memories. You don't mention Naples, but if you go down to Capri you can't miss Napoli -- dolce Napoli, and of course Pompeii. Since my time there, they have discovered the Arepo acrostic at Pompeii, the same which, as Rawdon Crawley would say, was found at Cirencester in this island. Here it is if you don't happen to have heard of it:

ROTAS  
OPERA  
TENET  
AREPO  
SATOR

I have worked this out as containing a secret message to the Early Christians, using up exactly the 25 letters, as follows: Pater noster esto. O ora et para. The Naples Museum is a "must" for any traveller in Italy, and you will find the acrostic there, if you are interested in that kind of thing. It was still buried when I was at Pompeii fifty years ago.

And when you're at Venice, don't forget to look out from the Bridge of Sighs, the Ponte dei Sospiri, and see whether you can see much of Venice from that look-out: as Byron fancied he could.

Now, my dear boy, you must not take it amiss if I cannot ask you to call and see me while you are over here. Since I turned eighty, I have had to cut off all such visits, even when I should have looked forward to them with pleasure as in this case. Father Time is inexorable: and octogenarians who wish to become nonagenarians and perhaps centenarians, have to keep very quiet. During the past few years, I have had to make it a rule to be accessible only on the telephone, which limits

interviews to a few minutes, and to fix the time for the same from 7 to 8 p.m. So if it would give you any pleasure to hear my dulcet tones, when you are in England, just ring up THANET 62713, between seven and eight any evening, and leave it at that.

-----  
June 9th, 1961.

Dear Eric Fayne,

Thank you for the C.D. and your letter of the 4th. I am glad that you liked the last T. V. Bunter. I liked it myself immensely; and although Gerald Campion, when he was here the other day, explained to me how he did the "double" act, it still seems to me a very remarkable performance. By the way, my dulcet tones will be heard tomorrow Saturday, in "In Town To-Day" at 12.30. Short but -- I hope! -- sweet!

Yes, I shall be very pleased to see you; but do let me know well in advance. Although I work only in the mornings -- a necessary concession to Father Time, -- my afternoons always seem to get booked up somehow, sometimes weeks ahead. Just a line or a ring.

-----  
July 9th, 1961.

Dear Eric Fayne,

What a truly grand magazine C. D. is these days. Its arrival provides a red-letter day in every month of the year.

The T. V. reviews interested me very much. I thought "Double Bunter" extremely well done. Gerald Campion at his best. Such slips as allusions to Mauleverer's 'father' instead of 'uncle' do not, of course, emanate from the author, and must have struck many viewers as odd, since Mauly couldn't be 'Lord' Mauleverer in his father's lifetime. Careless actors will do these things.

I like the review of 'Billy Bunter at Butlin's'. But that 'tie-up' is quite imaginary. I have never met Mr. Butlin, though I had, of course, to obtain his permission to make him a character in the story. Holiday Camps are now so universally popular that it seemed a good idea to land Bunter in one; and even George Orwell, if he were happily still with us, would I think admit that the topic was not out of date. The coincidence of the monogram occurred to me as the groundwork for a 'comedy of errors.' The book was published unusually early in the year as especially suitable for holiday reading. Seaside sunshine would be a little out of place in the rain and fog of October.

The date you suggest will suit me down to the ground. We shall have so much to talk about, and I have one or two things to show you.

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(FINAL EDITORIAL COMMENT: The letter dated July 9th, 1961, was one of the last received from Frank Richards. He died at Christmas time that year, and a million of his old boys and girls mourned.

The earliest letters in this collection were written from Hampstead Garden Suburb; all the later ones, and that is the majority, came from Rose Lawn at Kingsgate, near Broadstairs.)

Our cover for "THE LETTERS OF FRANK RICHARDS" was  
designed and executed by  
HENRY WEBB

ALL OUR YESTERDAYS -

are made immortal and are lived again in the pages of  
STORY PAPER COLLECTORS' DIGEST -  
the monthly magazine devoted to the histories of the writers,  
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