

Different Schools of Thought – Other Stories for Boys

Robert J. Kirkpatrick

While Talbot Baines Reed is the writer of boys' school stories most closely associated with the RTS, he was by no means the only one – and by no means the first – as around twenty boys' school stories had been published in hardback form by the RTS before it published Reed's first full-length school story, *The Adventures of a Three Guinea Watch*, in 1883.

The RTS was undoubtedly a major force in the field of boys' school stories in the nineteenth century, both in terms of its publishing of hardback books and through the pages of the *Boy's Own Paper*. It published far more school stories in hardback form – at least fifty – during the nineteenth century than any other publisher, although this figure should be seen in the context of a total of almost 460 boys' school stories which appeared in hardback in Great Britain between 1776 and 1900.

One of the comparatively unexplored areas of nineteenth century children's fiction is the *early* school story – *Tom Brown's School Days* (Macmillan & Co., 1857) is often assumed to have been the first boys' school story, but it had been preceded by around seventy other full-length stories (and numerous short stories in periodicals and story collections), mostly now long-forgotten but including several well-recorded titles such as Maria Edgeworth's *The Barring-Out* (1796) and Harriet Martineau's *The Crofton Boys* (1841).

The boys' school story is not only older than is generally recognised but is also far more complex, embracing a range of themes and ideas far beyond the generally recognised ones of games, rebellions, cribbing, slacking, practical jokes, fights, scholarships and mysteries (all of which, incidentally, found their place in the stories of Talbot Baines Reed). The nineteenth century school story in particular is notable for its wide variety – penny dreadful stories which relied on farce, melodrama, brutality, gothic horror and gross exaggeration, and which flourished between the 1860s and the turn of the century (and which has its echoes in today's teenage horror stories, proving that trends in popular fiction go round in circles); strongly moral and instructive stories, written with a clear and unequivocal didactic purpose; and the more rumbustious story which occupied the middle ground, often posing similar moral problems to those addressed

by the evangelical story but setting them amongst a backdrop of games, rivalry – of individual characters, forms and Houses – and the day-to-day routine of school life, and bringing in diluted elements of the penny dreadful type of school story in a way which was at the same time reasonably authentic as well as entertaining.

Underpinning much of this was the theme of friendship, often portrayed with a frankness that is surprising even today. Many nineteenth-century writers of boys' school stories – often, it should be pointed out, women – were not afraid to portray affection between boys, including embraces and kisses, and many tears were shed when boys were ill, dying, leaving school or simply declaring their love for each other. The emphasis, however, was on the purity of schoolboy romance rather than on 'beastliness' (a vice hinted at in a few stories, particularly F.W. Farrar's *Eric, or Little by Little*, published by A. & C. Black in 1858, but largely, and not surprisingly, otherwise circumvented).

School stories in the first half of the century tended towards the didactic, morally instructive and sentimental, being studies of character and the effects of a school environment, and a preparation for adult life, against a background of strong Christian belief, rather than studies of school life and the school itself. *Tom Brown's School Days* is widely recognised as a turning point in the history of the school story, which should be placed in the context of its simply being a continuation of a well established literary genre, one that was still finding its feet in terms of a recognisable and popular form but which had nevertheless already been in existence for well over seventy years.

The RTS published at least three of the boys' school stories which predated *Tom Brown* – George Etell Sargent's *Stories of Schoolboys* (1851), the anonymous *My Schoolboy Days* (1844), and, perhaps most importantly, the anonymous *Frank Netherton, or The Talisman* (1847).

This last story is, on the surface, a straightforward didactic tale, a precursor of the evangelical school story which, during the 1860s to the 1890s, fought for supremacy with the 'penny dreadful' type of school story and the more down-to-earth school story epitomised by those by Talbot Baines Reed and other writers such as Ascott R. Hope and H.C. Adams. The eponymous hero of *Frank Netherton* is an only child whose mother had died in childbirth – a weak and small boy, studious and clever for his age but brought up cossetted by his father. He accompanies his cousin Frederick to a small private boarding school, where he immediately befriends Howard, an orphan who has been at the school for a year but who is still homesick and something of a misfit. This friendship, discouraged by Frederick because of Howard's cowardice and apparent lack of intellect, persists throughout the story, Frank influencing Howard to such an extent that the latter eventually wins a prize for his work.

Frank in turn is befriended by Claude Hamilton, one of the school's most popular and influential boys, albeit one with an independent streak which is quickly restrained by Frank's unassuming and forgiving nature.

The talisman of the story's sub-title is Frank's bible, and indeed the story is full of biblical references, the central theme being that of

forgiveness. This is exemplified in an incident in which Frank is attacked and seriously hurt, yet, despite his subsequent illness, he forgives his attacker, refusing to name him despite the school's suspicions. In turn, his attacker is full of remorse and never forgets Frank's kindness.

The story's principal event is the theft of some fruit from the headmaster's garden (a surprisingly common motif in late eighteenth and early nineteenth century school fiction), with Frank being unjustly punished. The real culprit eventually owns up after a second theft, during which he is badly hurt, Frank tending him during his subsequent convalescence to such an extent that he sacrifices his chances of winning a school prize.

The importance of *Frank Netherton* in the development of the boys' school story is that it brings to the forefront the delicate boy, slightly effeminate (because of his upbringing), who dispenses moral advice to others (particularly to a stronger boy who then acts as his protector) and who is ultimately seen as spiritually (if not physically) stronger than everyone else. In his refusal to tell tales, he also carries the burdens of others, measuring this against his faith and belief in God. His immediate descendant was the far more famous George Arthur of *Tom Brown's School Days*, whose attributes were strikingly similar and whose influence on those around him was almost as marked.

