

Then, shame of shames, Renfrew burst into song. Right in the inspector's office, he put his hand to his emaciated chest and began to sing something fit to dance boogie-woogie to.

The humiliation was too great. I slumped to the floor and covered my face with my hands. Hollywood had laid me out—down for ten, slugged by the sledge-hammer fist that only genuine disillusion can wield.

I wondered what my boyhood—yes, and manhood—would have been like had I gone through the years cherishing the image of a Renfrew who looked like a chorus boy and sang boogie-woogie when the inspector handed him a difficult assignment.

I hoisted myself off the floor and looked around. The theatre was full of youngsters, who didn't seem one bit stirred up. They watched the picture placidly.

Looking at the pages of the *American Boy* I can recall whistling with delight and tramping vigorously about the room when Renfrew and the patrol would hit the road and the besieged families at Fort McPherson would glimpse "dots of scarlet in the woods below the grasslands".

No small boys whistled with delight at this Renfrew. How could they?

This may seem funny, and probably it is. Yet I can't help but wonder how many small boys Hollywood has cheated out of the legitimate thrills and stirrings of boyhood? *Westward Ho!* *Renfrew of the Mounted*, *The Rainbow Trail*, *Call of the Wild*—these were something for a boy to read. They were experiences he never forgot, not through all the trials and vicissitudes of later life.

Today boys go to the movies. What do they see? They glimpse an oval-faced college cheer leader masquerading as the indomitable Renfrew. Instead of the immortal tale of Buck the dog in *Call of the Wild*, they watch Loretta Young and Clark Gable deciding when the big kiss takes place. The only resemblance, living or dead, to Jack London's great tale is the unjustified use of its title.

The stories that moved me as a boy were not epic literature. But they were magnificent stories. I even liked the Tarzan tales. The movies, however, are a colossal washout so far as reproducing any of these thrills is concerned. Tarzan no longer is Lord Greystoke, the brawny ape man, dealing out justice in the jungle. It merely is an effort by the producers to see how few clothes they can drape on Brenda Joyce or Maureen O'Sullivan. I confess this is not without its attractions, yet I still insist that a whole lot of boys would rather see an actual reproduction of *Tarzan and the Jewels of Opar* than a generous glimpse of Brenda Joyce's thigh. Of course, this might not be true of their elders, and after all the poor producers must consider the box-office aspects of everything they undertake.

One wonders if movies *must* be phoney. Plenty of books seem to get themselves read without being completely false and twisted.

Does a Mounted Policeman on patrol have to sing *I Crave a Red-Hot Mama* as his horse gallops through the Canadian Rockies? Does Buck the dog have to give way to Clark Gable chasing Loretta Young?

I'm sure I don't know. I wonder if anyone does.

What I do know is that a lot of American youngsters of the 1946 vintage are being cheated out of some of the great thrills and experiences of boyhood. Not for the fattest stamp album or the slickest electric train in the world would I trade the hours I spent on the trail with Renfrew, swinging through the trees with Tarzan, or following Buck along a frozen Alaskan river.

But boyhood today is often spent in the movie theatre rather than over the pages of a book. This is not so good; ask anyone who has seen Renfrew in the movies after reading about him in the book.

As my wife and I walked up the aisle, someone was calling Renfrew "Rennie". I hurried to get away from the horrid sound.