

GEORGE MUNRO, "THE PUBLISHER"

By A. J. CROCKETT

VIII

Partnership with Irwin Beadle.

THE first year of the reconstruction period, 1866, brought new problems. For the Beadle firm it meant that the work of providing cheap reading entertainment for the men of the armies was over and so also was the work of propaganda at home and abroad. The branch, which Beadle had opened in London in 1861, was closed and its effects sold to the publishing house of George Routledge & Sons.

Other firm changes were more direct and vital. Robert Adams died in 1866, and George Munro and Irwin Beadle both severed their connection with the firm. Munro told others little about his affairs and gave no reason for taking this step, but he could hardly have been satisfied with his work and position, especially after the war years, and it would seem that Irwin Beadle was not satisfied either. The two left about the same time and formed a partnership, Munro with his business ability and small savings amounting to \$125, and Irwin with his name, sound sensible ideas and capital, which must have been considerable.

Irwin had no diffidence in stating the standards of the new firm. "We aim," he said, "to publish only the best efforts of American authors and not the trashy publications that are circulating in every part of the country and must occasion deep regret to every intelligent reader." Evidently there was dissatisfaction with the policy and principles of the Beadle firm and its plans for the new duties in the important years ahead. Standards were important.

Irwin was dominant in the new firm. Even from the beginning of the Beadle publishing ventures he was much more influential than has been generally supposed. He was at Buffalo when they started the Song Books and when the first of the Beadle Dime Novels was published it bore the name of the publisher as "Irwin P. Beadle & Co." as if Irwin was the principal man.

The first issue of the "Old Sleuth Library" also bore the name of Irwin P. Beadle & Co. Although he was associated with him, the name of Munro did not appear. Irwin was the company. He was a different type of man from Erastus, who was more aggressive, a salesman by experience and a flamboyant character. Much of the success of the Beadle Dimes was due to

Erastus and his striking advertising methods. "Seth Jones" was so widely and strangely advertised that nearly everybody thought they had to read it.

Aside from the marketing end of the business, Irwin appeared to have more influence with a good deal of sound common sense. He recognized Munro's ability and when the break came considered Munro more useful to him in the long run than either Erastus or the Adams brothers. It may seem one of "Life's little ironies" that Irwin, who learned the bookbinder's trade, should spend so much of his life in publishing unbound, cheap books with paper covers or no covers at all.

Gilbert Patten, who wrote for most of the publishers of cheap literature, seems to have had a high regard for Irwin and considered that to Irwin belonged the credit of developing the idea of the Dime Novel. Patten thought that they were influenced by the "Shilling Shocker", which had been in fashion in England long before the first Beadle Dime Novel. It was the idea of a full length novel for ten cents that was new in America.

In England by the eighteen-sixties the trend was away from the horror books and towards respectability. In that mid-Victorian period they were turning from Edward Lloyd and his writers with "the demonic imagination, a prodigious output and an engaging lack of scruple." Respectability was the word and the new trend in writing was vouched for by the patronage of H.R.H. Prince Arthur, the Prince Imperial and other distinguished persons.

As for the new firm of Irwin Beadle & Co., its first concern was to provide wholesome and entertaining reading for youth and the ordinary man with a limited education, a scanty knowledge of books and little money to spend on such a luxury. The average man, who read little, needed the entertainment to be found in books, as did the new immigrants and the settlers in isolated communities.

When the Beadle firm started the Dime Novel series the first writer chosen by Erastus, or possibly by Irwin, was the writer of the famous book, "The Prince of the House of David." The choice by Irwin for the new series of ten cent books, which was called the "Old Sleuth Library", was of a similar character. This time he employed Harlan P. Halsey, who at one time was head of the Brooklyn Board of Education. The subject of the series was crime, its detection and punishment and they avoided, or hoped to avoid, the danger of making a hero of a successful robber or outlaw. The locale was one of the great cities of the Eastern states and not the wild and lawless West.

The "Old Sleuth Library" was a successful venture. Tradition, or legend, has it that the books were great moneymakers and that much of Munro's fortune came from them. This seems unlikely. The series was discontinued after only forty-eight titles had been printed. If the books were issued weekly, as was usual, the series did not last a year. Clearly something happened. This must have been the death of Irwin Beadle and the series died with him. Thereafter the business was carried on under the name of George Munro.