Indeed, it can be suggested that *Tom Brown's School Days* was not only influenced by *Frank Netherton* but that it drew heavily from it. It may well be the case that Thomas Hughes, far from writing *Tom Brown* in isolation, as it were, consciously (or subconsciously) derived some of the elements of it from this and some of the other school stories which had gone before. (It has also, for example, been suggested – though the author denied it – that he took the name of his hero from Dorothy Kilner's 1804 novel *First Going to School – The Story of Tom Brown and His Sisters*.) Certainly, however, *Tom Brown* can arguably be seen as the major conduit whereby the principal theme of *Frank Netherton* became such a dominant force in the mid-to-late nineteenth-century school story.

The biblical theme of *Frank Netherton* was echoed by George Etell Sargent, a prolific evangelical writer, whose books were mostly published by the RTS. His school stories were amongst the most didactic ever written, riddled with biblical references and occasional stern authorial asides, although the moral precepts they espoused – particularly honour and generosity – had strong echoes in the ethos embraced by later school fiction, an ethos whose watershed was the First World War.

Sargent's first collection of school stories, *Stories of Schoolboys*, was published anonymously in 1851 (with a sequel being published in 1862). These were mainly character studies, exploring (always from a Christian perspective) such negative traits as envy, covetousness, dishonesty, moral cowardice and extravagance. His writing tended towards the turgid and heavy-handed, although his stories contained firm morals – forgiveness, honour, truthfulness, trust, generosity – which, put across in a different

tone, may have been far more palatable.

Typical is the title story of *The Young Cumbrian and Other Stories of Schoolboys* (1880), the hero of which is the orphaned Tom Smith, an eight-year-old boy, newly arrived at his boarding school. Thin, pale and stooping, and poorly-educated in everything except natural history, he is shunned by his schoolfellows and abused by Bowler, a monitor, until another monitor, Mansfield, intervenes. Tom and Mansfield become firm friends, while Bowler continues his campaign of spite. Two years later, Tom replaces Bowler as a monitor, thanks to a complex system of marking classroom work, and Bowler eventually unleashes all his fury and hatred on Tom on the last day of term, giving him a thorough thrashing before running away.

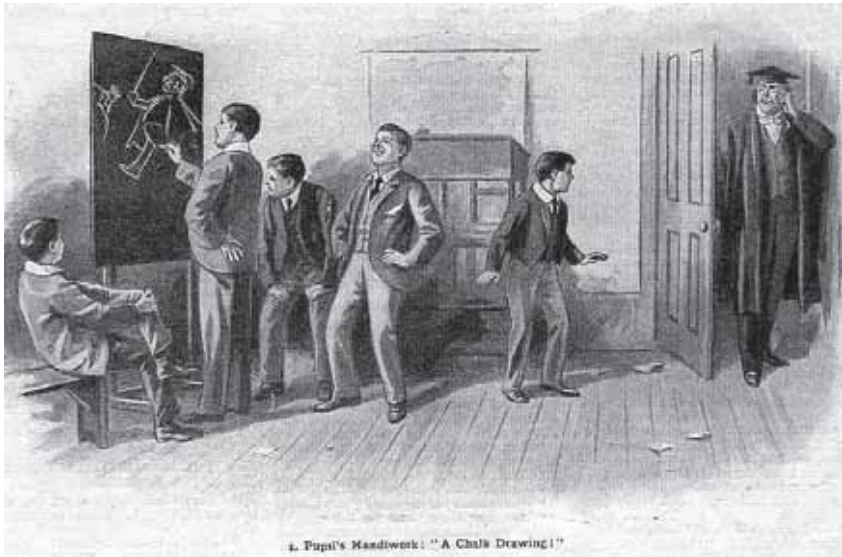
Years later, Tom, now a minister, and Mansfield discover that Bowler is down on his luck, and send him an anonymous cash gift, thereby ending the story on the theme of forgiveness and loving one's enemy.

The evils of money-lending are exposed in another story, with the ostensibly rich but careless Albert being indebted to the miserly Sam, to the tune of half-a-crown, which he cannot repay. Both Albert – for borrowing money – and Sam – for lending it – stand condemned, a rather confusing state of affairs when all's said and done.

Many of Sargent's stories end with little in the way of resolution, other than a warning as to the consequences of un-Christian behaviour. Their didactic and unashamedly religious themes were undoubtedly in keeping with the ethos of the time, but they must nevertheless have made for heavy, and depressing, reading.

The success of *Tom Brown's School Days* and some of its immediate successors, such as Farrar's *Eric, or Little by Little* (Black, 1858) and *St. Winifred's, or The World of School* (Black, 1862), led to an interest in boys' school fiction enthusiastically taken up by a range of writers and publishers, but surprisingly not the RTS. In the years between 1857 and 1883, when Reed's *The Adventures of a Three Guinea Watch* first appeared in hardback, the RTS appears to have published only fifteen boys school stories – at an average rate of just over one every two years – out of a total number of boys school stories published in Great Britain in this period of at least 160.

Several of these RTS stories were anonymous, with one or two being re-issued with author attribution later. One of the better-known was *Ludovic's Victory*, originally published anonymously in 1867 but later re-issued and credited to Mrs Sophie Prosser, the author of over thirty books (mainly family stories) almost all of which were published by the RTS. As with *Frank Netherton*, forgiveness is a central theme, this time the forgiveness of two boys in later life for the harsh treatment meted out to them by a master at their boarding school. The story opens with Ludovic being cruelly caned by Mr Flip, and suffering a serious injury to his face which confines him to the sickroom for several chapters. With the help of a missionary friend of his father's who is visiting the school, he converts his friend Armstrong to Christianity, although not without some initial resistance.



Public-school scene from the *BOP*, c. 1890

He later helps Armstrong with an essay, although the headmaster, who has hitherto regarded Ludovic as a bit of a dunce, suspects that it was not Armstrong's own work, and eventually teases the truth out of Ludovic.

