

A PIRATE AMONG PIRATES

REAL STORIES FROM THE LIFE OF A MASTER ADVENTURER.

by CAPTAIN GEORGE B. BOYNTON

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Editor's Note—Capt. George B. Boynton died a few months ago in Brooklyn. He served, all told, under eighteen flags and his life has furnished much material for fiction. This is a story of some of his adventures told by himself for the first time.

It was in the summer of 1874 that I made my first plunge into piracy, for, with all of the trimmings and aids of deception stripped away, that was what it really amounted to. I did not know into just what I was being led when I embarked in this new enterprise, but I am frank to say that it would have made no difference, for a free translation of the word "piracy" is "adventure of the first order," and that was what I was looking for.

Frank Norton, who had interested me in the China sea, said we would need the Leckwith and two ships to carry on the business to the best advantage, so I selected the Surprise, an American brig, and the Florence, a topsail schooner, both stout, fast ships. I put Lorenson on the Leckwith as sailing-master, George Brown on the Surprise, and old Bill Heather on the Florence. The Surprise took on a general cargo for Japan and was ordered to rendezvous at Hong Kong, while the Florence loaded for Singapore. Norton and I followed in the Leckwith.

We reached Singapore more than a month ahead of the Florence. Our scheme was to prey on the pirates who infested the China sea, and particularly that part of it lying between Singapore, Sumatra and Borneo, which was dotted with islands and beautifully suited by nature to their plundering profession, and many were the good ships that ended their cruises there, along with their passengers and crews. The British government had been trying for years to put an end to their operations, but the undertaking was a gigantic one. It was not until years after that it was officially announced that piracy had been suppressed, and piracy is still being carried on, even to this day, though in a small and desultory way.

The chief of a large section of the Chinese pirates was old Moy Sen, a rich Chinaman who lived in a handsome home in Canton and posed as a peaceful trader.

Norton argued that the pirates were bound to keep on robbing and burning and murdering in spite of anything we could do, and that we could derive plenty of excitement and large profits by robbing them. Incidentally, he contended we would put a lot of them out of business for good and all, thus contributing to the end desired by all nations.

It was arranged that I should pose as Dr. Burnet, a rich English physician who was cruising in his private yacht for his health. The Florence and Surprise were to carry some general cargoes from port to port among the islands, but were so to shape their cruises that we could keep closely in touch with them. They were to be given large crews and so heavily armed as to be safe from piratical attacks. The Leckwith was to do all of the preying on the pirates, and the loot we took from them was to be turned over to the other ships at the meeting-places. It was arranged that the bulk of our loot should be sent to a firm of Chinamen at Singapore, who dealt largely in dishonest cargoes.

With the Leckwith's bunkers stuffed with coal, we headed for the islands in search of pirates.

Our first experience was a profitable one. When near the "hunting grounds" we lowered the smokestack, got up our canvas and sailed along, awaiting developments. We were getting in among the islands when we met a big junk which had just looted and scuttled a richly laden Brazilian barkentine. We made a pretense of trying to get away, but in reality we eased our sheets to hasten matters along. When she was close astern of us, with the wind abeam, we luffed up, got out guns ready for action in a jiffy and, as we crossed her bows, raked her fore and aft with our carronades, which were loaded almost to the muzzle with slugs and nails.

Taken completely by surprise and with more than half of their number littering the red-dened deck, the pirates were panic-stricken. Before they could regain their senses we came about again and gave them another broadside, which put them at our mercy. As we ranged alongside, keeping up a rifle-fire, but disdaining any further use of our guns, they managed to launch a couple of boats, and all who could get into them pulled for the nearest island. We took out of the junk fully one hundred thousand dollars' worth of specie, silk, tea, porcelain and drugs, and then set fire to her, leaving her to bury her own dead.

After that easily won victory we trapped and sank half a dozen proas and feluccas in the same way, though with more spirited resistance in some cases.