This brief partnership with Irwin Beadle ended the publishing of Dime Novels of the Beadle and Adams type so far as Munro was concerned.

IX

*Munro in Control. His Family Paper,
"The Fireside Companion".*

The short-lived partnership of Irwin Beadle and Munro of 1866, dissolved by the death of Irwin, left Munro to carry on alone, under his own name and with his own ideas. The ten cent series of the "Old Sleuth Library", though apparently a profitable one, was discontinued. Munro was now free to appraise the situation and follow the dictates of his own judgment.

It was a period of railroad building, of the rise of great industries, of great public works and public utilities. Cities, towns and villages sprang up and the new, wide, fertile and vacant land was quickly filled with all sorts of people. Its development was made possible by the westward flow of substantial folk from New England and Canada and immigrants from Europe. Churches, schools, academies and colleges were founded but, with the exception of newspapers, little cheap reading matter was available to the public. The provision of good, wholesome reading matter for the home and family was one which called for great wisdom and sound judgment and Munro undertook to supply the need.

Now whatever may be said about the Dime Novels of Beadle and Adams, this much is true, they met a real need during the Civil War. They were approved by responsible people largely because they dealt with the great moral problem of slavery. They had the support of the American government, which bought them in enormous quantities and shipped them to the armies. Large quantities were also shipped to England for their propaganda value, serving to interpret American thought to the English public. But what was suitable in the war years might be an entirely different matter in the coming years of peace.

The Puritan tradition was still strong and there was a widespread and deep prejudice against the reading of novels, which was not only a waste of time but by many considered as absolutely wicked. These views were held by the Puritans and Non-conformists in England and by their descendants in New England and Nova Scotia until comparatively recent times. They were held by the descendants of the New Englanders, who settled in Nova Scotia during the seventeen-sixties and by the descendants of the Covenanters, the Cameronians and the adherents of the Secession church in the Pictou area, Colchester county and other places in this province. Even the works of Scott and Dickens came under the ban, for Scott was thought unfair to the Covenanters and Dickens caricatured the Puritans with their little Bethels.

There were many deep-rooted prejudices to be overcome. The publication of novels, however good and cheap, would be handicapped by this prejudice, while the publishing of a family paper would be an entirely different matter. Munro had long thought of a weekly family paper of a more popular and homey nature than those existing, a paper which should maintain a high level of character and interest and supply wholesome romances in serial form for general reading.

To publish such a paper and to start from nothing was a formidable undertaking, but Munro succeeded in getting out such a paper in 1867, "The Fireside Companion". Its aim he set out as follows:—

"To make a valuable and attractive paper for both young and old, aiming to combine entertainment and amusement with valuable information on matters relating to the home, courtship, marriage, society and dress, to gratify the innate curiosity and interest of all in the proper and natural romance of life, and to cultivate a taste for reading and intellectual pleasures, and to inculcate good sentiments and principles in the minds of the young."

Munro was the editor as well as proprietor and, like all successful publishers, had the faculty of judging what would meet the popular taste. He often remarked how hard it was to find anyone capable of judging new material and his own habit was to examine personally all contributions of new writers. Many, who afterwards became famous, among them the English novelists, Wilkie Collins and Edmund Yates, owed their success to the personal attention Munro gave their contributions.

The circulation of *The Fireside Companion* soon rose to five thousand and even through the great depression of 1872 continued to prosper. The paper had a fairly good circulation in Nova Scotia and particularly in Pictou county, and there are some still living who remember this attractive paper with its absorbing serial stories, which they thought unusually good. The paper not only circulated here but Nova Scotians were encouraged to write for it. Two Stewart girls, both school teachers from Porter's Lake, were contributors. One of them later became the wife of the Rev. Allan Simpson, the Minister of North Park Street Church in Halifax.

Munro considered the publishing of such a paper so important that for ten years he gave all his energies to it before taking on any new ventures.