At the end of the story, both Ludovic and Armstrong have found success – in the Church and Army respectively – but Mr Flip is unemployed and penniless, and he turns to Ludovic in his capacity as a governor of a local Board School in the hope of being given a job. Both Ludovic and Armstrong forgive him for his earlier treatment of them, and the story ends with Mr Flip thriving under Ludovic's Christian influence.

Also in 1867 came *Maurice Guildford, or The Trials of a Small Boy* (anonymous), which begins with Maurice being taught moral and religious lessons via his behaviour at home, and goes on to explore similar issues when he goes to boarding school. Questions about owning up, telling the truth, anger and getting into debt are all answered from a strongly biblical viewpoint.

Christianity, and living by its moral codes and precepts, continued to play an important part in boys' school stories throughout the second half of the nineteenth century, with publishers such as the Christian Knowledge Society (later the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge), the Sunday School Union and John F. Shaw producing a wide range of didactic and often rather laboured stories, hanging their message on standard school story themes such as theft, cheating, breaking bounds (and being injured, sometimes fatally, in the process), sneaking (or rather not sneaking) and bullying.

School prizes and scholarships also featured regularly, for example in the anonymous *Walter and the Prize* (1862), set in and around a village school and in which the eponymous hero sacrifices his chances of winning a prize by spending time when he could be studying looking after his ill sister (a theme repeated in the anonymous *How the Gold Medal was Won*

some twenty or so years later). In both of these short books, religious faith plays an important part, sustaining not only the boys but their sisters as well.

Similarly, in *Leslie's Scholarship* (anonymous, 1877) two boys are in friendly competition for a valuable prize; the circumstances of one boy, with an ill father, and the injury to the other during a scientific experiment which goes wrong, prompt clever questions about faith and God's will.

The breath of fresh air imparted by Talbot Baines Reed, whose stories adhered to a strict moral code but were enlivened by their large *public* school settings – with their attendant inter-House and inter-form rivalry, missing from much of the earlier fiction set in smaller private schools – and by Reed's love of sport, led to a sea-change in school stories. Religion began to be usurped by the more subtle and more digestible public school code which had its roots in the founding of the Empire and which embraced chivalry, manliness, honesty, loyalty and sportsmanship – basic Christian tenets but put across in a rather more secular light.

The growing emphasis on sport reflected the late-nineteenth-century concern with the need for boys to fit into an organisation; boys who would resist being deflected in their goals by displays of emotion. Schoolboy friendships now began to centre on equals – the relationships delineated by stronger boys befriending weaker boys, and vice versa, a significant theme in boys' school stories from this earlier period, fading into the background. This may well have partly explained the popularity of the *Boy's Own Paper* (*BOP*), in that its school stories excluded sentimental relationships between boys and featured very few milksops and weeds. The RTS was actually quite explicit about this – G.A. Hutchison, the first editor of the *BOP*, described such boys (in his introduction to the hardback edition of Talbot Baines Reed's *The Fifth Form at St. Dominic's*) as:

the unreal abstractions of an effeminate sentimentalism . . .
paragons who prate platitudes and die young . . . the morbid
specimens of youthful infamy only too frequently paraded by
the equally unreal sensationalism of today to meet the cravings
of a vitiated taste.¹

(No concessions to the poorly educated reader there!)

Jack Cox, in his history of the *BOP*, *Take A Cold Tub, Sir! – The Story of the Boy's Own Paper* (Lutterworth Press, 1982) commented:

The Christian, manly and natural tone of Reed's writing seemed far more appropriate to his readers than the larded approach of Dean Farrar in *Eric, or Little by Little*, a story which fell flat as a pancake amongst the very boys it was meant to influence.²

There is a particular irony about Hutchison's statement given that it was the RTS which had introduced such a boy (weak and effeminate) as a hero into the boys' school story genre in the first place.

At the same time as demoting the weak and effeminate boy to mere walk-on parts, the RTS was also setting its face against another form of school

story, that personified by the ‘penny dreadful’ and characteristically redolent with violence and chaos. The RTS deliberately set out to offer an alternative – with the launching of the *BOP* in 1879, it aimed to publish, in the words of Jack Cox again,

the kind of paper that boys would read, and buy; the kind of paper parents and teachers would approve; and the kind of paper the Society, as responsible Christian publishers, wanted to produce.³

Talbot Baines Reed helped this process by writing authentic and entertaining school stories. In particular, he emphasised the organisation of the large boarding school, with its houses and sporting teams, with relationships between boys being largely defined by their individual places within the school or house. The problems which arose between boys or within the social structure of the school were overcome using a morality based almost solely upon schoolboy culture and values, consistent with Christian values but fairly thickly disguised. The rule which forbade sneaking, for example, even if a boy was plainly guilty of wrongdoing, was regarded as acceptable whereas lying was not. If a boy was asked a question the answer to which would mean trouble for another boy, even if the latter was guilty of a moral or mortal sin, he would state that he could not answer. Such a refusal would be understood – even admired – by a master.

Talbot Baines Reed wrote nine full-length school stories, eight of which were serialised in the *BOP*, although for some reason one of these, *The Willoughby Captains* (serialised in 1883-84) was lost to the RTS and published by Hodder & Stoughton in 1887. A year later the RTS managed to acquire a school story from another popular writer of the period, the Rev. H.C. Adams, who had previously had twelve school stories published by Routledge between 1861 and 1881.

Adams’s career as a school story writer began when he edited and partly revised a manuscript left behind by his brother, the Rev. William Adams, on his death in 1848. *The Cherry Stones* was published in 1851, and H.C. Adams went on to write over twenty school stories until his death in 1899. Two of these, *For James or George – A Schoolboy’s Tale of 1745*, and *Two Old Westminsterers*, were serialised in the *BOP* in 1883-84 and 1885-86 respectively (although only the former was re-issued in hardback, by Hodder & Stoughton, in 1886).

