

Just a Brash Millionaire

By Alan Harvey

Reuter

LONDON—He wears raucous red socks, brown shoes and bright blue suits.

He calls himself a brash Canadian and admits to lacking social and intellectual graces.

He prefers paperback murder mysteries to heavy reading, but loves to work out multifigure financial deals on the backs of envelopes.

He brought North American techniques to the United Kingdom's most clingingly conservative city, Edinburgh, incurring hostility and social ostracism.

Yet he persisted, and he won. Crossing the ocean from Canada at an age when most men are reaching for their carpet slippers, he pulled off the biggest deal in British journalistic history and became the owner of more newspapers than any man alive.

He rescued the financially ailing Times newspaper and made millions out of a Scottish television enterprise which Scotland's best brains coldly shunned.

Such is the story of Lord Thomson of Fleet, the Toronto barber's son who, starting in the 1930s with a cast-off radio transmitter purchased on credit, branched out to build up one of the world's biggest international publishing empires.

Now apparently as zestful as ever at 81, despite a recent illness, this bulky, affable man, who has made millions out of the printed word without writing any

his first book, published this month by Hamish Hamilton, Ltd., and entitled "After I Was Sixty."

In it he recounts how, after his wife's death in Canada and having already built a flourishing chain of papers in North America, he decided in the early 1950s to take a chance in Scotland, the land from which his great-great-great grandfather had emigrated to Canada.

He took over the Scotsman newspaper in Edinburgh, enduring "a great many knocks" in an austere city that he grew to love.

"I laid myself out from the start to be friendly, but the doors of all but one of the most fashionable houses remained closed to me," he recalls. "The hostility and cold-shouldering of the locals would have driven away many a man.

"But I had had to keep my head down and my chin in through many years of adversity in Canada . . . and I wasn't inclined to let Edinburgh lick me."

It didn't. Soon came the breakthrough with Scottish television, an acquisition he described as "a license to print money," and the complicated deal which brought him the Kemsley family chain of newspapers, The Sunday Times and, later in a separate operation, The Times, whose world prestige he always has cherished.

Now the properties are farsightedly in trust for his son Kenneth, who seems a rather reluctant recruit to Fleet Street, and Kenneth's son and grandsons.

The self-made millionaire with the bluff disarming candor, blinking through thick glasses, was aware that he sometimes was "surrounded by enemies" in Scotland. But he set out to conquer at 60, and simply won through by dogged persistence, letting the snubs, as one British commentator phrased it, bounce off his hide "like rubber bullets off a rhino."

himself, finally has ventured into print to give his own account of his last two decades.

It's a story he hardly can believe himself. As he put it in an interview:

"It's an absolutely incredible story . . . My success goes far beyond my wildest dreams. And, as you know, my dreams are pretty wild."

The same frankness and evident delight run through