We had turned our cargo over to the Florence, along with a number of wounded men, and were back among the islands, when early one evening a full-rigged ship hove in sight. She passed us, but was not more than six miles away when we saw flashes that told us she had been attacked, and we lost no time in going to her assistance.

As we closed in we saw a Malay felucca on each side of her and the pirates swarming on her decks, with the crew putting up a brave fight. Running the Leckwith up on her starboard quarter, we threw our men aboard and they went at the pirates savagely from the rear. I led the boarding party.

The Malays outnumbered us more than two to one, but we went at them with a fury that was new to them and were slowly forcing them back toward their one good boat—we had smashed the other one to bits when we slammed alongside—when a beautiful white yacht came tearing up on the port quarter and sent three boatloads of men to our assistance in smart style. They clambered over the bows under command of a stockily built young officer wearing what looked like the uniform of a naval captain, and we had the pirates between us.

I understood later, when I learned who and what they were, why these re-enforcements, instead of discouraging the Malays, caused them to fight with renewed desperation, but

they could not withstand our combined rush, and the last them soon went over the side into their proa, which drifted away into the darkness when they cut her loose. However, in the last few minutes of fighting, the young British officer, as I took him to be, sustained a savage cut in his right shoulder, and after we had laid aside our dead and given our wounded rough attention I was surprised to receive an inquiry from him as to whether we had a surgeon on board. Taking him aboard the Leckwith, I dressed his wound on the cabin table. I then saw that his uniform was that of a captain, but not of a naval officer. He told me his name was Deverell, but when I asked him the name of his ship he answered evasively, and I had learned the ways of the China sea too well to press the question.

At Singapore, where we discharged our cargo, our agents reported that Moy Sen was vowing vengeance on us for the loot we had wrested from him and the havoc we had spread among his fleet. We worked our way back to the rendezvous and, after consulting with Norton, I took my interpreter, Ah Fen, who was half "Chinkie" and half Malay, from the Leckwith and went to Hong Kong on the Surprise to see just what was going on.

"The Beautiful White Devil," a woman pirate, whom I at first regarded as a purely fanciful being, came into my life on this visit to Hong Kong in the early day of 1876.

While waiting for Ah Fen's report I lounged around the hotel. Soon I began to hear weird stories of a woman pirate who, while never molesting honest merchants, preyed mercilessly and successfully on the Chinese and Malay pirates, just as Norton and I were doing.

It occurred to me at once that if such a woman really did exist it might have been her ship whose captain I had attended, but I could not make myself believe the tales that were told me.

Then a man called at my hotel one evening and asked if an English physician was stopping there, and I recognized Captain Deverell, but he was as formal as a stranger, and I did not indicate that I knew him. He asked if he could consult with me and I took him to my room, where he assumed a much more cordial air.

"I called," he said, "to invite you to take a cruise with me so that we may get better acquainted and I can show you my appreciation of your kindness."

I packed my bag and turned it over to a man whom Deverell summoned from the street. I was given the cabin of the surgeon, who had died recently. Deverell took me to his room and we talked until midnight.

It was considerably after eight bells before I retired, but my sleep was not long or heavy. At breakfast time Deverell, wearing a smart uniform, escorted me aft to the private quarters of the queen.

In a moment the queen appeared. As she parted the curtains and paused in the doorway with an air of diffidence, I was transfixed by her marvelous beauty.

"I already know Dr. Burnet," she said, as she swept toward me with superb grace and infinite charm of manner and extended her hand, small and soft.

"We are headed for my retreat," she explained. "I should like to have you stay with us as long as you can. I will put you down in Hong Kong or Singapore on three or four days' notice."

I assured her the prospect was delightful. On the afternoon of the third day out from Hong Kong we ran into a group of islands, off to the eastward of the regular course to Singapore. Just as dinner was announced a flag was waved from the bridge and I made out an answering signal on the steep side of a small island just ahead of us, but could see no sign of either a landing or an opening. Then a messenger brought word that the queen was waiting dinner for me. The ship slowed down while we were at dinner and finally the screw stopped. Immediately the queen led the way to the deck.

