

Chapter Eight

31 January 1949. The *Daily Mirror*. 'A comic with a serious aim.

'A new children's comic is likely to be on the bookstalls soon; its publishers, the Society for Christian Publicity. "It won't be a dull comic just because it's religious," said the Society secretary, Revd Marcus Morris of Southport, yesterday. "Everyone says 'Why doesn't the church do something to put itself across?' We are the first group to get down to that. We are here to issue propaganda not for the Church of England, but for Christianity.'" '

That little piece of over-optimistic reporting brought to St James' vicarage a very smooth journalist called Norman Price, who lived in Southport and worked on the Sunday *Empire News* in Manchester.

Norman Price 'reckoned Marcus was on to something' – this was a story which would sell. They would write it together. 'Comics that take horror into the Nursery' was given a prominent position next to the editorial in the *Sunday Dispatch* of 13 February. It described some of the illustrated stories contained in comics brought to the vicarage for Marcus's daughters by a well-intentioned parishioner:

'The front-page serial shows Arab pirates capturing a half-naked girl in trousers, brassière and bolero, who is gloatingly displayed to the crowd. The back page shows her sitting with arms bound in a rowing boat while a hired executioner rows her across a river and kills her with a sword.

'It is a magazine with 175 flawlessly vivid drawings that start with gangsters shooting a girl in the stomach, having the heroine twice bound and gagged, finally dumped in a bath of cold water to drown.

'One of the detective heroes of my own boyhood is now – I was dismayed to see – on sale to children with a front-cover illustration of a girl, naked to the waist, pitched overboard from a ship's porthole.

'This is the home market. American imports include "Fearless Fosdick" in which a character murders a group of six policemen with a machine gun, and a series "Fairy Tales for Juvenile Delinquents".

'Horror has crept into the British nursery. Morals of little girls in plaits and boys with marbles bulging their pockets are being corrupted by a torrent of indecent coloured magazines that are flooding bookstalls and newsagents.

'Have parents really bothered to study them – these weekly and fortnightly "comics" that sons and daughters from seven to seventeen years old are devouring?

'Not mere "thrillers" as we used to know them, nor the once-familiar "school stories". These are evil and dangerous – graphic, coloured illustrations of modern city vice and crime. Any school child with a couple of pennies can buy them.

'Latest crime figures in the Metropolitan Police area show a 33.7 per cent increase since 1938 in child criminals of nine years old – and nearly 40 per cent increase among children aged ten.

'I blame much of this on their "comics". As soon as a child becomes old enough to read, he enters a new world of horror and vice, where there are no apparent morals and certainly no holds barred.

‘It sickens and frightens me. Even in the lisping little nursery comics for the tiny tots the cute little animals seem mostly to be bashing each other’s heads or stealing each other’s sweets and cakes.

‘Surely there is adventure enough for any boy or girl in the lives of men like Grenville of Labrador? And some of the daily dangers St Paul met would make even Dick Barton look like a cissy. . . .

‘I shall not feel I have done my duty as a parson and father of children until I have seen on the market a genuinely popular “Children’s Comic” where adventure is once more the clean and exciting business I remember in my own schooldays – not abysmally long ago. Children are born hero-worshippers, not born ghouls. They will admire what they are given to admire.

‘It is up to us – whether or not we go to church each Sunday – to see they get a glimpse of what really brave men have done in this world, and share laughter that comes from the heart – not from the gutter! ’

The style is the journalist’s, the opinion Marcus’s – he was later to write that he found those final paragraphs a little embarrassing to read, although not having changed his mind about the sentiments.

The article created an immediate impact and letters poured in to the vicarage from all over the country, applauding Marcus’s stand and suggesting that he do something about the problem.

From Tunbridge Wells: ‘Though an agnostic, I obviously must agree that your protest is entirely justified.’

Manchester: ‘As the parents of a girl aged eleven and a boy of eight, we fully appreciate the seriousness of your remarks, as our children have from time to time brought these species of sensational literature into the house.’