The one story written by Adams and published in hardback by the RTS, *Ernest Hepburn, or Revenge and Forgiveness* (1888), is a complex tale revolving around the attempt of a boy, Edgar, to obtain for himself the benefits of patronage of a second cousin – principally a job in India – that were originally intended for the orphaned Ernest. He has a living conscience in a close friend, Leonard, whom he has known from early childhood, and who is a virtuous,



selfless and loving boy who is also often ill, as he has weak lungs. The three boys all go to the same public school where, after a series of duplicitous activities, Edgar seems to have gained the post he wanted. However, his wickedness is revealed, and he subsequently almost dies after boarding a ship bound for India. Before it has quite left the harbour it begins to sink in a storm; Ernest, in an act of revenge, refuses to swim out from the shore to rescue him, and it is left to Leonard to do so. The subsequent immersion and effort is too much for Leonard's lungs, and he becomes very ill, eventually dying with Ernest's face buried in his coverlet and crying for forgiveness for his refusal to help in the rescue of Edgar. His request is, of course, granted.

Interestingly, this story represents a reversion by the RTS to the kind of emotional story it had published twenty to thirty years previously, and it is quite unlike the school stories that had been published in the *BOP*. (One explanation for this may be that it had been written by Adams many years before and it had been waiting for a publisher willing to issue it.)

In addition, the book defends the depiction in school stories of boys with strong religious feelings. Adams argues that such boys are not the mere creations of theorists, (with) no existence in real life.

But those who have studied boy-character more deeply know better.⁴ He accepts that schools can be a shock to the sensibilities of the religious or sensitive:

The coarse evils which beset the daily life of every public school, the ribaldry of some boys, the unblushing falsehood of others, the impurity, the bullying and the like, evils from which no great school is ever free, startled and disgusted Leonard, so that at first his inclination was to write to his guardian and request to be taken away.⁵

However, Leonard decides not only to avoid taking part in such things, but also to resist interfering with the activities of other boys, and to refrain from expressing any of his own opinions. When the boys realise that he is sincere, and free of 'humbug', they generally leave him alone, a stance aided by Leonard's good humour and his willingness to join in at cricket and in paper chases.

A similar throwback to the mid-1800s was E. Maud Wright's *How Roger Saved His Brother*, the author's only book, published in 1890. This turns on its head the convention that when two brothers go to school it is the older one who is expected to look after the younger one. Set in a small boarding school, the story centres on an illicit night-time trip to the home of an ostensibly poor man, undertaken by Donald and his friend Edwin. Donald's younger brother Roger learns that the old man is a drunkard and a thief, and tries, unsuccessfully, to dissuade the two boys from going. When he discovers that they have gone, he goes after them, only to be caught out of bounds by the headmaster. When he refuses to reveal the reason for this, he is sentenced to be publicly flogged.

It is Roger's moral courage in refusing to sneak, and bearing his fate with fortitude, which persuades Donald to own up. The plot, despite its similarity to numerous other stories, centres on a powerful message, prompted by a belief in the grace of God but vividly illustrating one of the principal tenets of old-fashioned schoolboy honour.



T.S. Millington

The theme of forgiveness is central to Jesse Page's *Harry the Hero, or Forgiveness Wins* (1893), in which two boys from neighbouring schools fall out during a game of cricket, with the surly and angry Slim Jim deliberately bowling at Harry Bright's ankles, injuring him in the process. He rejects Bright's overtures of friendship, only to meet him during the summer holiday and having to be rescued by him when he is trapped by the incoming tide. As a result of this their friendship, boosted by Jim's conversion to Christianity, is firmly cemented.

A more notable writer of this period was Thomas Street Millington, a Committee member of the RTS and a regular contributor to the *BOP*. He spent many years as a vicar in Leicestershire, and wrote numerous religious books as well as school stories for the *BOP*, although only three of these appeared in hardback. His most popular story was *Some of Our Fellows* (published in hardback by Hodder & Stoughton in 1886 and reprinted several times up to the outbreak of the First World War). With its story of two new boys at a small private school, one a shipwrecked French orphan and the other the arrogant son of a wealthy merchant, it was one of the first school stories to introduce the theme of xenophobia, although Millington's motives in doing so are rather unclear.

His earlier book, *Straight to the Mark*, published by the RTS in 1883, was also set in a small private school, although one with pretensions to be something grander, having been transformed from a local day school into a 'college' for boarders. The central theme is truth, at a number of levels – between boys, between masters and boys, between parents and boys, and between masters themselves.

Many other school stories published by the RTS in the latter part of the nineteenth century were concerned with the school itself, such as Louisa Silke's *School Life at Bartram's* (1897). This is one of the few school stories set in a Blue Coat school and also one of the few stories written for boys implicitly critical of the establishment it portrays, with its theme of horrendous cruelty and bullying and its picture of a grim, cold and forbidding environment:

No ray of sunlight seemed able to penetrate within those grim walls, which were so high and frowning they might have served for a prison.⁶

A somewhat similar picture had been painted five years earlier in M.B. Manwell's *Tony's Neighbours* (1892), one of numerous school stories which centred on the trials and tribulations of a new boy. This is a near-perfect example of the milksop-turns-hero school of fiction – the hero, Tony Lorimer, being unfortunately, a pretty boy; so pretty that it was a delight to dress him in velvet and deep lace ruffles and a blue sash, to set off the long yellow curls which Tony hated.⁷

Aged nine, he has led a solitary life with his stepmother, having been brought up according to strict religious principles. Sent away to school, and shamefully unaware of the rules and rituals of boarding school life, he launches himself into a disastrous wrestling match with a senior boy on his first day, but immediately earns the respect of everyone but the school bullies when he refuses to elaborate on the circumstances surrounding the fight to the headmaster. Unfortunately, he finds himself sharing a dormitory with two of the school's principal bullies, who make life very difficult for him, forcing him to break bounds and bring back wine and pies. One trip is enough, and he endures nights of torture after he refuses to go again.