"This," she said, "is my kingdom—without a king. Isn't that beautiful?" I assured her that it was the most beautiful place I had ever seen, wherein, when day dawned, I found I had not exaggerated. We were at the head of an oval lake, perhaps a mile and a half long, with mountains rising crescent-shaped around it. There was a small village of English cottages and native huts. On three sides of the lake was a narrow beach; the fourth side, toward the sea, was a perpendicular bluff, sixty feet or more high. I searched it for the passage through which we had entered the lake, but nothing could I see but a bare wall of dark rock. The queen smiled at my perplexity. "Wait until tomorrow," she laughed. "We will go ashore at sunrise."

She appeared with the sun, accompanied by a Dyak woman whom I had not seen before, and we landed at a little stone dock in front of the village. All of the inhabitants, consisting of about fifty English and Scotch men and women, some with silvered locks and bent backs and some of them crippled by the pirates, and nearly as many natives, crowded the pier to meet her, their manner one of the greatest affection and deference. We walked through the vil-

lage, which was a model of neatness, and on up a winding path for nearly a mile, when a sharp turn around a flank of the mountain brought us to a large bungalow—the palace of the queen.

While breakfast was being prepared she made herself more beautiful by changing her dress of European style for a native costume of flowing silk so becoming that I wondered at her ever wearing anything else. After breakfast she looked down at the little town and far out to sea in silence for a long time and then told me the story of her life.

Her name, she said, was Katherine Crofton; her father one of the younger branches of a family headed by a baron. Her father was a lieutenant-commander in the British navy, and to prevent an accident he disobeyed the order of an incompetent and arrogant superior officer. In a quarrel that followed, her father knocked his superior down and otherwise abused him, for which he was court-martialed and dismissed.

"My father was a high-spirited man," she continued, "and his disgrace embittered him against England and everything English. He soon left home, and when we next heard from him he was in Hong Kong. When I was about fifteen, he wrote mother and me to take a P. & O. ship for Singapore, where we would find further instructions. When we got there father was waiting for us on a handsome yacht, the Queen. I am still using her. He brought us to this island, where he had established a small settlement and built a warehouse and a machine shop for repairs. He had taken great pains to make his rendezvous secure from discovery.

"When I was not much older than nineteen father and mother were taken desperately ill, and he called me into his room and made a confession. He said that in his hatred of the British he had turned pirate and had been for all those years preying on ships flying the flag he despised. He had also, occasionally, waged war on the native pirates and taken their loot from them, which explained why he had frequently come in with wounded men on board, and he made me swear that if he died I would continue the work he had begun. He told me I could rely on Frank Deverell, his chief officer, whom he said he hoped I would some day marry."—this last with just a trace of sarcasm. "My father died the next week and my mother three months later.

"That was four years ago. I have kept the oath, but the fulfillment has brought me increasing misery. My attacks on the British flag have been few—in fact, I have given timely assistance to many more English ships than I have robbed, and hundreds of their passengers and crews owe their lives to me, but I have preyed on the natural pirates of these waters as ardently, perhaps, as did my father."

After luncheon the queen and I set off toward the mountain-top, nearly one thousand feet above us, but we did not reach it, for the heat was intense.

"Well, what do you think of us now?" she asked, on our way down, after I had told her how I had spent the forenoon.

"I think enough of you to devote my whole life to your service!" I quickly replied.

When I came back to dinner she was waiting for me in her bower. As she came to meet me and extended her hand she said, earnestly and almost sadly: "I believe you were honest and sincere in what you said this afternoon, but I can only say 'Thank you.' What you suggested is impossible."