Cardiff: ‘I read your article to a meeting of our TUC Women’s Guild members and it was admitted that the majority of the mothers had never bothered to look at the comics which their children read. This, I think, will be remedied from now on. I sincerely trust your article was widely read and that it will be the means of making people more interested in the literature their children are given to read.’

Wells, Somerset: ‘Why can’t some decent Christian organisation publish for children cheap books at once palatable and wholesome?’

King’s Lynn: ‘I shall be interested to hear news of the Christian comic as the present type of so-called comic has been banned at the school to which my children go.’

Wolverton, Bucks: ‘I must say “thank you” for what you have written. You are the first man I have known to put his finger on one of the gravest sources of juvenile crime.’

E.C. Jennings, Pinner: ‘For a long time, I have been waiting for someone like yourself to call attention to the rotten state of the so-called “comics” of the present time and now, with the publicity that will follow your attack, you can, if you will, do something to make it “stick”. I am a cartoonist and, if you say the word, I shall be more than glad to pile in and produce, with your help, the sort of comic paper that the children of the country are entitled to read.’

Authors wrote complaining that publishers refused to look at 'wholesome and harmless' stories, many people requested specimen copies of Marcus's proposed comic and Lutterworth Press asked for further details.

Marcus said later: 'The publication of the article, the interest aroused and possibly the twenty guineas I received from the *Sunday Dispatch*, all set me thinking hopefully along the lines of strip cartoon.'

Marcus decided that he didn't have the wherewithal to produce an entire children's paper, but that he and Frank Hampson could easily manage a wholesome yet adventurous strip story. Norman Price thought that a strip cartoon written by a vicar would be a good gimmick and suggested trying to sell one to a Sunday paper. Marcus later explained: 'When Frank and I got interested in the strip cartoon idea, Frank was very keen on it. I wrote the story and he did the illustration for a strip called Lex Christian, which was not really for children, but for adults.'

'Frank turned out to have a really brilliant strip technique. Even at that early stage we went quite a long way towards evolving the character of Dan Dare, but Lex Christian was a tough fighting parson in the East End of London.'

Marcus and Frank were pleased with the result and Norman Price sent them to see Terence Horsley of the *Empire News*. They thought their strip cartoon infinitely superior to other samples he showed them. Horsley was enthusiastic and encouraging but suggested that their strip needed a little more work on it and they should come and see him again. Before they could do so, he was killed in a gliding accident on 24 April 1949.

The idea of a children's paper took hold again.

Marcus wrote in 1958: 'Shortly after Horsley died, I went to see Frank in his house at the other end of Southport. I remember the scene and my words very vividly because the decision we took that day was crucial.'

'I said, "Frank, we're wasting our time on this idea of a strip for a Sunday paper. Let's forget about it and go back to the original idea of a paper for children, consisting mainly of strips. I know it's much more difficult, but I'm sure it's the right thing to do."

'Frank's reaction was one of enthusiasm. At that moment *Eagle* was conceived, though the birth pangs had yet to be faced and the labour would be long.'

'From May 1949 Frank and I gave all the time we could spare to working on stories and ideas and features. We worked in a kind of informal collaboration which is hard to define. Both of us were quite inexperienced at that kind of work and there was a great deal of trial and error.'

'To begin with we turned Lex Christian into a flying padre, the Parson of the Fighting Seventh. Then one day, after re-reading C.S. Lewis's science fiction novel *Perelandra*, I said to Frank that I thought Lex Christian should leave London and go out into space. I remember telling Frank to get him to Venus and I would take over from there. Frank got him to Venus without much difficulty and I didn't take over; Frank continued to work on the story and the characters. The name Lex Christian didn't seem quite right and we thought up a large number of alternatives. I think it was Frank's wife Dorothy who came up with Dan Dare. He was the first parson to be launched into space.'

The strip based on the life of St Paul, which was to be the back page of the dummy, emerged from the same process of trial and error. 'I said one day that St Paul's life with all its colour and vigour and incident was just the kind of thing which would serialise effectively. Frank took it up. He wasn't a churchman or a student of the Bible but I have no doubt that St Paul's boldness and courage attracted him. He did a lot of research into the historical background, I roughed out the story and we had our second strip. For the rest of the contents I just drew up what subjects I thought would interest young children – some text, some adventure stories, sport, and wrote some of the scripts.'

