

LORD NORTHCLIFFE

Some Reminiscences of the Early Life and Struggles of the Late Lord Northcliffe.
(By Stephen Golder.)

T. P. O'Connor, in recent articles on Lord Northcliffe, rightly said that the multi-millionaire newspaper proprietor had as many struggles as most men. This is quite true, and I think I know as much of his early struggles for existence as anyone else. Nearly all of his biographers start off with the production of "Answers." Before that time he had indeed a hard struggle. For a couple of years I was in constant touch with him, and had the pleasure and privilege of drawing out cheques for signature for the small sums he was earning by his literary efforts and depending on for his board and lodging, etc. My position at that time was that of private secretary to the then small printing and publishing house of Iliffe & Sturmey, Vicar Lane, Coventry, Warwickshire—now a large publishing house with a branch in London known as Iliffe & Sons, Limited.

The firm I speak of at that time published and owned the Cyclist, the leading cycling paper, and also printed nearly all the price lists and catalogues issued by the cycling firms for which Coventry was famous. To combat the opposition of Wheeling, a cycling paper started in London, by Harry Etherington, who acted as London agent for the Cyclist, Wheel Life was started, and it was then that Alfred Charles Harmsworth, a member of the Hampstead Bicycle Club, first came into prominence in the literary world by his contributions to Wheel Life, under the nom-de-plume of "Arthur Pendennis." His contributions at the start of Wheel Life netted him the princely sum of ten shillings and sixpence per week, evidently a good sum for him—so much so that he soon removed to Coventry, joined the permanent staff of Wheel Life, and later Bicycling News, the oldest cycling paper, owned by Benjamin Clegg, and edited by James Inwards, and which Iliffe & Sturmey purchased. Harmsworth rented a room in the Holyhead Road in a house kept by a Miss Mercer. George Lacy Hillier, amateur bicycle champion at all distances and a well-known member of the London Stock Exchange, and also joint editor with Lord Bury of the Badminton Volume on Cycling, was editor-in-chief, and Alfred was assistant editor.

To the inside members of the firm Harmsworth was always known as the Kid. He was at that time very girlish looking, with a mop of yellow hair, a long curl hanging over and covering up half of his forehead, which he was always brushing back. I noticed the same peculiarity during his visit to Vancouver last year, but his hair was shorter and black.

He soon made his presence felt in the cycling world, but try as he would he was not a brilliant success as a rider, although he was a constant attendant at all our club runs. He would borrow any bicycle he could get hold of—borrowing in those days was a knack he had—this I know to my sorrow, particularly where books were concerned. Dr. Gordon Stables, another member of our old staff, had the same weakness. During one of his periodical visits to Coventry he fell in love with the writer's collection of Carey and Paterson road books. He borrowed two, faithfully promising to return them. Months after, a gentle reminder was given him by post. His response was a presentation autographed copy of a book on "Cats," he had just published; not at all useful or interesting in place of road books to an enthusiastic road rider. I had in those days several volumes of valuable books which Harmsworth borrowed, but I was never able to get them back.

Hillier and Harmsworth were always quarrelling, the reason being that the boy on the spot used to carve and cut Hillier's copy as he thought fit. Hillier was quite an artist, and I had hundreds of clever pen and ink caricatures enclosed in his daily correspondence to me. They were usually on the same lines, and depicted G. L. H. with a murderous look, hold-

ing a formidable knife in his mouth and clasping a six-shooter in each hand, peeping round the door of Harmsworth's den, the latter being shown sitting on a table with a huge pair of shears, carving up Hillier's copy.

This went on for many months and then the "Kid" succeeded in making Bicycling News a good paying proposition. He evolved the brilliant idea of issuing a supplement with the paper on the lines of the Bazaar and Mart, and advertising all and sundry items connected with cycling, at the rate of three words for a penny. Iliffe & Sturmey gave in to him, much to Hillier's disgust, and thousands of postage stamps came in the mails.

During the time Harmsworth was trying all sorts of schemes to make money, and contributed several articles to other papers, which were nearly always accepted and paid for. One instance, I remember well. I was always a keen stamp collector, and had a good collection. One evening Harmsworth, dropping in to borrow something, spent a few hours in my diggings looking over my stamp albums and asking all kinds of questions re philately. As a result of the information gained an article soon appeared from his pen in Tit Bits, headed "Why Old Postage Stamps Are Worth Their Weight in Gold." Whilst in Coventry he, in conjunction with Edward Markwick, a young barrister of the Temple, brought out a shilling book with an attractive cover in colours, called "How to Win at Nap." The gaudy outside depicted a full nap hand of cards. It sold well and brought grist to the mill; but whether anyone learnt anything from it is a doubtful question.

Then he evolved the idea of his penny paper on the lines of Tit Bits, "Answers to Correspondents." The paper was first printed in Coventry and started with number three. I asked him: "Why start No. 3?" "Oh," he replied, "Number three will be so good that everyone will be asking about Nos. 1 and 2 and regretting they did not buy it; later on I can bring out the two first numbers." Funds not being forthcoming to pay the printing bill, Harmsworth moved to London, and since then everything in a commercial line has prospered with him.

I lunched with him in Coventry a few days after his marriage, later on saw him at Broadstairs, and upon my return from Rhodesia lunched with him at Simpson's in the Strand, and did not see him again until thirteen months ago when in Vancouver. We talked over old times, and his last words when he left me for his world's tour were: "Good-bye, Steve, I shall never see you again; I am not well. Oh, for the old days; they were strenuous, but very happy."

ENLARGING THE B. C. M. LIST OF

"LEADERS IN THEIR LINE"

For various reasons the time available for consulting Business Leaders in any line in regard to publicity through this Magazine, is limited.

We are building rather than "boosting," and employ no dunning solicitors.

Because of the Magazine's steady progress and widening field of Community Service, however, we have arranged for assistance in the business department, and as soon as possible one of our representatives will meet the "Leaders" to whom marked Magazines have been sent.