

'MARJORIE STANTON'

by W. O. G. Lofts

'Marjorie Stanton' - otherwise Horace Phillips his real name, died on his farm near Lyme Regis, Dorset in 1972. Born at Camberwell, London, in 1881 this made him 91 years of age. So he deservedly lived a full life after giving many generations of girl readers so much pleasure with his tales of Morcove School, which started in The Schoolgirls' Own in 1921 and had a run of over 17 years.

In early 1961, I was in contact with his son Derek - who worked in the girls' paper departments, and put me in touch with his father - then living in retirement in the deep of the country on an isolated farm.

It has been a great treat I assure you, to hear from someone so expert on the characters of Fleetway House, and especially my school of Morcove. For you to write after all these years, to say that the stories gave so much pleasure, is really more than I deserve. It speaks of a great deal of kindness, and good-will on your part for which I thank you.

Yours sincerely,

'Marjorie Stanton' (Horace Phillips)

We exchanged a number of letters after my initial screed, when he even answered a questionnaire I had sent him about his long career in the juvenile fiction field. Some information was published at the time in 1961 Collectors' Digests - though not all, as well as it being against his wishes, some facts may have upset Charles Hamilton who was also alive at that time. After editing The Scout; Cheer Boys Cheer; Boys' Journal; in the early

days, he was suddenly asked to help solve a crisis. For reasons now well known Charles Hamilton as 'Hilda Richards' had ceased to pen the Bessie Bunter tales in the new SchoolFriend. He was asked to study the previous stories, and try and imitate them to his familiar style. He found this almost impossible as his style was serious in tone - in a way like John Nix Pentelow War-time editor of The Magnet and Gem. He would have much rather created his own school being a creative writer - and made no secret of the fact. His chance came after a year or so when Schoolgirls' Own started in 1921, that commenced the brilliant run of Morcove stories. Determined not to have the same unhappy experience of Charles Hamilton and Bessie Bunter, he insisted in retaining the copyright. Possibly here is the answer why Morcove was never revived after the Second World War like Bessie Bunter and Cliff House, mainly in picture strip form. Morcove was situated in the West Country a place he always loved, and where he was to spend the rest of his days. Horace Phillips had known Leonard Shields the artist for some thirty years, and thought him the ideal man to illustrate his stories - especially Betty Barton with her Northern flavour.

In real life Horace Phillips was an extremely serious person, so much so that he was nicknamed by the Fleetway staff and contributors as the Rev. Phillips - a name really unfair to the jolly clerical friends I have met through the years. His style was very Victorian in tone, but gripping to the reader where emotion was involved. Curiously when I was small in the middle thirties I knew a girl named Betty Barton - the sister of a friend of mine at school. She looked somehow like the Morcove Betty - and indeed wished she could attend such a fine school as the one in The Schoolgirls' Own, as she read the stories avidly of and about her namesake. I wanted to attend Greyfriars of course.

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