

It was in the fourth year before the close of the nineteenth century that qualities which had combined through time's uncountable millions of years joined together to start me off as a human being. My independent entry into the scheme of things took place in one of a nondescript row of small terrace houses in a street called Pallet Grove in Wood Green, North London.

It could not be expected that the universe was likely to stand still in expectant pause to preface my beginning or that new comets could be arranged to blaze across the skies or stars induced to alter their courses at my coming into the world.

In the more intimate personal world of the family I was born in my explosion into life did not even ripple the normal surface of the families' existence. Indeed, my coming might have passed almost unnoticed if I had not been so urgent about becoming born that I could not wait for the normal procedures to take their course.

I was the fourth child my mother had given birth to in the six years of her married life. My coming was, therefore, hardly more than the continuance of a pattern of genesis whose successive repetitions had become little more than a habit. Nevertheless my urgency might have given rise to more than minimum inconvenience had not my mother by this time become an experienced crafts<sup>woman</sup>~~man~~ in the art of producing her young.

She told me in later years that, in preparation for my coming, she had sent my three brothers, Jack, Hugh, and Ralph, to spend a few

days with her sister Annie. She had also brought in her own mother to help with the household tasks which her pregnancy might prevent her from carrying out herself. Having had no warning that I, who had tolerated my life so far in a condition of admirable placidity, was likely to demonstrate a sudden impatience to come out into the open, she had sent her mother to the butcher's to get twopennyworth of beef to make a stew for my father's dinner. Alone in the house she suddenly became alarmed at the efforts I started to make. Hastily putting on her ~~hat~~ <sup>bonnet</sup> she went out into the street to see if she could get the assistance of a neighbour. Fortunately she met a comfortable, level-headed friend of hers - a Mrs. Williams. Returning to the house together, they were unable to get further than the passage between the front door and the kitchen before the strength of my determination to appear on the scene put an end to any further speculations. The next half hour or so in the passage was occupied with the intimate attention necessary for my safe delivery; all was done with such success that when my grandmother returned with the twopennyworth of beef, Mrs. Williams was able to welcome her at the front door with the news that both mother and child were comfortably settled in bed in the front room.

Neither could the pattern of my father's life be described as revolutionised by my coming. On this, to me, most vitally important day he had gone to work as usual and as no courier heralding my advent had burst through the doors of his workplace to disturb his serene application to the job he had in hand, he had worked on to the end of his normal day. At six-o'-clock he took off his apron, rolled ~~up~~ <sup>this</sup> u

into a bundle and threw it on to his workbench, put on his coat and cap, and dusted the sawdust from the knees of his trousers. Saying " 'night all" to those of his workmates who had not made their exit in advance of him, he unhurriedly made his way home.

Arriving at his own front door, he put his hand through the letter box, pulled the string which opened the door and walked forward over the sacred spot which, an hour or two before, had been hallowed as his birthplace. Passing into the kitchen and finding nobody there, he called out.....

"Where is everybody? Hallo! Nell, where are you?"

A faint call from the front room advised him that something required his attention there. Turning and entering this room he found my mother and an incredibly ugly monstrosity, (which <sup>myself</sup> was me) snuggled up comfortably in bed together.

"Look Charlie," said my mother, "Isn't he beautiful?"

My father wisely did not refute this completely ridiculous assertion, instead with great tact he moved over to the bed, put his hand out and touched my forehead and murmured, "He has a noble brow. Then smiling into my mother's eyes he carefully leant over her and kissed her. Then looking again quizzically at me he said, "Born to be hung I should think."

My mother smiled back. "The last one was to become Prime Minister, if I remember right," she said.

"It's going to be a bit complicated for them, but they'll have plenty of time <sup>later</sup> to work out their respective roles for themselves,"

replied my father. "Otherwise, is everything all right?"

My mother then told him of the primitive obstetric arrangement which the passage had provided, and concluded: "But that Mrs. Will was wonderful, we had no trouble and everything went beautifully."

"Good", said my father. "Well, if you are all right for a bit I'll go and see what I can find to eat, I'm hungry".

"You'll find some stew on the stove, I let Ma go over to Annie" to tell her the news".

So it was I came, my beauty was recorded, my exceptional crani-structure noted and the circumstances of my final demise prophesied

This father of mine, who had taken my introduction to him so nonchalantly, was born in 1866 - thirty years before I came along. My memories of him during my early years, except as a dependable so-  
background to my life, are very hazy, but gradually from bits of in-  
formation I have gathered, or from the many stories he told me in later  
years of his own life, his character and personality has filled out  
and my own reactions to events in my own life have been better under-  
stood accordingly.

*himself*  
He was the third child of a large family of nine, with two sis-  
and four brothers, living most of the time in the Camden Town distr-  
of North London. His father, for most of his life, had been employ-  
as a piano-case maker by one of London's leading piano-making firms  
the middle of the nineteenth century.

At the age of six my father went to a school run by two elderl-  
ladies, his parents paying twopence a week for his education. At

twelve years of age he had learned to read and write and do simple arithmetic and when this stage of his education was satisfactorily completed he was withdrawn from school to go to work as errand boy in a general shop kept by his uncle and aunt.

His job with them was to give any service which might be required from washing the kitchen floor<sup>or</sup>, cleaning his uncle's boots, to assisting in the shop, delivering orders to customers or fetching stock from the various local warehouses. There was nothing Dickensian about this service with his relations. They were in fact kind and considerate to the degree of these virtues<sup>were</sup> considered adequate in those times. *in which* had to work hard. Starting by taking down the shop shutters at seven in the morning and finishing by putting them up again at eight-o'-clock at night.

An errand boy was not the somewhat trifling occupation it may be thought of today. Everything except bulk supplies, which the small shop could rarely afford to take, was fetched from the warehouse by errand boy, as was everything that had to be delivered to the customer; the deliverer had to trot from one address after another on the morning and afternoon rounds, and this lasted often up until late in the evening. For the heavier work there was a handcart. In fact Dad and the handcart were the firm's complete transport department.

The shop where he worked sold very much the same sort of things that Woolworths sell to-day except that almost everything was sold loose. Jams, pickles, and treacle were spooned out of big jars into pots supplied by the customers. Sugar was weighed from the sack and

packed on the spot into blue sugar-paper bags. Pickled cabbage was laid on and screwed up into home-made blue sugar-paper funnels. Peas, rice, lentils, oatmeal, birdseed, were arranged in sacks on each side of the shop floor, and scooped on to the scale-pan, or measured in cylindrical wooden half-pint, pint, or quart measures. Paint, turps, blacking, paraffin all formed part of the stock-in-trade and all added to the rich aroma that always pervaded that sort of general shop.

*? This -  
Whitby  
Basford*

For six years Dad trudged about the streets of old London. one could almost envy him. Transport consisted of horse-drawn vehicles, brewers drays, smart turn-outs, horse buses and the numerous handcarts of the errand boys. No noise in the streets but the clatter of the horses hooves, the ring of the iron-shod wheels of the carts on the stone cobbles of the streets, or the shouts of driver, derogatory or blasphemous salutation, or the challenging cries of errand boys to each other. Behind the main streets there existed a great deal of poverty and destitution. Many half-starved urchins lived among the dust and dirt of the alleyways and courts in an atmosphere of despair, fever and death. But to a healthy, strong youth of sixteen or seventeen, with plenty to do, sufficient good to eat, a good home, and a sanguine disposition it could unroll an exciting vista of a full-blooded life.

When he was nineteen, Dad left his uncle and apprenticed himself with the firm where his father had worked for many years. The family tradition of working in the piano-making industry became too strong

to be denied. There, working for the same firm, was his brother Jack - a fully-fledged craftsman.

To become an apprentice was an adverturous decision for Dad to as he knew quite well that the wages he would receive would be insufficient for him to live on and at that time he had no other resources. He had, however, two ways of making a bit <sup>de extra</sup> more money which made his apprenticeship venture possible. One of these was to work the evening as potman at a working mens' club, and the other was to go up, or take down, the shutters of shops on his way to the club or from his lodgings.

There are not many of these shutters to-day. Some pawnbroker and jewellers still have them and sometimes fish-mongers and a few others. In the 1880's it would seem that not only had many shops timber panels, about six to eight feet long, which were lifted on to a sloped rail at cill level and locked in line over the windows with an iron bar and a padlock, but that quite a number employed casual help to erect and dismantle them at morning and evening, and this my father contracted to do.

His apprenticeship was for <sup>a term of</sup> four years and at the end of that time he became a fully fledged piano action maker. He also, in his following years as journeyman, learned from his father and brother a great deal of their trades of piano case making, which enabled him later to be competent in all the range of the construction work the production of these instruments demanded.

To understand my father one needs to know something about the

political factors which affected the piano making and, in a wider degree, the cabinet making and similar craft trades in London at that period.

At about this time a stream of German craft workers were coming over to London to avoid conscription or political persecution in their own country; many of them were woodworkers, particularly cabinet makers, woodturners, musical instrument makers and similar specialist craftsmen. They brought with them, beside their crafts, a considerable impetus to the ideas on socialism that were then becoming current among the working class craftsmen in cities like Hamburg and Berlin, Stockholm and Amsterdam. The group organisation that loosely catered for these socialist political outlooks, was in this country the Social Democratic Party, which joined up with similar Continental groups into the Social Democratic Federation. This Federation formed the common meeting ground for both Englishmen and foreigners, particularly Germans, in the various branches in London and elsewhere.

What causes (other than his contacts with the craftsmen with whom he worked or whom he met in the working men's club) influenced my father to join the Socialist Democratic Party when he was about twenty years of age I cannot assess, but certainly the development out of religious conformity into idealistic, socialist theory was in the air of those days. My father, a sceptic in all matters of established conformity, was sure to have been almost automatically swept into its stream.

Carried into the stream were perfectionist doctrines of all kinds: Vegetarianism, anti-vivisectionism, spiritualism, anti-vaccination, teetotalism, and a host of other humanitarian, altruistic and abstract



tributaries of thought becoming part of the background against which my father must be seen to be understood.

Of his bachelor years as a fully fledged craftsman with a bit of spending money in his pocket I have only pictures of incidents as related to me when we talked together in later years.

v/f He went to Germany, Hamburg, sometime during his journeyman year and while there got a job in his trade (there was no restriction on European travel in those days) and lodged with a German family where he stayed for about six months. The rates of wages there were low in comparison with the rates of wages in London, about fifteen to eight marks a week as against thirty shillings a week in this country. The lower cost of living in that country bringing this disparity into a relationship of thirty shillings in England to about twenty five shillings in Germany. But as the exchange rate was one mark to one shilling and as my father had no intention of settling in Germany permanently, such saving as he could make of his eighteen marks was insignificant when exchanged back into English money.

He also went to Norway but this time on a purely holiday trip for a fortnight, suffering a very rough passage on his return journey, with many hours in a raging thunderstorm during which he thought his last hours had come, before the ship staggered into Harwich with most of upper works littering large areas of the North Sea.

His chief hobby in those days and, more or less throughout the rest of his life, was reading. In the later half of the nineteenth century, two things co-ordinated to make reading an exciting interest

h for the masses

probably to a greater degree than it had ever been before or is likely to be in the future. One was the tremendous increase in literacy arising from the various Education Acts of that period, and the publication of cheaper books and pamphlets about every subject under the sun and the second was the bursting out of scientific thinking on subjects which previously had been accepted as inexplicable mysteries. Future history may record this period and the early years of the twentieth century as the age of reading for pleasure and enlightenment. Late in the century reading was to become an escape from monotony or an occupation undertaken to acquire specialised knowledge which might prove useful to one's business or career. There was little thought, by most of these readers of my father's time, that the knowledge acquired would qualify them to get a better job, more money, or a higher social status; like a child's discovery of the new and exciting world which being able to read opened up, these new literates discovered a world of infinite depth and scope beyond their dreams, a world where, previously, talking had been the common medium of exchanging ideas.

My father read everything he could lay his hands on, history, geography, science, economics, poetry, fiction, drama and enjoyed his hobby purely from the mental excitement he gathered in the assimilation of knowledge, perhaps sometimes confused, sometimes not adequately digested but always broadening his outlook and developing his personality.

Another factor which had, I think, great significance in this age of reading was the relatively few other avenues of escape from monotony in leisure during the dark evenings or during bad weather. Outdoor

recreation was of course in an entirely different category, as one could pursue an interest in walking, cycling, rowing or similar activities as much as opportunity <sup>provided</sup> ~~arose~~. But the dark evenings had to be filled either by gazing into space, going to bed, or (to any extent that these were available,) going to meetings or to church socials or similar amusements. My father read.

Nevertheless he loved the outdoor life and enjoyed long walks into the countryside which was so much nearer the suburbs of that much smaller London than it is to-day. Many Sundays in summer time he has told me, he would go out on his pennyfarthing bicycle, to Richmond, Watford, Guildford, or Dorking, or to the upper reaches of the Thames at Virginia Water, Boulter's Lock, or Maidstone, and there would take out a punt or rowing boat to glide happily over the quiet waters. Always on these occasions there was a destination which included a cosy country pub for some beer and some bread and cheese. I could relive my father's joy in those days. The bright sunshine on the hard dusty road, the virile satisfaction in having the strength to force the large wheel of the bicycle up the inclines, and then with feet spread out, to rattle and bump down the hills, the welcomed thirst building up to a climax round the last bend urging one on to make one last spurt. Finally to throw oneself off the back of the bicycle and enter into the pub's shady interior there laying down twopence and quaffing a pint of the best. /

During his bachelor years he sometimes walked home in the company of a young apprentice who worked at the same factory as himself.

quote /

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This was  
life in  
those days

one occasion his companion invited him into his house to meet the family. The apprentice's name was Frank Bartlett, and Dad met Frank father and mother, and his elder sister Nell, and two younger sisters Annie and Grace. From popping in to see the family to staying to have a cup of tea, to staying <sup>over</sup> to have a meal, to spending an evening to taking Nellie out for a walk, to being Nellie's young man, (was) a sequence of events millions of times repeated with only minor variations in all parts of the world as a prelude to marriage.

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Dad was twenty four years old when he first met Nellie Bartlett and wasn't, I gather, a bad looking young fellow. He would be about five foot three tall, slightly built except that his shoulders were broader and more powerful than might have been expected. He had regular clear-cut features, tolerant, slightly-humorous grey eyes, and wore a ginger moustache. His hair was dark chestnut, covering a cranium which was noticeably broad at the back.

Mum was also small, not above five feet tall, with dark eyes in small-featured winsome face, framed in a mass of almost black hair which was tied in a knot at the back of her head. She had a neat trim figure and was a veritable dynamo of energy and vitality. She was a very determined little person and inclined to be managing.

Nellie Bartlett and Charlie Goss walked out together. They were both of a cheerful disposition and about equal in intelligence. They were approximately of the same social strata, so that words and inferences between them had similar meanings. No fairy story of a match between the most beautiful princess in all the world, and the gallant prince in Christendom, could have presented a better foundation for a 'living happily ever after' conclusion. In addition, as is traditional with every fairy story, Mr. Bartlett fulfilled the role of the wicked ogre. The story logically concluded with the rescuing of the fair maiden from her ogre father and with this also the rescuing of the fair maiden's relatives to add merit to the task.

The job my father had thus undertaken was simple and traditional. This was to find an unoccupied castle, pay the rent, and take up occu

marry the princess and take her and her mother, her brother and her sisters to live in it. The furnishing of the castle was simple also starting with the nocturnal absconding from the ogre's castle of a few beds and some odds and ends of furniture, augmenting this with a few orange boxes suitably draped with remnants of cretonne curtaining and the new castle was complete; to a skilled wood craftsman and his apprentice brother-in-law, no unsurmountable difficulties would be likely to arise to prevent them being able later to transform the castle into a palace.

The relief of Mr. Bartlett on returning to his home to find his long-suffering wife had left him and so freed him from any responsibilities he might have felt he had for her can be imagined.

The loss of the furniture was also of no disadvantage as it reduced the inconvenience he was likely to suffer in disposing of the remains before he could completely shake the dust of the old life from his feet.

For twenty-two years he had carried his load of matrimonial cares and now suddenly and unexpectedly a young Sir Galahad had whipped in and taken the father's burden on his own young shoulders and merrily danced away. How he must have laughed inwardly when he returned to the expansive atmosphere of his local temple of solace, and made lugubrious from semi-intoxication, he wept before his friends while he regaled with the story of how badly he had been treated by his cherished wife and ungrateful children.

In the years following my father's elopement little was ever heard of this ancestor of mine by the family who abandoned him. From time

time, unconfirmed reports of <sup>his</sup> having been seen, trickled through to our family circle, were talked about cursorily amongst us and then forgotten. Somewhere at sometime he must have died but something of his character and personality, and something of himself will have been passed on via my mother to her children and to me and through me to my children and grandchildren into posterity. Traits modified and intangibly coalesced with other streams of inheritance possibly sometimes strained out pure and unalloyed in flashes of Francis John Bartlett in us in ours and in the world to come.

And what of Sir Galahad. A three roomed flat in Camden Town with a dark scullery and an outside w.c. was his castle, and a new joy and justification in life in matrimony. The future was a silver thread lighted pathway going over hill and dale into a future which looked brighter and brighter as it disappeared into the distance where lay socialism and the glorious millenium. His burden was accepted and day to day acceptance made him a happy man.

My grandma who at the time of my birth was out shopping for two pennyworth of beef for my father's dinner, did not really register with me as a significant part of my life until I was about seven years old and only completely when she came to live permanently with us about ten years later. Although she would be in her early fifties when I first saw her, my memory of her has always been of a little old lady, grey, insignificant and very deaf. A little mousy unobtrusive woman overshadowed by my mother, not physically - my mother was and is a tiny woman - but in strength and personality.

My earliest personal memory of her was when, as in my own case, she came to stay with us at a time which coincided with my mother giving birth to one of us children, and occurred when I was about seven years old. The occasion of our introduction was unfortunate. On my way home from school I had become increasingly dominated by an urge to relieve myself, before nature, not to be denied, dirtied my trousers. Cautiously at first trying to sublimate the urge by ignoring it I had not changed my walking pace, but gradually, more pressed, I had started to run until in a panic over the last few yards to my house, I hurled myself forward and in at our front gate. The house where we lived was set back behind a railing topped wall and a high privet hedge. A narrow path ran between this hedge and the front bay window. This ended in a small completely hidden alcove which occupied the space between the end of our bay window and the party privet hedge of our door neighbour. Almost at the last gasp, I swung in through our gate and dropping my trousers on the way, threw myself past the bay window where, with no time to spare, I dropped my load in the alcove. It was when I came out from my concealed lavatory that I met my grandmother who was at that moment issuing out of our front door and descending the steps to the path, where she immediately saw me coming out of my sanctuary. Questions and answers followed. On her side questions suggesting she was convinced I had been engaged in some very dubious activity, on my side the first explanation (other than the truth) that came into my head. I told her I was engaged in selecting some privet twigs from the hedge which my teacher had asked me to take to school that afternoon, an



explanation that appeared to satisfy her.

As I remember her then, my grandmother had a rather sweet face surmounted by grey hair covered generally by a lace fringed black bonnet. Her upper torso was covered by a black satin bodice with sleeves of the same material coming completely down to her wrists and tightly buttoned there. This satin was decorated with an intricate design of metal sequins. Below the torso was a voluted and inverted bell of black satin which descended to the ground. This, when she moved, spread out around her or trailed in her rear. Beneath this mass of black material there was no evidence of any structural formation. The only evidence one could have on that subject was the presence at the side of the armchair at which she usually sat, of a pair of elastic sided boots, which when she went out were replaced by a pair of comfortable soft slippers.

It was later on when I was with her on the road sloping down from Stroud Green Station that I became conscious of the sadness of someone other than myself, and coupled with it my first feelings of pity and compassion.

Alongside the pavements at each side of the road were rows of small rather tired looking shops, boot repairers, secondhand dealers, rag shops, pawn shops, small ill-lit grocers and chandler shops, old clothing dealers and a pub or two. It was raining and the roads and paths were wet and muddy. I wore rubber shoes called plimssoles which caused my feet to be cold and wet as they squelched along the sloppy pavements. Grandma was holding my hand. Why we were there I cannot now remember.

*Switzerland  
at school  
walked*

but I think we must have been waiting for either my father or my mother to come from somewhere to meet us.

It was late, and the shop lights merely existed to tell any chance pedestrian that the lit shop was still open. The hand in mine shivered and I knew that my grandmother was human and cold and sad, and I knew then that the long draggling dress, which had at some unexpected twist slapped my bare legs, was a soaking muddy mess. Previously I had only known my own sadness and discomfort. Now for the first time I came to realize that grown-ups could also be unhappy, perhaps more deeply unhappy than I had ever been.

There is much speculation as to when memory can first be registered and take permanent place in our minds, ready at will to be placed like old record on the turntable of our reminiscences. It probably varies very considerably from one person to another, but the following scene registered <sup>with striking impact upon</sup> ~~through~~ all my senses <sup>encompassing a period</sup> ~~of a time~~ when I lived at Pallet Grove sometime before I was two years old. *prior to my second birthday.*

I was in a narrow scullery filled with steam. The whole atmosphere reaked with <sup>of</sup> washing, soap, suds, warm water and steam. I was sitting on the step of the open scullery door, playing with a little <sup>a mechanical</sup> toy well. There was a tin bucket in the well attached to a roller which I could turn by means of a little handle. I was intently occupied in bucket the water from the well and tipping the contents into a tin basin. When the well was emptied I refilled it from the tin basin and started the process all over again.

This episode has neither beginning nor end, but, considered in its symbolic form, that childish exercise might be thought of as epitomising the whole of life's activity from the cradle to the grave.

Thinking back over <sup>these and later years of</sup> my early childhood years I get an all pervading sense of wellbeing, a feeling that all was comfort, warmth and security. I can remember instances of pain and shock, but never of cold, of dull skies or miserable days. In those years there must have been winters but I cannot recall a day of them, but what does come back to me are memories of strong sunlight and deep shadow, tall hollyhocks nodding me out of a neighbour's front garden, and the feeling of warm dust caressing my naked toes when I pressed my feet into the dusty gutter the side of the road.

Before I was two, my family moved to a house in St. Pauls  
Road, New Southgate and from out of the years that we lived  
~~I~~ I can recall too a hot summers day and being seated on the flag  
pavement outside our local baker's shop. I think on this occasion  
must have been dressed in a little shift with no other clothes beneath  
for I can distinctly remember the warmth of the flagstone on my bare  
bottom. From the grating in front of me <sup>issued</sup> came all the lovely bakehouse  
<sup>aromas</sup> smells of new bread and cake, of hot currants, coc<sup>o</sup>nut and raspber  
jam, a feast of <sup>alluring aromas</sup> smells. With me also were hosts of wasps who were  
enjoying the bakehouse atmosphere, hovering, diving, zigzagging here  
there with sharp quick dartings interspersed with pedestrian inspection  
of the grating bars; in and out with noisy buzzing they whirled about  
their black and yellow striped rear halves bending down at right angles  
as they put on the brakes, their black hammer-heads prodding and feeling  
before with angry buzz they again charged through the grating bars into  
the hot steaming darkness below. They never stung me as I was on the  
best of terms with them; we each formed a part of each others' <sup>?</sup> schemes  
and all enjoyed the bakehouse smell and the warmth and sunshine together.  
Perhaps in that lay my immunity.

Running along at the back of the bakery was a slaughterhouse.  
I don't think at that time I ever clearly connected the animals being  
driven down the passage to the rear entrance, or the horrible noises  
that came out from there, with the meat hanging in the butcher's shop  
next door, and the processes of killing and the display of killed  
carcasses. But I do recall the nauseating smells that wafted out from  
that slaughter house and the ghoulish men in bloody aprons coming out  
through the strong, double doors <sup>to throw</sup> and throwing buckets of water and

cabolic about and lustily sweeping the alleyways and the bloody inter  
and the pretty coloured pools of cabolic and blood and water left in  
hollows of the paving.

