

Whitefriar talking



A BOOK OF 94 PAGES HAS SOLD OVER A million copies in America since August, 1970.

Last week it sold as many as 300,000, which shows there's a lot of life in the old book yet.

Ten publishers have turned it down in this country, and that's not surprising. Not when you know that before the MACMILLAN part of CROWELL COLLIER MACMILLAN did it in America it had run the gauntlet of magazines, editors, publishers—with not very much luck.

Book is called *Jonathan Livingstone Seagull*, and two words are tagged on to the title: *A Story* (which is what it is, of course) and under the author's name, Richard Bach, there are these helpful words: PHOTOGRAPHS BY RUSSELL MUNSON.

The book started life back in 1959, when an ex-wartime flyer, a Chicagoan called Richard Bach, couldn't pay his rent by writing and was, naturally enough, damned depressed. It's been reported that he was wandering along the river bank somewhere in California when he heard voices, rather like Joan of Arc heard voices. Richard Bach's voices said: "Jonathan Livingstone Seagull" and he rushed back home and banged out around 3,000 words about this seagull who had tired of life as lived with other birds and who upped and flew away, a loner at last.

Nine years later, the yarn was picked up again, and the seagull in author Bach's hands was turned into a sort of preacher to other birds. He had achieved freedom and happiness, had become an ace-flyer, and in somewhat misty prose was ready to perform a sales-miracle.

AS A MAGAZINE PIECE, IN SOMETHING called *Private Pilot*, it attracted attention from letter-writers, so other magazines reprinted it. But author Bach's earnings never topped 200 dollars. In book-form, totsbook publishers saw it, turned it down, and so did other publishers whose faces remain terribly, terribly red today.

Then, at MACMILLAN's, New York, a

senior editor saw the piece (we are in 1969) and she persuaded her management to let her do the book. She reported to them: "The story will appeal to pilots and seamen, but its theme is universal. Through perseverance, love of learning, and ability, we can all achieve perfection". She added, percipiently enough: "I think it has a chance of growing into a long-lasting book for readers of all ages", and she should have said *that* again!

MACMILLAN'S, NEW YORK, WEREN'T impressed but they ordered 7,500 copies, with Russell Munson's photographs, and charged 4-95 dollars for it, hoping for the best and swearing they'd never indulge in a senior editor's whim again.

The book was a sleeper if ever there was one.

On publication (August 31, 1970) all of 3,000 copies had been ordered, and reviews hardly filled the quotes-book at MACMILLAN's publicity department. One reviewer opined: "It's a mite too icky poo for comfort", and the teletypes wouldn't have author Bach on their programmes for bad money and that's death for a new book.

But it sold, and it sold, and it sold. *Reader's Digest* condensed it later, and THE BOOK OF THE MONTH CLUB made it, tardily, a Dividend Book, and now, after its present over-the-million sale it has come to this country.

IN BRITAIN, ON OCTOBER 5, FOR £1-50, *Jonathan Livingstone Seagull* was published by TURNSTONE BOOKS. It was their first-ever publication, and if you ask me how they got this world-beater of a book, and who they are, I can tell you.

TURNSTONE BOOKS is the creation of Alick Bartholomew (the Edinburgh-born, youngest son of the present map-making firm) and his fellow-directors are Cecil King, and Geoffrey M. Watkins, the Cecil Court, London bookseller.

Bartholomew was for nearly two years

editorial director of VICTOR GOLLANCZ. Before that he had been senior editor at HOUGHTON MIFFLIN's in America, a chore he coupled with that of rights manager. Before *that* he worked for ALFRED KNOPF in New York where he edited the firm's social textbooks for two years. Before that, if you're still with me, he was employed by MEIKLEJOHN's in London. Until OLIVER & BOYD took them over.

Additionally to all these important jobs, Bartholomew was a book salesman on the road for MCGRAW HILL, and had studied at the University of Chicago's Business Group (not unlike the Harvard School of Business).

Too, at Cambridge (England!) he had taken his degree in Geography (don't forget he springs from that map-making family) and Geology.

Now, he's a very serious publisher in his own right, full of ambition, and in charge of an imprint that will almost certainly make an enormous impact on book-buyers, booksellers, librarians throughout the country.

"I should feel guilty if my books weren't worthwhile", he says, and he's fortunate in having, as an unpaid director, IPC's ex-boss, Cecil King.

Of *Jonathan Livingstone Seagull*, Cecil King has said: "It is one of the most original books I have ever read", and I go along with that.

It won't sell a million here, but I'll be very surprised if it doesn't take off the way Paul Gallico's *Snow Goose* did for MICHAEL JOSEPH.

And remember, *that's* still in print, as *Alick Bartholomew's first book will be, years after its launching this week.*

It has heart, soul, and saleability.

Smith's Trade News was the influential weekly magazine of the publishing and bookselling trades.

This article, written on the publication of JONATHAN LIVINGSTON SEAGULL, gave credibility to the first book of an unknown publisher, significantly helping to launch the new imprint.