In the three weeks that followed I urged my love upon her with all of my determination, but she refused to change her decision and apparently was a firm in it as she was at first. It was agreed that we should both give up piracy, but all of our arguments ended there until finally, one afternoon, as we sat looking out over the sea and talking of the ordinary affairs of life, she said, slowly and emphatically, "Deverell was my father's right-hand man. I am going to take the next ship for England, lay my case before the home secretary and ask him for a full pardon. I will confess to him that I have taken from the pirates what they had stolen from others. To offset that offense I have hundreds of written statements from people whose lives I have saved from the pirates. I believe I can secure a pardon, and if I do I will meet you with a clear conscience and become your wife!"

There was nothing to do but fall in with her plan.

I knew about where to find the Florence. We picked her up in a few days and I boarded her made sail to meet the Leckwith at the rendezvous. Kate went on to Singapore, where she took the next ship for England. Six months later I received word that she had died suddenly there, before she had applied for a pardon, and the course of my life was changed.

When I rejoined the Leckwith, I told Norton simply that I had been away on strictly private business. A day or two later I told him I had decided to sell the Florence and Surprise and quit the business we were in. Norton, dumfounded, advanced many arguments against such a course, and finally he lost his temper. "It may be," he suggested sneeringly, "that this is due to the fact that Moy Sen has threatened to exterminate us. If you don't want to fight the old scoundrel why don't you say so?"

That dart struck a tender spot. I would be the last one to quite under a threat or under fire, and Norton knew it. "Far from running away from a fight of that kind," I told Norton. "I should much rather run into it. We will cruise around awhile to see whether the Chinkies really mean to give us battle. But it is the sport of it that I want and nothing else, for if it comes off it will be a great fight."

Nothing happened for ten days or two weeks. We saw several junks which we could easily have stood up and robbed, but I would not permit it. Then, late one evening an enormous junk appeared suddenly from behind an island. She appeared to carry only a small crew, but when we came together it seemed to me for a moment that she had more Chinamen on board than I had ever seen before at one time. Suddenly she swung to starboard and would have smashed into our bow if we had not gone full speed astern. As she passed under our bowsprit she threw a grappling-iron which caught on our port bow.

We lit our battle-lamps so that they illuminated our deck, where we preferred to fight because we knew every foot of it.

It was such a fight as one gets into only in years, perhaps only once in a lifetime. The butchery was dreadful, but the excitement of it set one's blood ablaze. There was not a pirate left alive on the junk or on our own deck.

Before we had time to congratulate ourselves or count noses, we discovered a big steamer coming on top of us. It was the Ly-ce-moon, the flagship of Moy Sen's fleet, and, though we did not know it, the old pirate chief himself was in command of her.

