

SOME SPILLS & THRILLS IN BOOKHUNTING

It seems to me that there are three main elements in the thrill of bookhunting - one, **discovery**: finding a title you've been seeking for a long time, or one that you were not previously aware existed; two, **bargain** - purchasing a desired item at well below the market level; and three, **admiration** - the enjoyment of a really nice copy, bright pictorial covers perhaps, or some superb colour plates or woodcuts, or maybe some special feature, rare or unique, or simply fascinating. Not often will all three elements coincide in the case of any one item. But most collectors will have a line to draw which will make the copy in question unacceptable - missing pages, level of scruffiness, lack of dustwrapper, later edition, excessive price, insufficiently significant variation. The collector who is not a bookseller will have to consider the difficulty of passing on copies when he finds a better one for his own collection.

Successful book collecting will involve learning from one's mistakes, such as paying a first edition price for something that turns out on closer inspection not to be a first; buying a 'VG' item which after all lacks a page or plate; buying another copy of an expensive title which one already possesses; or most embarrassingly - for a dealer at least - offering an item in good faith, but failing to notice an important defect and having it returned, one's reputation suffering accordingly.

My most recent 'spills' include sending for an 'unrecorded' offered as such in a trade journal, to find myself unwrapping a title by F. Carruthers Gould; and a few months ago in some hurry 'finding' an SBG article listed in the contents of a bound Windsor Magazine, but on getting it home discovering that the article itself was missing. This is certainly a problem for the unwary.

Annuals and magazines in publishers' bindings can usually be relied upon to contain what they claim. But often the original owner would have the monthly numbers bound somewhat haphazardly at a local bindery, without too much concern for completeness, or precise relation of contents to cover date. Then some publishers would bind six months' issues together, running from October to March for instance. You may therefore be seeking an item published towards the end of one year which emerges in its 'volume' form dated the following. Some will have two volumes for each year running from January & July. The year date will thus be insufficient for identification: you will need to know the volume number as well. But the page numbers of the Windsor magazine start with the December issue, and run through to the following November. My problem was that the local binder had stuck to the calendar year - in this case 1903 - thus excluding the December 1902 issue which contained the item seen in the table of contents. Sometimes special Christmas numbers or supplements are bound in with the rest of the year, sometimes not. Twice recently I have found SBG items in such supplements which I might well have passed by since I already had copies of those annual numbers, which contained no evidence of 'extras' available. One of these included a photograph of SBG which I have not seen before.

Another thrill is the discovery of relevant newscuttings left in books that one buys. In a recent purchase of Red Spider which was, in any case, an improvement on my own copy, I

found two such cuttings - which will be reprinted in the Newsletter in due course. Better still would be an SBG letter, or flyleaf signed by him (did he ever?).

Not all SBG contributions to bound magazines &c are clearly flagged - several are indexed as "by the author of Mehalah, John Herring &c". And not all such volumes are indexed at all: so there are undoubtedly some items waiting to be discovered by the patient and painstaking researcher leafing through dusty and weighty tomes. Some indices are at the front and some at the end; a few give titles only and not authors; some have a summary of principal authors on the title page which does not invariably include our man, although he may actually have made a contribution.

I have recently made myself a chart, which will help to save me from endlessly searching through items that I have already scanned - with the risk, of course, that I may still miss something in the process!

So have some thrills, and not too many spills. The hunt is still on.

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