Subsequently, he begins turning away from the path of righteousness he initially set out to travel, and acquires a reputation as a slacker, at the same time swearing to get his own back on the bullies. The conflict, of 'loving thy neighbour' (hence the title) is painfully clear. Finally, a fire breaks out in the school, and Tony is trapped in his dormitory alongside Stacey, one of his tormentors. Stacey reveals himself to be a coward (as are almost all bullies in school stories) and he is eventually pushed out of the window by Tony when a master appears with a ladder.

One outcome of the investigation which follows into the bullying which Tony endured, revealed after the fire, is that the school's dormitories are partitioned into cubicles, in the (perhaps rather vain) hope that younger boys will have protection against bullying (and possibly other vices) in the future. With this important revelation, *Tony's Neighbours* becomes one of the very few juvenile school stories where something more than just personal good comes out of adversity – in this case a positive reform to the school itself, although the reform is probably more in hope than expectation of success.

Another recurrent theme in boys' school stories, as we have seen, was sneaking – and in S.S. Pugh's *Geoff Blake – His Chums and Foes*, published in 1900 but set in the mid-1850s in a small private school, the dilemma – of whether or not it is right to sneak in some circumstances – is explored in some depth. The eponymous hero, a farmer's son who is initially something of a misfit but who soon finds his feet and some degree of popularity thanks to his hatred of bullying, rises through the school carrying the traditional schoolboy code of honour which is against sneaking. But a series of events inspired by an older new boy, who encourages others to take part in poaching and practical jokes against the local villagers, leads the headmaster to issue a homily to the school prefects:

put on one side altogether this fearful delusion about what is called 'sneaking'. . . . Let your band of honour be the band of truth, of justice, of righteousness. Schoolboy honour should be the honour of men, of gentlemen, of Christians, nothing less."⁸

Blake, now a prefect himself, becomes aware of boys breaking bounds but fails to intervene, the ideal of not sneaking being too deeply ingrained, although this dramatically changes when a poaching expedition ends in disaster, with six boys almost being drowned. This is the turning point in Blake's attitude to

the concept of schoolboy honour, in a story which posed questions about one of the central tenets of the old public school ethos that had rarely been asked before.

Rather more pleasant and inconsequential pictures of school life were painted in stories published by the RTS such as those by H.F. Charles, Annie Fairey, Minnie Harding Kelly, Edith C. Kenyon, A.N. Malan and Ernest Protheroe. Moral content was mixed with games, rags, adventures, rivalries, and occasionally academic work (usually the battle for a scholarship or prize), and while the author's message was still fairly obvious it was made more palatable for the average



reader by its immersion in a variety of plots, themes and diversions. One of the exemplars of this new tradition was M. Geneste's *Skylark, or A Boy's Influence* (1912), the story of an inveterate and much-loved practical joker whose honesty lands him in more trouble than his pranks.

A rather more serious theme was portrayed in Ernest Protheroe's *Bob Marchant's Scholarship* (1906), set initially (and unusually) in an elementary school, from where the hero goes on to a public school after winning a scholarship. At first he hides his background, but his secret is eventually found out and he faces the prospect of being cold-shouldered by his fellow pupils, simply because of his background, until news leaks out of an act of heroism by his father, and his colleagues take him on board as one of their own. He eventually wins another scholarship, this time to Oxford.

Emma Leslie had portrayed a similar struggle in her 1900 story *That Scholarship Boy*, which centres on a boy from a board school who wins a scholarship to an exclusive grammar school, and the efforts by a group of his schoolfellows, driven purely by snobbery, to get rid of him. Ultimately, of course, he comes out on top.

This theme, of 'poor boy makes good,' was not wholly unfamiliar, perhaps reflecting publishers' awareness that many readers would have been attending the new state schools set up by the 1870 Education Act. Indeed, it became a popular and successful element in the school story, and was taken up by several other writers, in particular Gunby Hadath in *Schoolboy Grit*, first published by Nisbet & Co. in 1913, and, most notably, by Warren Chetham-Strode in his stage play, later a successful film, *The Guinea Pig* (the script of which was published by Sampson Low, Marston & Co. in 1946, with a novelisation by Arnold Meredith appearing in 1948).

The RTS published a few other school stories with settings somewhat removed from the traditional public and/or boarding school. John Adams's *The Rickerton Medal* (1896) has as its sub-title 'A Board School Story' (although when it was re-issued under the pseudonym of Skelton Kuppord in 1902 it was given the sub-title 'Tram Street, Standard VI'), and is an

authentic picture of life in an inner city (Glasgow) school, with a surprising emphasis on how such a school operated.

The anonymous *Tales and Pictures of School Life* (1869) and *School Pictures Drawn From Life* (1876) were heavily didactic collections of short stories set in Sunday Schools and village schools; Marianne Parrott published *Tales of Village Schoolboys* in 1874, and similarly the principal characters in Annie M. Fairey's *An Unwilling Hero* (1906) were village schoolboys in a perpetual state of feud with a neighbouring boarding school. One of the village boys, Frank Topham, helps establish the innocence of a boarder accused of injuring a horse, although as a result of this he himself becomes a suspect, but in true schoolboy style refuses to implicate the real culprit. He then rescues a young girl from drowning whilst playing truant, and is finally recognised as the hero of the title.