All this extra work didn't leave much time for Frank's silk screen printing business and the piecework he was earning on *The Anvil* was not enough to keep his family so Marcus paid him a salary of £8 a week out of his own stipend.

The Anvil still had to be produced and Frank's partner, Harold Johns, was brought in to help. Harold was a quiet and self-effacing man and a talented watercolourist – one of his wartime paintings is in the Imperial War Museum. As well as helping Frank on Dan Dare, he produced his own strips for the dummy. It soon became clear that he as well as Frank would have to go on a salary if Marcus was to retain their services.

Harold Johns brought in J. Walkden Fisher, one of a 'gang' of local artists, who was at that time designing for a toy firm. 'Fish', as he was known, produced a series of intricate diagrams and drawings of man-made and natural phenomena, and the Hiawatha story in black and white strip.

The first dummy of *Eagle*, produced early that summer, contained two colour pages of Chaplain Dan Dare of the Interplanet Patrol, Dan in an RAF-colour uniform, dog collar and swirling white cloak. The second major colour strip was two pages of 'Secret City' featuring Jimmy Swift. On the back page was 'The Great Adventurer', the story of St Paul. There were two half-page funny strips – 'Joe from Strawberry Farm', and 'Ernie, Always Unlucky', drawn by E.C. Jennings who had written from Pinner in response to the *Sunday Dispatch* article. There was an Editor's Letter, Railway News, Model News, Competitions, a page and a half of stories and Fish's 'World of Wonders'. Frank made three photo-copies of the dummy and coloured them in.

The name of the magazine had been the subject of much discussion between the Hampsons and the Morrisises; it has always been said that Dorothy Hampson came up with *Eagle* after gazing at a church lectern.

Marcus was, by the spring of 1949, in very deep water financially.

'Even my kind and understanding bank manager was losing patience with me, but I couldn't believe that it was a time for caution. I was sure that our idea would eventually turn out to be a great success. Even on the brink of bankruptcy or imprisonment for debt I was willing to back my conviction and did so again when, in order to keep Frank in Southport, I had to raise his salary. If Frank went I knew the idea would go too.'

Frank had also found himself in financial difficulties and went to London to see one or two big agencies. They liked his work and could use it. Frank

went back north to tell Marcus that he'd been told he could earn £1,000 a year in London. Marcus had no choice but to increase Frank's salary and he offered to pay him an extra £2 a week. This was nowhere near those prospective London earnings, so Marcus was relieved and grateful when Frank said that he shared his belief in the children's paper and would carry on; £10 a week would be just enough for him and his family to survive for the time being. Marcus agreed to raise this to £12 in August and to £20 by the following February (having faith that he would have found a publisher by then).

By the end of May Marcus was paying Frank 53 per cent of his Church stipend; he owed the *Southport Guardian* over £600; his bank account was heavily overdrawn. Norman Price, ostensibly so helpful, was unwilling and possibly unable to come up with any money. He thought that they were on to a winner with the children's paper but that *The Anvil* was little more than a millstone round their necks. He suggested that they form a publishing company to take over *Anvil*, which would then be suspended for a period. Marcus would be managing director, with Norman devoting himself to compounding with creditors and raising funds: 'I think you will agree that, although I lack your own undeniably brilliant conception and leadership, I am likely to have a far more balanced and stringent hand upon the communal purse-strings and will be able to buy to better advantage.'

The terms of his proposal were so heavily weighted in Norman's favour that Marcus would have nothing to do with it, particularly the idea of suspending *The Anvil*.

'You are asking me to give up what I consider to be the most important thing that I have been doing to date, presumably in order to increase the Company's chances of profits. In return for that you offer me, in effect, £80, i.e. £5 a week to Hampson for four months.

'I may say that I should have felt a good deal more sure of your co-operation in the future if in these last few months you had really done some practical work to help me. I believe you could, with the expenditure of comparatively little time and no money, have made use of your contacts to get *The Anvil* publicity and advertisements. . . .'

