

BEN HOPE

Twice weekly during the late 1920s the Rock Hill Record received a lengthy column from its Clover correspondent, "Ben Hope." In that time, community correspondents sent in their local happenings in exchange for a free subscription to the newspaper. The Rock Hill Record carried items from such York County areas as Tirzah, Filbert, Delphia, Gold Hill, Fort Mill, Newport, and even Pleasant Valley and Belair in Lancaster County.

The best writer of the lot, by far, was a shut-in who sent his news from Hawthorne-Hampshire Mill Village in Clover. He called himself "Ben Hope" although his real name was James Stanhope Love. Entirely self-educated and crippled from birth, Ben Hope found it difficult to support himself. Writing was the only means he had of support beyond a pitiful \$3 a month stipend from the county which was earmarked for groceries..

Ben occasionally shared with his readers some information about his origins and his plight. From the columns, Ben's biography can be pieced together. He was born in 1887, the son of a tenant farmer in western York County. Ben's father lost his life at a railroad crossing, leaving the support of the five-member family to his mother and a widowed sister's work in the cotton mill.

Ben's first book was written when he was 22. He called it "The Story of My Life and My Work" and got it published by the Gaffney Ledger through the kindness of the publisher, Ed H. Dechamp. All copies sold and Ben produced more books in 1912, 1917, 1920, 1922, 1924, and 1928. The books were usually sold by mail and in editions of 1,000. Ben also sold his books at community picnics and on the streets.

Friends raised the money for a wheelchair. Someone gave him a typewriter and another benefactor sent him a radio. The wheelchair was too large to go through the doors of the house so that it was reserved for outside trips. He had good use of only one hand and arm. In the house, Ben used a straightback chair which he alternately dragged and rocked to propel himself. He said he had worn out many chairs.

E. M. Bailes, a "local character, a Confederate veteran, rather unlearned," started Ben writing. Some of Ben's articles were even printed in the State newspaper and Ben was proud that W. W. Ball, the editor of the News and Courier had helped to instruct him. Ben also was a regular Grit correspondent.

In addition to his writing, Ben Hope tutored school children and wrote poetry for hire, especially for love-sick young men. Ben was a little embarrassed over that but thought it nevertheless a challenge to turn another's sentiments into words that would inspire.

Among the news of his neighbors' comings and goings, Ben wrote little snippets of general information that readers today can enjoy. On January 3, 1929 Ben wrote: "Many cakes were baked for Christmas by the good ladies of this village, and when the cakes were cut pieces of them were carried from house to house in a most hospitable manner. Every lady is proud of her cake baking ability and is anxious for her friends and neighbors to taste of her cake."

In another column: "Since the schools are out and time hangs heavy on the hands of the small boys around here, the youngsters are making airplanes for

pleasure and pastime." Ben then described how the boys' airplanes were constructed of "boards, spools, strings and wire with their pocketknives, hammers and nails..." He concluded that they were "pretty fair imitations of the real planes." Ben also passed along the local boys' discovery that a yo-yo made of two ends of a yarn spool from the mill and a hard-twisted cord was better than any yo-yo that could be bought from a store.

Ben's language was expressive. Everybody must have understood what Ben meant when he wrote of suffering from a bad cold that left himself feeling "about like a cake of soap after a hard washing.

By Louise Pettus