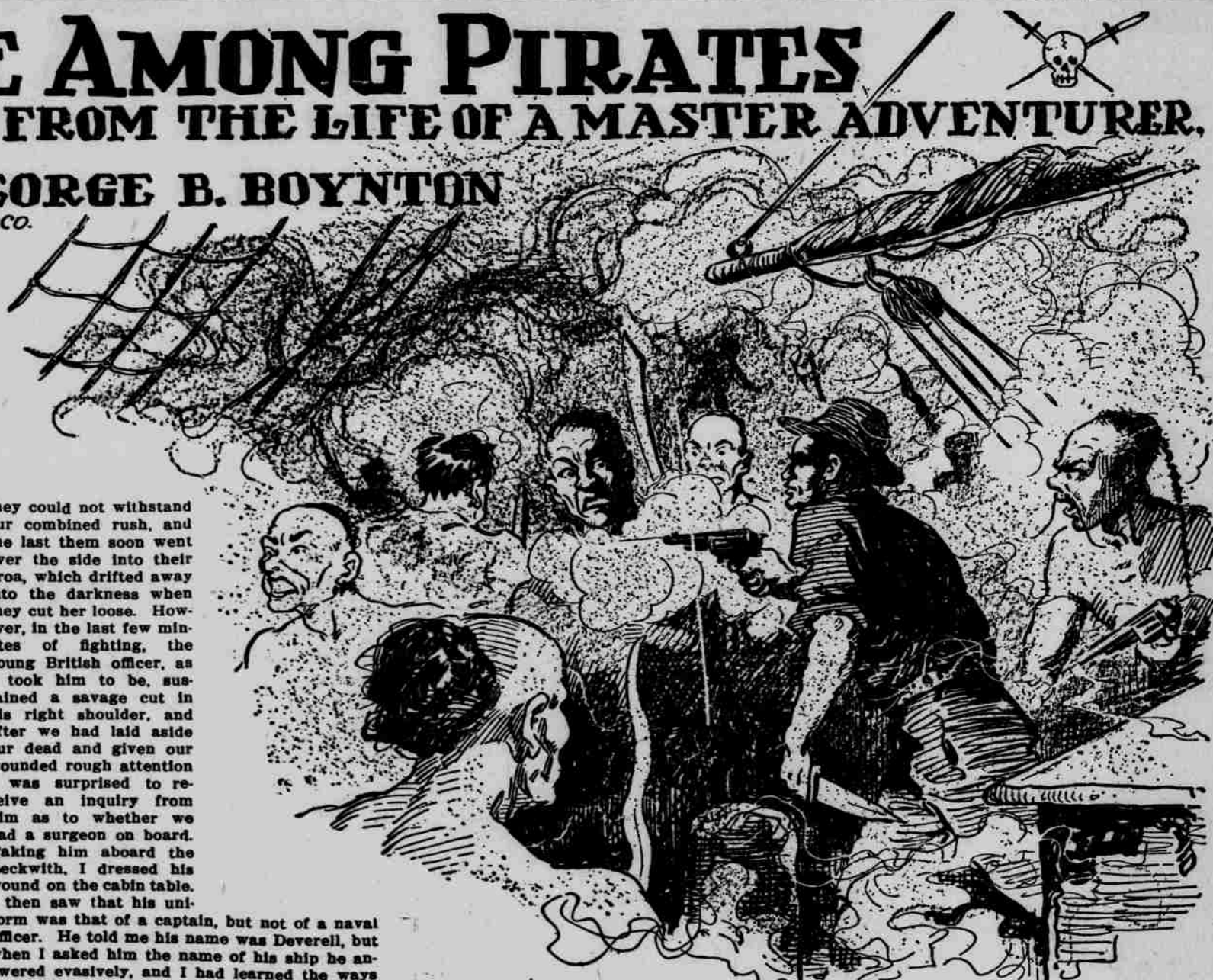
The result was a repetition of what had occurred with the crew of the junk, but it required much longer to accomplish it.

Gradually, but slowly at first, we got the upper hand of them. It was broad daylight by the time we had thrown overboard the last of the dead Chinamen and washed down the decks, after giving our own badly wounded men such attention as was possible under the conditions. We thought for a time that Moy Sen had escaped, but we found him, almost chopped to pieces, close to the after-wheelhouse, with three of our men beside him.

On the Ly-ce-moon were two teak chests, filled with gold and silver coin and ingots, silverware, jewelry and precious and semi-precious stones of the Oriental variety, and these I allowed to be transferred to the Leckwith, in preference to throwing them overboard.

It then became a question as to what we should do with Moy Sen's ships. We compromised the difficulty by scuttling the junk and putting a crew aboard the steamer. We went to Singapore, arriving there in the early part of 1876, as I remember it, to close up our business, and sold the pirate ship to our Chinese agents for a third of what she was worth. We also sold to them, for a small part of its value, the loot we had taken from her, but all of that money was divided up between Norton and the crew. I held to my promise and touched none of it.

I left the China sea behind me and never have returned to it. After a fruitless expedition after buried treasure in Corea, we sailed for Shanghai and from there for London.



YOUNG MEN DREAM DREAMS

Their Invention Is More Lively Than That of the Aged, Says Bacon.