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The Seaside Library

Various attempts had been made to issue the works of English writers in periodical form. In 1875, a Chicago firm, David C. Cook & Co., hit upon the device of keeping their presses running in off-seasons by launching a series of reprints of modern English novels with no regard whatever for the English author. The Cook company had been publishing papers for Sunday Schools, helps for Sunday School lessons and religious literature generally. Their publications catered to all denominations and had a wide circulation all over the continent. The new series of reprints was published under the name of "The Lakeside Library." The Cook company ran into difficulties and was forced to curtail its operations. Munro bought the assets of the series and in 1877 started a series of his own under the name of "The Seaside Library."

The Seaside Library was the most successful and best of all Munro's publications. The series differed from others of the day in that Munro was not concerned with the works of American or any other new authors. He aimed to reprint the best of English literature in cheap form and make the classic English books available to the ordinary reader. The series was issued periodically in pamphlet form to secure newspaper postal rates.

It was a comprehensive series including the works of Dickens, Thackeray, Charlotte Bronte, Charles Reade and a host of others. Works of the greatest English authors for three generations were there, but it included not only fiction but history, biography, travel and religious works. Especially noteworthy was the in-

clusion of religious works and the type Munro chose. In general they were adapted to the needs of the common reader. The dramatic sermons of Talmage were there, as also Spurgeon's "John Ploughman Talks" with their homely pungent message. They were widely read. In the catalogue, the titles of these books were printed in larger, different type to arrest attention. In his advertising, Munro used a substantial part of his space to set out the merits of such books as "The Life of Christ" and "The Life of St. Paul" by Dean Farrar, Cunningham Geikie's "Life of Christ" and Conybeare and Howson's "Life and Epistles of St. Paul." They were printed in clear, bold, handsome type and on good paper.

Munro's religious bent appears in different ways. Number 1,000 in the Seaside Library is an example. When the issues of the Library were nearing a thousand another publishing event of great magnitude was looming on the literary horizon. Many biblical scholars had been working for years on a new, modern accurate translation of the Bible and the revised New Testament, the first part to be issued, was to appear on May 21, 1881. There was no copyright and publishers were keenly anxious to secure advance sheets, but it was not until the morning of the 20th that a copy could be obtained, and the very next day, May 21st, the revised New Testament appeared as No. 1,000 in The Seaside Library.

But number 1,000 contained more than this. Munro added an introduction to the New Testament by Tischendorf, the famous German scholar. This gave an account of the three oldest New Testament manuscripts, the Vatican, the Alexandrian and the Sinaitic; the last, dating back to the fourth century, discovered by Tischendorf himself in an ancient monastery on Mount Sinai, and now in the British museum.

In No. 1,000 of The Seaside Library, the revised text was printed side by side with the text of the authorised, or King James, version in parallel columns, with the preface, marginal notes and the list of readings preferred by the American revisers. It was the most complete edition, either for popular or scholarly use, in either Europe or America and met a great popular demand.

The emphasis on the religious note does not mean that the books in the series were mainly or largely religious but a fair proportion was included, Munro recognising the place of religion not only in his personal life but in his business undertakings. There were many good solid books but most were popular English novels, though many would be classed as second rates.

While the margin of profit was small, the business was large and increasing, though from the first Munro saw that, in order to sell cheaply, he must pay no profits which could be saved by labor and foresight. As soon as he was able he established his own office and printing rooms to take care of the Family paper and The Seaside Library. He erected a nine storey building on Vandewater Street and installed the most modern up-to-date machinery. It was said of his typesetting machines that in no printing office in the world were these machines used to better advantage

Having organised, managed, and built up a very extensive business, Munro entered upon his fourth venture, real estate, which was probably the main source of his wealth. The apartment house, which he built on 59th street, was the tallest building in New York.

Such in brief is the story of Munro's best known and most influential enterprises. Through The Seaside Library he rendered a great service in interpreting British life and thought to the American people. This is one aspect of no mean moment which is often lost sight of.

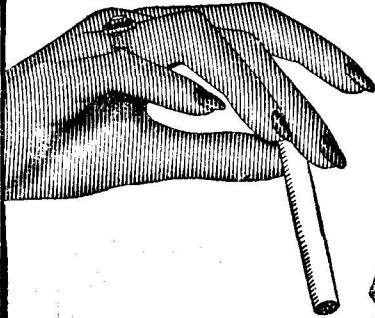
XI

The Copyright Controversy.