The smells I identified in those days were not the weak anaemic  
smells I know to-day, but good honest full-blooded ones. In my late  
years smells have become faint - meagre whiffs. A hedge of lavender  
a scented cube in a bath of hot water, a field of rotting cabbages  
occasionally register with me in an otherwise almost scentless world.  
But the old smells, mignonette, carraway seeds, grass, hay, tar, carb  
washing day, new bread, clean sheets, and a thousand others came out  
clearly and distinctly in a cleaner and purer air.

We are told that dogs live in a world of smells; so it is with  
child in his first years, adjusting sight and touch to his register of  
identity by smell. I can remember now the smell of grass as it was  
when, as a little boy, I rolled down a bank on a very hot day in summer  
my whole body thrashing the long grass and its scent coming up in waves  
and enveloping me.

~~Before I was two, my family moved to a house in St. Paul's Road,~~  
~~New Southgate.~~ <sup>at St Paul's Road</sup> In our garden we had a tortoise I never knew why.  
Possibly it was bought for my interest and education. It ate lettuce  
which I was induced to feed it with. I thought it an ugly, silly,  
awkward thing and quite out of place in my garden. It died through  
being shut up in a shed among a lot of bamboo poles where it had gone  
to hibernate through the winter. How much it enjoyed life, or how  
it suffered, I never knew, but I never thought there was much profit

either for tortoises or humans in getting together.

On one side of our garden was ~~was~~<sup>a</sup> close-boarded fence which divided us off from the playground of the infants' school next door. Like smells, there can be a quality about sounds which make them solid and three-dimensional. The sounds of children in an enclosed playground can have such a quality. There is a rhythm which for no apparent reason rises or falls in volume, a sharpness like hands clapped in an empty room or a murmur like the hum of a beehive. In my garden with its tufts of coarse grass, the few dried-up cabbage stalks, the bed of mignonette and the tired creeper clinging desperately to the end wall, I would be alone with the sunshine and the silence and the dust. Suddenly, into the silence there would come a grating sound followed by several sharp cracks then by a medley of buzzing noises interspersed by a series of sharp tapping sounds that translated ~~itself~~<sup>themselves</sup> into the hum of voices breaking through like the sounds of raindrops beating on to a tin roof. The volume increases and the sounds mass together then disintegrate again into the separate sounds of the scrunching of gravel and of many running feet, sharp cries, children's screams.

It's the children's playtime. The school doors have been thrown wide open. First the small feet tap on the stone steps then grate on the gravel on the playground proper. Individual sounds first, then ~~quantatively~~<sup>quantitatively</sup> with a loss of identity in the scrambled sounds. A little behind the footsteps come the <sup>vocal</sup> voice sounds; a shout, a cry, a <sup>little</sup> girl's scream, more and more shouts all joining together into rhythm with the tapping, and gravel-crunching noises, more and more confused noise, louder and louder up to a crescendo. Then all falls away to rise again and again as the concentration sweeps from one corner of the playground

to another.

My silent garden basking in the sun being suddenly saturated with the sounds coming from over the fence becomes like the inside of a drum reverberating with the noises beaten into it from outside. The wooden fences are sounding boards that beat the noises about, throw them at the house wall that throws them back again at the garden and at me. As suddenly as it came it departs. The bright clear note of a handbell rings out. Like a sharp hose playing on a fire dowsing the flames the noises diminish, spark up in little flickers, die, flicker again, sigh and pass away. The doors clang to. The outer world departs leaving my garden in total silence once again.

My mother comes into the picture as someone in a frilly white apron with broad white tapes that are tied together in a bow behind, and a voice humming a song. There is a kitchen and a brown American cloth covered table, and sunshine flooding in from the garden and some peas popping into a colander. I think I must have failed to negotiate the step properly and found that the tiled kitchen floor had no construction for little boys' backs and shoulders. I probably burst out with wild yells of anguish. The apron and a pair of arms come down to me and raise me up and <sup>fe</sup> comfort me. The lady who sang and popped peas from the colander gives me a handful of raw peas to eat and so diverts my sobbing and, in my comfort, my mother breaks through from being an element in the pattern of accepted wellbeing to becoming a solid personality that was to last me all my life.

At the front door of our house was a tiny piece of ground enclosed by a low wall and a low wooden gate. The wall, the gate and the

enclosure, were to give the house a standing which a house flat on the pavement could not claim. The enclosure was useless as a garden plot, being too small, too enclosed, too dank to grow anything. The gate, too, was useless except to complete the tiny enclosure and to provide me with a gate to swing on. From the dull routine of sliding and crawling or toddling from place to place I could climb up on to this machine to achieve a new form of locomotion, on which I moved with the changing balance of my weight. I was not being wheeled in a perambulator cart. I imagined myself mounted on a spirited steed who galloped faster and faster with the sway of my body. Being mounted and encouraged to go faster my steed refused to stop, got out of control until at last in a panic throwing my weight the wrong way it flung me off through the air over the top of the gate and down on to the hard unyielding pavement on its other side. Again the apron enfolds me, the warm arms comfort me as I am petted and kissed better and taken indoors to be patched. But soon again a chance comes. The front door is open and, the ride forgotten, my spirited mount lures me to ride again. Again I climb on again I swing and again I fall off.

Fear and horror gripping the stomach and twisting the bowels, the cold, clammy brow, the bursting tension of fear almost too great to be born, perhaps the child or the savage can feel these as no other can. In the long lush grass scented with meadowsweet and sorrel a long, slithy<sup>er</sup>, greeny snake. Three or four big boys <sup>are</sup> and teasing and jabbing it with a long stick at the side of the ditch in the long grass. I am made to come and see it. Shrinking with fright I am



made to touch it. It writhes. I fall over it down into the ditch. The snake falls over me and I feel its cold body against my legs, fear and horror blot everything out. Memory returns with my stumble along a black ash pathway at the side of a railway, a post and rail fence on one side, a dock-filled ditch on the other. The telegraph wires sing with a high pitched monotonous vibrating sound which comes down the poles and fills the air with warning. I see myself a little boy, the sound, kindly, solid world shattered to make a world of black ash, snakes, and tall squelchy dock leaves, the whole presenting a never to be forgotten picture which imprints itself on my mind and teaches me the meaning of fear.

Dook was a God. He was the biggest, strongest, kindest God that ever was. I never knew his correct name, his parents or his what he did or where he came from. Except for himself only one other thing identified him, he had a horrible devilish cruel, ugly younger brother, sufficient my senior, and sufficiently stronger and bigger than I was to be able to bully me. He once put some horse manure into my mouth when, at his behest, I had "shut my eyes and opened my mouth to see what God would send me"; he was my first knowledge that there could be people in my world who did not wish well and who could be unkind. But Dook would lift me in his great strong arms and poise me on his shoulders with my legs around his neck and my feet hammering his chest. Then grasping my hands in his he would go galloping down the road, with me shouting with all hysterical glee from the rich joy of being a 'Flying Angel'. I

up there on high looking down upon the head of my God/and I was safe with him and I was very, very happy.

Hobson's shop on the corner of St. Paul's Road - the cul-de-sac where I lived - was a general shop. To enter it one had to climb three semi-circular steps to a glass panelled door which was opened by pressing a brass thumb latch. I could not reach up to the latch to properly master opening the door, but Dook could. Lowering me from my 'Flying Angel' position we entered Hobson's shop hand in hand to meet by the combined smells of merchandise from half the countries of the world.

Among the things that Mr. Hobson sold were a large variety of sweets including special items like icing sugar mice with white striped tails, bands, ropes and ribbons of black liquorice, aniseed balls and treacle toffee. To me the most exciting of his sweets was an item called a sherbert sucker. It consisted of a little bag of sherbert with a tube of liquorice. Through the tube one sucked the dry sherbert then ate up the sherbert coated liquorice tube, finishing by licking out the remaining sherbert grains from the paper bag. It was this that confirmed Dook in his exalted Godly status. He would complete our tour of the heavens by bringing me to the feast, then buying me a farthing sherbert sucker. I entered paradise.

In later years my father would amuse us when anything offended his sense of justice, or any invention or gadget failed to act to his satisfaction, by thinking up especially horrible tortures to be inflicted on the cause of the annoyance. The inventors of barbed

wire, collar studs, noisy cisterns, trouser turn-ups were some of the candidates for his punishments. But my memories of that time not call to mind his ever giving thought to the excruciating agony which the slate and the slate pencil have inflicted on young children. Nor can I now think had he done so how he would have made the punishment fit the crime.

One day, when the peace of my garden was being shattered by the cacophony of sounds which playtime brought from over the fence, I was lifted up to see the milling, shrieking pack of mother's darlings who were making all the noise. The guardians of these little savages, who patrolled the playground to prevent the more ghastly types of maiming or murder among their charges, paused to chat to my mother. They very naturally remarked upon the bright, beautiful and intelligent child my mother was holding, going on from this to the suggestions that I might like to come to school. The idea that I might like to be projected into the maelstrom of wild life on the other side of the fence, must have appealed to some otherwise dormant streak of adventure in me because I <sup>must have</sup> registered acceptance of the suggestion.

How cruel the kindly can be not only to others but to themselves. Teachers are all so kind, they say to themselves that they love children, that children need teaching, that however tired and distracted, overworked and over worried they the teachers are, the child grave or gay, happy or miserable who is not within their fold should be brought into it to the greater glory of education, and the advancement

of Godliness.

How cruel to a happy but solitary child to show him a host of other children seemingly happy, laughing, shouting, running and playing together, and saying to the child, "Would you like to go and play with them?". The child, eagerly following the swift manoeuvres of his promised playfellows, nods his head. By this slight and almost automatic movement he gives away his birthright, and projects himself out of the sinless irresponsibility of the completely depend<sup>ant</sup> child, into doing, thinking, living on a world of rules, codes and morals, of civilisation and obedience from out of which he must be content to squeeze rare strains of pleasure, and bare the stigma of sin if he enjoys himself too much.

A bare room with bare floor boards so much scrubbed that the hard spruce knots hump the surface. Long, hard forms without back hard plastered walls painted in chocolate brown up to the window sills and dark green above. Thirty or so toddlers seated on the forms, each clumsily holding a slate against his knees and scratching the slate with a screaming pencil, producing the thin nerve-twangin sound which vibrates in the ear and scrapes the raw nerve ends. School, the aching bottom, each cheek of each little rump tested to the limit of endurance before swaying to its fellow for relief. The moving back of the teacher as she chalks marks on the blackboard registers a new remoteness to the child, for whom all previous backs that have controlled his life were familiar, personal backs. "Quiet children, quiet," The flies hum and the bluebottle buzzes

against the high window. Thirty little heads move in their direction  
"Attention now children." Thirty little heads swing back again.  
"D O G dog. Now on your slates, as I have written it on the black  
board. Deee, Oooo, Geee, dog." Outside, the smells of grass and  
meadowseet, and Mummy shelling peas, a dusty garden and the memory of  
the feel of bare feet in muddy pools. Inside a box that one cannot  
out of, an unfamiliar, unloved pair of shoulders, the screech of slate  
pencils and the buzz of a bluebottle. The betrayal of a child who  
only agreed to play with the children in the playground.

The expansion of London has taken place by the encircling of the original centre by ring after ring of new development, showing in each case in its housing the social changes which have taken place before the bursting of the previous ring.

During the middle of the nineteenth century London's increasing wealth and its increasing population created another significant architectural and social ring. North and South of the Thames, for a distance of four to five miles from the river, a building belt developed in the form of streets and streets of almost exactly similar houses, all catering for the expansion of the then middle-class.

The increasing affluence that the industrial era was bringing to London, particularly into the pockets of the rising middle class, gave rise to desires among them to move into accommodation as closely resembling the type they believed that <sup>the</sup> higher social strata enjoyed.

The architectural <sup>planning that catered for</sup> satisfaction of these demands lay in the type of house, (thousands and thousands of which) were built in areas like Sydenham, Penge, Dulwich, and Clapham in the south, and Tottenham, Finchley and Maida Vale in the north, at and around this period.

Fronting the pavement was a low stone-coped wall supporting a wrought iron fence and gate, each gate and fence being exactly similar ~~for each house~~ and for the whole <sup>of</sup> the length of each side of the whole of the streets so built up. This wall and fence being to prevent pedestrians from falling into the basement area which at a level occupied the fronts of every house. Inside each gate a short flight of wide stone steps led to a front entrance porch on the ground

floor and another narrower flight descended to the basement to a door hidden beneath the porch landing above.

The layout of the accommodation in the basement would be very largely similar to the main structure of the house above except that the room spaces would be restricted in their use, to coal cellars, storage areas, a living room containing a heavy cast-iron kitchen range, a scullery for food preparation, clothes boiler and pot washing facilities and a larder. At the rear the basement opened out into a paved area about six feet wide from which an earth bank rose to the garden above. An outbuilding in this yard formed a solid projection supporting a conservatory for the family of the ground floor above, and an access directly into the garden at the higher level. The outbuilding contained at basement level a W.C. and a tool shed.

At the ground floor there was a drawing room with behind that a living room and a dining room.

The first floor contained one large bedroom and as many small ones as could possibly be squeezed into the remaining space except for room for a bathroom and lavatory at the head of the stairs. From the first floor level a stair rose to the attic whose total floor space was restricted by being built partly in the roof space. This attic was lit by dormer windows at back and front placed high above the attic floor level.

The middle-class family occupied the ground and first floor. Any suggestion that its members should do any manual work other than keep themselves clean was inimical to the gentry status values they

were trying to emulate. Their problems were overcome by employing 'a maid'.

Up and down the stairs 'the maid', who was paid a few pounds a year for her services, toiled from early morning until late at night for almost the whole of the seven days of each week and for fifty two weeks of each year. She cooked, did the washing, cleaned the house, emptied the slops, made the beds and, at the insistent call of one of a row of bells which hung from springs from her basement ceiling, would ascend to the floors above to minister to the wants of her mistress, her master, or any other members of the family. Up and down, up and down all day long until the last requirements of the family having been ministered to she lit her candle and staggered to bed in her dark, cold attic.

This was the pattern in thousands of these similar dwellings of the aspiring middle class of that era in the 'residential' districts of London.

As time went on better transport facilities allowed easier access to the expanding suburbs being built on the fringes of the previous belt. To the new development moved the more successful of the middle class, leaving their less successful colleagues behind, who tightened their belts, sub-let part of their houses to a house-hungry working class population pressing in to occupy any vacant ones. In such manner sometimes three or even four families were thereby housed one on each floor and with the poorest in the basement.



It was to live in the basement of one of these houses - 36a Almington Street, Tottenham - late in 1901, my family moved from New Southgate when I was ~~just turned~~<sup>nearly</sup> five years old.

The period of our stay in Almington Street was one of two during my childhood when we as a family suffered the evils of extreme poverty. My father, being out of work, we had insufficient food, inadequate clothing and bedding, and the poorest of accommodation. We were also strangers in the locality in which we lived and so without kindly neighbours, friends or relations who might have helped us. So much was this so that we children felt the ills of poverty sinking into our immature bones and dominating our budding minds.

To make matters worse during our stay there, something went wrong with the drains, necessitating trenches being dug down the whole length of the garden. The muck from this trench filling the whole of the garden except for a walkway by the wall underneath the backroom window. The muck was yellow clay with streaks of blue grey in it, this possibly becoming discoloured in this way from the sewer leaks which had given rise to the repair work becoming necessary. The window to the back room had a low sill and using this as a modelling board I moulded there vast quantities of marbles of many different sizes, some larger and some smaller and not always spherical, some of these I stuck together to make little figures, probably discovering the art forms among early savage tribes, who probably dug their first drain to make their first models.

The result of my activities should have been an early and

and painful death from typhoid, or tetanus, diphtheria or dysentery  
or having had these and been dragged back from the edge of the grave  
I should have become an Einstein or a Henry Moore. None of these  
conditions seem happily or unhappily to have resulted.

Frisby Street and Sygismund Street which were the last two streets  
entering from the left at the bottom of Almington Street would be,  
any but their residents, indistinguishable the one from the other.  
Yet to the youths who resided there, there must have been some advantages  
(ages of location, standing, or status, as certain elements in the  
respective streets formed themselves into the Frisby Street gang and  
the Sygismund Street gang and occasionally staged a street fight and  
themselves to prevent either side getting an overwhelming sense of  
own superiority.

Occasionally the urge would come to raid into the neighbouring  
street to impress their neighbours with the strength, bravery and  
courage of their own mob, and the superiority of their armaments,  
their cause, or their moral right to being recognised as the cock  
street gang in that locality.

The raid having been decided upon by the gang leader, spies were  
sent out to reconnoitre; if the enemy force was thought to be less  
concentrated or less powerful than their own, the fight was on.  
Each respective leader would assemble his hosts, look to the sticks  
and stones necessary to the foray, and brandishing a big stick him-  
self would head a rather ragged, triangular formation round the top  
of the next street to rush the enemy post.

To those who took part in the street fights of those days the affair was little enough, little damage was done to others than themselves, and this rarely produced one hospital case. A few bruises, a cut cheek, a bloody nose and a few extra tears in already dilapidated clothing was about all. But to the respectable local residents the affray was worrying and unsettling and to the womenfolk fearful. To a little boy not quite five who had no reason to think the world was other than a stable, friendly place, the shell of his illusions were burst asunder and his world became chaos.

My mother had, I think, gone out for the day to do some dress-making and left her three younger children in charge of my eldest brother Jack. On this occasion, after doing her work, she would have hoped to collect payment and then buy some food for us on her way home. My father had gone some distance away to look for work and had not returned. Bunched together, my brothers and I, with David in the go-cart, stood at the corner of a street waiting for our mother's return. Nothing was happening, we were cold and miserable and very hungry but we were patient. Then in some indefinable way an atmosphere seemed to be created, a tension that disturbed the nerves. Sounds of running feet could be heard coming from a distance, people stopping, listening, hurrying, as the sounds came closer, until round the corner, one then two..... then half a dozen men came running while from another corner another body of men debouched. The two gangs met and clashed, struggled together, threw each other on to the ground, kicked, fought, struck at each other with sticks, grim,

hateful bloody faces, a melee of flying legs and arms. In the centre of this fo<sup>r</sup>ary were we four boys, the elder closely guarding the other<sup>s</sup> and squeezed back tightly against the railings and barrac by the go-cart, while the bloody fight went on around us. How long it lasted I do not remember; none of us were hurt and our waiting finally rewarded by the appearance of my father coming from the opposite direction from that from which he might have been expected. But for me a little boy's safe world had been burst apart that even and nightmares, dreams, exaggerations and travesties of the actual happenings stayed with me throughout many coming years.

Dad liked a drink, and after he had had one or two was the most happy and charming father children could ever have wished for. His arrival, which rescued us from the street fight, was such an occasion, and in his expansive mood soon surrounded us in an atmosphere of new joy and hope. Lest I should give the impression that my father, out of work and penniless, was a bad father to leave his family in penury, and then come home drunk having cadged or borrowed or stolen the means to get the drink, let me say at once that this was not the case. My mother was always firm in the belief that before things got desperate something would turn up. As things must<sup>often</sup> have been near the worst so that something had to turn up or would have gone bust, she was proved right again.

Dad had the very best of reasons for indulging in a pint on that day. He had got a job and was to start on the following Monday, and on the strength of this had been around to a pal and borrowed some

money off him. Feeling that his luck must now be in and should be given a chance to show its metal, he indulged in another great joy of his life and went to the races. There was a race meeting that day at Alexander Park, and there, by the judicious placing of bobs *Alexander* he had won enough to recognise that the Gods deserved some slight libation for glancing in his direction after such a long period of desertion. So he'd had a drink or two. The world, temporarily at least, was a good place to live in and of much significance in that good place was his lovely wife and charming children, so on the way home he had bought some groceries to feed them all with. My mother too when she joined us all later, had had a days work for which she had been paid a few shillings so once again we were a prosperous and united family.

The second incident that comes to my memory from the few months we lived in Almington Street was one that did not concern either Dad or Mum but my Grandmother. I was at that time barely five years old, nevertheless my grandma, who must have come to stay with us to help with the housework while Mum went out dressmaking, sent me to greengrocers some streets away to get some potatoes. What weight potatoes I was instructed to get I cannot now remember, but it was certainly more than I could reasonably hope to carry home. From the shop I got them across the road on to the opposite pavement and then finding I could not carry them, I dragged them along in the string bag I had as a carrier. The distance to my home was possibly not more than a quarter of a mile, but to a little boy dragging a heavy

load it seemed an almost endless journey. A short drag at the load had to be followed by a rest for which I sat down at the curbside where I pondered on the mysterious world of people who came out of the houses or passed up or down the road before me. It was during one of these rests that my attention became focussed on a dustcart in the street running at right angles to the curb where I was sitting. The two dustmen came eventually to the last house but one and were in the act of disposing of the contents of a tin bath and a battered basin. Their procedure, which fascinated me, was the way they deftly turned over the rubbish to see if anything of value was retrievable before hoisting the stuff into the cart. In their final consignments one of the men pulled out an object and, turning it in his hands, called to his partner to see what he had got. For a few moments they looked at it and laughed and were about to throw it in with the rest when they saw the little urchin who was sitting on the curb opposite watching them. Holding up the object they beckoned me over. After a moments hesitation I left my string bag and went across. Up to that time I had no inkling of what the object could be. It was a stuffed owl on a turned wooden base in a state of fairly good preservation. It was a wonderful thing in my eyes. Being offered it, I gladly took it and shaking the dust off it carried it away.

I remember no more of how I got that owl and the potatoes home. But twenty years later when I was leaving home to get married my mother said to me, "Aren't you going to take your owl?" It was then with some reluctance I had to remark that the poor thing was a bit <sup>wangy</sup> mouldy.

and perhaps might now be consigned to the dustbin from which fate I had rescued it twenty years previously.

My father had a job again and moving to a better house was immediately undertaken. Moving house, however trying to parents, was to me a wonderful and memorable occasion. Helping to pack up our things in boxes, buckets, bowls, and the tin bath, carrying boxes or discovering toys long hidden at the back of cupboards or drawers was a very exciting business. The bustle, the scrappy meals when Mum had to waive her usually strictly diatetic regime and provide something tasty not usually included in our menu, such as biscuits or cake, or even sausages or meat pies or such like was great fun. In the packing up the family worked on throughout the whole day, until my father accompanied by a pal came home in the evening. They then started work and got the bedsteads down and ready for transport, and rolled up the bedding for my mother to tie into bundles. Then came the furniture van.

Nearly all moving jobs in those days were done in the evening among people like ourselves, as the heads of the households could not afford to lose the time if they were working. Also, a cheap line of transport could often be arranged with a local coal merchant or grocer, not counting those occasions when arrears of rent made a quick get-away during the hours of darkness the most tactful manoeuvre.

The man with the van was properly supervised by the five year old as he went through the operation of giving oats to his horse, loosening the girths and seeing that the brake on the van was holding.

He then came into the house to inspect the load he had to take, and to tell Dad what was to be the order of loading. I then immediately appointed myself to the post of general nuisance by insisting on carrying out to the van all the small things I could lay hands on and in doing so being frequently told "For goodness sake child do get out from under everybody's feet," But such admonitions were insufficient to restrain a widely excited little boy from entering with complete dedication to such a task as moving all the household furniture. Carrying everything I could get hold of I dashed with it to the van to find inevitably it was not the thing immediately wanted, and I had to be constrained to put it down by the curbside or hang it on to the railings.

Finally the lino was rolled up and pushed in over the top of the piled furniture. The problem of the furniture being disposed of, the problem of the transport of the family remained. But this was overcome with much good will on the driver's part, by leaving the tail-board down on the hook and chains and <sup>tying</sup> ~~tying~~ the perambulator on to the tailboard with the clothes line. David, the baby, was put in the pram, Jack was told to climb up inside and sit on a box and hold on to the pram, Ralph was wriggled up into a corner of the bed between that and the roof, and I sat on the tailboard with my little legs nearly touching the ground. Dad, Mum and the friend who had come to help, went off as soon as the van was loaded to get to the house as quickly as possible, taking a few groceries and a kettle and a pan with them to have something ready for us when we arrived.