Norman replied, 'The features agency was for the purpose of supplying the company with Lex Christian. . . . It might also of course have been used for Frank to sell his comic strips to me, after having first bought his scripts from you – and my selling thereafter to the company – all for no other purpose than dodging taxation.'

Although Norman continued to be involved on the periphery for some months, they never again worked closely together. Marcus was later to say that 'he is a very smooth, slippery customer who sails very close to the wind'.

Still somewhat ingenuously convinced that forming a company would relieve some of his problems, Marcus went to see a solicitor who had been recommended to him by his former colleague. The solicitor was 'an elderly man, scruffy and tall with eyes which didn't rest for very long on anything – least of all on the eyes of anyone talking to him. He always carried a dirty mackintosh. If he had offices in which he interviewed clients, I never

discovered where they were, as we always met in the waiting-cum-tearoom at the Central Station in Manchester.'

For the sum of £90 he formed a limited company, Anvil Publications Ltd (also called at one stage Astra Publications; the prospectuses are virtually the same), which Marcus naïvely supposed people would rush to invest in. The prospectus declares, 'The company is being formed to publish popular Christian periodicals which have a wide appeal to the man in the street whether church man or not.

'In particular, the Company proposes to publish a new children's coloured "comic" paper, which will be of a much higher and more mature quality than anything published in England and in appearance and format will be modelled more on the American comic papers which are so far in advance of our own. Retail price 3d. First-class illustrators and well known children's story writers have already been engaged and the first issue is practically complete in dummy form.

'A circulation of 100,000 a fortnight is hoped for within a few months . . . the comic will show a profit at a circulation of 60,000. At 100,000 the profit should be £200 a fortnight.'

Marcus's first approach was to those people who might be assumed to know something about him.

The Church Assembly Children's Council had been talking about the necessity of some kind of illustrated magazine for children and the Bishop of Blackburn had expressed some very precise views on the subject.

Marcus asked Miss M.G. Bartlett, Secretary of the Council, 'whether you think that it would be worthwhile approaching the SPCK or some other Church publisher with a view to their taking it over, wholly or partly. I have no very high opinion of the SPCK and am reluctant to have much to do with them but possibly you and I together might be able to convince them that here is something really worthwhile. And it would have the added advantage that there need be no watering down of the Christian element in the comic paper.' Miss Bartlett was sympathetic and supportive; the Council gave the magazine its backing, but no money.

Canon John Collins suggested that Marcus talk to the head of the Church Missionary Society, Kenneth Grubb, who had been involved with the Society for Christian Publicity. Grubb regretted that 'I do not think we could undertake a project so ambitious as that which you have in mind.'

The next line of attack was the publishing companies. Wills & Hepworth, who produced Ladybird children's books, said that they were not big enough to take on a fortnightly publication. On 1 July, Marcus wrote to Edward Hulton at Hulton Press, but got no reply.

From a public telephone box just off Fleet Street, by Temple Bar, he telephoned Sir Neville Pearson, Chairman of George Newnes. Amazingly, he was put through to Sir Neville and his enthusiasm must have been infectious as, to his great surprise, Pearson invited him to his office. After the meeting with Pearson and his fellow director, E.D. Lush, Marcus was optimistic. He wrote to Mr Lush, 'To begin with we plan to publish it fortnightly with twelve pages of which eight will be in full colour, produced by photogravure. But we can

supply the material for weekly publication. . . . It is intended for children between the ages of nine and fourteen, but it may well attract a large adult readership as such papers do in America. . . . Though it will be a Christian publication in the sense that it is being produced by Christians and will stand for Christian values and standards, there is certainly no intention of making it a pious or conventionally religious paper of the Sunday school type. On the contrary, we want it to appeal equally to children who have no contact with religion. Our first aim, therefore, will be to make it as attractive, original and exciting as possible. I believe that the Bible strip as we have treated it will have a wide appeal, but we shall probably alter the hero of the "Dan Dare" strip and will no longer make him a parson.'