From what has been said about the standard followed by "The Fireside Companion", and from the type of book chosen for a place in "The Seaside Library", it is abundantly clear that the wide-spread notion that Munro grew rich by the publishing of questionable and disreputable books, Dime Novels, as these "wicked" books were classed, is utterly without foundation, but that, on the contrary, he strove for a higher intellectual and moral tone. On the other hand, it is true that in "The Seaside Library" he published many hundreds of books by English authors without their permission and without paying them a single dollar. This is the basis for the charge that Munro made money by "literary piracy", publishing the works of English authors without so much as "by your leave" and robbing them of the fruit of their effort, and as Munro was the most successful American publisher of cheap literature, Munro stood out as the main target which drew this hostile fire.

The situation is not so simple as this would make it appear. The question of copyright, on both sides of the Atlantic, had a long period of controversy behind it before being settled in either country. The same arguments were used, both for and against,

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as were later used in America, and contrariwise decisions given by the courts, before the question was finally settled in England. It was stoutly maintained that "all thought, if not expressed, is rightly the property of the thinker, but once it is reduced to writing and given to the world, it is free to all, the same as a scientific discovery, and it is for the benefit of all, like the wind, the sunshine and the rain."

It is interesting to note that in Boswell's "Life of Johnson" reference is made to the fact that at that time the works of English authors were printed without their permission in Scotland and in Ireland and, indeed, sometimes surreptitiously sold in England. The authors had no recourse in either country. This is exactly the same situation which in Munro's day faced the English author in the United States. There was then no international copyright and the English author had no legal protection for his work in the republic.

At the same time there was a group of reputable publishers, with whom Munro was associated, who made arrangements with English authors for the publication of their works and at a time when they were not required to do so. Munro paid for the advance sheets of new English books on the same terms as other reputable American publishers. He was on good terms with contemporary English authors. Some of them contributed to "The Fireside Companion", and while publishing "The Seaside Library" Munro, acted as agent for English publications.

There was a gentleman's agreement by this group of publishers that they would respect each other's arrangements and would not compete with each other by reprinting the same books. For example, Macaulay's History of England was published in England in 1859 and reprinted in Boston by Harper's in 1860. It was bound in cloth with good print and paper and sold in Boston for forty cents a volume, later the five volumes were bound in one and the complete History was sold in Nova Scotia for \$1.35. Macaulay's History was not published in "The Seaside Library" as Munro recognised the prior right.

One of the difficulties was that such a prior right was not always recognised and a publisher, having paid an English author for his work, later found himself faced with its publication by another less honorable publisher who went his way regardless.

It must be borne in mind that the conception of an author having property rights in his printed production was, at that time, a new idea in the United States. In England, after long controversy, the matter had been settled but the attitude on this side of the Atlantic was quite different, and honestly dif-



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ferent. An American citizen might be given statutory rights and a foreign author, by residing in the United States and becoming an American citizen, might acquire such rights, but to give these rights to a foreign author was thought to be neither fair nor just and was sacrificing the rights of the people. These were the growing days of the nation and by what right should books be made more costly to the ordinary person? Why should any foreign author be given the right to fix the price of a book in the United States? This, they felt, was to endanger their democratic way of life. That this publishing was done at the expense of the English author, the American opponent of copyright did not see or care. On the other hand, the English author looked upon it as literary piracy and bluntly said so. Eventually the controversy came to an end with the passage of the American Copyright Act in 1891.

Much might be said on this subject but it may suffice to refer the reader to the article on Copyright in the ninth edition of the Encyclopedia Britannica, which is significant in that it was published at the time Munro started "The Seaside Library". This contemporary opinion is the joint product of an English and American authority and gives the various opinions held by groups in the United States and the attempts to frame a satisfactory international copyright act.

Whatever view one may take of the rightness or wrongness of his action, this must be said, that Munro is not to be judged by the settled ideas of today on the subject but by the situation, and its basic philosophy, of his own time.

Much has been gained since the passage of the Copyright Act of 1891, but something has been lost. It has become increasingly obvious that there is in the United States the lack of an intimate knowledge of British life and thought with its corresponding effect on the relations between the two peoples. This lack Munro, in his day, supplied through the widely distributed and uncounted volumes, by English authors, in "The Seaside Library"



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