The journey was a passage through fairland. It was dark when we started and had rained but was now clear. The road glistened in the paths of the street lamps. The shops threw their beams of light across the pavements. Passing through the main shopping centre to the sound of the clip-clopping of the horses' hooves, I drank in the colourful scene where men, women and children, moving in the yellow light from shop doors and windows, hustled and jostled each other and went in and out of the shops to make late purchases; and all looked like a mass of bees hovering about and darting in and out of the doors of their hives.

Coming up behind us, a hansom cab entered my field of vision from a distance, and I watched it with growing excitement as, gradually overtaking us, it twisted its way past other vehicles and through unhurrying pedestrians. Larger and larger until the horse could be seen head up, nostrils distended and forelegs raised high dashing towards me, the driver leaning forward and shaking the reins and urging him on. Then suddenly when they were almost upon us with a sudden swerve they twisted to one side and passed us at a gallop. The steaming, glistening horse and its swaying carriage making a brave sight that might easily have been thought of as a charging Roman chariot.

Out of the main thoroughfare into the side streets our journey took us where patches of light from the street lamps alternated with stretches of complete darkness, and where figures would suddenly appear as if by magic out of nothing and disappear as quickly as they had

Arriving at the new house, we children had to inspect the rooms

including the lavatory and peep out into the velvety blackness of the night outside to see if anything was to be seen of the new world our new address would discover to us.

Then the unloading and the getting in the way again as the beds the first articles to be taken out of the van, were taken upstairs and be erected. The clang and clatter of the bedstead framing as the pieces were put together, the side pieces being dropped into their sockets and the bed laths threaded basket fashion and hooked over the boss which with a sharp right hand turn locked them into place. And then finally the mattresses were put on and the beds made up and we children were given a cup of cocoa and a biscuit at the kitchen table before being shooed away to bed to make an end to our exciting day. But before sleep came the highlights of that wonderful day would come bobbing in and out of the mind and mixed up with these the whistle of an engine and the rumble of a train coming from the railway nearby and the purr of the voices of the grown ups or the muted sounds from their own room of their own bedmaking.

From Almington Street we went to live in Enfield. In later years I came to understand that there were a variety of reasons for our shuffling and uprooting from a house where we appeared to have lived quite comfortably for a year or two to live temporarily in a house which was certainly less suitable only to move again after a short interval into more permanent and more suitable quarters. The first reason that seemed to fit the case was that it coincided with my father enjoying a period of regular employment; the later change to such grim accommodation as was provided in Almington Street arising from my father getting the sack. New employment brought the possibility of making a change for the better. Thinking things over on these lines I find this explanation did not always fit the case, as certainly the differences in rent over a short period would rarely pay for the cost of the upheaval and the removal expenses.

A second factor lay in the conflict between a mother's ache to get clean air, sunshine and health for her children in the country and the father's ache to reduce expenses and to reduce the time wasted in journeys between home and work if the distance between the two increased beyond a reasonable maximum.

But there was a third factor which I only became aware of much later in life. The revelation of this factor only arose from a close analytical study of the subject, which was that although we, as children, never thought of it as being unusual, my two elders brother and myself all had two birthdays each.

Some members of the Royal family have a true as well as an off

birthday but our status was obviously out of the range of the Court circular. Nevertheless in each case our official birthday always followed our natural birthday by a few weeks.

It is probable that the same duality arises in legions of other cases of the registration of birth being delayed beyond the statutory time when its declaration is by law required. Whether in our case our parents secretly revelled in 'cocking a snoot' at the law by evading its dictatorial requirements, or merely that my parents left the authorities to accept the shadow while they enjoyed the substance I cannot be certain. But whatever the case, we always celebrated our actual and never our statutory birthdays.

The reason why my parents delayed the registration of our birthdays requires the explanation of another law-dodging technique which had its basis in my mother's deep sincere and abiding conviction that medical science was a professional racket bolstered up by the State to mask its own deficiencies in not providing decent feeding, housing and living standards for its people.

There was, at that time, no law against people dying of starvation, cold, or having to live in insanitary conditions, but there was a law that demanded that all children should be vaccinated. This was given the name of an "Act providing for the compulsory vaccination of children against Small-pox." This Act in my mother's interpretation required that within six weeks of one of her babies' births she would have to allow the entry of a certified medical officer to cut open her baby's arm and inject into it a poison, cultured from some

artificially produced on the bodies of calves. As this last entailed vivisection which she also thought was wicked, and as cutting open her children which she had gone to some trouble to produce was an affront against her rights as a mother and a cruelty to her children defying or dodging the law was the only answer.

In these days, when almost everybody is innoculated against almost all the diseases that trouble us, we may be inclined to laugh at such a fantastic outlook, thinking such behaviour as possible only among unenlightened primitive tribes or among peculiar long-haired sects hiding away in some backwood against the natural advances of civilisation; but seventy years ago these truths were not so obvious to people as it may appear today. Doubts about many things which are universally accepted now had not then been steamrollered into subconscious conformity.

My mother then, having a new baby on the way, waited to make sure of its safe arrival before putting her law avoidance tactics into operation. Dad, with foreknowledge of what was required of him in whatever spare time he had available would be looking for a new home for his family in a district not covered by the same local officer of health as the area in which the child was expected to be born.

Came the birth, and with it the programme of avoidance came into action. Within six weeks after the registration of birth the doctor would be along to carry out his vaccination job. The get-around had, therefore, to be made a certainty before the registration of

birth was actually made. When the arrangements for moving house were decided, the birth was registered and six clear weeks still remained to get well clear of the menacing poisoner.

So it was that, until the law in this matter was amended to allow parents to make a declaration of objection, all of my mother's children were born just prior to a moving job, and all had two birth days.

Another aspect of the situation which may stagger almost all of the older generation was the ease with which new accommodation could be found at a reasonable rent for a family comprised of a man, his wife, and three, four or five children. Perhaps the reason for this was that investors in property had not, up to that time, realised that building to absorb a growing population could in some areas create a superfluity, and that this was far less profitable than tolerating a scarcity. Also, superfluity of accommodation could be found for large families whereas scarcity cannot tolerate them.

It must have been during the spring and summer of 1902 that we lived in Enfield, as I have no recollection of the weather being anything but warm and sunny; the air had that rarefied and almost misty quality like a thin, fairy gossamer veil and the roads were hot and dusty. A ford crossed the road on the way between our house and the school I attended with my brothers. On our journeys to and fro, we almost inevitably divested ourselves of our ~~shoes~~<sup>boots</sup> and stockings, and, stuffing the stockings in the ~~shoes~~<sup>boots</sup>, tied these about our necks with their laces and paddled in the cool water. If a horse and cart

or cattle had to be driven through the ford while we were there we would climb up on to the wooden footway at the side to let them pass. The pebbles in the stream were round and smooth and many coloured. Sometimes the only dry parts about us after we had paddled were the boots and stockings hung around our necks.

There was a wonderful shop on the corner of the street where we turned off the main road to reach our school. This shop was kept by two industrious elderly ladies who made up little packets of sweets for a farthing or a ha'penny a packet. These two old dears sold their ordinary lines at four ounces a penny, but some toffee which they made themselves and which they broke up for sale they sold at six ounces a penny; few of us could ever take advantage of this of as the same rate was not accepted for smaller quantities.

It was also reputed that, somewhere amongst the made up packets of sweets, there were vouchers entitling one to a free second packet. The children on their way to school in the mornings swarmed into the shop or gathered around it, if they had no money themselves, to wait the lucky ones or hope to share their purchases. I think the prize packets must have been genuine as they were so completely accepted by the young customers but, so infrequent was the issue, that anyone who asserted their authenticity would fall back on hearsay for justification when challenged for proof.

Of the school itself I remember very little except that I have a feeling that the atmosphere was brighter and the lessons more interesting than they had been at St. Paul's Road. I do, however,

remember having to plait strips of glossy, coloured paper into gay designs, and picture alphabet blocks to form small words. Little else, except the assimilation of one lesson bearing on infant psychology that has lasted me a lifetime, remains in my memory.

It happened this way. A parents' visiting day had been arranged and we children had been told to tell our parents about this and beg them to come and see us in our school on the selected afternoon. For a week previously I had pestered my mother to come along on the day in question. Her evasive answers, that she would try but could not promise, brought home to me that with two brother older than I was and now David a baby in arms, I could no longer expect to receive the major consideration which my being just me suggested I merited.

The afternoon, when it arrived, was very sultry and we, the youngest children, were crowded rather thickly into desks in the largest schoolroom available, leaving a space out in front for a rocking horse, a doll's house, a doll's pram and sundry dolls and a portable see-saw. There was also sufficient room for a couple of teachers and a half a dozen parents to circulate. None of us had ever seen these grand toys before and one can only assume they were imported for the occasion.

Some few minutes before the time the parents were to come we were all seated at the desks and told to be good. "Being good" meant setting oneself into a statuelike posture in the manner that the Yogi are credited with doing and keeping perfectly still and



silent. The pose was to fold the arms about the chest with hands clasping about the biceps. To strain the head into a position where one had difficulty in seeing below picture rail level and to stretch the legs out straight and slightly apart so that one could not shuffle. This pose had to be retained for as long as goodness could hold out.

The show opened and the parents, mainly mothers, arrived. To enliven the proceedings, the teacher had told us that the goodest of us would be selected to ride on the rocking-horse or the see-saw or, for the girls, to play with the doll's house or cot. How long that afternoon lasted I do not know; perhaps an hour and a half, perhaps two hours, and I am convinced I was quite the goodest little boy in the whole bunch. I strained into and kept the most exaggerated form of this most difficult pose throughout the whole time, and hardly moved my eyes, let alone any other part of me except that through a bleared mist of perspiration that flowed down the ends of my hair into my eyes I caught a glimpse of my mother outside the classroom door with David. She paused a moment and looked at me but, presumably reluctant to contrast her rather shabby clothing with that of the better-dressed mothers chatting to the teachers, she quickly passed out of my sight.

Child after child was selected from among us to go forth and ride or see-saw, held safe from falling off by sycophantic teacher or vapid parent. But all my goodness, which the Gods were given amply opportunity to reward right up to the final dismissal of the

class, came to naught. Little effort was made to enforce the accepted goodness procedure. Perfectly ordinary children were slobbered over by their fond parent, gushed over by the teacher, and giggling or affectedly reluctant, were conducted to the front of the class and hoisted on to the rocking horse, or introduced to the doll's house or the pram. The good were ignored, not forgetfully, but calculatedly. Any of us who had no parent in attendance to foster their merits were the subject of a blind spot in the eyes of teachers and so failed to register that they existed at all. If the desks had not been a solid obstacle to prevent the teachers from making a direct line towards someone's moronic offspring we would have been trampled underfoot.

From such small incidents, indelibly impressed on a child's mind, can arise a cynical acceptance that just being good is not enough, that the way to get a ride on the rocking horse is to know the right people and see that they are there when the opportunity for a ride comes along so that they can give one a hoist into the saddle.

It was in this spring of 1902 that the consequences of the industrial revolution caught up with us as a family. It had, I believe, been going on for a long time before this and legions of families over the past one hundred and fifty years had been beaten to their knees by its impact. Some had survived, some had even prospered, but it had come upon an unnumbered host like the visitation of a plague destroying their wellbeing, ruining and starving them, and leaving them destitute, crippled and dying in its wake.

It was one Saturday afternoon, about 2.00p.m., when only my mother and I were in the house. She was sitting comfortably before the kitchen grate mending socks, while I sat on the hearth rug playing at building houses with a lot of small irregular shaped bits of wood which Dad had occasionally brought home for us children to play with. The crash broke through our serenity.

Dad opened the front door and came through to us from the entrance passage beyond. Mum stirred in her chair, pressing her work into the sewing basket at her side and looked around toward the door expectantly. As Dad came in I looked up and in some indefinable manner knew all was not well. For one thing he was a little earlier than was his habit on a Saturday when he generally had half-a-pint at the pub on his way home; the other thing was that he usually came in expressing, in his manner and attitude, a spirit of joi-de-vivre which on this occasion was lacking; there was no light in his face which looked tired and dispirited and his step lacked its usual springiness. Mum must have noticed it too for the look of welcome

faded from her face to be replaced by a look of concern.

He came across to where she was seated and bent over and kissed her. This was quite normal procedure and, had he not done so, would have shown that some trouble had come between them and not from outside.

"Hallo! young shaver," he said to me, rubbing his hand through my hair. "Where's the others?" he said, turning back to my mother.

"Out somewhere playing, Jim's probably sickening for something he's a bit feverish I think, but what's the matter Charlie?"

Dad had sat down on a chair by the kitchen table and resting there on his elbows was gazing abstractedly into nothing.

"Here, you're hungry," said Mum, rising and hurrying out into the kitchen. "You sit there I've a nice stew for you and that will soon buck you up."

Returning with a plate of stew she put it in front of Dad, and laying her arm about his shoulders said, "Well! Out with it what's the trouble?"

"Dad put his hand into his waistcoat pocket and took out one gold coin and some silver. "That's the last wages you'll get for a bit" he said.

"The sack?" said Mum.

"Umm," said Dad, "came a bit unexpected this time. I thought this new job would last out the summer."

"Never mind" said Mum, "it's often happened before, but we have always managed somehow. Come on, my dear, pull yourself together."

We'll manage. You'll see."

Dad shook his head. "It's never been quite like this before. Before, there has always seemed a chance of getting in somewhere. Getting out of work was only for a week or two or at most a couple of months. But it's not like that now. I could name a dozen of my pals who were out all last winter now I've joined them. We have always had work in the winter before. Once out now, you can't get in anywhere. If there's no work in our trade in the winter, Gawd help us."

Mum patted his shoulder. "Now don't you worry, things may be a bit tight but we'll get through it. You'll see. Now eat your dinner and then go and have a lie down and forget all about it for a bit."

This was the beginning of our second period of dire poverty. Poverty in itself is bad enough, but while you survive and have hope it is endurable, it is despair that destroys the fibre of a man. To see the bones and structure of life disintegrate, to feel the patterns and habits of living, in which the future has been envisaged as a procession of normalities, destroyed and replaced by a living fear of greater and greater destitution and want becomes an interminable progress into a greater hopelessness that surely breaks the spirit. This was the drama that thickened the atmosphere on that Saturday afternoon and one that registered itself in my mind as I sat unnoticed, playing with my blocks and looking up wide eyed at the drama that was being acted out between my father and mother at

the kitchen table.

I had measles and so possibly did my brothers, and all the time my mother battled on to cope with illness and penury struggling against depression while the long, hot summer dragged on. Gradually every bit of furniture that would fetch a few coppers went to the pawnshop. We lived on crusts and scraps and the scant purchases with a shilling or two which, now and then one of my aunts could spare from her own family needs. The rent was not paid and piled up into a formidable sum. The milkman and the grocer, with ever-diminishing generosity, allowed us small quantities of the bare necessities on tick. Friends rallied round and helped all they could. My brother Jack, during the long school holiday over August, found he could make a shilling or two caddying at a golf course somewhere in the vicinity of Ralph, and later even I, ranged over the better-off houses in our neighbourhood and knocking at the doors asked: "If the lady wanted any errands fetched." Everything which we could earn, get given, or find, was brought home to help us make out.

Mum took in washing, or, if she could get it, did dressmaking at the lowest rates that she could possibly accept. Sometimes people were generous, and visualising the poverty of the unemployed, delayed their opportunity to squeeze out the last drop of blood from the indigent. Clothes, boots, bedding, became progressively more ragged and worthless, but still the hot summer went on and Dad had no work.

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It was at sometime during this period that Dad brought home

Gluey Sawyer. David was in bed but the rest of us children - Jack, Ralph and I - were playing with old copies of "The Musical Opinion", which was Dad's trade paper. It was most valued by us because it was glossy and folded sharply to make paper boats. Dad came in and was followed by the scruffiest looking individual I had ever come to close quarters with. He was tall and gaunt, his red hair was straggled and matted, his face was a composition in reds and yellows and blues, sown over by patches of ginger stubble and dirt. His great red hands and wrists projected out from the frayed sleeves of a coat much too small for him.

Mum was in the kitchen at the time, working on someone else's washing, and came into the living room at Dad's call to be introduced. It says something for my mother's savoir faire that not by a glint of an eyelash did she betray any stupification at the figure that confronted her.

"This is Gluey Sawyer" said my father. "He says he is Iris but take no notice of that as he is the biggest liar in Finchley."

Mum perfectly poised and ladylike said, "How do you do Mr. Sawyer," and allowed her hand pure and clean from the wash tub to be enfolded in Mr. Sawyer's huge, reddy-brown paw.

"Gluey and I are going on tramp," said Dad.

"Oh!" said Mum, "this is the first I have heard about this. Won't you sit down?" she said to Gluey, indicating a chair.

"The three sat around the kitchen table while we children, ears for the conversation, sat on the hearthrug ostensibly occupied

with our paper boat-making.

"Now what's all this about?"

"Well you see Nell, I have known Gluey for sometime, he used to work in our factory, that's where he got his name from, one of his jobs was to see to the glue pots, (this explained the dabs and streaks of shiny substance that were smeared in an irregular pattern about his trousers), and I met him this afternoon."

"Where was this?" said Mum.

"Let me tell it Mrs. G; Charlie is not one for telling a tale."

"I give you best there," said Dad.

"I was coming along Tottenham Lane," said Gluey, "when I saw Charlie here sitting on the bench outside the 'Hope' (this being a tavern, 'The Hope and Anchor' on the corner of Manor Road) looking like any other thirsty man would look sitting outside a pub without the price of a pint in his pocket. So I said to myself, 'What's the matter with Charlie, he don't look too happy, let's see if I can cheer him up. And, when it comes to cheering up, it's Sam Sawyer is the boy for your money.'"

Mum nodded her assent to Gluey's estimate of his powers, at least, as <sup>far as it's</sup> ~~his~~ effect on her husband might be concerned although possibly feeling a little dubious as to whether Gluey's powers would have the same effect on herself.

"So," continued Gluey, "I sat down beside him and I said 'Watch Charley Boy' I said."

"Ulloh" he says, screwing up the paper he had been looking at



and spitting on the pavement, "Oh, it's you is it?"

"Don't remember me do you" I says.

"Ulloh Gluey" he says, "yes, I remember you".

"Times are bad," I says, "anything in the papers?"

"Charlie hands me the paper. "Only a few domestic 'elps, a butler, half a dozen errand boys, and a few clerks, nothing I could do."

"Nothing about in your own line, pianos I mean."

"Pianos," he says, "there's enough pianos in the factories to give everybody one each and leave some over; they ain't going to make pianos any more."

Then I starts to look down the 'Ads.' column in the paper. I sees it. "Did you notice this" I says: "FOR THE OUTLAY OF TEN SHILLINGS YOU CAN EARN TEN SHILLINGS A DAY; APPLY BILL'S BOSTON SWEETTRIES, BOSTON, LINCS."

"What about it," says Charlie.

"Might lead to something," I says. "Beach trading, that's it is. Think of it, perfect weather, golden sands, deck chairs, children on holiday with their parents with money to spend. I often thought of having a go at beach trading in the summer."

"How are you going to get there?" cut in my more practical mother. "It must be a hundred miles away."

"Didn't think it was as much as that," said Gluey, "about I should think.

"We're going to walk it," said Dad, "sleeping rough - at

it's perfect weather for that. Gluey reckons he might be able to find ten bob, and if I can borrow ten bob from Fred, (my Aunt Annie's husband) we'd have enough for the first lot of sweets from the Sweeteries. Then when we had sold some of the stuff we should be able to pay our way and soon be able to send some money home. Better than chewing the ends of our finger-nails off here anyway, he ended, a little defiantly.

There was a long silence. Presently my mother looked up and noticed the three wide-eyed youngsters drinking in the scene.

"Well!" she said, "I'll go and make a cup of cocoa, and we'll have it with some bread and marge; then we can sit down and talk it over. But you children can clear all that paper away and get off to bed."

"Oh! Mum" we all said in chorus, "can't we stay up a bit; we'll stay quiet."

"No, off you go, this is grown-ups talk. Shoo now".

Reluctantly we gathered the mess of folded paper boats, stuffed them into a box by the side of the empty fireplace. We kissed Mum and Dad goodnight but deftly avoided a similar embrace from Mr. Sawyer; we may have admired him like one would admire a pirate or a buccaneer but we had no wish to accept him at an avuncular level.

We were on the point of trooping off to bed when Dad said: "Look Nell, <sup>Gluey</sup> ~~Mr. Sawyer~~ here has nowhere to go for the night. D'you think we could put him up?"

Mum looked at Dad, in a manner that suggested that she would

have got more satisfaction from reading of Gluey Sawyer's sad demise under the heading of 'FOUND DROWNED' in the early edition of the next morning's newspaper. Nevertheless she said, "All right, you three had better all sleep together in the big bed and Mr. Sawyer can sleep in Jack's small one."

So ended that session so far as we were concerned and what later transpired from further conversation round the kitchen table only came to light from my father telling of his adventures later.

The next morning when we got up our guest had departed, Dad and he having got away early for their long tramp to Boston in Lincolnshire, <sup>though meanwhile</sup> and Jack had snuggled up in <sup>the</sup> ~~his~~ warm bed <sup>immediately</sup> after Gluey Sawyer had vacated it.

Coming down to breakfast we were told that Mr. Sawyer and Dad had gone on tramp together, and we had better hurry up now and get off to school.

"What are you scratching for Jack?" said my mother, noticing my eldest brother trying to get one hand over his shoulder and down his back a distance that nature had never provided him with length of arm to achieve.

"Come here."

Jack came over, and Mum took hold of him somewhat roughly, bent his head forward and looked for a moment over the back of his neck. She pushed him sharply away as a look of tragedy spread over her face. Suddenly with arms spread wide she laid her head on her arms on the table in front of her and, her fists pounding the table, b

into sobs. "Fool, Fool," she kept saying, "I might have known I might have known." Her outburst passed while we stood around, frightened and embarrassed. Suddenly she got up and clutched Jack. "Come with me," she said. "We've got work to do." "You two" - indicating Ralph and me - "take David, and the three of you go out into the back garden and stay there until I tell you what to do next."

"But....." we protested.

"Go" she said, "do what I tell you and stay there. I'll come as soon as I can."

We departed dutifully, wondering the while what could have happened to create this tornado which had so suddenly born down upon us.

The rest of what happened came later from Jack's description of the power, drive and gradual diminution of energy the human mind had suddenly developed.

"Stand where you are, and don't move," she said to Jack as she swept all the breakfast things to one corner of the table, tore the table cloth out from under them and with a gesture like an opera hero flinging his cloak over his shoulder, flung the cloth over her shoulders. Then, from the front of her dress, abstracted pins which she used to pin around her this unconventional cloak. Almost without a pause she swept out of the kitchen into the scullery, snatched a tin bath from off its hook, and, returning with it, planted it firmly down on the centre of the hearth rug.

"Get undressed," she said.

Jack was a big boy, nearly twelve years of age, and well past the age when such a drastic dictatorial command could go unchallenged.

"But Mum," he said, "I....."

He had no time to finish, Mum turned on him, her eyes dark pools of blazing anger.

"Get undressed," she said. "You're lousy, you're infested with fleas and bugs. Don't stand there, get undressed I said, and drop all your clothes into that bath."