A man that is young in years may be old in hours, if he has lost no time. Generally youth is like the first cogitations, not so wise as the second, for there is a youth in thought as well as in ages; and yet the invention of young men is more lively than that of old, and imaginations stream into their mind better, and, as it were, more divinely. Natures that have much heat, and great and violent desires and perturbations, are not ripe for action till they have passed the meridian of their years; but reposed natures may do well in youth.

On the other side, heat and vivacity in age is an excellent composition for business; for the experience of age in things that fall within the compass of it, directeth them. The errors of young men are the ruin of business; but the errors of aged men amount to but this, that more might have been done, or sooner. Young men, in the conduct and manage of actions embrace more than they can hold, strive more than they can quiet; fly to the end, without consideration of the means and degrees; pursue some few principles which they have chanced upon absurdly; care not to innovate; use extreme remedies at first; and that, which doubteth all errors, will not acknowledge or retreat them—like an unruly horse, that will neither stop nor turn.

Men of age object too much, consult too long, adventure too little, repent too soon; and seldom drive business home to the full period; but content themselves with a mediocrity of success. Certainly it is good to compound employments of both, for that will be good for the present, because the virtues of either age may correct the defects of both; and good for succession, that young men may be learners while men in age are actors. And lastly, good for extreme accidents; because authority followeth old men, and favor and popularity youth. But for the moral part, youth will have the preference, as age hath for the public.—From Bacon's Essays.

Work a Watch Does.

It is a matter of every-day occurrence for a person to say to his watchmaker:

"Here is a watch which you sold me some ten years ago. It has always gone well until just lately, when it has taken to stopping without any apparent cause."

The people who speak in this way little think of the amount of work a watch has performed in this space of time and might be astonished at the following figures:

In ten years, which includes two leap years, and consequently a total of 3,652 days, the hour hand has made 7,304 and the minute hand 87,648 revolutions. The end of an average minute hand travels more than 10,850 yards—more than six miles. The second hand has made 5,358,880 revolutions, and its extremity has traversed on the dial a distance of upwards of 123 miles. The escape wheel has made 52,588,800 revolutions, and as it has fifteen teeth, it has come 788,832,000 times in contact with each pallet. The balance has made 1,577,644,000 vibrations, and any point on the outside of the rim has covered a distance of about 50,000 miles, and that is equal to twice the circumference of the earth.

What Alaskan Dogs Eat.

Dogs in Alaska, when on the trail, are fed once a day, after the day's work is done. They are never fed in the morning, for if they were they would be lazy all day, or, what is more probable, would vomit up their breakfast soon after they got on the trail. Dogs to work well, must be well fed, and it is false economy to underfeed a dog. They are fed on a variety of foods, including rice, tallow, cornmeal, and fish. If rice or cornmeal forms a part of their food it must be cooked. Some men prefer to feed their dogs on bacon or fish, thus doing away with cooking. Cooked food is cheaper and more fattening than raw food, but the question as to whether dogs can work better on cooked or uncooked food is one that will never be settled so long as there are "mushers" to argue the question.—The Wide World Magazine.

Man—Hat—Dog.

On a very windy day a man is walking along the street with his dog. An extra fierce gust of wind takes off the man's hat and sends it rolling and skipping.

"Hey! Rover!" shouts the man to the dog, and the dog bounds after the hat.

A fine, intelligent animal that; in retrieving the hat he saved his owner a lot of work and trouble, you think; but wait a bit.

Now that Rover has got the hat a playful streak strikes him and before he brings it back he rolls the hat around on the sidewalk where he has nuzzled it and gets it pretty dusty and he winds up by slamming a big dent in the crown.

Nice dog, intelligent, very, but the man thinks he'll recover his hat himself hereafter.—New York Sun.

Educator's Long and Useful L.M.E.

Prof. Arminius Vambery, professor of languages at Pesth university, at Budapest, has just entered his eightieth year, with no diminution of the vigor which has characterized his long and active life.