A working-class hero also appears in Marianne Parrott's *Little Redcap* (1870), where the boot-boy at a boys' boarding school whose religious upbringing helps him overcome temptation, makes enemies of some of the pupils.

Another familiar theme in school stories was smoking, condemned by writers for a variety of reasons but mainly because it leads to a shortness of breath on the playing field. Nowhere was smoking condemned more strongly than in W.R. Campey's *Always A Knight* (1913), where it is seen as the root of all evil and the reason that smokers go to the dogs.

The story opens with young orphan Rupert McKenna being thrown out of his home by his uncle, following a row with his cousin Harry. He is adopted by a farmer and his wife, and after a year's private tuition is sent to a boarding school, only to find that Harry is a fellow pupil. What follows is a fairly torrid story based on Harry's hatred of Rupert. The school, which once had a good reputation, is now an ill-disciplined and slack establishment, thanks largely to its elderly and weak headmaster. On his arrival Rupert is horrified to discover his schoolfellows' predilection for gambling, drinking and smoking, refusing to join the 'Smoke Hole' and finding himself despised by almost the entire school as a result. His position changes when he rescues one of his enemies who has fallen over a cliff, and later when it is discovered that Harry has cheated him out of top place in an exam and, on top of this, has planted a stolen watch in his desk.

Rupert's worthy and moving forgiveness of Harry is wasted when the latter runs away and ends up living in poverty. In the meantime, the school is burned to the ground in a fire, Rupert only just surviving thanks to the efforts of Mike, a half-witted boy who pumps the school organ and whom Rupert had earlier befriended. A lot of incident is crammed into what is actually a fairly short story, much of it unoriginal and hackneyed (the rescue, the planting of the stolen watch, the cheating in the exam, the fire) but overriding all of this is its almost obsessional concern with the evils of tobacco, which gives the story an impetus on a par with the temperance stories (portraying the evils of drink) which had enjoyed some degree of popular success some fifteen to thirty years earlier.

Equally bizarre, although for different reasons, is A.N. Malan's *School-*

days at Highfield House, a collection of short stories originally published in the *BOP* and re-issued in hardback in 1898 (and subsequently re-issued at least once). Its central theme is cruelty towards animals – be they donkeys, sheep, chickens or goldfish. The opening chapter describes at some length the effect of hurling old tennis balls at a hapless donkey:

We thought it fine sport, and there was not more cruelty in it than foxhunting, coursing, pigeon-shooting, and other similar sports, which a section of our nation regards as ennobling to the British character.⁹

One can hardly fault the author's logic, although not his ethics.

The importance of the RTS in the development of the boys' school story began to wane after the turn of the century. The 1890s had seen the end of the heavily didactic school story – one of the last exemplars of this tradition was K. Shirley Plant's *The Captain of the Eleven* (1898), a collection of short stories centering on the application of biblical precepts in day-to-day school life, a harking back to earlier stories and something of a contrast to the stories the RTS had been publishing since the early 1880s. Religion was still important, but the dogma and piety characteristic of earlier stories had all but been replaced by a more subtle and less strident approach.

Minnie Harding Kelly (who disguised the fact that she was a woman by writing as M. Harding Kelly – Edith C. Kenyon also published her boys' school stories under the name E.C. Kenyon) wrote three boys' school stories between 1913 and 1928, although they all have echoes of the nineteenth century. *Boys of Gresham House*, in particular, published under the imprint of the BOP Office in 1928, is riddled with references to preparing boys for service in the Empire. Set in a public school's Preparatory House, it is little more than a picture of high spirits, presided over by an unusually benevolent headmaster.

Kelly's first school story – *Tom Kenyon, Schoolboy* (1913) – is far more complex, albeit almost wholly derived from earlier stories. The eponymous hero is an orphan, allowed to run wild at home (in the care of his uncle) until he is packed off to school with the maxim '*do your duty by God and man, whatever the cost*' impressed upon him by a family friend. His first days at his public school are portrayed both vividly and authentically – the strangeness of new surroundings, rules and rituals, and the struggle of an outsider to fit in.

He immediately befriends a fellow new boy, Evans, weak and delicate, and in turn is befriended himself by Charles Barris, slightly older and more experienced. Much drama, largely derivative, follows – Evans and Tom are cut off by the tide, and later Evans almost drowns in the school swimming pool – and Tom, dispirited by the bullying which is a predominant feature of school life, begins to drift, 'Eric'-like, enduring several unpleasant interviews with masters and the headmaster.

Gradually, however, his fortunes change as he moves up the school, eventually becoming Head Boy and having to come to terms with that position's unpleasant duties, such as punishing offenders. One of his particular enemies, Eldred, who had earlier seriously injured Tom during a cross country race, features in the

story's last major incident – a fire (another indication of the derivative nature of the story) in which he is rescued by the brave Tom.

Although *Tom Kenyon, Schoolboy* is predictable and familiar, it is an exemplar of the tradition of the late-nineteenth-/early-twentieth-century school story – the dramatic interludes serve a well-established but important purpose, pitching good against evil in an accessible way and offering a strongly moral, if not overtly religious, message.

In the years between 1900 and 1919 the RTS was overtaken in the school story publishing stakes by Thomas Nelson & Sons, S.W. Partridge, A. & C. Black and W. & R. Chambers. In the following two decades its influence waned even further, and whilst it still ranked top in terms of the overall number of titles it had published since the middle of the nineteenth century, its position was under threat from many more publishers, including Blackie & Son, Frederick Warne, the Oxford University Press, Collins, Cassell & Co. and Sampson Low, Marston & Co. A complete list of all the boys' school stories published by the RTS (and the Lutterworth Press) is given below.