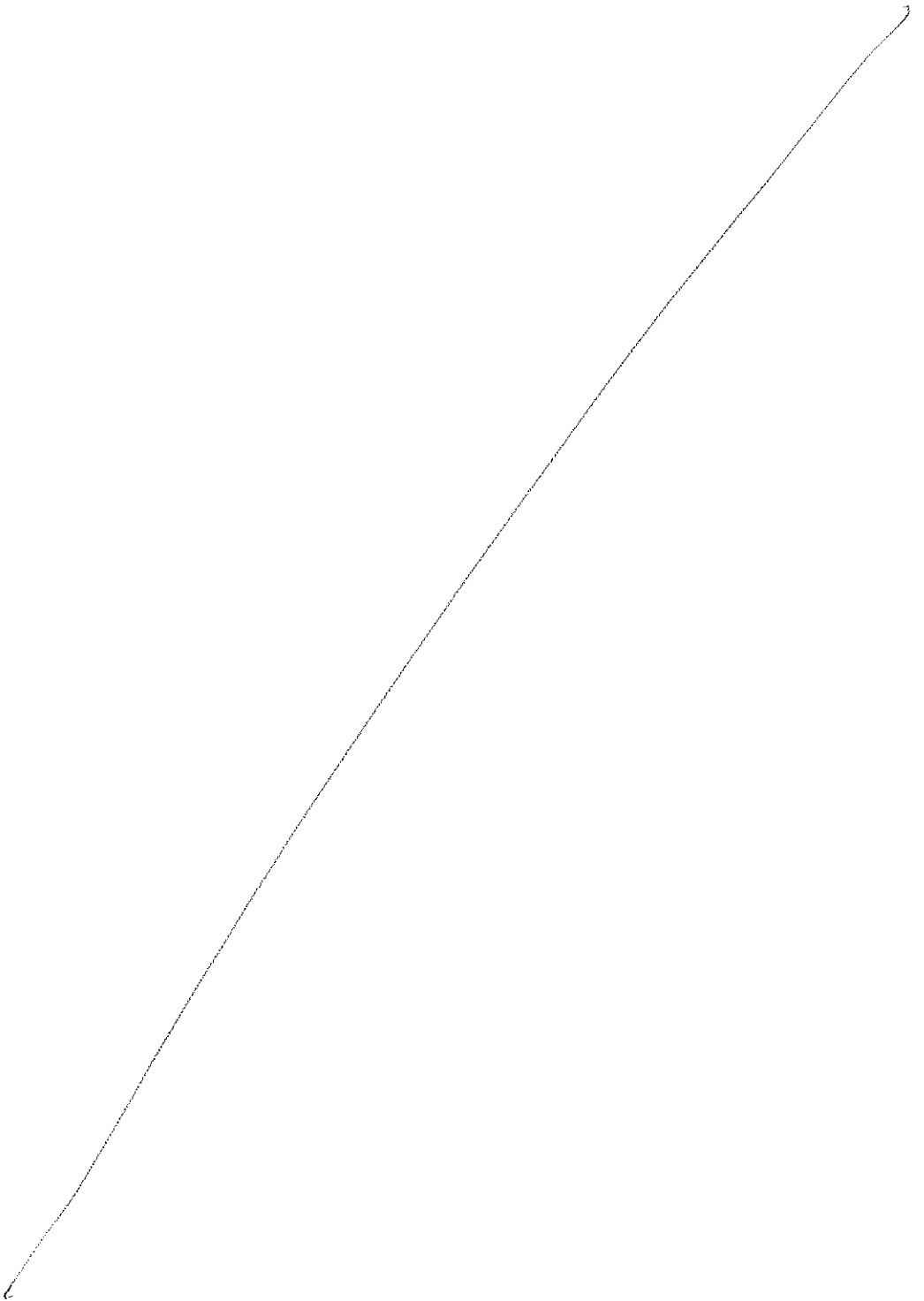
Her command of the situation was complete. Jack meekly stripped off garment after garment and dropped them into the bath as directed then stood completely nude awaiting the next command. Mum then took a piece of old towelling and rubbed him over with it from head to foot. Then, from a drawer below the dresser, she snatched out an old shirt of Dad's and from a hook behind the kitchen door an old pair of trousers. "Here" she said, "put these on; I will have to see to your head later."

Hardly sure by this time that decapitation might not have been the sinister meaning behind this remark, Jack obeyed. The shirt came well passed his knees, and the trousers well up under his armpits.

"That's it," said Mum, "now don't stand there, turn those trousers up so that you don't trip over them, and help me with this bath."

"In a whirl of haste as if no moment dared be lost the two of them clutched the bath and swept out through the scullery door into the garden.

At the moment of their sudden entry on to our stage, we three



children were stood in a row like dumb mutes at a funeral. As the strange calvacade swept past us, it was not surprising that David and I started to bawl. Tipping the contents of the bath on to the patch of ground we called the garden, Mum and Jack re-passed us going back into the house, Mum only pausing long enough to say angrily, "Stop that bawling, I'll attend to you later."

Back in the house, Mum grabbed some things from the scullery shelves, and with a glance over her shoulder at Jack, said, "Follow me with the bath, you can manage that by yourself," headed off upstairs.

There the bath was placed in the middle of the floor, <sup>in the bedroom</sup> the window curtains were pulled, and the door closed, then Mum lit a candle.

"Now," she said, "you can see them better by candle light. We've got to catch every flea, bug, or louse there is in this bed. You watch me and I'll show you how to do it."

First she examined the top blanket, holding the candle close for her scrutiny. Then with a sharp dab her fingers came down, met and rolled the speck of life which she had caught between her thumb and forefinger (this to make it dizzy) before she dropped it into the candle flame where it made a tiny popping sound as it burned.

Jack soon entered into the spirit of the chase. First the blankets were examined on both sides until, being relatively sure they were clear, these were dropped into the bath. Then the sheets, the underblankets and the pillow-cases were similarly treated one

after the other. Jack told us in the recording of this exploit, that he revelled in catching the biggest lice as they made the loudest pop when they met the candle flame; he was soon wishing there might have been more and juicier game for the hunting. Finally the bedclothes had all been examined and were deposited in the bath.

"Here, take this," said Mum, pushing half a bar of carbolic soap into Jack's hands. "Now we rub this all over the mattress and the pillow." Suiting the action to the word, she started rubbing and Jack followed suit. This done the two of them returned to the garden with the clothes and the bath.

There, she instructed Jack to take charge of us in pegging out all the clothes, one by one, on the clothes line, and beating them with some canes from the shed.

For the rest of that morning, while David sat happily playing with the garden dirt, we others beat and shook and laughed and shouted with glee. Then at Jack's command we took our own clothes one by one and beat and shook these; until Jack, staying our enthusiasm and exercising a nice sense of propriety for his age, made us all keep on at least one concealing garment and commanded that these should be beaten in-situ.

When finally we returned to the house, and hesitatingly pushed out heads round the kitchen door, we found Mum her eyes streaming with tears, her head bent over a sheet of newspaper combing out her long black hair strand by strand.



Later on, we also had to have our heads combed, trapping and killing lice which might have infested us and spreading them sprawling on their backs so that they could be summarily disposed of with our thumb nails.

Thinking over this incident in later years, I have realised that what followed the sobbing at the kitchen table, was not an excess of horror at having lice in the house, nor an overcultivated zeal in the cause of her children's cleanliness, but a surge of reaction against her moment of despair, urging her to fight back against the poverty, dirt and misery that fate was subjecting her to.

The story of my father's adventures on the tramp to, and the return from Boston, and of the humours, fears, disappointments and near-tragedy of that desperate journey, are not really part of my story. Suffice it to say that a fortnight after his departure he returned home completely penniless. He entered the house about 8p.m. on a Saturday evening in the expectation of having to squeeze out some last ray of courage and hope for his family when he himself was almost at the end of his own tether. But he found almost the reverse of his expectations.

During his absence, my mother had gone to see a family for whom she had often worked at times before her marriage. This was a Jewish family where there were four daughters; she had, in her maiden days, made the girls' clothes and had been accepted as almost one of the family. It transpired that her visit was made

exceptionally fruitful as the eldest girl was getting married and there were bridesmaids' dresses and an exceptional quantity of similar work required for the occasion. She was received with open arms and given all the work she could undertake. Further, the family appraising to some extent, my mother's personal affairs had got together to help relieve some of the worst aspects; they made up parcels for Mum to take away of men's old clothing and boots, and also of food, including a large meat pie and an outside rice pudding. These Mum had brought home and put away in the larder for Dad's homecoming, which from a card she had received, she thought would most likely be the Saturday.

In addition to this, another acquaintance had arranged for Mum, on this particular Saturday, to look after the catering at a local cricket match in which he was one of the players. After serving the teas, sandwiches and cakes, and tidying everything up, she had been told to take away any surplus food that was left. This comprised quantities of white and brown bread spread with real butter, cucumber and other sandwiches, and a quantity of assorted cakes.

It so happened, therefore, at the moment of my father's entrance into the house, we were all seated round the kitchen table tucked into the best feed we had had for months, in fact it was such a memorable feed I can taste the special flavour of that real butter to this very day. The contrast with my father's expectations can be easily appreciated and could not but make him feel momentarily that his own trials and tribulations had been worse

than in vain and that, in fact his family appeared to be able to manage better without him.

Nevertheless, after a good wash and a large helping of meat pie and vegetables and a satisfactory pipe of real tobacco, which Mum had thoughtfully got for him, his humour was soon restored - enough for him to graphically relate and perhaps embroider his late adventure.

About my sixth birthday we moved from Enfield back nearer to London. This time our new home was the downstairs half of a terrace house in Rathcoole Gardens in ~~North Hornsey~~ <sup>Hornsey North</sup>. During the time we lived in this house my father suffered several periods of seasonal unemployment so that, in our autumns and winters, we got sufficient to eat and, in our springs and summers, just about enough to survive.

The most important single item of nourishment which kept us going over our worst periods was bread pudding. My Aunt Annie, who lived just across the road from us, had three girls - all young children. She also had a husband, my Uncle Fred, who enjoyed regular employment. The affluence in this family allowed the girls to be a bit choosy about what they would or would not eat. Among other things they would not eat their crusts. So Aunt Annie sent over to us all the crusts her own children would not eat and any other stale or surplus bread they could not or would not devour. By soaking these crusts, adding a little sugar and a few currants and baking the mess in a slow oven, a tasty filling and an inexpensive addition was made to our otherwise meagre diet.

Feeding and bringing up her children healthily was my mother's greatest problem, a problem which she went into with great thoroughness. Arising from my father's adhesion to the cause of socialism my mother gave serious consideration to all the 'isms' which the development of the humanistic outlooks fostered. Feeding and bringing up her children had to be brought into line with this and also to be put o

a sound economic basis. A very big expense in the normal household budget was meat. So meat and all things similar had therefore to be eliminated from our menu, provided she could get sufficient nourishment from cheaper sources; with the exception of my father who could not stomach it, we all became vegetarians.

The economics of vegetarianism gradually becoming lost in vegetarianism as an end in itself as a new and better way of life and an answer, if only the right sort of foods were taken to all the ills that mankind suffered from. To this end my mother had as her guide a doctor whose vegetarian clinic still survives, I believe to this day.

From her studies in this matter, she had concluded that all that was needed ~~was~~, to keep <sup>her</sup> children healthy, <sup>was</sup>, first, wholemeal bread and second, water. These two vital substances could almost completely supply the energy necessary for life and growth; they also gave promise, by reason of the simpler processes of digestion and elimination, of a bonus of energy available to nourish additional mental brightness. It may be that this diet does constitute a sort of 'elixir of life' - if one can take enough of it and stand its monotony. We, as children, couldn't, so simple additions had to be included. Vegetables were therefore allowed on the menu, raw better than cooked, and the rawer the better. Raw potatoes, carrots, cabbage and greenstuffs of all sorts were offered, and eaten if nothing better seemed to be forthcoming. Sugar in any form was slow poison, causing catarrh, ulcers, eczema, all forms of spots and

boils, colds, stomach troubles - almost all ills in fact could be put down to sugar. This applied especially to synthetic sugar about which the theory was current that it was whitened with sulphuric acid which was not thought to be very digestible. Natural cane sugar, a dirty dark brown in colour, was allowed in moderation as it was nearer to a natural product.

Tea was also out as it was exciting to the nerves, causing hysteria and bad temper. Butter was out as we could not afford it and margarine, which was at that time flooding into the market with the claim that it was as nourishing as butter, was scraped off to help the brown bread down. This was later substituted by 'Nutter' a white substance made, we understood, from nuts thus giving it a very high place on the nutriment chart. Meat or fish and all forms of meat, offal of fish preparations, lard or drippings were also out. Dried fruit if we could afford it was in, as was cocoa, the cheaper and coarser the better for nourishment. Milk was good for us if we could afford it, we rarely could, so not much milk came out way. White bread, if new, was almost poison but if it was three days old it was tolerated as a substitute for brown.

It is perhaps unfortunate but in line with the contraryness of human nature although the diet I have outlined was probably good adequate and sufficiently substantial for growing children, its greatest failing was that all the things we liked were left out, and all the things we did not like were left in. Nevertheless the cost of such a diet in the bare ribs of its form was a great

deal less than the cost of other foodstuffs and one way or another we got enough to keep us all alive and growing-up fairly normally.

Whenever the opportunity occurred we would wolf down any sweet cakes, fried fish, sausages or other delicacies and, as a result of our being only used to a spartan diet, easily made ourselves ill in consequence. This certainly helped to justify my mother in her faith. Always on the look out for any means that might help to make her money go further, she discovered the trade in stale bread. I do not know how the practice of buying stale bread was discovered by my mother, but it must have been very shortly after our moving into Rathcoole Gardens. Probably Dad had got the information from a conversation with a neighbour or from a chance acquaintance in a pub. The same system may be in vogue today, but I should think the bread shortage and its rationing toward the end of the second world war put a stop to it and by reason of other factors it has never been resumed.

Quite simply, bakers did not manage to sell all their bread while it was fresh and new and most people do not want stale bread. This induced the bakers to sell off their three-days-old loaves at a discount. To get stale bread, the purchasers had to line up outside the bakers before they opened in the morning. At half past seven on almost every week day morning, in all weathers, three sleepy children, unwashed and with their clothes put on with a view to covering the general demands of modesty, came out of 56 Rathcoole Gardens each carrying a pillowcase. Led by my eldest brother Jack we made our way to the first baker's shop at the top of our road

at its junction with Tottenham Lane. In the entrance to this bakers there would probably be one or two other children - early arrivals - and like ourselves armed with pillowcases and shelter in the shop porch.

At eight-o'-clock the door opened and, in the sequence of our queue, we marched in. Our order in each case was for two pennyworth of stale bread. The meaner shops would give a two pound loaf for this - proper price tuppence halfpenny; better shops would give loaf and a half. If the surplus of stale bread gave out before got to the counter, a further trek to the other bakers in the district had to be made until the whole round of bakers' shops in the district had been covered. Each refusal gave rise to diminished chances of success as the stocks of stale bread were cleared by the first comers in each case. My eldest brother, being the captain of our team, decided on the advantage or otherwise of splitting up his platoon to cover the different shops, or to send one or other of them home with any of the spoils already acquired, or to move on en masse following our rounds.

In the event of almost complete failure we had a possibility at a more distant shop in a better-class neighbourhood, of obtaining stale rolls or buns. But the gross quantity of bread and its quality of nutriment were regarded as being considerably below par. This, although we were strongly tempted by the greater palatability of the food, our captain stood rigidly to the code and no-one dared to suggest that we should make our raid on the stale cake shop first.



If all other sources failed, my brother Jack was allowed to buy a new loaf, but only if there was not some of the previous day's stale bread left in the house for such an emergency.

This pattern of the stale bread task was the task of myself and my brothers for the four years we were at Rathcoole Gardens. It became even more demanding with the addition of two extra mouths to feed - a new sister, born about two years after our coming there and Cousin Bill who came to live with us at about the same time.

Footwear for his children was a great problem for my father. There were four of us boys between the ages of four and thirteen, who all had an unaccountable urge to kick anything kickable and to slide, scrape and worry out footwear in any way which could possibly be discovered. Every Sunday morning, Dad got out the chair with a back which was his snobbing stool - his boot last ~~into~~ which he fitted <sup>into</sup> a circular pillar of about three inches in diameter - his tools and leather. All our ~~shoes~~ <sup>boots</sup> then came under review and were treated according to their need of repair, the work being done to the accompaniment of a lot of swearing, in which Jesus Christ figured prominently, mixed with lengthy diatribes on the low mentality and destructive potentialities of his particular children <sup>Gardens</sup>.

When we went to Rathcoole ~~Road~~ my proper schooling began. Crouch End School was twenty minutes walk from our street but by part running and part hopping on and off the curb stones it could be covered in under fifteen. The school was a three-storey barrack of a building set behind an expanse of gravel covered playground.

It was entered from the main frontage through some tall brick pillars. To the left of the building a passage led to a small area where the boys' lavatories were placed. The infants' entrance was from a lane on the right, to a separate wing. I do not think there could have been a girls' school. Up to that time and until seven years later 'girls' did not exist, so there may have been a girls' school of which I was completely unaware in some other part of the building.

After going into the 'bigger boys' from the infants, I passed into the care of Mr. Pickles, the teacher for standard one. I loved Pickles and held long and imaginary conversations with him in my day dreams. I would willingly have been his stooge, his shadow or his slave. I did indeed become his class monitor. To do this job I often stayed in at dinner time (the midday meal was not spoken of as lunch by me until at least forty years afterwards). I had to tidy up the desks and distribute the books for the afternoon school and, on special occasions, to clean and refill the inkwells. Sometimes I was privileged by being allowed to run a private errand for Pickles after school hours. There was a general impression among my classmates that the office of being a monitor carried with it the salary of one penny per week, but in fact my lord and master accepted my services in the spirit in which they were given as being for love and not for gain.

Among the poorer children who attended elementary schools in those days, teachers were thought to belong to a higher social order.

than their pupils. Their private lives away from school, to the extent that we ever thought of them, were conceived to be on a higher plane than our 'bread and margarine' lives; a world of gaiety and fashion, an educated cultured world such as we might read about in the best Victorian literature, this was the life we thought to be theirs. We had nothing but gratitude for their patronage in bearing with us over the long days and weeks of our tutelage. Thinking about this penny for my services as monitor, I have since wondered in later years if Pickles might not have had a large family ~~and~~ to give me a penny was a generosity <sup>in all</sup> he ~~probably~~ could ~~by~~ not ~~means~~ afford.

I soon realised that a teacher did not necessarily have a calm smooth life for ever because of what happened to Pickles. He got the sack, at least that was what we youngsters heard was the cause of his sudden disappearance from our school never to return. It happened like this.

Standard one - Mr. Pickle's class - had about fifty pupils. Half of us were thought to be the brighter boys who sat at one side of the classroom, with the assumed duller boys sitting on the other. Pickles' job was to get the maximum number from both sides into standard two in twelve months. His success in this task registered with the School Board as his success or failure as a teacher. One of the boys in the less brainy group, named Taylor, was either a 'late developer' or a bit mentally deficient. The limits of a teacher in chastising his scholars

in the interests of discipline or learning was in those times undefined. Pickles was probably not a patient psychologist nor of that saintly disposition that suffers fools gladly; he found Taylor a fool and disliked him accordingly.

Boys being hauled out in front of the class to receive summary justice was no rare event but Taylor was the victim oftener than most. Bearing in mind that, at that time, the view was still held by many people that mental deficiency was a sign of original sin and that, to some teachers, a child's inability to learn was obstinate devilment which had to be thrashed out of them, Pickles was no different from many others who thought in these terms. Unfortunately for him, Taylor was not the child of poor parents who would have found it difficult to obtain any redress but the child of a fairly well-to-do business man. A man of means, Taylor's father was not going to allow a damned flunky of a teacher to knock his offspring about. So he summoned Pickles for assault.

Two boys, who might be classed as Pickles' favourites, had to go into the headmaster's study to be interviewed by a lawyer on Pickles' behalf. I was one and my evidence was, I fear, coloured by my unquestioning loyalty to my teacher rather than by any understanding of the social dangers <sup>involved</sup> arising. To my later shame I consciously played down the chastising as much as I could.

It was all to no purpose, Pickles' case failed as there was visual evidence of weals to be seen on young Taylor's bottom, which was sufficient to prove Pickles guilty of undue violence.

My maturer consideration of Pickles' crime was that, for his bread and butter, he undertook a task which no self-respecting educational authority should have put upon him; he became, in effect, the scapegoat for that authority's inadequacies. Be that as it may, I have still great regard for him as my teacher. For by taking a party of us to see the Tower of London and other historic monuments and buildings in London, he introduced me to the subject of history from which I gathered so much pleasure subsequently. With me at least, this merits an appreciation which balances out his sin in causing pain and suffering to young Taylor.

When Pickles took a party of half a dozen of us to London to see historic monuments, we met at Stroud Green station on a fine Saturday morning. We pressed <sup>ourselves</sup> ~~our way~~ <sup>third class</sup> into a compartment and, except for Mr. Pickles, plastered ourselves against the windows on either side of the carriage. We spent the journey into London hanging half in and half out of the windows, prophesying the name of the next station we should reach and being pleasantly surprised if it turned out to be the one we had memorised from a time-table the previous evening. Pickles, the only occupier of a seat in the compartment, spent the journey in demonstrating an aspect of blasé decorum by reading a newspaper and appearing to take no notice whatever of either his charges, or the exciting countryside as viewed from a train running between Stroud Green station and Kings Cross.

At Kings Cross, we all got out and piled into a horse-drawn bus, where we sat on top  $\chi$  in front, and behind the driver. It was a fascinating journey with Pickles pointing out places of interest on our way - Grays Inn, the Law Courts, Holborn, Lombard Street, the Bank of England, Moorgate Street, Ludgate Hill, St. Paul's, and a view of the top of the Monument poking its head above the surrounding buildings. At last we were set down at Tower Hill where we reluctantly disembarked. From here Pickles marched us into a tea place where he bought us all a bun and a cup of tea.

I do not know if any of the other boys who were with us had ever made the journey into London before, but with me, with the

exception of a rather unhappy journey made one Sunday morning with my father to Marylebone Hospital to have a very painful tooth extracted, (this hospital service being laid on for poor people at an extraction charge of sixpence per tooth), this was my first London visit.

The eye and mind of a child coming to a sense of reality which combines in one sudden encompassing, the historical, geographical, fictional and pictorial impressions he has stored up throughout his childhood can react to be a shocking disappointment, or a fairy tale revelation. Sometimes so different is the reality from the imagined it is unrecognised, and the falsely enjoyed picture fades out struck unconscious by the revelation of hard cold facts, and becomes unhinged from its fairy tale entity, and is lost never to return. Sometimes with mental glee the bits of fact fit into the imagined picture and a sense of satisfaction arises from impressions being substantiated by reality. Only rarely, and probably only in the immature mind does reality transcend the imagined. Then the floodgates open and with wide eyes the child stares, and stares, and re-forms and re-peoples and re-builds the mezzotints of his fairy tale world, and broadens its whole conception. ~~The scene revealed was the greater and wider reality outside my own street.~~ *This revelation came to me when*

... Having walked from the tea place we came out on to London Bridge and stood looking out over the river <sup>from</sup> ~~over~~ the parapet. It was a sunny morning and waves upon waves of colour and movement flashed into the scene. In that moment a new mind was born for

me, overlaying with a vast coloured mantle the make-believe mind of childhood.

Passing from the Bridge we all entered through the turnstile into the courtyard of the Tower of London. But the Tower of London was all wrong. It was the bare, dried bones of everything castles stood for. It was an aged skeleton, preserved in a show case, stripped of all vitality. There should have been knights in armour, mounted on caprisonned steeds clattering over the draw bridge and sweeping into the forecourt. <sup>There</sup> ~~There~~ They should have been met by retainers in colourful garments rushing forward to help them dismount and taking <sup>their</sup> ~~eng~~ horses to the stables. There should have been soldiers, scullions, ladies and their maids-in-waiting, filling the whole place with bustle and noise and activity. There should have been dungeons, with emaciated, chained prisoners being beaten and tortured by cruel, unkempt jaolers. There should have been nobles and courtiers standing tormenting unfortunate prisoners or flirting with the scullery maids. There should have been enormous, busy kitchens with boars being roasted on spits and rank on rank of capons and trestle tables covered with rows of enormous pastries. But there were none of these, the place was stripped of the last vestiges of romance, and replaced by a sanitary orderliness that reduced the observer to the depths of disillusionment. Perhaps after all this was indeed history.

