

BOOK SELLERS, BURIYANI AND BARBERS

A boyhood in Kandy, Long Age

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ords are keys that open cobwebbed corridors to place disant in time close to the heart, Bookellers, buriyani, barber toys and patent medialoons, 'bioscope' carts are words that call to mind the Kandy of my oyhood in the early ineteen forties.

School bookshops Booksellers

eemed in Kandy, or so seemed to one young ook addict. Most useul, but least-interestng, were the bookshops clustered at the top end of Castle street specialsing in text books and llied paraphernalia, for low out-dated skills. such as instrument oxes, pasted crayons, pen holders and nibs (G. elief and ladies') hich were rapidly dereloped into lethal board "The Yusuf's Corweapons by ingenious ner Book Stall" drew my These school teacher father

tion for school by gangs and games. Not far away, Lazarus and Kandy Medical stores tantalisingly displayed, amidst

and khaki tunic. I be

lieve he collected his

school."

cines, fat and colourful schoolboy Annuals which one longingly leafed through hoping for a birthday gift. The Corner Book Stall

As one grew older younger siblings entered school and stretched

nasty Nazis. Old Yusuf parental budgets. New knew his books and had books were only for the an unerring eye for cusyounger ones. We learnt tomer tastes. Father was to forage for used texts guided towards dusty from promoted seniors olumes of history and and second-hand booktravel. And also to stalls. Thus I found paraabridged versions of the dise, most appropriclassic historical roately, next to Kandy's sole undertakers at the corner of Castle and King Street. The sign-

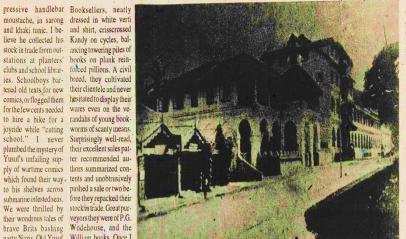
mances and adventures of his own boyhood. Thus I waded with gusto into Hereward the Wake, The Last Day of

Pomdii, and tales of ship wrecks and derring-do

ancing towering piles of stock in trade from outbooks on plank rein-forced pillions. A civil stations at planters' clubs and school librarbreed, they cultivated ies. Schoolboys bartered old texts for new their clientele and never comics, or flogged them hesitated to display their wares even on the vefor the few cents needed randahs of young bookto hire a bike for a joyride while "cutting worms of scanty means. I never Surprisingly well-read, their excellent sales patplumbed the mystery of Yusuf's unfailing supter recommended auply of wartime comics thors summarized contents and unobtrusively which found their way. pushed a sale or two beto his shelves across submarine infested seas. re they repacked their We were thrilled by stockin trade. Great purveyors they were of P.G. their wondrous tales of Wodehouse, and the brave Brits bashing William books. Once I picked out for a few cents battered leather volume of Arctic adventure because it had been published almost a century ago. I was thrilled to personally own such an incient book. It is yet with me, another half century later!

thirsty prehistoric villain, preserved in a gla-cier, resurrected by a Wrapping Paper

An unexpected mad scientist (who mine of reading matter else?) to wreak mayhem



in shot's competing to around, I wonder?) build continuous series of adventures, with gaps filled by banter. The sharpened their wits on these puzzles but none from Ceylon ever hit the newly discovered Ice jack pot. However, the Age Man of the Alps Weekly did father proud flashed my memory when they published some of his writings. back to one amazingly prophetic yarn of a blood Brightly coloured Tamil magazines jostled dull Indian editions of English "classics" printed on

literary society (is it yet Hotels were incredibly posh, the haunt of white planters and memsahibs obsequiously waited on by starched waiters. This left us with The Muslim Hotel. We were ushered upstairs to the 'family rooms' entered through swing doors, loyally decorated with pictures of Mecca, Mr. Jinnah, and portly king Farouk coarse paper with amazof Egypt resplendent in

ins medals and

vellow chaps. Only a full fledged "fowl" qualified the curried Wattalappan, oily and sweet. incredibly rounded off the repast.

The noisy "feeds" of schoolboys were held downstairs at long tables where we competed to score records in gobbling down string-hoppers. Oblivious to this mayhem more sober

to look at while waiting advertise the latest of our turn. Garish prints ferings at the Empire and of Gandhi Nehru and Wembley were the Subhas Chandra Bose 'bioscope' carts. Two held pride of place. I large boards with bright posters were mounted learnt of the hero-assassin Bhagat Singh from tent-fashion on a bulthe naive portrait standlock cart which paraded Kandy's streets Inside ing hand-cuffed arrothe tent a happy band of gantly before his galurchins drummed lows incongruously lively tattoo of bails natty in felt hat and medleys on empty tins waxed moustache. In as the cart trotted along. between were plump Intermittently they flung Indian film heroines and a handful of advertising moon faced Chinese handbills which we ray women in chongsams, behind to collect and all looking like Mme, avidly read. Their con-Chiang Kai Shek. tents were the ultimate Summoned at last in suspense and titillawe sat before a mirrored counter cluttered with

tion. The story was told in vivid phrases but antiquated ended abruptly with the bracketed phrase ("see the rest on the silve screen"). parental dikscented water to tame tat, alas, restricted our viewing to "educa-tional" films such as Robin Hood (with Errol Mikado Scent - to per-Flynn), Young Tom Edition (Micky Rooney), Marco Polo cut throat razors and the (Douglas Fairbanks) leather straps on which and Walt Disney films. they were rhythmically Tarzan (Johnny opaque Weismuller) was grudg chunks of astringent ingly accepted. To my alum to invigorate

impedimena barbering -bottles fitted with plungers to spray bristly hair; jars of, new forgotten, unguents — Afghan snow, of Roses,

the

fume young men prom-enading the Lake bund; strapped;