

No. 71 - Schoolboys' Own Library No. 232 - "The Rebel of Grimslade"

When the Amalgamated Press replaced the Popular with the Ranger in 1931, they must have done so with a glance over their shoulders at the challenge of the Thompson papers, for the Ranger was undoubtedly aimed at the same type of market as the Scottish boys' papers. Even Charles Hamilton's contribution had a new look - bright, breezy, and energetic.

Grimslade school was situated on the borders of Lancashire and Yorkshire, and the two houses (White's and Redmayes') were intended to echo the Wars of the Roses. The headmaster, Dr. Sammy Sparshott, was youthful and unorthodox in his outlook, and the school specialised in breaking in unruly boys. Jim Dainty arrived as the unwilling new boy, spoilt by his mother in his father's absence and now sent to his father's old school. It is not difficult to see the Harry Wharton theme being worked out again in shorter compass.

Charles Hamilton could seldom let slip the chance to have a joke with a surname, and so we had two friends called Bacon and Bean, and a German fat boy named Von Splitz. There was nothing attractive or sympathetic about him, and the humour consisted in laughing at his bad English and his German conceit.

When one looks over the Greyfriars stories of 1931, it comes as something of a surprise to realise that they were written at the same time as the early Grimslade tales. Of course, Charles Hamilton's weekly contributions to the Ranger were very much on the short side, which eliminated the possibility of the more leisurely development that the length of the Magnet tales afforded. It is also a fact that school stories (like real schools) need time in order to build up a convincing atmosphere and to establish a tradition. Grimslade's career was too brief to allow this to happen.

Even so, Charles Hamilton at his least inspired was never less than readable, and the Grimslade stories were well above this level. At the beginning they were very much in the nature of character studies when Jim Dainty was learning to respect his headmaster but still inclined to acts of rebellion. When it is considered that they represent only an insignificant part of Charles Hamilton's prodigious output, it is astonishing how much he put into work which was only of minor importance to him.

---