From the turnstile a roped-off pathway led across the courtyard to a side door in a renovated stone façade leading to the



castle proper. Following this pathway in serried ranks, groups of sightseers were marshalled by Tower attendants in blue uniform and peaked caps on which in metal lettering were the initials of the particular authority that employed them. The sightseers were a mixed lot, of which our party was possibly the least noticeable. There were bowler-hatted gentlemen carrying rolled-up umbrellas, accompanied by stout bombast and sequined ladies and thin, straw-hatted children; there were men in sports blazers showing off self-consciously to bedecked and flower-hatted young ladies. There were foreigners, with beards and without, but all intent in getting as close to the guide as possible. This crowding was to enable them to hear his descriptions of the show places and their historic implications. At places of particular importance he stopped to dispense the special piece of information that concerned it. Each time he stopped his herd gathered about him. It can easily be estimated what chance any of our contingent of seven year olds stood of hearing anything comprehensible in such circumstances. Skirting the back of the crowd, our heads as close as possible to the backsides of the most exterior ring, and our ears stretched to get any snippets of valuable information that might be going, we got the ~~sense~~ <sup>sound</sup> of a word here and there but not sufficient to make sense.

Into the dungeons, clean swept and tidy, our queue filtered to see the rusted display of heaps of chains and balls and tangles of ironwork which once were torture engines which, next to the

Crown Jewels, were the pride of the establishment. Mr. Pickles when not up in front officiating as the guide's honorary deputy, would, from the guide book he had bought at the gate, retail to us bits of information about the more famous of the historical characters who had spent half a lifetime scratching their names on the hard stones of their prison cells.

At last we came to the White Tower and mounted the stone staircase to the jewel room. There, in an oblong glass case, protected from too close an approach by a fancy rope barrier, reposed the Crown Jewels - crown, orb, sceptre, the lot. Beefeaters stood with shouldered halberds at each corner of the barrier ready to swing down the sharp chopper <sup>edge</sup> ~~head~~ of their weapons to cut off the fingers or heads of any that dared approach too near these symbols of awe and majesty. From what glimpses we got of the display we were unable to condition our reactions into either a genuine or affected yelp of rapture at what to us had certainly less impact than a well set-up fruit stall and far less than a toy shop window at Christmas time.

From this inspection we children soon got restive, having in our social conditioning not yet arrived at the stage of unquestioned acceptance. Had the orb been of such a nature that it could have been passed to us to play football with we should have played with it without any feeling of sacrilege.

After Pickles had accomplished the task of getting us outside

the Tower in one bunch we all took a bus to Blackfriars. There, with only slightly less impact than the revelation of beauty which had flooded over me on my first seeing the Thames from Tower Bridge, the views up and down the river from Westminster Bridge with the towering pinnacles of the Houses of Parliament dominating the scene, was the second highlight in that most memorable day.

But Pickles, demi-god as he was in my childish thoughts, had only substance when within my personal contact. What sort of heaven he was a denizen of when away from me I had not developed imagination enough to picture. It is reasonable to suppose that while in the earlier stages of our excursion he had been prepared to accept a martyrdom to duty in giving up his free time on this Saturday morning, he was not such a martyr as to accept being separated from his home comforts for more than the morning of his free day. Our sightseeing tour was, therefore, somewhat hurriedly terminated by our being summarily crowded into a bus, on the lower and uninteresting deck, and whisked away to Kings Cross Station and back on to the train to Stroud Green. There <sup>when</sup>~~where~~ he had collected us he bid us all a hurried "Good-bye", and strode off down the road.

Play in the streets and waste land in the neighbourhood of Rathcoole Gardens developed in a direction which had far-reaching effects in my later life.

The housing boom of the early part of the nineteenth century came to an abrupt halt with the slump which started about 1903. Many builders caught midway in estate development went broke. The slump caused untold misery and ruin, but provided the boys in our street with the most wonderful playground ever devised by man.

We discovered it on the first morning after moving into the house in Rathcoole Gardens. When smouching around to see the lie of the land we found the schoolboys' paradise; an area of several acres that contained the skeleton of one building with brickwork up to roof level, and with ground and first floor joist and ceiling joists all in place, but no roof, stairs or other joinery. A second house was in a similar condition but only up to the first floor joists and there was a third and fourth with foundations only. There was also a pile of several thousand ~~4~~ bricks in a symmetrical stack about ten yards long, six yards wide, and seven feet high and large heaps of scaffold poles, scaffold boards, and corrugated iron sheets, also a lime putty bay and small deposits of sand and clay.

The field was fenced off on two of its sides by wooden posts and rails separating it from the railway, and on the other sides by locked-up houses that had been almost completed. Our brickfield had, we discovered a caretaker who, from his resemblance to the

bard, we called William Shakespeare. This resemblance only applied to his torso and head, that being the only part of the original hero of that name we ever remembered having seen. In dress, our caretaker was shabby, in movements shuffling, and his chances of ever stopping us children playing on the estate he was charged to look after so negligible that he never tried. In fact we might have been the caretakers, not him, for as soon as he saw us making for the site he shuffled away as quickly as possible in another direction.

Such a wealth of building material without any obvious owner presented us boys with our vocation. First, we would haul the bricks from the stack and lay out houses with the walls a single brick high and with bricks left out for door openings. Then having planned our rooms we went through the pantomime of knocking at the front door, entering the living room and sitting down on the earth floor imagining ourselves installed in a real dwelling. Or, with a few sticks and paper in the fireplace, we would imagine it was a brick oven and serve each other with all the dishes which we had heard of but rarely enjoyed. Later, the scaffold boards came in to make floors, and the walls would be built in dry bricks a foot to eighteen inches high.

The <sup>main</sup> ~~brick~~ <sup>of bricks</sup> stack was itself hollowed out by removing bricks from its centre and the hollow so made roofed over with corrugated iron sheets covered with bricks to keep them in position. So we found a dry cave for shelter when it rained. This dangerous shelter also became a smugglers cave where our treasures were brought

admired and swopped and where secret smoking sessions were arranged by the older boys.

As we grew older and got to know the boys of the neighbourhood our adventures in the brickfield got to be more and more daring. Hoards of us, led by an older and stronger boy, would swarm over the derelict building doing what we called 'dags' in which, whatever the leader did, we were dared to follow. We scrambled inside the buildings, climbed to the first floor, ran over the joists our steps so gauged to the spacing that our speed were hardly less than normal running. Then up on to the ceiling joists above, which sagged and bounced a little beneath us but never fortunately gave way. Down again on to the first floor where our special 'dag', only risked after long and frightening hesitation, was to drop from the sill of the first floor window on to the ground beneath.

Once having accomplished this feat without breaking either our legs or necks it became the normal route of our leader and his following. The only one of us who was ever injured was our leader who fell from the ceiling joists onto the ground beneath and broke his leg. This accident, although it permanently deprived him of ever leading us again, did not deter the rest of us from continuing the game from time to time.

It would be at about this period that I took up wrestling. The leader of our 'dags' was Henry Oberholtzer, whose father was a German and a physical training instructor. This father was a

big blond, rather frightening, man who spoke with a guttural accent. Henry's mother was also a big blonde German woman who disliked us calling to see if Teddy, Henry's younger brother, could come out to play. She felt her husband's profession was of a somewhat higher status than those of the fathers of the boys that called, judging us by the rather tattered garments that we wore in comparison to the neater turn-out of her own children. From this she must have concluded that we would be bad company for her son.

Exhibition <sup>wrestling</sup> bouts were staged at booths and fairs and in the many variety theatres throughout the country <sup>at this period</sup>. The world champion was, I think, at that time Hackenschmitt with various other wrestlers having titles such as "Killer this" or "Strangler the other" who could draw big crowds to watch their performances.

Having such close relationships to this highest level in this noble art in the shape of the friendship of the sons of a German gymnastic instructor naturally made us fans both of the stars and the sport. Henry Oberholtzer was our teacher and the brickfield our arena. Henry, who was about fifteen years old at the time of our brickfield adventures, was regarded by us as almost middle-aged. He was the impresario who staged the brickfield bouts. He was so far removed from us small fry that we talked in whispers among ourselves about his exploits, but his interest certainly tinted our atmosphere with a shade of athletic appreciation it might otherwise not have had. Some of the glory that he shed came down with little diminishment to his brother Teddy who was a year older than myself.

I was then about between seven and eight years old, thin and light but as wiry as a mongrel dog. To this day I treasure as the one and only athletic success of my life that among the brickfield wrestlers of my own age or even up to twelve months older, I could put down for the count (the patting of any free hand three times on the ground by the defeated being the count) any of those who wrestled with me. This accomplishment also included Teddy Oberholtzer. As this feat did nothing to enhance my popularity I learned from it that thinking one is in any way superior to one's friends in any activity brings more lasting satisfaction than going to the trouble of proving it, and certainly makes for more enduring friendships.



The brickfield at the bottom of our street was sufficient to hold our interest in the summer evenings or on Saturday afternoons. But on Sundays or holidays we often wandered further afield to Finsbury Park, Queens Woods, Highgate Woods, Alexandra Park or even as far as Hampstead Heath. One adventure in Alexandra Park is, I think worth recording in that it reveals that the narrow margin between children's innocence and juvenile delinquency may be very small at times.

I was never happy at Alexandra Palace, neither in its buildings nor in its grounds, although we as children went there many, many times. <sup>from</sup> At the top of our street it was only a short distance to reach the park gates. Something in me always responded best to a countryside that was wild and informal. Bracken, brushwood, soft springy turf, broad meadows and unbanked streams, the dark caverns under interlacing trees and the twisting limbs of willow trees overhanging clear pools; all these I delighted in. The formal park with neat borders and flower beds, green-painted grandstand and smelly conveniences depressed me. Old buildings, especially any that presented an aspect of defeat and neglect made me feel unhappy, and feel I was wandering in an unreal fourth dimension, a sort of purgatory, neither a part of me nor of my future, a bad dream world into which I had drifted.

Most people who went to Alexandra Palace, except on special gala days, found themselves there as a result of having an urge to get somewhere different from their immediate surroundings. While

they were there they probably spent their time subconsciously wondering why they had surrendered the comfort of their familiar home for a wearisome trek through the delapidated halls, uncompromising formal shrubberies, and patchy flower beds.

A magnificent flight of stone steps rose from the front lawn to a paved terrace which ran along the whole front of the building and wide tall windows, some blacked over with paint to prevent people looking in, took up almost the whole of the front elevation. In every available nook on the terrace stood a slot machine. Every sort of machine which the slot machine manufacturer had ever thought of found a home there and was duplicated in serried ranks running along each side of the entrance hall, the various passage ways, alcoves, and dead-end corners. None of them worked without a penny being inserted to set them going. Now a penny was all the money which my elder brother Ralph and I had between us when we visited the place; so it was too heavy a price to pay for such a transient pleasure as jiggling little metal figures placed stiffly making futile passes at a miniature football, or gazing for a few moments at the hard daguerreotype series of pictures showing innocuous bedroom scenes through a metal visor, or even to stamp one's name out on a thin metal strip; particularly when the penny could provide food in the form of four ounces of treacle toffee or a bag of stale cakes.

Inside the building were the great rooms, their ceilings supported by tall columns showing areas of spoiled paint and plaster and discoloured gilt. These ceilings weighed heavily on a little

boy who felt so small in comparison to such giant proportions,  
~~that he lost thereby~~  
~~losing~~ that fine rich feeling of being a little bit important.

The great bare unfurnished rooms were dusty, dirty and delapidated. Some areas were sealed off by temporary partitions and the whole place was too large and too expensive to be sprucely and cleanly maintained.

One Sunday morning the three of us, Ralph and I and a boy called Graham who lived in the same street as us, found ourselves wandering about the park grounds in a mood for adventure, where no adventure was to be found. Probably hungry - we were always hungry - we wandered about kicking anything that could be found to be kicked, tearing a few leaves or protruding saplings from trees, or throwing any stones that attracted our attention and suggested a tiny relief from boredom. The time was late spring and we found ourselves picking off the large round buds of a rhododendron bush. The buds as we pulled off their outer green covering exposed the compact frilly red flowers and these we slowly picked apart, opening up their flower petals and straightening out their wrinkles. Still aimlessly we wandered from bush to bush, picking the buds and tearing them slowly apart and dropping the torn buds in our wake. There was no real joy in this destroying neither was there any feeling of doing anything wrong; we were merely putting in time and relieving our boredom.

Having stripped the buds from most of the numerous bushes that dotted the grounds we left the Park for home leaving a trail

of destruction of torn red flowers and green casings on the park grass and paths behind us.

What was the value of what we had destroyed? What frustration had we brought to the park gardeners whose work we had ruined? What pleasure had we taken away from future visitors and sightseers? But no park keeper saw us nor, so far as we knew, any chance visitor. In fact no crime was ever committed as we were never found out.

The barrier between the world of conformity and the world of make believe can be crossed by passing over from a place with which one is very familiar to a place that one has never, or rarely, been to before.

Such happened when, in our holiday wanderings, I went with my brother Ralph on summer rambles to Hampstead Heath. At just about the spot where Hampstead Road finishes and Spaniards Road starts, my mental reaction to the physical world changed. The very air seemed to have a different texture; the clouds and sky the grass and the trees all presented themselves in different, sharper tones, taking on something of the quality of a setting for the stage.

Our route to the Heath was by Crouch End, and Hornsey Lane and then over the bridge at Highgate Archway to Highgate Hill and then via Hampstead Lane and Spaniards Road. Although the shortest route lay through Waterlow Park, we generally made a detour to avoid this as the park depressed us.

The pattern of restraint which the boy sees foreshadowed by civilisation is to him exemplified in the perfectly regulated park. Green lawns and banks, tidy purposeful paths looped grass-guards and plaque-like notices telling him to "keep off", "keep out" and to respect the amenities that have been laid out for his pleasure - all these disturb him. The bandstand in the centre of a star formation of paths, the solid and respectable drinking fountains, the tiled and glazed brick lavatories, the geometrical flower beds with geometrically patterned, tiered and colour arranged flowers - all these set up an antipathy in his anarchistic mind. Old people sitting on solid wooden benches gazing at the irritating young who disturb the placidity of their declining years challenge and deepen the distaste of children for the Sunday conformity of the public park.

There is a fiction that was built up in the nineteenth century by magistrates, educationalists, and well-meaning people generally that children love parks. To create a park for children to love was possibly the highest social benefit that one man could achieve in a lifetime of good works; to abstract from the wealth accumulated over a successful business life, sufficient money to donate a park to a local authority could be reckoned as the most positive assurance to the donor of a firm seat among the upper social strata in heaven. It is doubtful whether donors could expect to get much earthly satisfaction from having a statue of themselves cast in bronze and erected posthumously at the park

entrance, but they could anticipate a heavenly satisfaction at being able to look down at such a solid testimonial to their earthly merit.

But children don't like parks, at least not the Waterlow type. So that it was towards the freer excitement of Hampstead Heath that we turned for a stimulus to our imagination. The hem of the cloak of make-believe would flick a shade across my thoughts when crossing the bridge at Highgate Archway. It was along this way, so history tells us, that Dick Turpin passed when on his ride to York. When we crossed it, the bridge spanned a gap of eighty to one hundred feet and was forty or more feet deep at its centre but at the time of Turpin's ride there was no bridge. The gap presented an almost impassable barrier. But, under the incredulous eyes of the Bow Street Runners following him, Dick forced Black B forward and the pair leapt down the almost precipitous incline, leapt again the narrowed gap lower down the gorge, stumbled a moment, then with incredible speed forced their way through the undergrowth to the top at the far side. They left their pursuers at the far side of the gorge, unwilling to risk their necks in an effort to follow them. In my mind's eye, I saw it all happening again.

Leading up to the Spaniards, an ancient inn famed as having been the rendezvous of highwaymen in highwaymen times, the road led through a dark gloomy tunnel made by the overhanging branches of the trees. This was Ken Woods. At last the tunnel opened

out into full sunshine, revealing like a suddenly uncurtained picture a whitewashed, unwindowed circular building on one side of the road and a set of stocks for malefactors on the other, with the white roadway in between leading up to the virgin Heath.

The circular whitewashed single-storeyed building, with one solid oak door for entrance, was reputed to have been the prison in which Jack Straw, another highwayman, had been immured by the Runners until the time came for him to be conducted to London for his execution.

During the hours we spent on the heath, I lived in a day dream world, making the heath alive with stage coaches, steaming horses, whip thrashing drivers and pistol carrying postilions. With behind each clump of trees silent black-masked figures lurking, their horses trained for silence, and their riders ready to dash from hiding to shoot the postilions, halt the coaches, and demand from the passengers, "Your money or your life."

Or perhaps the stage coach would be carrying a beautiful damsel and her duenna, all dressed up in their yards and yards of lawn and lace and furbelows, and I was a chestnut haired gallant just arrived in the nick of time to stop the highwaymen from maltreating the highborn and beautiful damsel suffering a fate worse than death. ——— The highwayman a scurrilous looking fellow, would be lying sprawling at my feet while his cowardly gang would be racing away up the road almost hidden in a cloud of dust as they hastened to get away as quickly

as possible from the risk of another shot from my pistol's hot muzzle. The lady offers me her jewelled hand to kiss as with modest bow I present my respects and assure her safety to her journey's end.

*From this again*  
— ~~My~~ mind would sweep forward to a change of scene. The stage coach now becomes part of a cavalcade of rich burghers and once again I am leader of my highwayman gang. We hold up the rich burghers and take away their money and send them on their way. Then, with a laugh and a flourish we throw the full purses to those who have conveniently gathered in the adjacent bushes to see the rich robbed to provide alms for the starving poor.

The sunshine, the dusty road, the wild heath, the racing clouds in the sky, give all the textures of the coloured illustrations in a story book. A faint blue haze predominates over everything toning down facts into a fairy tale world of make-believe.



Bill was my cousin. His parents and several brothers and sisters had all died of consumption over the years since his birth. Finally, his father and mother having died, he was put into the workhouse from which he was rescued by my parents. I assume that their sense of responsibility for the last of this family must have outweighed the very strong material considerations of the addition of an extra child. The burden of bringing up a nephew fell on my mother's shoulders, as our family income was certainly not augmented by their decision.

Bill had lived since birth, among the slums of Islington and amidst the poverty arising from his father's employment as a casual labourer. In an atmosphere of pawnshops, sickness, childbearing and death, Bill had survived with a strong frame, a sturdy independence and a deep distrust of any form of authority.

Food from the garbage cans, augmented by the swift snaffling of meat pies, cakes, or anything else lying around loose on stalls had been his chief sustenance. By the time he came to live with us, after years of running wild, he had, I now realise, all the makings of a 'wide' boy. His tastes in food were for the highly flavoured - fish and chips, faggots and peas and black sausages. He could swear with greater variety and deeper swear tone-values than could or would my father.

Had my mother taken on the task of civilising Bill up to her ideals of what a little boy should be by itself, she would have earned high merit in any celestial record of such things. To tal

it on as an addition to the struggle for her own brood's food, health and civilisation showed, perhaps, an exaggerated willingness for martyrdom in the cause of her idealism.

Anyway, there it was; Bill was with us. He was nine years old and eight months older than I was; heavier built but not quite so tall, my equal at school, my equal in almost everything. In most things we were intensely jealous of each other and disliked each other sometimes to the borders of hatred; yet we went through our boyhood in such close contact that we might have been identical twins held together by an invisible cord.

Under his tuition I mastered the elementary lessons of snatching the odd things displayed on hawkers' barrows or outside shops. But I never became a good liar like Bill, who lied as if brought to it by nature. He replied to any query about any action of his that was questionable, by sweetly, innocently and convincingly telling his tale in the way he felt would best fit his case. Bill's apprenticeship to living by his wits had been very thorough. So far as I can remember he never got into any trouble with the police. Unfortunately - his pupil - did. It happened like this.

About five minutes walk away from our new house were a number of tennis courts. These tennis courts were separated from a road by a wooden fence about five feet high. Between this fence and the wire of the back of the courts was a ditch about four feet wide. Bill found out that tennis balls sometimes came over the wire fence and into the ditch where they got lost in the undergrowth. Unfortunately

to get to the ditch the five foot wooden fence had to be climbed; to do this an accomplice was needed who could help to climb it. Bill knew that, in whatever other ways I might be deficient, I excelled at climbing. So he chose me as his accomplice.

The following Sunday morning the two of us went to investigate. Climbing up on Bill's shoulders I reached the top of the fence and hauled myself up, then leaning over, managed after a bit of a struggle to get Bill high enough to get his hands on to the top so that he alone could get himself up and over.

On this occasion we found two tennis balls and claimed one each. On those days most of our games and all of our football was played with tennis balls in the street. The hard wear and tear that tennis balls suffered from this treatment, coupled with the wastage of lost balls or balls casually snatched by bigger boys, made a trade in tennis balls quite a good line. The current 'black market' price was a penny each. Our first two balls were soon disposed of and our appetites whetted for the easy money to be obtained from this simple line of business. Sunday morning after Sunday morning we made our visits, got over the fence and searched the length of the ditch generally finding one or sometimes two balls.

One Sunday our search of the ditch proved in vain. We walked over to the pavilion to investigate the focal point of tennis ball storage. The pavilion was, perhaps fortunately for us, completely secure. Disconsolately, my cousin and I returned toward the ditch for a last look round. Suddenly Bill darted off to the right

shouting back at me as he went - "Look out, Jim, a Bobby!"

Up to that moment it had never really occurred to me that our activities at the tennis court had any criminal content, with the result that I was bewildered by Bill's sudden warning and departure. Nevertheless, I ran for the ditch and hid down in it behind the fence. A policeman, who probably had us in view ever since we had crossed over from the pavilion, loomed over the fence above me and a giant hand firmly grasped me by the collar; the voice of doom said "Come on out of it sonny, let's see what you have been up to." As I was being hauled up over the fence, I had a fleeting glimpse of Bill's form in the distance flying over the fence, landing on its backside on the pavement and making off down the road as fast as its short, stubby legs could carry it.

The policeman, although probably of relatively normal height for a policeman, looked to me to be at least eight feet tall as he inspected what to him must have appeared a tiny eight year old criminal. He asked what I was doing; I replied, "Nothing". When he asked if I had taken anything, I replied, "No." These replies were obviously unconvincing as I had a tennis ball which had been 'found' previously tucked up in the roll of my jersey.

Placing his hand firmly on my collar, he asked me where I lived and we proceeded in the direction of my home rather than in the opposite direction - one which led, I had reason to fear, towards the police station and the cells.

The time was now about half past eight in the morning. After

knocking for sometime at our front door (which I could have opened by means of a string pulled tight across the letterbox) the door was opened revealing my father in the act of bracing up his trousers and looking none too happy at having his Sunday morning lie-in spoiled. The policeman having assured himself that he was addressing the fellow father, recounted what had happened and said what he thought should be done with such a hardened criminal. My father, tactfully, expressed sorrow and hoped that no action would be taken, a hope with which the policeman did not express entire agreement. My father, as an aside, expressed the wish that the policeman had caught the other little bugger instead and taken him to the police station and given him a good hiding.

Bill returned home later and was, with myself, given a good talking to; we could expect, said my father, to get bloodywell summoned for thieving and trespass; he hoped we would get six months in gaol for it but before the start of the expected sentence we had better lead abstemious lives to prepare us for the bread and water diet during that period. My father knew quite well, from a private chat with the policeman, that no action would be taken provided Dad gave the two of us a good hiding (which he was quite incapable of bringing himself to carry out).

So worried were we at the gloomy prospect that faced us if we waited at home constantly in fear of the clutching hand of the law coming to claim us sometime in the near future that we decided - Bill and I - to run away from home.

When we asked for food enough to see us on the first stages of our flight, a request which we voiced as casually as possible, Mum quickly supplied each of us with a large chunk of bread pudding, several thick rounds of bread-and-marge and a bag of dates to start us off on our journey. We did not even dream that they suspected what was in our minds, but were confident that the duration of our flight would last little longer than the duration of our food supply.

In the previous September there had been a family outing to Hadley Woods, a stretch of park and common land near New Barnet, where we had gone to gather blackberries. This was about ten miles from our home and on the outside edge of our known world. Here, we reasoned, the possibility of our policeman's arm ever reaching us was so remote as not to be worth bothering about. So off we set. First we moved hurriedly through the back lanes and alleys, constantly alert and scanning every open space for any sign of our enemy before dashing to cover in a lane on it's far side. Later, more assured and happier, we pressed on for the rest of the ten miles. Our foot steps dragged slower and slower before at long last, really tired out, we reached our haven at about three-o'-clock in the afternoon.

