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PETER HEBDON: AN APPRECIATION

H.E. Bates

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It must be almost a quarter of a century since I found myself, one winter day, with a spare ticket for an international football match at Wembley, to which I was going with my publisher, Michael Joseph. Like me, Michael

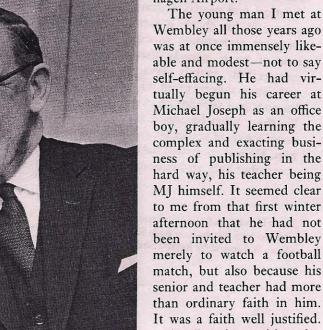
Joseph was an ardent follower of soccer and had himself been a player of some distinction. When I told him of the spare ticket and asked if he would care to suggest someone to whom to give it he at once said, 'Offer it to young Peter Hebdon. He would be both honoured and thrilled.'

'Young Peter Hebdon' duly went with us to Wembley. I have now forgotten the country England played on that day, though I remember well that we won handsomely, as was England's habit in those days, but what I do remember even more vividly was the almost schoolboyish delight with which 'young Peter Hebdon' shared our plea-

sure in an English victory. But this was not all: the afternoon was the beginning of a friendship that lasted, in spite of many vicissitudes and some not altogether happy trials on Peter's side, through all the years until

he tragically died in Copen-

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chael Joseph Ltd, so he and I saw more and more of each other, until we became the firmest and most affectionate of friends. That first impression of mine—namely of an intensely likeable modesty in him—never had any reason to be modified or changed. In these increasingly exacting days publishing tends to grow less and less like the intimately personal business it used to be when I began writing forty-five years ago, but it remains a remarkable fact that Peter, gifted with his matchless personal integrity, never allowed the running of the business side of publishing to obtrude on or disturb in any way our personal relationship. In all these years I cannot recall our ever having a single cross word, or a shadow of dispute, about anything.

With the exception, I should add, of Yorkshire cricket. His devotion to that particular sporting sphere was partly fanatical and partly, I think, deliberately done with his tongue in his cheek: a fact that gave me immense and frequent opportunity to exercise a particular characteristic of mine, namely that of leg-pulling. This, done unmercifully, mainly served to illustrate two other characteristics dominant in his character: a great sense of humour and perhaps an even greater degree of tolerance. To these must be added an even greater one: there was never a hint of malice or even unkindliness in him. He was, as I shall for ever affectionately remember him, an honourable man.

Peter Hebdon had a small operation at a local hospital during 1953 and received this cartoon from Ronald Searle on his departure. (Souls in Torment by Ronald Searle was published in the same year)