For some reason, the RTS failed to publish any hardback books by some of the most popular and prolific nineteenth and twentieth century boys' school story writers such as Ascott R. Hope, Richard Bird and Hylton Cleaver, although these three in particular wrote several serials and short stories for the *BOP*, and later saw many of these stories re-issued in hardback by other publishers.

Many of the post-First World War school stories that the RTS did publish were issued under the imprint of the 'Boy's Own Paper' Office – including reprints of most of Talbot Baines Reed's titles and the occasional story by more modern writers such as W.E. Cule, Frank Elias and Michael Poole. These stories had wholly abandoned the didactic purpose of their nineteenth century counterparts and were straightforward school stories very much of the type by which the genre is best recognised today. They contained familiar themes – stolen exam papers, scholarship boy makes good, lots of sport and rivalry – but generally untainted by religion. The only moral code at stake was the public school code, rather than a strictly biblical one.

(It should be added that at least one edition of *Tom Brown's School Days* was published by the RTS in the early twentieth century, presumably for no other reason than to cash in on the book's still enormous popularity, and because almost every other publisher of children's fiction was getting in on the act by re-issuing – and occasionally revising – it. Surprisingly, perhaps, the RTS appears to have chosen not to publish F.W. Farrar's *Eric or Little by Little*, after its copyright expired in 1909, despite its similar degree of popularity.)

Later still, the Lutterworth Press published several books by Anthony Buckeridge (the *Rex Milligan* series – Buckeridge being better-known for his *Jennings* books, published by Collins), Gunby Hadath, Peter Jones and Geoffrey Trease – the stories of Buckeridge and Jones breaking away from



the familiar ground of the public school and instead using the grammar and secondary modern school for their setting, following the lead of other publishing houses who had realised, in the aftermath of the Second World War, that children's literature needed to break new ground if it was to appeal to a new and changed readership.

Religion still played a part in a few school stories – published by the Victory Press, Pickering & Inglis and the Paternoster Press – but on the whole it was no longer a relevant ingredient of school fiction. One of the last gasps of the religious school story was L.V. Davidson's *The Two Gangs*, published under the Lutterworth imprint in 1947 and centring on the battle between good and evil, personified by two rival gangs of public school fifth formers. The bad lot was called 'Selby & Co.', perhaps a conscious nod in the direction of Rudyard Kipling's *Stalky & Co.* (Macmillan & Co. 1899) – a book which arguably had a greater impact on the school story genre than any other, a book which frequently mocked the public school ethos and, by default, its religious antecedents, and after which the school story was never quite the same.

References

1. Reed, Talbot Baines, *The Fifth Form at St. Dominics. A School Story*, London: RTS, [n.d.] Prefatory Note, p.7.
2. Cox, Jack, *Take a Cold Tub, Sir!: The Story of the Boy's Own Paper*, Guildford: Lutterworth, 1982, p.44.
3. Cox, *ibid.*, p.20.
4. Adams, H.C., *Ernest Hepburn, or Revenge and Forgiveness*, London: RTS, 1888. p.198.
5. Adams, *ibid.*, p.199.
6. Silke, Louisa, *School Life at Bartram's*, London: RTS, 1897, p.55.
7. Manwell, M.B., *Tony's Neighbour*, London: RTS, 1892, p.1.
8. Pugh, S.S., *Geoff Blake – His Chums and Foes*, RTS, London, 1900, pp. 145-146.
9. Malan, A.N., *Schooldays at Highfield House*, London: RTS, 1898, p.14.

Checklist of Boys' School Stories published by the RTS and Lutterworth, 1844-1961