Reaching sanctuary is one thing but knowing just what you are going to do when you get there is quite another; that part of the inevitable result of running away from home had not come into our considerations. There were no blackberries either as autumn was six months away in either direction. By this time we had long since eaten up all our food. We were very tired and hungry and very far

from home. Here we were, two urchins - eight and a half and just nine - on the edge of our world and without any food. Although home was five hours journey away at least some degree of comfort and sustenance might be found there even at the cost of our peace of mind. After wandering in the woods for an hour, vainly ~~searching~~ seeking nourishment by chewing some of the more succulent grasses pulled up as we went along, there seemed no other alternative but to face the long and tedious return home even at the risk of being made to suffer at a later date for our previous crime.

It was by accident that we found our salvation. Coming out of the wood and turning into the main road which would take us in the direction of London we decided to go to one of the large houses along the roadside and ask there for a drink of water. Our native talent lay in my seeming ingenuousness linked with Bill's gift for exercising his vivid imagination. While Bill told his story, all I had to do was to say nothing and keep the eyes of my innocent, angelic face glued to those of the lady who answered the door.

At the first door we tried Bill stated, to the elderly lady who answered it, (we had instinctively gone to the front door as even on Sunday afternoon the maid would most likely have answered the door at the back) that we were thirsty and could the lady give us a drink of water. The lady looked at me and I must certainly have looked tired and hot even if there was no evidence that I was thirsty. Bill followed the slight pause as the lady considered the situation, "Yes see, lady, we have been in the woods for hours. We got lost and

there was nobody about to ask and we couldn't find the road again". "Wait a moment," said the lady and went away to get the water, returning a moment or two later with a jug and a cup. "Where do you come from," she asked. "From London", said Bill. "We walked and walked and didn't notice the time and we got tired and hungry and then we got lost." I put on my most tired and hungry look and the lady was as clay in the hands of the potter. We left this house each with a large chunk of the best fruit cake we had ever tasted and enriched financially by the present of a penny each.

The experience was too rich in its potentialities of unlimited food and wealth to be immediately abandoned. But in the matter of thirst there were limits to our capabilities. We thought of all the ways we might inculcate a deep and abiding thirst or, alternatively of absorbing by some sort of conjuring trick any surplus quantities of water it might become necessary to dispose of. We tried one morning in a house successfully with the plea of; "Please can we have a drink of water", and were able to appear sufficiently thirsty to get away with a bag of stale rock cakes - and a further penny each.

The success of our operations so far suggested a new possibility. Selecting at suitable distances from each other any kindly-looking, elderly ladies coming towards us Bill hesitatingly accosted them in a weak tired voice and asked if the lady could tell us the way to Tottenham - this district suggesting itself as a more likely place to have been heard of in these parts than Hornsey. By this means, and a further assuaging of a non-existent thirst, in a matter of three



quarters of an hour we had accumulated the sum of one shilling and a penny, not to speak of the cake and buns. At New Barnet station we found there was a train for Stroud Green. Paying our fares we took the train and arrived back in our house at about eight-o'-clock with tuppence left; our fear of having to spend the next six months in gaol was completely forgotten.

One evening, almost six months later when there had been a fire in a dress shop in the Broadway at Crouch End which all the children and police in the neighbourhood had collected to enjoy, I saw my policeman again. Whether he saw and recognised me or not, I cannot say, but the memory of my guilty past flooded over me and I fled home at the speed of a young deer without once stopping to turn round to see if my enemy was in pursuit.

Apart from an occasional clout from my father when we were unusually trying we never underwent any form of corporal punishment at home. My mother ruled by subtly imbuing us with the thought that doing anything that we knew was wrong, brought its own retribution in ways which, at that time, might be difficult to define. My father ruled by 'divine right'; he was the law maker; to disobey was unnatural. Corporal punishment meted out to us by those who might have power over us outside was suffered with more or less resentment to the extent that we thought it was undeserved. Our resentment was often all the more bitter as there was no appeal to any higher level to give proper consideration to the merits of our case.

Bill and I often stayed dinner at school, generally when my

mother had to go out to work. We took with us a slab of bread pudding, and a couple of slices of bread and marge and washed this down with water from the basin in the lavatory.

On one occasion when putting in time between finishing our meal and the time to start our school lessons again, we felt at a bit of a loose end. We had a tennis ball with us but if we started to kick this about in the playground, bigger boys inevitably joined us until our part in the game would be wide out on the fringes of the general kicking scramble and would inevitably finish with one of the bigger boys claiming the ball as his own. On one such an occasion I took the ball into the small area at the rear of the school which was surrounded by high walls, and which during the meal time was deserted.

We had only just started to kick the ball about when one of us kicked it into the w.c. where it lodged somewhere behind the cistern. To recover it I climbed on to the w.c. seat and started poking around in the accumulated rust and dirt about the cistern which was almost out of reach above my head. Then without warning chaos and confusion surrounded me. From the skies came bricks and mortar, cistern, ducts and pipes falling in a confused mass about us. We panicked, not staying to inspect how much damage we had done. The cloud of dust and torrent of water with an entanglement of pipes and masonry convinced us that the whole building had collapsed. Together we ran down the passage at the side of the building checking ourselves before we came out into the big playground so that we could stroll casually down the length of the playground to make our exit into the street.

Back at school, after our dinner-time break, we were sure that there could be no suspicion that we could have been involved, so we attentively proceeded with our class work. But barely had the class started when a boy entered the classroom and gave a message to our teacher. Our teacher - Onions it was - looked up. "You Goss and you," pointing to the two of us, "go to the headmaster's study."

The head was a big broad man with a huge mop of white hair with sideboards and beard of the same colour. An awe-inspiring figure he reminded me of what I assumed God looked like. He said no more than "Follow me," and led us out by the back door into the lavator area. The scene of ~~carnage~~ <sup>confusion</sup> with which we had expected to be confronted had mysteriously disappeared but, being ~~required~~ <sup>impelled</sup> to take a closer look at the w.c., we were asked to note that the cistern had been pulled off its brackets and the water feed pipe was now bent down and discharging into the pan beneath. "Did you do that?" said the head. From sheer habit Bill said, "No, we weren't here at dinner time." This statement immediately convicted us. My dumbness implied that I saw no chance of my trying to lie myself out of the situation. We were then led back to the ~~head~~ headmaster's study; in silence he took down a willow cane; in silence he put me over his knee and in silence I received half a dozen strokes of the cane. But Bill was different. Although I do not think the indignity of the chastisement registered so deeply with him as it did with me, the opportunity and even right to protest vociferously was not to be missed.

About four months previously in a fracas in the small bedroom where we three brothers and Bill slept, he had caught his bare behind on a projection at a bad angle resulting in a goodish swaith about four inches long and a half of an inch deep being cut in his flesh. It was fixed up temporarily and the next day stitched up at the casualty ward of the local hospital. All went well and it mended nicely. But the opportunity of being birched by the headmaster enabled him to stage the demonstration of his life. The scholars their various classes throughout the school were suddenly brought into close contact with pulsating life by hearing shrieks coming from the headmaster's study; the reiterated phrase, "Oh! Oh! my poor arse," rang out as clear and true as a bell above the monotonous drone of class work. It was only to be expected that the more unfeeling among his colleagues should for sometime after the event refer to Bill as "Poor Arse" <sup>was only to be expected, but my being</sup> So, too, was I dubbed, "Poor Arse" <sup>seemed to me an unflattering interpretation</sup> "cousin" ~~which seemed to be an uncharitable comment~~ of our relationship.

Bill, as I have mentioned before was an orphan. Suddenly from out of the blue came a maternal aunt. I was in the house when she visited us and a spectator of the dramatic scene which followed. It was because she thought there might be some money arising from the disposal of her brother-in-law's estate that Bill's aunt had come to see us. Where any idea of where any money came from did not become clear. But knowing my father if there had ever been any, he had probably spent it on his brother's funeral expenses or in the purchase of some second hand clothes to replace Bill's workhouse garb. It was also possible that Aunt Harriet - I think that was her name - came to visit her nephew to salve her conscience for her tardy interest in this last survivor of her <sup>sister</sup> brother's family; although it transpired that she had no intention of helping to support finding a home for him.

After the usual courtesies and introductions had been exchanged our childish attention in the scene, had all but evaporated when we were startled by hearing my father's voice being raised in anger for the first time in my memory. Loud exchanges took place between him and Bill's aunt until finally he ordered Harriet out of the house and threatened to get a policeman to eject her if she didn't go that minute. In considering her approach to her poor unhappy nephew she had taken the obvious course of bringing him a present. The present she had brought him lay forgotten and discarded during the heat of the argument and had been left in its wrappings on a chair. As a final protest before departing, Harriet snatched it up and raising it in her hands *clashed it to the floor*

flouncing out as she did so, never to be seen again. The object in its wrappings hit the floor with a plunk and bounced up almost to the ceiling, knocked a china vase off the mantelpiece on the way down before finishing up under the sewing machine. It turned out to be a small-sized football.

Nothing so wonderful as a real football had ever come our way before and, whether we judged Aunt Harriet rightly or not, at least the thought behind the gift does suggest that she was better hearted than we had given her credit for.

Possessing a football raised the younger members of our family to a new aristocratic level among our indigent friends in Rathcoombe Gardens; it raised Bill, of course, to the exalted plane of being a born leader of men, or at least of boys. I have a mental picture of him now, the football under his arm, making off in the direction of the nearest recreation ground with an entourage of his cousins and favoured local ragamuffins trailing in his wake, each member in strict order of precedence.

From our previous football games, at the level of kicking a tennis ball about in the street, new horizons developed. We even considered forming a football team and indulged in all the vicarious joys of spending hours in front of sportshop windows, voicing our preferences for the types of boots, stockings or jerseys we would have liked to buy. Vicarious because apart from the miniature football there was no more hope of our being able to buy even one pair of football stockings among the lot of us than that we should

have been immediately chosen to form a new, first division, league team.

Of course, Bill's standing with his cousins altered as well. Whereas, up to that time, we had indulged in a slight edge of superiority, now we clung to the hope of being recognised as favoured courtiers about his person. Bill quickly accepted the new status that arose from his ownership of the treasure, as we were never allowed, except in the course of a game, to kick his ball and certainly not to touch or to carry it.

But Bill's importance was short lived. One day, leading his tattered team to a neighbouring recreation ground, we took the short way across the brickfield, <sup>then proceeded</sup> by way of the footpath that <sup>led</sup> ~~came~~ out ~~by~~ Harringay Station. This path was a private railway one, and was fenced in on both sides with wooden rails and palisades, the palisades being placed about four inches apart. On the far side of the fence was the railway where about a dozen lines formed an extensive siding.

The sun shone and our journey was half done; the prospect of an anticipated game brightened our eyes and hastened our footsteps. In a ragged file we followed Bill who marched proudly ahead, his tail under his arm. No thought of impending tragedy entered our heads until, suddenly, tragedy enveloped us. "Lese majesty" reared its ugly head with Ralph as the culprit. Eighteen months older than Bill, he had perhaps resented more than us the superior airs which ownership of the football gave his cousin. Suddenly, dashing from the rear, he caught up with Bill, swung his fist and knocked the ball from under his arm. Following the ball he joyfully dribbled it a

down the path being pursued by its shocked and blasphemous owner and his motley supporters. With a wild shout Ralph put all his strength into one free and glorious protest against such blatant flaunting of private property as Bill had displayed and hooked the ball into the sky. It shot over the fence and landed in the sidings a good fifty yards away. Gathering our wits, but now shaken by this staggering blow against the fundamental rights of property, we put our faces to the gaps in the railings and saw the ball in the distance lying between the sleepers in the siding. For a few moments we debated how we were going to retrieve it until, with intense relief, we saw a railwayman coming down the line in the direction of the ball. We shouted and waved as the railwayman got nearer and nearer the ball. He was almost in a direct line with it; he must see it. We waved and shrieked again. Then we realised he had seen it; our troubles would soon be over and we could continue on our way. All would be as it was before.

The railwayman took not the least notice of us, even appearing as if he had neither seen nor heard us. Then he picked up the ball, without a glance in our direction, and walked off with it in a direction at right angles from us across the siding. And that was the end. From that day neither I nor Bill nor any of our family ever possessed another football of our own.

A week or two after our loss, a ball of exactly the same size appeared in the school playground for the Friday afternoon kick-about awarded to the best-attended class of that particular week. It's presumed owner, a big lout of almost thirteen, being faced with our



claim to ownership of the ball, and seeing the weakness of  
our position in a moment laughed it to scorn, .....  
~~it to scorn.~~ His entourage, older boys than Bill's late court,  
shrieked their laughter with him. We were then chased into a corner  
of the playground where we finished off the football episode in a  
rough and tumble of flying limbs and heaving wrestling bodies on the  
playground's gravel surface. But Bill never got his ball back; his  
short reign was over for treachery, jealousy, robbery and finally  
violence had robbed him of his crown.

Along Tottenham Lane, just before the turn into Rosebury Avenue on the right hand side, was an extra large field. Most of the year was to be seen through the five-barred gate set in an opening in a thick **K**awthorn hedge. In it a few horses occasionally grazed; but mostly was empty. We used to pass this field on our way to and from school. One day, an unusual activity became noticeable through the open gate. Heavily-loaded carts, pulled by as many as four horses, were to be seen dragging in loads of brightly coloured poles and piles of canvas. As if by magic a great marquee arose and nearly filled the field.

Opposite the field was a very high hoarding. On our way to and from school the sight of the bill-posting man changing the advertisements, always pulled us up short to watch him at work. We were fascinated by the way in which, from a pile of folded papers on his cart, he would take the top one, pose it on the end of his long past brush and with deft flicks open out, paste it, turn it face up and adjust it into its correct position on to the hoarding. Each section of the whole picture was available on his cart in order of sequence; as one piece after another was neatly fitted into the pattern the picture and the wording became intelligible. For as long as I can remember, one great poster held pride of place on that hoarding: "High on the fence leapt Sunny Jim, Force is the Food that Raiseth him" - in which a thin man dressed in the style of "Uncle Sam" was to be seen leaping over a fence.

Display bills for theatres and variety performances were also pasted up with a regular weekly change. The Tottenham Empire, which

was evidently the home of melodrama, could be depended on for a splendid if somewhat harrowing display. Two I remember were: "The Silver King" and "The Girl who Took the Wrong Turning".

The depiction of this last as the pieces of its poster were built up on the hoarding was a work of art. The story of the play was reduced to a series of cameos joined together by short lengths of road running between one cameo and the next to illustrate the sequence of events. In the top left hand corner was a picture of a warm, comfortable drawing room where a party was being held and a young lady, evidently the pride and joy of her parents, was being induced by a dark monacled gentleman to sip a glass of wine. The cameos proceeded via increasing revelry, through drink to debauchery and shame with the girl passing down the scale of comfort and affluence to penury and disgrace. The last picture returned to the first scene; the same room but another party is going on. This time the parents sit hand in hand gazing sorrowfully forward into nothingness. The same dark monacled man, apparently none the worse for wear or drink, is now inducing another young girl to drink her first glass of wine. Outside the window through which we are looking in at the party is the first young lady standing, cold and starving, while clots of snow gather on her threadbare dress and on the sleeping child clasped tightly in her thin arms.

In due course bills were posted about the circus which was to take place in the field opposite the hoarding. Before our fascinated gaze were pictures of elephants, lions, and tigers, chimpanzees, bears and sea

lions appeared. There was to be a lion tamer in an arena surrounded by a dozen or so howling, roaring, bloody-jawed monsters which he was shown keeping at bay with a tiny stock whip and his menacing and quelling eye. There were also shown girls balancing on rigid toes the backs of beautiful white horses whose streaming white tails showed they were cavorting through space at a furious speed. Acrobats, clowns, jugglers - all were there. Lord John Sanger's circus was coming to town.

Notices were sent to the school asking the headmaster to bring the notice of his scholars the forthcoming attractions whose undisputed educational value the master would undoubtedly recognise. In addition the notice respectfully offered special performances for children under twelve to which they would be admitted at half price - half price being threepence. The agencies advertising the circus had done their work thoroughly. We children talked of nothing else for weeks. Some of us, of whom I unfortunately was not one, even had leave from school to watch the coming of the circus animals along the route between the station and the field.

Bill and I were swept up into the atmosphere of excitement and days before its coming we went over in imagination the various acts depicted on the hoardings and discussed them as we lay in bed in the evening before going to sleep. After the circus had arrived we pestered Mum for the threepence entrance money until at last, unable to stand up against our barrage any longer, she gave way.

It was a miserable rainy evening, great dark clouds rolled across

the sky and sporadic bursts of rain came tumbling down sufficient to damp the enthusiasm of any but less determined pleasure seekers. Arriving at the field, our threepences clutched tightly in our hands we presented ourselves at the entrance barrier. The man taking the tickets, looked at us quizzically then laughed gently, "Sorry sonny it's only half price for the afternoon performances." Outside, with the flickering lights of the tent's entrance beckoning us to the far land of gaiety and pleasure within and the music of the mechanical organ throbbing out waves of exhilaration, we took stock of our sorry situation. Our conclusions suggested that ~~several~~ <sup>two serious minded</sup> boys could easily ~~hop over~~ <sup>scramble through</sup> the fence in the flickering lights and shadows of the torches, and could then find a way round to the back of the tent and crawl beneath the canvas to make a surreptitious entry. This seemed a relatively simple and fairly obvious solution to our difficulties. But this circus management had obviously thought of the possibility of small, undisciplined boys trying to reduce their takings by such unconventional procedure and had taken the necessary precautions.

Our efforts to carry out our proposals got us as far as the rear of the circus tent where, on our stomachs in the wet grass, we were in the act of wriggling under the canvas <sup>When</sup> a hand descended out of the obscurity to grab me by the collar while Bill was prevented from immediate escape by the heavy pressure of a large boot resting in the small of his back. Had our apprehender not been both greedy and optimistic in hoping to collect two very active nine year olds at one and the same time on an almost dark night among the ropes and lines

tethering a large marquee all might have been lost. As it was with quick movement I twisted myself under the adjacent tent rope which pulled my attacker off balance forcing him to move his foot from Bill's back. Bill released, he threw himself at the hand which had held my collar, grabbed it in a flash and bit it. Together, without staying to make any apology, we tore off into the darkness.

All hope of seeing the performance ~~was not~~ <sup>were now</sup> completely abandoned. Disconsolately, turning up our coat collars, we wandered off down the road still clutching our threepences in our hands. I suppose children morally more stable or wise enough to assess the repercussions of a possible crime before undertaking it would have turned back home, handed over the threepences and even have been consoled by being allowed to keep the money. But temptation is ever ready to lead little ones off the beaten track. We had rarely had all of threepence written as being ours with no definite object on which to spend it. Our spartan diet at home seldom provided us with luxuries and now the shop displayed so many things, that we had often savoured in imagination which could now so easily be within our grasp.

The baker's shop at the top of our street finally seduced us. Then we had gazed longingly into many shops and passed them with a sigh. But, gazing into the warm interior of the baker's shop window at the fancy cakes, we found that we could not take our eyes or thoughts away from some pink conical objects sprinkled with desiccated coconut. Going back and forward over the length of the window we honestly tried to take our minds off these cakes by creating within ourselves such

atmosphere of indecision as would give us strength to move away. It was all to no purpose. Two, penny cakes soft, sweet and fresh were bought and slowly, crumb by crumb, devoured.

This deviation from the path of rectitude would have sufficed us had we now been able to pay over the remaining tuppence without questions being asked about the missing penny. If this could have been done, we would have willingly relieved ourselves of the major part of our burdensome sense of guilt. But we were now fast held in the trap we had sprung ourselves. Our loss of face in begging so hard for the threepences to go to the circus at a time when, by our own silly faults, no half priced seats were available, was perhaps our first reaction to our problem. Our succumbing to the use of part of the money to buy 'trash' made impossible any justification that could bring us solace. The two pennies now weighed more heavily in our hands than the three had before.

Mouching along with our sense of guilt, our cold damp clothes, and our burdensome problem we gazed less excitedly into the windows of all the neighbouring shops. In one of these, I suppose it was a delicatessen shop, we saw some round, flat objects covered with a fine sprinkling of golden brown which looked like grated nuts. Thinking of these as some more exciting version of the deceased conical cakes more to relieve ourselves of our now unwanted money than feeling any great interest in our new purchase we went in and bought one each of the mysterious objects. Our disappointment when, on taking a bite we found they were what we later came to know as fish cakes can be imagined; the substitution of a fish cake for what had been expected

to be a more than ever tasty raspberry bun, or one third of our delight in the performances of elephants; lions, tigers, and circus riders made them taste, to us, more like dust and ashes.

To finish off our debauch, this time making more sure of the degree of satisfaction we could expect for our money, we bought and consumed with more relish two overripe bananas each.

Having disposed of the money given to us to go to the circus, we had no thought of confession gaining us absolution; the loss of face, so important to children, put that solution out of the question. The decision to conceal our crime by credible lying had subconscious been our release into the realms of "it never happened". To do that our two stories about what had happened had to be identical. Our stories, we decided after consultation, were to make out that we had been to the circus and that neither cakes, nor rissoles nor bananas had ever come into the picture. This being agreed, we went along home quite reassured that our past was dead and the episode closed. Arriving home, we got through the initial return to honest society without any great difficulty. We told of the various circus performances ~~As~~ <sup>not seen, with convincing assurance. This assurance we easily gained</sup> we had been led to anticipate they would be. ~~This was~~ <sup>easy</sup> from the poster descriptions and from what we had learned from other boys at school who had seen the show. The tension of producing our excited but lying chatter was soon relieved by our being sent to bed.

Next morning at breakfast my eldest brother Jack quite casually turned to us and said, "Where did you get those bananas I saw you



scoffing last night on the Parade in Tottenham Lane." It says something for the unity in the minds of the culprits that we accepted that the danger of discovery was imminent and that our reactions must be immediate and consistent. Without a flicker of embarrassment, Bill said we had picked up the bananas at the side of a stall which we were sure had been discarded as too far gone for sale in the shop. I kept silent which could be assumed to be in support of the truthfulness of this statement. Bill's explanation was accepted but brought down wrath upon our heads from my Mother who warned us of the dangers of sickness and death which could arise from eating bad fruit and finished with a prophesy that we should ultimately poison ourselves if we continued in the way we seemed to be going. Then, knowing us better for what we really were than we had expected she looked at us closely to see if a lie appeared in our eyes as she said, "You didn't steal them did you?" Our righteous indignation at such an outrageous suggestion convinced her that we were not guilty at least of that crime.

This was not the end. Jack was now head boy at the school we then attended and, in the week following, he brought a message round all the classes to tell each teacher that the circus people were offering a prize of five shillings for the best essay about the circus written by one of their scholars under twelve years of age; the headmaster would decide upon the winner making due allowance in his choice for the ages of the contestants. "Hands up all the boys who have been to the circus". My eldest brother, to whom we had already

lied about the bananas, stood in front of us by the teacher's desk. What could we do? Without the slightest hesitation our hands went up and our names were taken down on the list.

Our researches among those who had seen the circus, ~~gave further colour to any further lying we might have to make.~~ Coupled with ~~our lively imaginations/could not but result in our producing excellent~~ ~~lively imaginations, we raised our performances to the highest level~~ ~~performances~~ of brilliancy imagineable. The writing of the essay was a gift. ~~And it is with pride I can record~~ Unfortunately, I have to announce that Bill won the prize, and I ~~did~~ got a special mention to the effect that I should have done better. I had used more imagination and had not stuck too closely to the facts. Bill's essay had the honour of being read out by the teacher in each class and, so far as our class was concerned, was much appreciated.

Oranges at twenty for threepence, a savoy cabbage for a penny; block ornaments - the offcuts which the butcher threw to the side of his chopping block when trimming up his cuts of meat - at fourpence a pound, potatoes at threepence a stone, apples, plums, tomatoes tuppence a pound; these, with two pounds of fourpenny margarine, and one pound of cocoa essence at sixpence, were typical of the main items that my eldest brother Jack would have on his list for our shopping sorties to the Wood Green market on a Saturday evening.

