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EDITORIAL BOARD

Editorial Secretary

Claus Ohrt, Ängen, S-560 34 VISINGSÖ, Sweden
Fax Int. Code +390 40776

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Immanuel Björkhagen

1888-1994



Immanuel Björkhagen, honorary member of the LMS, has died at the age of one hundred and six years. Very few people reach that age, and many of his former pupils must have said to themselves on reading the announcement: "Oh, was he still alive?" Yes, he was, and very much so. Few were the annual meetings of the LMS where he was not present, still keeping a lively interest in his profession at a very great age.

He was a brilliant teacher – I was not one of his pupils, but many of my friends were, and they were very fond of him. They were fond of him, not just because he taught them good spoken English – which was not so common at the time – but because of his great sense of humour and because of the keen interest he took in his pupils.

He was also a tutor of many generations of young teachers. One of them told me that there once arose a lively discussion in the classroom. Manne, as his friends called him, had marked a passage in a written piece of work as wrong. Several pupils protested, showing dictionaries and grammar paragraphs, and finally Manne said: "All right, I will rub out that mark." Then he looked at his watch, and said: "Well, gentlemen," – there were no girls at that time! – "you have now spent eleven minutes convincing me that a passage might be half correct. If you had used a fraction of that time to learn the correct wording instead, both you and I would have profited from it." A good lesson, also for the young teacher who witnessed it!

But his excellent teaching extended far beyond his classroom. His textbooks were widely spread, and for many years quite dominated the market, being the best ones available. They taught good, modern everyday English in instructive texts, mixed up with amusing stories, anecdotes, and quite a few limericks. The first one, in a blue cover, was soon followed by another, for the higher forms, in a red cover, and finally by a sensible and practical grammar, in a green cover. Every teacher of English knew "Bluehagen, Redhagen, and Greenhagen", and used them, year after year.

A very long and useful life has come to an end. Generations of students and teachers miss him, but remember him gratefully – and joyfully.

Erland Kruckenberg

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