

## SO, HORACE PHILLIPS, AND WHAT WERE YOU DOING IN 1913?

by Ray Hopkins

Once safely secured in his permanent position as “fly on the wall” reporter at Morcove School in 1921, the larger world of the boys’ weeklies appears to have become lost to yet another writing phenomenon of the Amalgamated Press, Horace Phillips. Not too widely known to most of us, except under his Marjorie Stanton pen-name, his own name does not turn up that frequently in references to his earlier work as he was apparently over forty years of age when recruited as the Morcove Saga chronicler.

In the British Library Catalogues he has only one entry under his real name, *The Army Chaplain’s Sin* (1916), the only publishing details being given as No. 1 of *The Companion Library*. The Lofts/Adley compilation of *Boys’ Friend Library* titles reveal only four listings between 1912 and 1919: *The Worst House at Ravenshill* (No. 210), *The Worst Fellow at Burnside* (No. 247), *The Honour of a Scout* (No. 309) and *Cast Out by the School* (No. 453), one each reprinted from *Boys’ Herald* and *Cheer Boys Cheer*, and two from *Boys’ Journal*.

So it was of considerable interest to encounter his name in an issue of *Cheer Boys Cheer* (No. 33, 4 Jan 1913) as the author of a serial with the title of *The Boy Breadwinner*, with “A Great New Story of Life’s Handicap” as a sub-heading and beneath the title illustration a formidable threat: “These scoundrels have stolen my brains, they have left us to beg for bread. But let them beware, MY TIME WILL COME!” Crumbs, as my Dad would say. Life in this instalment is not going to be all that cheery but it makes for exciting reading.

He who has had his brains stolen is one Jim Carden, a young mechanic who has invented a new type of motor engine. But when he presents his employer with the idea he is told that the German manager, Carl Richel, has already submitted the same invention and he is sacked on suspicion of stealing another’s idea. That is what has gone before. Now read on!

Lured to London by a false cry for help in a letter from his boss’s nephew, Harry Redwin, who has left his uncle’s employment to throw in his lot with Jim, he surprisingly meets Harry at the junction halfway to join the London Express. Harry is hastening back to Jim with twenty-two pounds badly needed in their business, which Harry received from doing “some big pot a service” in London. He confirms the letter summoning Jim was not

written by him and both boys fear it is a ploy to get Jim away from his family so that Richel can wreak some vengeance on them while they are without Jim's protection. His orphaned family consists of his sister Hetty, a schoolboy brother Bob, and little Jacky who is crippled.

Arrived back at Millton at almost midnight they see unusually crowded streets and a crimson glow in the sky towards which fire engines are racing. It is Jim's home and he is told, "It is burning from floor to roof!"

Jim and Harry arrive at the fire, see that Bob is safely out of harm's way and immediately plunge through the front door to emerge carrying the senseless Hetty and Jacky. Carl Richel, watching in the darkness, grits his teeth with chagrin knowing his plan to burn down the Cardens' house to ruin Jim's chances has failed. He returns to his lodgings in fear of being discovered as the writer of the false message to Jim from Harry as well as being the arsonist. Richel's "black heart seethed with rage" when he later discovers that Harry's car containing Jim's new invention has been saved from the flames and is now in a new home let to him by a widower which contains a motor-garage the boys can use as their new business premises. Richel approaches the garage, a small revolver reposing in his pocket, and, finding nobody there, goes inside. Jim comes upon him there and knocks Richel to the ground, finally kicking him through the open door as the villain reaches for the gun. And there we are told there will be "another grand instalment next Tuesday". T'were ever thus!

In 1913, Horace Phillips was the Editor of *Cheer Boys Cheer* and was adding his own compositions to the paper's programme while in complete charge of the paper's contents. This may have begun a tradition with other A.P. editor/authors, the best known early example of this being John Nix Pentelow whilst Editor of *The Gem*. During a brief spell as Editor of *The Schoolgirls' Own*, C.E. St. John Pearce wrote a serial and a series of shorts as Ada Crundall, both of which were reprinted in the *SGOL*. C. Eaton Fearn, while Editor of *Girls' Crystal*, wrote many serials using the bylines Gail Western and Sylvia McRae, also using the name of Herbert MacRae when he wrote for *The Champion*. Stewart Pride, who edited the Third Series of *The School Friend* in the 1950s, included stories of his own as Dorothy Page and Joy Nesbit.

The Lofts/Adley compendium of boys' story authors informs that another of Phillips' pen-names is Walter Hope, a name new to many of us who are interested in such shenanigans of deviousness. This byline appears in this same issue of *Cheer Boys Cheer*, a totally different type of story altogether to the serial instalment recounted above, thus showing writing versatility that this author was capable of even as far back as the pre-World War One period. It is entitled *The Football Feast*, and commences with the blurb: "A Really Laughable Complete Story of Schoolboy Plotters and How They Were Paid Out".

Jack Brooks and his Co. are convinced that they have unwittingly swallowed a drug after a final score of 6-3 and a feeling that there are "gramophones playing in their heads" as they leave the field. The school Doctor confirms at once by turning back Jack's eyelids that he has indeed been the victim of some kind of drug plot. As the team of Fulson's House they played are the "fattest, laziest lot of gluttons" it is obvious who administered in secret the drug that caused the Ross House team to lose. And it could only have been swallowed by the Rossites in lemonade provided by old Waffles, an amiable drunk whose barrow contains soft drinks on footer days at the school. Brooks and Co. force a confession out of Waffles after he emerges, reeling, from his nightly imbibing at the Pig and Blanket. They appear before him garbed in long nightshirts with luminously painted goblin masks. Waffles, before fainting with fright, confesses he added powder to the lemonade

and was paid by a Fulsonite for doing it. When he regains consciousness at midnight he wakes up the Superintendent of the local temperance league to sign the pledge!

Dr Dyson prepares a noisome concoction for Brooks to take his revenge on Sly, Hogge and the other Fulsonites. They are to have a celebratory feed, the centrepiece of which is a magnificent fruit pie. The Ross House juniors remove the tasty fruit filling and replace it with an old football bladder, half inflated and filled with the Doctor's noxious liquid. When the feed commences, Brooks and Co. lock the Fulson House juniors in so that when Sly cuts into the pie and the burst bladder releases the smell of dead cats and rotten fish, they throw open the window for air, exits being denied them by the locked door, and are promptly met with a cry of "Fire" and receive in their faces eggs, apples, potatoes and onions. Thus an unpleasant reward for a mean trick and final victory to the Rossites who steal the rest of the feed while the Fulson crew are miserably engaged in the lavatory.

The lightness of touch of this story compared to the approach in the first story, which is that of Victorian melodrama, is remarkable. Both of these approaches can be discerned in Horace Phillips' long-running series about Morcove School and in particular in the several holiday series laid in Turania, where the intrepid Fourth-Formers are confronted by more than one slimy foreign villain.

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