The four of us - Jack, Ralph, Bill and me would be brought in from our play and assembled for briefing at about 7.00p.m. on every Saturday evening. We were supplied with a string bag, an American cloth bag and two clean, light sacks, and told what to look for that was in season and likely to be going cheap. Jack was given a purse with a few shillings in it, and off we went.

As far as I can remember the shopping job only seemed to come to us in winter as, although there was no daylight-saving measures in those days, I have no recollection of such an excursion ever being made in daylight. With Jack in the lead and all of us armed with our bags the motley platoon set off to do battle. Our objective the maximum amount of good substantial food for the least expenditure of money. The market was held in the High Street, Wood Green on the main road between Islington and New Southgate. By the time we arrived it was in full swing. <sup>In front of</sup> At the shops on the sidewalks, in the yellow light shed by the gas mantles, the shop assistants, like barkers at a fair, tried to persuade the hesitant passing shoppers t

buy. As time went on and the time for closing drew nearer they raised the price of their goods to clear their stocks.

In the road itself at each side, leaving only a narrow space for the passage of handcarts and shoppers to worm their way through stood the street stalls, their light wooden superstructure hung with goods, and the whole silhouetted like a Japanese print, patterned against the night sky. Naptha flares blazed and roared and the vendors shouted, banged their stalls, weighed, slapped, and tossed the goods into the extended shopping baskets. Underfoot the earlier rain of the day paddled itself into the cabbage stalks, leaves, straw, paper, discarded ripe fruit, spilled vegetables, and horse manure. To a little boy of nine it was a dream world. In and out of the light of the blazing flares grotesque faces thrust themselves forward then withdrew being replaced by others, different but often more grotesque. Black bonnets with pale blobs beneath surmounted ample tight-laced satin covered bosoms. Coloured handkerchiefed heads with wisps of grey hair sticking out at all angles, deep peaked caps, an occasional Homburg - all formed part of the shadow theatre of the night. Raucous voices mixed with shrill piping ones, and deep meliferous ones, all speaking at once in the sharp, angular cockney twang, <sup>identified</sup> ~~mixed in with~~ the throng that squeezed round the stalls either merely in curiosity or with eyes dancing with excitement hoping that something that was wanted would be offered for sale within the calculated margin.

Sometimes it rained and the rain dripping off the stall coverings

on to our collars and down our necks helped to squelch up the mud round our leaky boots. We children were not spectators watching the natives in a colourful bazaar; we were part of it, scheming, hoping, daring, thrusting forward or dodging from beneath the arms, legs, bags, and baskets of the exciting multitude. Looking up for a moment through the many-headed crowd beyond the flares, beyond the stalls, beyond the second storey of the shops on the sidewalk, up above the roofs, the moon and stars on a clear night would sometimes swim into the picture, suggesting that the moon was the spectator who had come to see our play.

As the purchases were made they were dropped into one or other of our carriers, and as the evening wore on our bags grew heavier and heavier. But time was on our side. The later it got the better the bargains until all the money was spent or the list of requirements fulfilled.

Going home was a long weary trail, an anticlimax that dragged our feet as the weight of the loads seemed to get heavier with each step. At last we were in our street, and could make greater speed down the hill to our home. As we ~~went~~<sup>all</sup> bundled in at the front door we were received in an atmosphere of warmth and welcome where we excitedly displayed our bargains and were rewarded for our acumen by the appreciation my mother always had for our efforts. Then, after a cup of hot cocoa, perhaps with a slice of bread spread with a scrap of the plum jam we had brought home with us, we were sent off to be happy in the sense of our achievement.

One of my mother's most fundamental beliefs was that in this life it was not possible to get something for nothing and in her financial arrangements with her children her code was reinforced by her not expecting her children to be better than she was and themselves be expected to do something for her without being rewarded. So we were paid wages. Our wages were three-ha'pence per week, and our tasks were, the daily stale bread excursion, the washing and drying up of the dinner things each day, and the proper carrying out of a rota of tasks on a Saturday morning before going out to play. These tasks were divided up as follows. One - clean the front door knocker, the front door bell, the fire-irons and the fender. Two - clean the knives, forks and spoons, the first on the knife board the others with powdered emery. Three - run any errands that might be required. Four - one week to clean all the upstairs windows, and the following week to wash the bedroom floors including shaking the mats. We were paid our wages each Monday, each Friday and each Saturday, a ha'penny at a time. This income was augmented by running errands for our neighbours for a ha'penny a journey.

Arising from an accumulation of savings from these sources Ralph, Bill and I found ourselves one September carrying a surplus of income over expenditure. The attraction of a Christmas Club at a sweet shop where the payment of threepence per week for thirteen weeks entitled one to a Christmas parcel worth four shillings appealed; this seemed to us, after calculating the odds, a very worth while investment. So all three of us paid in our first threepences and were given our

cards with the first square stamped for the receipt. Pleased with our precocious entry into the world of business and high finance, we mistakenly thought that Mum would be pleased with us for showing such solid, respectable tendencies. Here we were sadly mistaken.

First, as I have said earlier, Mum thought all sweetstuff near poison and was consequently filled with alarm that the first months of the New Year might be unduly taken up in ridding our systems of the generous amount of poison the Christmas Club contracted to provide. Secondly, she knew all too well that dreams of a regular income are not always substantiated by fact and that we might find ourselves unable by the end of the year to meet our commitments of thirteen threepences each and so lose all our savings. Thirdly, she had an ingrained distrust of all such bourgeois arrangements that propagated the theory that 'two in the bush' were better than 'one in the hand'. She therefore set herself to talk us out of the Christmas Club proposition even to the extent of our losing our initial threepences.

She proposed we should substitute our procedure by a much more solid banking system, in which she received and kept our savings for us, returning them at Christmas when we could possibly make a better and more diverse choice. Mum's rational approach to matters such as these, coupled with our complete trust in her judgment, carried the day and from that time until the twenty fourth of December we religiously handed back our surplus wealth to her keeping.

As a banker, without cumbering herself or us with any written evidence of any payments we might make, Mum was beyond suspicion.

She knew to a ha'penny what our accumulated savings came to at any time. By the evening of the twenty fourth, the three of us had saved a total of thirteen shillings and fourpence.

During the week previous, in solemn conclave, we had continuously made, altered and amended, torn up and re-made lists of the possible purchases which thirteen and fourpence could buy. Sometimes our individual preferences clashed badly and the discussion became acrimonious; often, agreement almost reached, we totted up the total and found it was more than our bank could meet. Such was the position to the last minute when Mum entered the discussion to suggest that, we found it so difficult to agree on our lists, wouldn't it be a good idea if we spent the money in buying those extra treats for Christmas which our usual fare always lacked.

With enthusiasm we accepted the suggestion. Our lists took on a more realistic form and our decisions soon became unanimous. We had down custard powder, figs, dates, nuts, candied peel, raisins and sultanas, blanchmange, jellies and many similar items. The list being complete the thirteen and fourpence was handed to us and out we sallied ~~forth~~ excited and happy, to get our purchases.

The business was such a success I have never forgotten it, although <sup>now</sup> much later ~~now~~, I wonder whether Mum didn't that time get 'something for nothing!'.  
  
7



The simplest human procedure for getting from place to place is to walk. To get goods from place to place the simplest procedure is for man to load them about his person and carry them. This has applied since human beings got up on to two legs. The development of any method by which man was able to get from place to place by being carried, or get goods from place to place by means other than human portage has given rise to other forms of satisfaction. There is the satisfaction of reducing the time required to get to any given destination. There is the satisfaction of increasing the quantity of goods moved, and reducing the physical effort necessary to move them. And there is the enjoyment and exhilaration of speed. Lastly, there is the opportunity to receive a great number of impressions which freedom from the physical effort of personal propulsion releases.

It was Tottenham Lane and the two mile journey between our house and the Wood Green market place that provided me with the earliest appreciation of this philosophy of transport. Bill and I, now a little older than when we were ~~the menials~~ <sup>summarily recruited</sup> in the working party on our Wood Green shopping expeditions, were on our own late one Saturday evening our shopping bags full and facing the journey home with our loads. We had accomplished our shopping task successfully and had turned out of the main street into Hornsey Lane. There had been fine rain all evening and we were very damp although this did not trouble us a great deal as we were used to rain and accepted weather as a fundamental condition of existence. Nor were we miserable or despondent; we had done our task adequately and the home we knew was not far away; a welcome reception on our arrival was guaranteed.

On the corner of Hornsey Lane a crowd of people surrounding a coal cart. A horse had slipped on the wet cobbles and was lying down in the road, breathing heavily and being <sup>tugged at and admonished</sup> ~~advised~~ by the driver - with little help from the spectators - to get up. It did not appear to be badly hurt, but the traces on one side were broken, and the animal was inclined to be panicky. Bill and I put our loads down on the pavement by the wall and wormed our way amongst the spectators.

The horse had slipped sideways dragging the shafts down and up-  
ending the cart. In falling it had fortunately broken the traces  
attaching him to the shaft on his near side, this had prevented the  
shaft being broken by his fall. Some coal sacks had fallen on to the  
pavement. The horse lay on its side in the mud, snorting with frigid  
its great chest heaving and his nostrils flaring. One oil lamp had  
its glass broken and was flaming and smoking, producing an eerie  
setting resembling the sort of scene one might expect to see in Hell  
revealing in sudden flashes, the shoulders, heads and faces of the  
circle of spectators, the ridges and edges of the cart frame and the  
heaving flanks of the panting horse; then as suddenly - darkness -  
where only the sky above showed as a greeny blue light at the top of  
a vertical <sup>shaft</sup> ~~pit~~. The driver, unhurt in the accident, had descended  
from his cart. Then a big man, with an enormous moustache and a  
bowler hat, offered his help. He promptly sat on the horse's head  
to prevent it getting up and damaging itself and the cart by galloping  
away. Meanwhile, the driver worked to free the horse from the traces.  
Bill, who had a natural affinity for the unusual in street even

was soon happily perched on the horse's neck, oblivious to the danger of his position. He stoutly resisted the large hand of a policeman which came out of the darkness to help control the situation and made the reducing of Bill's ego his first job. I, in the meantime, had stood a little apart, shy, out of my element and somewhat fearful of the whole strange happening except that I had almost unconsciously stopped down and picked up the carter's muddy hat from the pavement where it had fallen.

When the traces were untied, the horse was encouraged to rise with such suitable 'horsey' expressions as "Take it easy boy", "Whoa", "Steady now, steady boy its all right", "There you are, now steady, steady I say". It rose shakily trying to relieve its head from the firm grasp of its captors by jerking it sharply up and down. Now it stood on all fours, its nostrils still snorting and steaming, its forelegs shivering frighteningly as if at any moment they might give way again, his flanks like huge bellows bellying and flattening with each panting breath. The lamp was then attended to a new glass appearing from nowhere to replace the old, and the wick trimmed and reset. Now with the assistance of the previously diffident spectators the traces were rebuckled to the shafts, the broken ones repaired with short pieces of rope, and all was soon ready for the carter to get on his way. Order now having been restored, my shyness left me and as the driver was getting up to drive away I came forward and gave him his cap.

The excitement was now over so we boys picked up our heavy lo

of shopping and made off towards home. We had not gone many yards when the coal cart came alongside us, and the driver leant over and called out, "D'yer want a lift, youngsters". We were soon perched up beside him on some coal sacks that cushioned the hard plank served as a seat. Our shopping was put behind in the open cart and the driver, with a shake of the reins and an encouraging "Cluck", had us quickly on our way.

What a wonderful ride that was. The warmth and comfort of the coal sacks on the seat and of the rail behind us, the friendly driver's nigger minstrel face, his dusty corduroy trousers, shapeless and rigid with coagulated layers of coaldust and sweat, tied at the knee and flared out at the bottom over his enormous hobnailed boots which rested so lightly on the near end of the shafts.

Looking down from our perch, our horizon was filled by the greasy dome of the horse's behind, each buttock alternately and rhythmically swinging a little off centre and then back again, the black blob of the tied-up horse's tail bobbing up and down, to be occasionally raised with neat precision to give clearance to a satisfying fart, *a dollop* or to ~~drop a consignment~~ of horse manure.

The pace was little faster than we could have walked as the driver was steadying the horse back to tranquility after his fall, but speed was the last thing in the world we desired. If we had any worry at all it was that we should get to our destination too quick

Through the blue-plum darkness our bubble of entity, horse, driver and two boys, haloed in the dim sphere of the flicking drivin

lamps, rattled and swayed over the uneven road.

The carter told us he had a daughter called Alice who would be in bed when he got home but awake and waiting for his home coming; for he always brought a present for her every Saturday night. This time it was a picture book about cats. Alice had a tiny kitten and the carter had bought it because he knew she would like to learn all about cats. His wife would have his dinner for him, nicely hot on top of the oven. She would have expected him home earlier but for the accident; but everything was all right now; 'Charley' was a good horse and this was only the second time he had been down and if he took things steady he would forget all about it.

The heavy hooves of the horse plonked solidly down, their iron shoes clacking on the hard sets. The dark, polished surface of his back and hind quarters gleamed and reflected shimmers of silver light from the street lamps as he plodded past. Nestling down between the warm sacks, we told our driver something of ourselves, and what we had bought while out shopping that evening, what school we went to and the name of our teacher. We told him that we had a little sister who would be about the same age as his Alice who didn't go to school yet but would in about a year or so. We both wallowed in a feeling of comfort and in the interest of a man who understood horses and drove a coal cart. We felt a unity with the earth, the air, and the darkness. But the journey had to end, perhaps our ride had taken little more than a half an hour, but it seems now to have had no relationship with time.

When we got to the top of our street, our driver stopped his horse and we climbed down. The driver handed us our parcels. The with a wave of the hand and a jerk of the reins, he trundled off into the night.

We entered the house, dragging in our loads and dumping them on the kitchen table. Mum was in the kitchen and called out to us as we entered, "Hallo, you're back then! You've been a long time". She entered the room wiping her hands. Looking up she saw us, the look of welcome faded from her face to be replaced by consternation. "What on earth has happened to you two?" she asked. "Just look at yourselves." At this we turned and, for the first time, looked at each other. The red lips in each other's face opened in astonishment, our dark pupils rolling within the whites of our eyes in otherwise black faces. Mum came nearer ~~being~~ <sup>but was</sup> careful not to touch us. "My goodness, you're covered in coal dust from head to foot; and look at that table!" "Get out of those clothes and take them into the scullery." "It's a good thing it is bath night."

In normal circumstances our bath night was on Mondays after washing day, but recently Mum had found this too much to undertake in one day with all the washing to see to as well. So that now, on Saturday evening, the washing copper was put on while we were out shopping. On our return ~~each of us in turn~~ <sup>one after the other we</sup> went into the copper. The fire had already been damped down and a piece of cocoanut matting placed in its bowl shaped bottom to prevent our slipping and drowning in the scullery in the valuable hot water of the bath! Fitting in turn

into the copper, knees up to our ears, our hair was doused and sludged. Faces and heads washed - with particular attention to our ears and neck. Gradually, as we emerged, the areas of dirt were washed off regions lower and lower until at last our feet were reached. When the job was done, out we got each on to a piece of soft matting on the floor and rubbed ourselves down before putting on our nightshirts.

On this occasion, when we had been done, the mess wiped up and our clothes dumped into the copper for later attention, we soon set before the fire in the kitchen range. We delayed going to bed as long as possible by slowly sipping our cocoa while we retailed our adventures of the evening.

The satisfaction arising from pure speed as an exhilarating experience came to us children not from any form of transport but in the far simpler human experience of running. I came to learn to run naturally when I was about nine years old and it registers clearly with me with the entry into the scope of my play equipment of the iron hoop.

The ~~iron~~ <sup>made from mild steel wire</sup> hoop was a quarter of an inch thick bent into a circle of about two feet in diameter and joined together by the blacksmith who forged the ends together on his anvil. We could buy one of the hoops from the blacksmith for twopence, and then with a handle made from a length of steel, hooked to loosely control the hoop, it would be guided on its course by its master.

Along the wide stretch of Tottenham Lane a half dozen of us, with steel hoops and guiding, steel-hooked handles, took over the road. We were almost as fast as the fastest vehicles that travelled the highway, we could dodge, swerve, glide, and race and the steel hoop, running through its hooked controller, produced a high, regular, singing note like the purr of an engine. Up into the shopping centre of Crouch End, round the Clock Tower, at a speed even faster and more furious to the top of our street and back down the Gardens. So imaginatively encouraged by the hoop that led us were we that we seemed to finish as fresh as we had started.

So with the dawn, day, and evening of that pleasure passed the exhilaration that came from the pure joy of running, purposeless except from the joy we felt in our fleet-footed attainments.



With rare exceptions, the speediest vehicles on our roads were private horse-drawn or hired carriages. Of these, only the four-wheeler had any merit in our eyes. Any effort to chase them and to hang on to any protruding part, was not the result of excessive boredom but an almost involuntary action similar to that which possesses a dog which will automatically chase things that move.

The hansom cab had a disadvantage in that the driver, being perched up at the rear of his vehicle, could see and apply his whip to any little boys trying to get a free ride. The four-wheeler was made to be chased and <sup>ridden</sup> ~~rode~~ upon. The driver was seated only just above the level of the horses he drove, and his vehicle and passengers blocked his view of the road behind.

Innocently, standing at the edge of the pavement, looking at the scenery or at nothing in particular, we were conscious of the approach of any four-wheeler coming in our direction. Nicely judging its speed and the point at which it would hide us from the driver we would make a furious dash out on to the road after the vehicle. If our judgement and the burst of speed we could put on were just sufficient we could reach the rear of the fleeing carriage, grasp the bar at the back of the chassis, and with a swift turn throw ourselves to a seat upon it. Then, with our legs dangling six or seven inches off the ground, we were carried along in style. The wind whistled around the ends of the cab, the road flew past under our dangling feet and the speed with which we passed the slower vehicles brought us an introduction to speed.

There are some miserable urchins who cannot bear to see their peers enjoying an advantage which for them may be temporarily unavailable. Seeing us royally seated on the bar they would be consumed with envy and would shout after the driver, "Whip behind, Guv'nor". This call was a hint to the driver that he had non-paying passengers hanging on to the rear of his cab. When we heard this it became urgent to transfer ourselves from the speedy vehicle to the static road as quickly as possible, before the tail of the driver's whip found sharp contact with our faces, arms or legs.

Getting off the vehicle was, if anything, more of an art than the actual getting on. One had to put both hands on the bar one on each side and throw oneself into the road and away from the cab as far forward as possible, then as soon as the toes touched the ground twist sharply through one hundred and eighty degrees so that one's forward momentum - which appeared to be designed to throw one on to one's nose - was cancelled out by the twist in the opposite direction. After a bit of practice, <sup>which</sup> with included a few scratched knees, hands and bruised bottoms, one learned to accomplish the feat to a nicety.

The summer holidays of 1906 were over and we were back at school by the second week of September. The change and excitement of going into a new class was wearing off and we were settling down normally, when a new excitement, rumoured at first but gradually gaining in substance, arose. Our family was to be completely uprooted and to go to live in Lancashire. As the possibility reached certain ears we three boys, Ralph, Bill and I, studied closely the map of England, isolating Lancashire from the rest and impressed upon ourselves the location of the various towns and rivers, and the county's main physical features. In particular our interest became centred on the Pennine Chain. Up to that time we had no experience of any sort of country, but that enclosed by streets and shops and houses with a few parks, recreation grounds and water works. All other sorts of countryside were only a build-up in our imagination from what we had read. Going to live in such a different sort of country was a tremendous thrill. Lancashire appeared to be dominated by the Pennine Chain. Its main industries were given as cotton manufacture, and coal mining. Its chief towns were Oldham, Bolton, Wigan, Rochdale, Blackburn, Burnley, all clustered to the north of Manchester and Salford. Down in the south-west corner was the Port of Liverpool. Manchester was a hive of industry connected to the port of Liverpool by the Manchester Ship Canal along which ocean-going liners plied their way, bringing merchandise from the furthest corners of the earth. This and much more we read and ~~ideas~~ <sup>of ideas</sup> poured in a hotch-potch into our young minds of the sort of country our new life would bring.

On the 24th of September 1906, after hectic packing and the dispatch of our furniture by rail - a week in which we went to stay at my Aunt Annie's across the road from us in Rathcoole Gardens, we took train for Manchester.

My father had started on his new job some weeks before and had written that he had received the furniture and that now we could join him in our new home.

The journey can be imagined. It was all a new and exciting experience. In the train we children ran up and down the corridors half fearfully negotiating the wobbly concertinas that joined the carriages together, trying all the lavatories and pulling all the chains. We ate at odd intervals the food that Mum had provided, fidgeted, quarrelled, and sometimes slept. The journey was a long one for it had to be, <sup>done in</sup> the cheapest way possible; my father in Manchester <sup>having</sup> waited until a half day excursion was advertised for a trip from Manchester to London, ~~then to get~~ <sup>and then got</sup> the necessary number of adult and children's tickets for the journey and <sup>posted</sup> ~~post~~ them to Mum. We came to Manchester with the return halves. The chief disadvantage to this was that, as the trip had been advertised from a dozen or more stations in the Manchester area there were a dozen or more stops on the return journey before the train got to its final destination. The whole journey took five or six hours and for the final hour or so became tedious and an anti-climax making us children very peeved, tiresome and quarrellsome. How mother stood up to the wear-and-tear of such a journey only women who have carried through such a task can ever

At Manchester, Dad was waiting for us. The luggage was checked and distributed among us in the order of weight to age, and off we set through the strange, dark streets on the final stage of our journey to our new home. There, we children were quickly bundled into bed and were soon fast asleep; When dawn came a new life in foreign land became a reality, and gradually blotted out the old.

Mud and puddles in the country are different <sup>from</sup> ~~to~~ those <sup>found</sup> you find in the town. An open countryside, coming almost up to the door, with the hedges and fields murky with a fine layer of coal dust are very different <sup>from</sup> ~~to~~ the ordered layouts or controlled recreation ground of a built-up city. A farm gate bogged down at its entrance with a mire of cattle manure, revealing a dozen or so dirty looking cows is very different to the occasional scene of cattle being martialled toward a slaughterhouse along a London street. The silhouette of a winding gear against a grey and lowering sky, the sprawling pit mouth fed by an overhead bucket conveyor, the great square cotton mills with their oppressive roar of mill machinery and the sweetish, warm odour of the cotton and oil exuding from the mill doors - all these made a different world.

Almost all sights and scenes, sounds and smells were new and strange. Yet I was the product of my past. In the past I had belonged, as a handful of yellow sand belongs on a beach but which, taken and deposited on a coal heap, is foreign to its element and obvious in its separateness; until it is thoroughly mixed into the heap or discoloured and coated until its difference is no longer recognisable.

My father <sup>had in the past</sup> waged a constant war against the dissolution of his children's footwear. Sunday morning after Sunday morning he had given up to the task of keeping our boots watertight, and the fact his children could kick their boots to pieces faster than he could repair them did not allow him the satisfaction of ever completing his

task. One consequence of this was that we all suffered in the cold winter months with chilblains. These drove us to frantically rub our bare, fevered feet on the cocoanut matting at our front door or, at night, to prefer to thrust our hot feet into the freezing cold of the lower sheets rather than bear the itching discomfort closer to our bodies.

But the chilblains end, and my father's task was relieved when I adopted local custom and took to wearing clogs. Clogs were cheap and could take a lot of hard wear; and clogs didn't let in water. A new set of irons, or even a pair of new wooden soles could be built into the hard leather tops in a few minutes. But this simple solution did not affect us in other ways.