While Marcus was hoping that Newnes would supply financial backing, he was also alive to the possibility of their acquiring ownership of *Eagle*, retaining him as editor. But Newnes expressed doubts about paper supply; no new periodicals or magazines were permitted if they used more than sixteen hundredweight of paper in a four-month period. In view of his difficulties in getting paper for *The Anvil*, Marcus seems to have been a trifle optimistic about bending the rules governing Paper Control Orders. He told Lush that John Sherratt & Son, who had agreed to print *Eagle*, had ample supplies of paper. 'If, however, we were to be bound by the Paper Control Order to which you refer, I had intended in the first place to apply for a licence for additional paper. . . . We planned if necessary to acquire another publication with the requisite paper allowance.'

Lush replied, 'There is ample paper available if one has the permission to use it. . . . I agree that there is provision for special licences being granted but having regard to the competitive nature of your proposed publication I personally rather doubt whether such an application would be successful. Your other suggestion of acquiring another publication is, of course, a solution.'

Nothing more was heard from George Newnes until October, when Mr Lush decided 'that the economics of the journal are not sufficiently attractive to us to warrant proceeding any further.'

Meanwhile, Marcus wrote enthusiastically to Mr Morgan of Williams Deacons Bank 'I am glad to say that the arrangements for the new Company are practically completed. . . . I have had one definite offer of help and have made contact with several people who are interested and are just waiting to see the necessary documents. When I went to London on Monday last with dummy copies of our proposed comic paper I was very encouraged by the enthusiasm it met both from the Church authorities and from various people in the publishing world.

'I don't think we shall have great difficulty in raising the necessary capital. . . . I have had to keep paying out in order to have something definite to show those whom we are approaching to support us. . . . I am very grateful for your patience over this long period.'

But Mr Morgan's patience was tried too far. 'The whole business is getting out of hand and you have no right to continue to issue cheques when you know quite well that your limit is £450. We were also very surprised to hear that you still have outstanding bills. Under no circumstances can we allow any further advance and these bills must remain where they are until you can put

your hands on a decent sum of money. We should not like to return any of your cheques but we shall be compelled to if you continue in this manner.'

Marcus wrote a passionate two-page reply. 'The matter is being dealt with in the only possible way, i.e., by the formation of the Company which will take over my publications. . . . I already have £500 promised. . . . I am going down to London tomorrow night for several appointments. . . . I have no doubt at all that we shall raise the capital because our proposed children's paper is very definitely a commercial proposition. . . . I have the official support of the Church Assembly Children's Council. . . .

'I imagined that it was because you appreciated the situation that you have allowed me to increase my overdraft. . . . I am so near completing my plans that it would be more than unfortunate if I was prevented from doing so now. I have no other assets or property which would realise the amount needed and the payment of my creditors therefore depends entirely on my success in forming this company. . . . I should be glad if you could see your way to allowing me a little further latitude.' And the splendid Mr Morgan complied.

The first board meeting of Anvil Publications Ltd took place in the vicarage in July. Marcus and Lionel Lister elected each other as Secretary and Chairman, with Jess as a director. The occasion was productive of a great deal of hilarity, but not much else.

Lionel was Captain of Formby Golf Club where John Moores, founder of the vast Littlewoods Pools empire was a member. Armed with an introduction and the dummy of the children's paper, Marcus went to see Moores on 26 July. Mr Moores expressed a kindly interest and said he had no doubt that his young daughter would like a paper of this kind. He would be prepared to back it and would spread the word around. He agreed to lend Marcus £1000. 'I was a very happy man when I left his office, relieved at this apparent solution to all my financial problems.'

This elation was short-lived. On 4 August, Marcus wrote to John Moores at his home in Freshfield, near Southport, 'You were kind enough to say that I might use your name as one financially interested in the project. . . . Since your name carries such weight I have taken advantage of your permission and mentioned your interest to a number of other likely supporters. Since as a result of a telephone conversation with your Publicity Manager, Mr Ayers, I now understand there may be some doubt about the situation, I should be most grateful if you could spare the time to see me again for a few minutes at your convenience.'

