

Captivated by a hot ³⁷³ air stream

NON FICTION

By Jove, Biggles, The Life of Captain W. E. Johns by Peter Bradford Ellis and Piers Williams (Corgi, £5.95)

For many of us Biggles was as formative an influence on our childhood as *Just William* and *The Eagle*. His creator, Bill Johns, after service in the Machine Gun Corps in the First World War, then the Flying Training School, then the RAF, took up the pen and wrote 168 books, of which 98 were Biggles stories. This did not leave him time for a lot else. I could have done with a bit more lit. crit. about the literary phenomenon. After the Second World War, Unesco calculated that Biggles was the most popular juvenile fiction hero in the world. But were the books any good, and what explains their attraction? I think that they caught the hot air stream of the new world represented by flying.

Moreover, Too... by Miles Kington (Penguin, £2.50)

... Nevertheless, although politics and hard news are jolly important, not all of us are stern-minded enough to live on an undiluted diet of them. For such weaker-minded brethen and sisters among us, the best bit in *The Times* on scaly days and any old days is the bottom right-hand basement on the page opposite the editorials, where *Moreover Enterprises*



The boys' own hero: Biggles

conduct their business. This selection of *Moreover* covers the field of asphodel from the admirable Mills and Bang imprint to *Unusual Jobs* number 94. Professional hacks among us admire the prodigious output.

On Liberty by John Stuart Mill, edited with an introduction by Gertrude Himmelfarb (Penguin Classics, £2.50)

Those were the days, when philosophers wrote, trumpet-tongued, for the ordinary man rather than for their professional colleagues in their box.

This is one of the foundation documents of western democracy. Dr Himmelfarb discusses Mill's precocious, utilitarian education, and his reverence for the unrivalled wisdom of his wife, hinting at unconscious motives. She records responses to his books, and comments on his fear of the tyranny of the majority. She argues that the inconsistencies that underlie *On Liberty* still complicate the moral and political stance of liberals today.

Philip Howard