ADAMS, H.C. *Ernest Hepburn, or Revenge and Forgiveness*. RTS, 1888

ADAMS, John *The Rickerton Medal – A Board School Story*. RTS, 1896

See also **KUPPORD, Skelton**

AVERY, Harold *A Fifth Form Mystery 'Boy's Own Paper Office'*, 1923

BELLAMY, R.L. *Old Nick of Pig's. 'Boy's Own Paper Office'*, 1927

L.B.W. A Prep School Story 'Boy's Own Paper Office', 1929

BUCKERIDGE, Anthony *Rex Milligan's Busy Term*. Lutterworth Press, 1953

Rex Milligan Raises the Roof. Lutterworth Press, 1955

Rex Milligan Holds Forth. Lutterworth Press, 1957

Rex Milligan Reporting. Lutterworth Press, 1961

CAMPEY, W.R. *Always a Knight*. RTS, 1913

CHARLES, H. Frederick *Osgood's Rebellion, and What Came of It*. RTS, 1877

- (originally published anonymously)
The Boys of Highfield. RTS, 1878 (originally published anonymously)
The Doctors Experiment. RTS, 1884 (originally published anonymously)
- COKER, A.M.** *Crookside Lads*. RTS, 1886
- COWEN, G.F.** *The Dragon of the Moor*. RTS – Lutterworth Press, 1940
- CULE, W.E.** *Rollinson and I*. RTS, 1913
Baker Secundus. 'Boy's Own Paper Office', 1917
- DAVIDSON, L.V.** *The Two Gangs*. Lutterworth Press, 1947
- ELIAS, Frank** *The Shadow on the School*. 'Boy's Own Paper Office', 1921
The Two Captains of Tuxford. 'Boy's Own Paper Office', 1924
Out of the Straight. RTS, 1925
Captain's Orders. Lutterworth Press, 1947
- EVERETT-GREEN, Evelyn** *Mr Hatherley's Boys*. RTS, 1885
- FAIREY, Annie M.** *Gerald's Victory*. RTS, 1901 (re-issued as *Gerald Patterson's Victory*)
How Arthur Won the Day. RTS, 1901
An Unwilling Hero. RTS, 1906
- GENESTE, M.** *Skylark, or A Boy's Influence*. RTS, 1912
- HADATH, Gunby** *Grim and Gay*. Lutterworth Press, 1942
Fight It Out. Lutterworth Press, 1943
What's In A Name? Lutterworth Press, 1945
The Fifth Feversham. Lutterworth Press, 1948
No Robbery. Lutterworth Press, 1950
- HAYCRAFT, M.S.** *Lindenholm*. RTS, 1893 (re-issued as *The General's Children, or Life at Lindenholm*. Religious Tract Society, 1904)
- HUGHES, Thomas** *Tom Brown's School Days*. 'Boy's Own Paper Office', 1930
- JOHNSON, Joseph** *The Master's Likeness*. RTS, 1885 (re-issued as *Fighting His Way*. RTS, 1920)
- JONES, Peter** *Crump the Crock*. Lutterworth Press, 1961
Wheldon the Weed. Lutterworth Press, 1961
Mathematics or Blood? Lutterworth Press, 1964
- KELLIE, M. Harding** *Tom Kenyon, Schoolboy*. RTS, 1913
John Crane Wins. RTS, 1923
Boys of Gresham House. 'Boy's Own Paper Office', 1928
- KENYON, E. C.** *The Heroes of Moss Hall School*. RTS, 1905
Derrick Orme's Schooldays. RTS, 1913
- KENYON, E.C. & SOANS, Rev. R.G.** *Norman's Inheritance, or The Young Crusaders*. RTS, 1894
- KUPPORD, Skelton** *The Rickerton Medal, or Tram Street, Standard VI*. RTS, 1902
- LESLIE, Emma** *Charley's Log*. RTS, 1882
- MADDICK, Maud** *True to the Colours*. RTS, 1913
- MALAN, A.N.** *Uncle Towser*. RTS, 1892
Schooldays at Highfield House. RTS, 1898
The Wallaby Man. RTS, 1904
- MANWELL, M.B.** *Tony's Neighbour*. RTS, 1892
Kit & Co. RTS, 1901
- MILLINGTON, T.S.** *Boy and Man* RTS, 1877 (originally published anonymously)
Straight to the Mark. RTS, 1883
- MURRAY, Harold** *The Boys of Sancotes*. 'Boy's Own Paper Office', 1920
- PAGE, Jesse** *Harry the Hero, or Forgiveness Wins*. RTS, 1893
- PARROTT, Marianne** *Little Redcap* RTS, 1870 (published anonymously)
Tales of Village Schoolboys. RTS, 1874

- PLANT, K. Shirley** *The Captain of the Eleven, and Other School Stories*. RTS, 1898
(Re-issued Lutterworth Press)
- POLLARD, M.M.** *Robert Deane's Mission*. RTS, 1885
- POOLE, Michael** *The Cross-Roads at Broxton*. 'Boy's Own Paper Office', 1936
- PROSSER, Mrs Sophie** *Ludovic, or The Boy's Victory*. RTS, 1876 (originally published anonymously)
- PROTHEROE, Ernest** *Bob Marchant's Scholarship*. RTS, 1906
St. Merville's Scholarship Boys. RTS, 1908
- PUGH, S.S.** *My Schoolfellow Val Bownser*. RTS, 1879
Max Victor's Schooldays. RTS, 1883
His Masters. RTS, 1887
Geoff Blake – His Foes and Chums. RTS, 1900
- REED, Talbot Baines** *The Adventures of a Three Guinea Watch*. RTS, 1883
The Fifth Form at St. Dominic's. RTS, 1887
My Friend Smith. RTS, 1889
The Cock House at Fellsgarth. RTS, 1893
The Master of the Shell. RTS, 1894
Tom, Dick and Harry. RTS, 1894
A Dog With A Bad Name. RTS, 1894
A Book of Short Stories. RTS, 1897
Parkhurst Sketches and Other Stories. RTS, 1899
Some of the short stories in the last two volumes were re-issued as *Parkhurst Boys, and Other Stories of School Life*. RTS, 1905
Boycotted and Other Stories. 'Boy's Own Paper Office', 1917
The School Ghost and Boycotted, with Other Stories. 'Boy's Own Paper Office', 1930
- RUSSAN, Ashmore** *The New House Mystery*. 'Boy's Own Paper Office', 1918
- SARGENT, G.E.** *Stories of Schoolboys*. RTS, 1851 (published anonymously)
Stories of Schoolboys (Second Series). RTS, 1862 (published anonymously)
Boys Will Be Boys. RTS, 1879
The Young Cumbrian, and Other Stories of Schoolboys. RTS, 1880
- SILKE, Louisa C.** *School Life at Bartram's*. RTS, 1897
- SOANES, R.G.** *The First False Step*. RTS, 1896
- STRONG, L.A.G.** *Sink or Swim*. Lutterworth Press, 1945
- TREASE, Geoffrey** *The New House at Hardale*. Lutterworth Press, 1953
- WHITEHOUSE, F. Cowley** *Meltonians All!* RTS, 1911
- WRIGHT, E. Maud** *How Roger Saved His Brother*. RTS, 1890
- ANONYMOUS** *The Captain of the School, and Other Stories*. RTS, 1887
Frank Netherton, or The Talisman. RTS, 1847
Harold's Revenge – A Story of Schoolboy Life. RTS, 1880
How the Gold Medal Was Won. RTS, (?) 1888
Leslie's Scholarship. RTS, 1877
Maurice Guildford, or The Trials of a Small Boy. RTS, 1867
My Schoolboy Days. RTS, 1844
Old Schoolfellows, and What Became of Them. RTS, 1871 (revised, 1912)
School Pictures Drawn From Life. RTS, 1876
Tales of School Life/ RTS, 1869
Walter and the Prize. RTS, 1862
Which Wins the Prize? RTS, (?)1871
- ANTHOLOGY** *Twenty-six School Stories for Boys*. 'Boy's Own Paper Office', 1925