9 August, to Revd Marcus Morris: 'I certainly never authorised you to use my name as a "backer" to encourage others to interest themselves in your proposed venture. On the contrary, I expressed grave doubts as to its success, having regard to the resources at your disposal and the competition you would have to face. So much so, that I asked Mr Ayers to see you and, having done so, he confirmed my apprehension.

'Forgive me for saying so, but I take grave exception to the manner in which you have apparently thought fit, quite unjustifiably, to "cash in" on the strength of my name.

‘I must, therefore, ask you kindly to leave me out of account in your further consideration of the matter of your children’s “comic” paper.’

12 August, to Mr John Moores: ‘I must confess to finding myself more than a little perplexed by your letter of Wednesday. And considerably astonished at finding myself accused of misrepresentation.

‘I am not in any doubt about the facts and they hardly appear capable of being misunderstood. On three occasions you used the words: “You can rely on £1,000 anyway” and on the third occasion you added “whatever Ayers thinks of it”. As you went to the door to speak to your assistant you remarked “You can say I am putting some money into it, if that will help”. I naturally assumed that the words were used in their normally accepted sense and that you meant what you said.

‘At the close of my conversation with Mr Ayers (of which you do not appear to have been fully informed) he assured me, so far from expressing grave doubts, “that he would do his very best for me” in suggesting that you gave some financial support so long as it did not entail any extra work or worry for you. When he spoke to me on the phone from London he expressed his regret at not persuading you into being associated with us. He informed me that I should be receiving from you within the next day or so a cheque for £250 which, however, was not to be used for shares.

‘It is somewhat confusing to receive two such conflicting promises – and then to discover that both are to be abrogated.

‘You can rest assured that I shall make the situation perfectly clear to those to whom I have mentioned your name.’

12 August, to Lionel Lister, Esq: ‘I enclose a copy of a letter I have received from Moores. I really feel pretty angry with him. His letter is nothing but flagrant lying – the exact reversal of what he actually said to me.

‘I suppose that’s that, and I only hope that it won’t embarrass you in your relations with him in the future.’

18 August, to Revd Marcus Morris: ‘I am extremely sorry that there has been this misunderstanding between us, and that your recollection of the facts does not correspond with mine. Nevertheless I feel that no useful purpose will be served by any further argument.

‘However, there has quite obviously been a genuine misunderstanding and, rather than you should feel in any way aggrieved, I am enclosing my cheque for £250 and would ask you to accept it with my best wishes for the future success of your venture.’

Marcus’s immediate reaction was to send the money back. He was angry at having been misled and falsely represented but, when he had calmed down, he admitted that he badly needed the money. He swallowed his pride, banked the cheque and wrote to John Moores expressing his thanks.

He then went the rounds of the other rich citizens of Southport. His reception was always friendly, sometimes vaguely condescending; occasionally the politeness almost hid the conviction that he was mad or at least more than usually eccentric, even for a Church of England parson.

No more cheques came in and the overdraft started to mount again.

With writs hovering from the *Southport Guardian*, Marcus realised that he would have to give up any idea of keeping the project under his own control and would have to try to sell it to someone who would employ him to edit it and Frank to draw the strips.

He packed the dummy in his briefcase and caught the train to London again.

On Sunday nights, after a full weekend of parish work, services, sermons, baptisms, weddings and putting *The Anvil* together, Marcus took the train from Liverpool and spent the next four days in London, staying with Jess's sister and brother-in-law, the actors Ruth Dunning and Jack Allen, on the top of Campden Hill, Kensington.

'A young chap I met who was someone in the film business put me in touch with John Myers, publicity manager for J. Arthur Rank. Sir Arthur, I knew, was interested in making religious films for children and he was as keen as mustard on Sunday schools. It seemed hopeful. I even saw the great man himself once, in the largest office I had ever come across. It seemed a long walk from the door to his desk. Again I received sympathy, but no cash. John Myers advised me to go and see Montague Haydon, Editorial Director of Amalgamated Press.'

