

Renfrew of the Royal Mounted

By Richard L. Neuberger*

I now have a real grudge against the movies. Formerly it was only a very evanescent and intangible grudge, like the homeopathic soup which Abraham Lincoln said was made "by boiling the shadow of a pigeon which had starved to death".

But it is a big, bristling, *bona fide* grudge now.

It all began the other evening when my wife and I trudged into a second-run movie house advertising *Renfrew of the Royal Mounted* on the marquee.

As a boy—and that was not too long ago—I had thrilled to Laurie Y. Erskine's book about Renfrew. Who under 12 had not read the Renfrew tales in the old *American Boy*? Some of the most stirring moments of my boyhood were spent on the trail with Renfrew—slogging through the snow-drifts to Yellowknife, trading .45 shots with McGaw and his free traders, and riding to rescue with the patrol from Athabasca Landing when the beleaguered settlers would see red dots in the distance and know that Renfrew and the wilderness police were coming.

*Mr. Neuberger, whose *Our Promised Land* published less than ten years ago is regarded by many as an epic of its kind, is a well-known writer of Western American history. He first came in touch with the R.C.M.P. in the Northwest Territories where as a captain in the United States Army he was personal aide to Gen. James A. O'Connor who was in charge of the construction of the Alaska Highway and the Canol Project. He is now on the staff of *The Oregonian*, Portland, Ore., in which city he resides, and is state representative of the Oregon Legislative Assembly. His article "The Royal Canadian Mounties" appeared in *Harpers* magazine and later was published as a world rewrite in *The Reader's Digest*. Thus, though an outlander of sorts, Mr. Neuberger is not unacquainted with the Force, its ideals and prejudices, and the present critique which appeared under his by-line in *The Progressive*, a newspaper in Madison, Wis., should prove of interest to many of our readers.

I REMEMBER my boyhood conception of Renfrew as a grim, resolute man with iron gray temples and a calm, steady look. He even had a thick beard after he had been on snow-shoes for six months along the frozen shores of Hudson Bay and Coronation Gulf. In Renfrew's life there was no truck with women and other frivolities. Renfrew was the fellow who got his man. The chase might lead across the pole and to the nethermost regions of the planet, but Renfrew would bring him in. Stubborn and determined, yet sympathetic to the mistreated Indian tribes—that was Renfrew.

In my most rapturous day dreams I was not Tarzan of the Apes nor President of the United States. I was Renfrew, three great gold chevrons on my scarlet tunic, slogging across the barren lands to carry the King's law beyond the Arctic Circle.

Well, my wife and I entered the theatre.

There on the screen was a beardless lounge lizard with a yell-leader look whom other characters addressed as Renfrew! The hackles rose on my neck. Each time this individual from behind a soda fountain was called Renfrew I squirmed lower in my seat. I refused to accredit my hearing organs whenever I heard the name Renfrew applied to this fugitive from a rumble seat.

Lese-majeste.

For 20 years—two decades, the better part of a generation—I had treasured a memory of Renfrew. At difficult moments in my life, when failure seemed to pile on failure, I could still retreat to the remembrance that I might be Renfrew, the manhunter of "N" division, stalking his prey across the Arctic.

Could this dance-hall Lothario on the screen actually be Renfrew, the pinnacle to which I had aspired during the greater part of my life? The answer seemed too awful to contemplate.