

## A SCHOOL PRIZE

IN *DANDELION DAYS* Henry Williamson describes a 'Visitation' by the governors of Colham School. The annual Visitation is still held and the school song, which Williamson gives almost verbatim, is still sung: 'Come Sons of Colfe', by Leland L. Duncan, or Sir Heland Donkin of the novel.

Williamson's eye and memory for detail hardly need emphasis in this Journal, but I have recently enjoyed sharing with the present generation of Colfeians a small discovery which tangibly demonstrates these qualities.

In the Visitation scene Williamson gently mocks Victorian values and the way in which they were extolled to the boys. The Master of the Company, addressing the assembled boys, used as his text one of the school prizes:

*Had anybody received as a prize a copy of that wonderful book, Smiles' Self Help. That was a fine book, and one that should be in every home. It was that spirit, he ventured to say, that had made the Old Country what it was. Smiles' Self Help won the Battle of Waterloo - it was that spirit that had made the Great Man, whose portrait was above the platform at that moment, of whom Colham School was so very proud, win for The Great White Queen, and for Christianity, the vast continental spaces of Dark Africa. It was -*

What has enlivened this passage for us at Williamson's old school, is not so much the current political cry for a "return to Victorian values" as the discovery of a small volume in the Library. Bound in leather, it is blocked in gold on the front cover, "Lewisham Free Grammar School founded by the Revd Abraham Colfe, M.A. Vicar of the Parish. A.D. 1652", and on the rear cover, "Presented by the Worshipful Company of Leathersellers of London, the Trustees". Inside is a book plate inscribed: "Presented to B.A.W. Norrie as a reward for classics". The year of presentation has been erased. Norrie was at Colfe's from 1858 to 1863. He graduated at Trinity College, Cambridge, and became a clergyman in Yorkshire. How or when his prize returned to the school is not known, but it was part of the Library in 1929 when the catalogue of the present Library was established. The school building that Williamson attended was entirely destroyed in the Second World War and with it the Library. Barely a couple of dozen volumes from the old school are now on our shelves and this is the only one with the presentation binding. Its title: *Self Help*, by Samuel Smiles!

Whether the Leathersellers' Company were still presenting copies of *Self Help* in Williamson's day, more than forty years after Norrie, I do not know, but I doubt it. More likely, I would surmise, that this very volume on the school library shelves, looking so important with its inscribed covers displaying the arms of the School and the Company, exuding its Victorian values, caught Williamson's eye and imagination and gave him the idea for the Visitation speech. **Peter M. Heinecke**  
*Photograph on page 44 © Philip Ryder, Colfe's School*