So Marcus went to Fleetway House full of hope and told his story, which he now had off pat. Montague Haydon's reaction was civil, guarded and pessimistic. 'I think I puzzled him. He was not quite sure what to make of this dog-collarless parson from the North of England who was trying to sell him a comic and he was suspicious of what I was really up to.' In September Montague Haydon returned the dummy with a note: 'I have taken a good hard look at the enclosed dummy of *Eagle*. It is bright and it is good, but no brighter and no "gooder" than our average juvenile. So I don't know what we can do with it except send it back to you.'

Marcus wrote: 'With Kemsley Press I utterly failed. I didn't even get as far as Lord Kemsley, then owner of *The Sunday Times*. I was seen by an underling who got the idea into his head that I was asking for a donation for charity. With great charm he said, "I am sure you will realise that his Lordship has many calls on his purse." He was a silly little man, I forget who he was.' It was Denis Hamilton, who later became Lord Thomson's right-hand man and in charge of *The Times*.

'I went to see T.E. Boardman Ltd which was a bold move as they were already importing the very American comics which had inspired me to attempt something better and less harmful for children. They liked my idea and considered it quite seriously for a time before telling me they didn't want it.'

He saw John Walter, General Manager of *The Times*, and Lord Camrose, proprietor of the *Daily Telegraph*; Mike Wardell, editor of the *Sporting Record*, for some reason expressed an interest. Marcus talked to the editor of a children's comic, *Merry-go-round*, at publishers Martin & Reid, but the bogey of paper rationing again reared its ugly head.

'My journeyings round publishers' offices seemed endless, yet though I

felt depressed and disheartened and exhausted I never lost my basic confidence. And always, at the back of my mind, the thought of my debts drove me on. I also received much-needed advice and encouragement from Jodi Hyland, who was now firmly established in women's magazine journalism in London.'

Lutterworth Press, publishers of *Boy's Own Paper* and *Girl's Own Paper*, whose advice Marcus had sought in 1947 regarding *The Anvil*, were very keen to take *Eagle* on: 'Of the need of such a periodical there is no doubt. The excellence of your approach and the high standard of its execution greatly impressed.' Lutterworth couldn't see any way of overcoming the obstacle of paper rationing in view of 'the immense quantities of paper that would be needed successfully to launch the publication. . . . I can only hope that you will be successful in finding another publisher who will find it possible to finance you until such time as paper becomes freer.'

In October Marcus remembered Hulton Press and his unanswered letter. This time he paid a personal visit and was shown into the office of Ronnie Dickenson, one of the Assistant General Managers. Ronnie was, according to Marcus, charming and courteous – and sufficiently interested in *Eagle* and 'Chaplain Dan Dare of the Interplanet Patrol' to ask Marcus to wait. Ronnie showed the dummy to the General Managers, John Pearce and Maxwell Raison, and Marcus was invited to see them. 'I told them who I was and where I came from and explained my proposition to them. They said, "We would like to look further into this. Will you leave your dummy with us for a few days?"'

'I did so and returned to Birkdale to see my solicitor and try to appease my printers. I was on the edge of bankruptcy, the loss of my job and probable defrocking. My downfall would have been complete. Desperate to get help I returned to London and went to Church House, to the Church of England Finance Committee.'

The Secretary to the Committee, C. Sorden, was entirely sympathetic, but every penny the Committee had was already earmarked.

'After a pause, he said, "Tell me about the last people you saw. Hulton Press – they're Roman Catholics, aren't they?" I said they were; he picked up the telephone and asked someone what they thought about the Hultons. When he'd listened to the answer, he told me, "You go along to the chapel at the end of the corridor for a quarter of an hour and I'll see what can be done." I went to the chapel and sank to my knees and prayed very hard. When I returned to Mr Sorden he said, "I can't give you any official help, as you know, but I'm willing to give you my own personal cheque for £250, if that's any good to you."'

Marcus found it difficult to express his thanks for this very noble gesture, which was given without any guarantee or security from him or anyone else. He was able to return to Birkdale and mitigate the printers' wrath and postpone the impending writ. (Mr Sorden's loan was repaid in January 1950.)

On 10 October, a week after the visit to Hulton Press, a telegram arrived at the vicarage from John Pearce: 'Definitely interested. Do not approach any other publisher.'