It ~~may be~~ <sup>is almost certainly</sup> universally true that in 'going native' the stranger misses some subtlety in the native way of life which shrieks out a sharp and obvious distinction stabbing at the sensibilities of the natives themselves. We found we were challenging the facade of a world in which wide degrees of actual inequalities were hidden by a closed front door and in which the observance on Sunday of an acceptable style of clothing was sufficient to establish conformity. Normally, you could go about in rags or ill-fitting garments and still be a perfectly respectable citizen provided you did not flout all finer feelings by wearing clogs instead of leather boots on Sundays. Dad hadn't bargained for this and wouldn't have taken much notice if he had. One set of serviceable footwear was the limit of his parental responsibility in this matter.

Clogs are something you cannot silence or hide. A thin mac. can cover any sort of worn or unsuitable clothing, but you cannot even tip toe in clogs. The Sunday afternoon siesta in the front room of the terraced houses where families sat in fidgety discomfort or dropped into Sunday afternoon lethargy, maintaining the ritual of Sunday observance, was to be disturbed by a clattering staccato of sounds. At first a faint tapping coming from a distance, then growing more insistent as it came nearer, until the clear ringing of clogs on the hard paving outside shocked repose into irritated, startled consciousness. Up from their seats sprang the housewives, jumped for the lace curtained windows, carefully parting them to see who was breaking the peace of the Sabbath. "Yes", they thought, <sup>"that was it,</sup> it was those Goss's, foreigners from London way who had recently come to live in the neighbourhood. An ungodly lot, and wearing clogs on Sunday too!" With our passing curtains closed again and the occupants settled back to try and compose nerves so unhappily shattered by such blatant disregard for conformity.

My father did not hold sufficiently lofty a position in local society for there to be any loss of prestige on account of his children being 'improperly dressed' on a Sunday. His problem was solved, his children were shod. But we suffered the tortures of the damned. Whatever prestige we might have built up in school or in games or in just being boys among other boys for six days in the week, our Sunday clogs isolated us from all normal, respectable children. On Monday and during the week the stigma of our challenge to the accepted standards of respectability remained with us. Neither in New Moston, nor la



on when we lived in Oldham, did we ever entirely overcome this separateness from our playfellows. And this was rightly so; for, if you wish to go native, you can never succeed unless to the last ounce you renounce native customs and conform completely to the pattern of native life.

One other contributing factor was that Mum on her side was unaware of some of the prestige values contained in some of the other, subtler degrees of conformity. In those days, no one was properly dressed if he did not wear some form of head covering, and it did not occur to Mum in spite of the need to replace lost caps, to do other than to provide her children with headgear.

Mum was a ladies dressmaker and would, therefore, knock together our trousers and our coats but she did not feel capable of manufacturing the standard type of peaked cap. So, when we were in London, they had to be purchased. Coming to Lancashire a new solution to this problem presented itself. All schoolboys in our locality wore pork pie caps. These were manufactured from a stiff blue material in the simple, cylindrical shape of a flat bread tin. From a dressmaker's point of view, it only needed two shapes of material, a circular top and a band of material forming the cylinder and the two sewn together. My mother could easily make these hats out of odd lengths of any material from her store of cut up old suits or overcoats which were her stock for making our other clothes. So she proceeded to make our hats. But in spite of the correctness of shape and size she had not understood the real significance of the pork pie hat. As a head covering it was completely unsuitable and inadequate protection against

the weather; its blocked form made it impossible to hang on a nail or to bundle up into one's pocket. It was, in fact, a completely useless and unnecessary piece of clothing. But every boy wore one and not to wear one was to be different. To give my mother credit she had appreciated that aspect of the case; but worse than not wearing a hat at all was to wear an obviously home-made one.

Children suck up these prestige values with their mother's and our entering into this new fraternity wearing home-made hats, which had no stiffening and flopped a bit onesidedly on the head, ~~showed such an aggressive separateness from the natives by the wearers~~ ~~passive distrust and active attack on the wearers~~, the offending ~~ones~~ <sup>Were</sup> ~~being~~ snatched off and used as footballs around the school playground. The boys' playground at school was, in consequence, a place to be avoided as, like stranger bees in a hive, we were immediately set upon by the swarm. If not exactly stung to death and slung outside, we were shown pretty clearly that our presence in their midst was an affront to their own appreciation of their worthiness and a disturbance to the simple pattern of their lives.

Sundays were our major problem. Two things co-ordinated to make our Sundays set apart from weekdays and different from any Sundays in any place we had ever lived in before. To avoid displaying to our school-fellows that we were too poor or too unconformable to wear proper footwear or headgear on Sundays we tried, if we went out, to get clear of our immediate locality as quickly as possible before our schoolfellows, dressed in boots and Sunday best, were on the streets. We also felt it unwise to return from these excursions

until that dead period between four and six of an evening, when Sunday streets were a deserted wilderness. The other thing was that our parents took a lodger, a presentable, young piano tuner, whose social standing and background, my mother felt, would cause him to be uncomfortable on his day of rest if he were to be surrounded by howling, quarrellsome nagging crowd of young urchins. So that, each Sunday morning we were provided with parcels of bread and marge, bread pudding and a penny to spend the day away from home as best we could and we hastened to give our locality as wide a berth as possible. These two factors together resulted in our taking a lot of healthy exercise which probably helped to build up our physique. We tramped as far away from New Boston as our little legs would carry us on journeys calculated to return us home either at the time of maximum street desertion or after darkness.

However rough the weather - rain, snow, drizzle, wind or ice - we were shooed at ten-o'-clock each Sunday to walk, and walk and walk. Sheltering sometimes in shop doorways from the worst of the elements but stoically accepting most climatic conditions with uncomplaining fortitude, the very energy of the effort created an internal warmth. Far from undermining our health or making us subject to colds or similar ailments these Sunday expeditions built up a resistance which fortified us through years to come.

While we were living in New Boston my grandmother came to live with us permanently. My father went to London Road Station to meet her but, after being away some three or four hours, returned back alone. He had met the train it had been arranged for her to travel on and even waited for the next after that, but found no Grandma. It was difficult to know what could have happened as my grandma was so deaf and so unused to travelling she might have gone to any other town in England. An hour or so later she turned up at the house, complete with string bag containing the whole of her worldly possessions her black bonnet nodding from the top of her head and she herself perfectly serene.

She had apparently, on leaving the station, followed a line of passengers down a subway on to another platform and from there had taken some time to extricate herself. Leaving the station she had taken an experimental journey to an outskirt of Manchester which she thought had sounded like the name of the district she had been instructed to ask for. After several attempts to find her right direction by asking chance pedestrians and failing to understand a word of any instructions given her she had finally taken a piece of paper from her purse on which the address was written and shown it to someone and had been put on to the right direction. "You see, Nelly", she said to her mother, "they don't seem to speak or understand English! I was so pleased when I found they could read it."

With her arrival the jigsaw pattern of our family life was taken to pieces, trimmed, and a new piece was fitted in. Then the pattern

was complete again. <sup>From that time</sup> Grandma was permanently part of our household for fifteen years until the day when, on a rubber-wheeled trolley followed her coffin to a grave in a churchyard in Topsham in Devon 1921. Gentle, self-effacing grandma doing her tatting on a black satin pad in the corner of our living room <sup>where</sup> she worked away by the soft yellow light of the oil lamp. Sometimes when I was alone with her of an evening when I was almost a young man, she would tell me her cousins and aunts and friends of her Plymouth days in the jewelers shop. She would show me her letters and the letters from her friends. The same letters which she had written were returned with a new letter written across the original. She had no difficulty reading her own original letter and the superimposed reply of her correspondent, but I used to find it very difficult to pick out the one from the other.

It is hard to think of our grandmothers having once been young of their having been loved by their mothers and of their being taught to be kind to their own grandmothers, of their having been laughing happy, little girls learning to skip with other little girls on the sidewalks of the dusty street. It is hard to think of them as having been young women - lithe, active, rosy cheeked - thinking about boys and love and marriage and the happiness in maturity awaiting them beyond their near horizons. Then of their marrying and having children, bringing them up and caring for them until they were passing over the crest of nature's purpose, ~~at~~ last they become the

cared for and their children the caring.

Day by day, slowly, imperceptibly, she receded deeper into the shadows of our stage. Year by year, being less important to us and less considered she, as if accepting our assessment of her importance, retired into herself until finally she died peacefully in her sleep one warm, summer evening while the family, of whom she in large measure had been the genesis, were away at the seaside enjoying a picnic.

Nothing remained to tell the whole world that she had ever lived but a few, odd letters, her Astrakhan coat, her elastic-sided boots, and her string bag. No message, no complaint.

The first school that I attended in Lancashire was New Keston Elementary School where I fell in love with my school teacher. She was very tall and wore a long, straight skirt, a blue belt and a high-necked, blue blouse from the left side of which dangled a gold watch on a length of silver chain. She had fair hair, dressed high on her head, and she walked like a semi-articulated statue. Her face was long and pale and her nose was perfectly straight. Her eyes were deep blue and fringed with long lashes. Her eyes always looked kind and understanding to the little boy who secretly worshipped her.

Her way of presenting our English lessons was to read a book to us. Whether the readings were given only every day, or only once or twice a week, I cannot now remember, but during the nine months I spent at the school, she read through Little Women, and followed that by going part way through The Children of the New Forest by Captain Marriott, broken off for me by my leaving that school. At one point in the reading of Little Women, unable to master my sobs, the reader had to stop. The teacher wisely selected this outburst as a sign to close the session and give me time to recover myself. The class was mixed and a book like The Children of the New Forest, appealing more to the spirit of adventure than to more sensitive emotions, would have been her next choice to ward off similar exhibitions which another work like Little Women might have resulted in.

Once again it was clogs that spread their tragic influence; this time being the means of destroying my calf love romance. Seated at our narrow desks, our little clogged feet were supported on the

cast iron foot-rest beneath. There could be few things more disturbing to a teacher than the rattle of iron-shod clogs against the metal rail. If the noise or shuffling persisted or was thought to be ~~un~~premeditated, the child was required to take his clogs off. If such actions were construed as a wilful challenge to the teacher authority, the culprit was required to go out into the hall to be interviewed by the headmaster who corrected such tendencies by giving the child several strokes with a cane; the number of strokes was an assessment of the degree of annoyance caused or the degree of correction thought to be necessary to break down resistance.

On this occasion the teacher, hearing a noise of feet coming from the desk where I was seated with another boy, turned to me and said, "Goss, you were clattering your clogs." I protested my innocence. She turned to the boy seated beside me, "Were you clattering your clogs?". The boy, being probably more phlegmatic than I was, calmly removed his clogs without even being requested to do so. This was possibly because he felt sure he had no holes in his stockings or was more indifferent to the exposure of naked toes or heels than I might have been. Or possibly he was not in love with his teacher; there would be no shattering to his pride by a suggestion that she thought no more of him than to make him remove his footwear in front of all the other ordinary little boys in her class.

A short time later the teacher again turned in my direction. "Goss, you were shuffling your clogs, take them off." Acute misery flooded over my whole being as I shook my head vigorously from side



to side and burst into sobs. "Take your clogs off at once and stop blubbering." I could not do it, my heart was broken into fragments. Feet, clogs, holes in stockings, nothing meant anything any more. I could not do it. "Goss, stand up and don't be such a coward. Now go out into the hall and tell Mr. Walters I sent you to be punished for kicking the desk with your clogs." I stood up, wiped my eyes with my sleeve and groped for the classroom door, finding my way out into the hall. The headmaster was not at his desk, and by the time that he returned I had recovered sufficiently to tell him coherently why I was there and to receive almost joyfully the half dozen strokes on my hand with the cane. With these strokes the pieces of my heart fitted together again. The world of love and adoration in which I had lived so tenderly, disappeared into the past. The mended heart beat in a new world as different from the old as if I had been suddenly dropped on to a new planet. Nothing would ever be the same again and when I returned to the classroom I noticed what I had never observed before that my teacher's nose was much too long and, what was more, it divided her face into two quite different and somehow unco-ordinated halves.

It was not long before our family shook the dust of New Moston from our clogs and went to live some nine miles westward at a place called Waterhead, about three miles out of Oldham. Turner Street, Waterhead, started where it turned from another street called Maily Bank. This turning was marked by an enormous, red-brick, cotton mill surrounded by tall iron railings. Within these railings, apart from the mill, a large patch of pale grey grass tried to grow and a tall, red brick chimney had no difficulty in pouring out an endless plume of smoke. Opposite this on the other side of the road was a stretch of scrubby mounds of earth which rose in undulating tiers <sup>up to</sup> ~~to show~~ the backs of the grey houses which belonged to the street on the hill above. Beyond the mill on its side of the road the ground fell away sharply <sup>to</sup> ~~through~~ a deep valley through which there had once run a pure rippling stream, but where now ran the filthiest stream I have ever set eyes on either before or since. In between Turner Street and the stream was the <sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> tip. This tip in the three years of our residence in Turner Street grew to a vast area that almost filled the valley on one side of the stream and was completed as a plateau about ten feet higher than the ground floor of our house and coming almost up to the back door.

There were ten of us when we went to live in Turner Street. Beside our parents there were Grandma, Jack sixteen, and John earning his own living and six of us kids, Ralph 12, Bill 11, me 10, David 6, Nance 2, and Dick two months. How ~~we~~ we all managed to get bedded down in the house in Turner Street I have often since tried to puzzle out. The ground floor accommodation comprised a living room about 12 feet by 12 feet, opening out directly

into a kitchen about 12 feet by 10 feet, and a scullery 10 feet by 7 feet. ~~From~~ <sup>At</sup> the back the scullery opened on to a concrete surface yard, which contained an open midden, a W.C. and a coal house. From this yard a gate led on to ~~a~~ <sup>the</sup> tip which was gradually filling up the valley beyond. Somewhere inside the house was a stairway which mounted up between two close walls to a landing above. From this landing, doors led off right and left to one large room above the living room and two small bedrooms over the kitchen and scullery, with a tiny bathroom sandwiched somewhere between these last two. In spite of our numbers and our limited accommodation we managed somehow, and whatever the adults felt about it we children never felt we were overcrowded.

It was at about this period that I came to notice my brother Ralph with greater significance. He was two years older than I was and, in consequence, his schooling, playmates, and interests had been just that much in advance of my own. This, coupled with the fact that my always having my cousin Bill almost the same age as myself as playmate, had kept Ralph on the fringe of our adventures. But, on coming to Oldham from London, we were as children in a foreign land and it would have left Ralph in isolation if he had not joined up with Bill and me as playmates.

About two years before our coming to Oldham, Ralph had won a scholarship at our Crouch End Board School for a place in Hornsey Higher Elementary School for five years grammar school education. In those days the winning of a scholarship was quite a feat as not

more than two or three such places were available each year from any one school in the district. From this success Ralph got his feet to the bottom rung of the ladder of learning and was regarded hence as the brainy one in our family, an assessment which often gave rise to most ungenerous feelings of jealousy.

The Hornsey High School had only just been built when Ralph first went there and amongst other innovations almost unique in school buildings of that calibre there was incorporated both a swimming bath and a gymnasium. The physical development which the availability of these two agencies had on my brother created a new line up of forces. In the physical battles for supremacy, which had up to that time gone on between the three of us Ralph had been for some years almost equal to my own height weight and build. He was also less heavy than Bill and that, when it came to squabbling and fighting, we were almost a match for one another. Now Ralph shot ahead and when he joined up with the others he became immediately the undisputed leader.

Coming to Oldham Ralph had had to give up his scholarship as it could not be transferred. But Dad and Mum, always as strictly fair to their children as circumstances would allow, found the means to enable for him to go to Oldham Grammar School and from what I have gathered from him since then, he spent there the three most unhappy years of his school life.

To get to school from Turner Street he was faced with one of two alternatives. The first was to go round by road a mile and a half to walk through Waterhead and then on to Oldham by tram for most of the

remainder. The second was to cut across the open country at the back of our house and, by a short cut, halve the actual distance and save tram fares.

Often in our new found comradeship Bill and I would watch from the top of the tip at the back of our house to see Ralph on his way to school. First he would have to scramble down the steep shifting slope of the tip, disturbing deposits of tin cans and bottles on the way. Then he would have to cross a short stretch of wasteland before he reached the mill stream. This stream would be passed by jumping from one uneven stepping stone to the next, the momentum of the jump swinging his school satchel far out one way or the other, and nearly overbalancing him. On the far side of the stream was a level field and on this the sewage from the adjacent mill cess pools was spread at times when there was danger of them otherwise flooding the mill properties themselves.

To negotiate these obstacles required skill, patience and a devious line of approach. Having crossed the slough of despond Ralph was then faced with an almost precipitous bank, rather like the scarred face of a quarry, except that it was the result of the cutting out of the valley by the stream, probably in prehistoric times. From this bank jagged chunks of rock projected through a scrub of grass tufts and stunted bushes.

When he had arrived at the rocky face we would see him, now a tiny figure in the distance, crawl and climb from rock to rock pushing himself forward by grasping and heaving on the coarse tufts

grass and bushes. Finally he got to the plateau above where the st and houses started again, and led off down to the centre of Oldham w his school was situated. Before disappearing over the top he would and wave his hand in parting.

The superior education he was receiving also developed a superi imagination in his leadership of our trio in our adventures. On th road to Greenfield going through Hay, there rose up on the left hand a most peculiar hill. This hill we had discovered early in our loc walks as it lay in the path of our main route to the wild countrysid the Pennine foothills. Ralph had dubbed it 'Kangy Hill'.

At sometime previous to our coming to that district, an extra- ordinary deluge must have burst over the top of the hill and spread cascaded in one large sheet of water over the whole of its surface. In its path it must have carried away many thousands of tons of soil. In the years since the deluge the saplings, shrubs and coarse grass held on to the surface of the steep slope but had gradually died off want of sufficient nourishment, leaving behind stark, twisted masses undergrowth. I suppose the hillside belonged to someone, but in ou urban upbringing, any piece of tenantless and deserted ground had no owner and trespass had no meaning.

Climbing the six foot high boundary wall, which retained the bottom of the hill by the roadside, we went to discover what excitem could be got out of Kangy Hill. Immediately the condition of the d late place projected us into identifying ourselves with mythological Gods wandering at large over a prehistoric landscape. Finding we

could grasp a fair sized tree of up to four or even six inches diameter, with our united strengths, uproot it, hold it up by its branches and cast it from us, made us at one with Hercules, Jason and Atlas. Having cast down twenty or thirty trees in this manner a deep accumulation of twisted and brittle trunks and branches, built up in a tangled mass, surrounding us. From being Greek Gods we changed to being brave woodsmen, trappers and explorers, deep in the heart of a Canadian forest. There, to protect ourselves from murderous Indians or wild carnivorous animals, we had hastily to build a log cabin and an encircling palisade. We were in the country of the Iroquois, a treacherous, murderous, savage race who could not but have noticed our invasion of their country and were probably already sending up smoke signals to their blood brothers - the Sioux - on the other side of the hill demanding that they join in speeding our elimination.

Working with might and main we dragged the tangled mass apart. We then selected a couple of standing stumps as corner posts and into them we interlaced as best we could the untrimmed trees and underbrush we had surrounded ourselves with. These we compacted with dry, tufted sods and small bushes to produce a structure which to the unjaundiced eye would have looked no more than it was - a heap of brushwood. But to us it was a perfectly satisfactory log cabin and fort. In this fort we had contrived an aperture at the front which led us into an irregular shaped burrow in its interior.

Had an effort similar to our own been discovered by explorers in the hinterlands of Borneo, or the Celebes, whole books could have been

written about them. These would have described the ingenuity of the native tribes their customs and habits, and the book could have been suitably illustrated with pictures of native, naked, hirsute savages seated before their primitive homestead grinding up mealies - or some similar occupation. Had we ourselves been stripped of our conventional clothing, daubed with the grey pervading dust of the hillside on those parts of us not generally exposed to nature, and photographed eating our chunks of bread pudding in stolid, happy satisfaction before the entrance to our hastily made shelter, our similarity to the Borneo illustrations would have been so lifelike as to have given authenticity to any explorers who cared to take the trouble to expose us. They could then have avoided the tedium of going to Borneo to get their material.

In fact the log cabin was a poor affair. Without any means of cutting anything off to length or trimming off any unwanted branches nor any string, buffalo hide thongs, or strong twisted vines to tie anything together with, and without any vertical projections substantial enough to control the formation of our house design, we had to select from the various branched skeletons of trees, those which appeared for the moment the most serviceable for our task and benefited with the result. Our final structure was a mound of tree branches and turfs, a very irregular twelve feet or so square, forming a wedge shaped structure thrust out from the hillside like a dated, thatched eyebrow. In front of the mound was a very rough entrance hole through which we could crawl into a very prickly interior.



almost eighteen inches high at the front and tapering toward the back with the slope of the hill and giving an area of accommodation of about eighteen square feet. Having with much sweat accomplished our task we crawled into our shelter and lying bunched up in an uncomfortable heap enjoyed to the full a quiet appreciation of ourselves and of the homestead we had built.

Having built our log cabin and savoured the exhilaration resulting from the successful accomplishment of our task, the next development of our adventure had to be discussed. Ralph, buoyed up with the success of the log cabin building and realising that to retain leadership he must advance us further into the realms of adventure suggested that now, having a house of our own, we should live in it and cut ourselves adrift from the tedious demands of grown-up mankind. Agreeing to this very reasonable proposition, we opened up our packages of food and slowly and quietly consumed our first meal to commence our new and free life together.

Seated outside our log cabin, with the slope of the hill descending before us into the Greenfield Valley and the piled up hillsides beyond, the prospect of spending the rest of our lives freed from grown up tyranny appealed to us and also brought us much more in line with our leader. From where we sat we watched the sun go down over the distant hills and became one with the earth and the hills and the sky. Until, gradually, the oppressive gloom of the twilight set a cold hand over our hearts; from the exhilaration of belonging to being encompassed by all life we each came to feel isolated and

abandoned in a world where happiness lay in all places but the one we had chosen. Hours seemed to pass but, such is the strength of friendship between three children who have involved themselves in a 'dark' condition, that none of us wanted to be the first to weaken and cry "enough". Ralph realised that, as a true leader, he must hearten us with a diversion before gloom broke our spirits, so, following his suggestion, we decided to go down into Greenfield and find out what time was.

Descending the hill we climbed the drystone wall into the street below, then turned away from the direction of home and headed down toward the village.

Strangely enough the village did not seem to have been affected by the aeons of time and hours of darkness that seemed to have elapsed since the sun had gone down over the back of the black horizon as we watched it from the vantage point of the hill. The streets were dark in the village, but some shops were still open.

Not having had, during our sojourn in the wild native country to the east, any means of spending our pocket money, we could now use it to lay in supplies to fortify us for our proposed long stay in the Indian country. We found that the time was ten minutes to nine. This was impossible in view of the hours of darkness since the sun had gone down we discounted the accuracy of clocks in general and accepted that some overall inaccuracy had kept the shops open until almost midnight. From the few shops still open we searched for the greatest quantity of food obtainable for our money, bearing in mind that vari-

is as essential to sustenance as is quantity. Our purchases comprised:- stale cakes, a lot, in various conditions of staleness - penny, a pound of green apples - one penny, and four ounces of treacle toffee - also one penny. This last to give sustenance with pleasure over a longer period than any other known food. (I held the record in our family for holding a piece of treacle toffee in my cheek for the longest time before it all got sucked away). Laden with our purchases we slowly returned in the direction of our log cabin.

Climbing the wall as nearly as we could judge in the darkness at the point of our original ascent we commenced our journey to the log cabin in good order, Ralph first, me second and Bill last. In such order we scrambled up the stark hillside, torn at and scratched by the ghostly bushes, apprehensive of each rustle or sound which we had not made ourselves, fearful of possibly wild animals, snakes or even ghostly Indians listening in the underbrush or lurking behind each of the mounds or boulders we passed in our passage. The darkness was velvety black but in the thought that by proceeding up the hill at right angles to the wall we would find our cabin, we crawled on. On and up we went until sweating and dirty we had at last to stop for breath and to accept a fear, that had gradually deepened within us, that we were lost. We rested at a place under an overhanging boulder, and each had divergent views as to the direction to the log cabin, which way to proceed to find it, and whose fault it was that we had not made straight to it in the first place. Fear

and discomfort gathered to give rising acrimony to our discussion then Ralph suggested that each of us should go in the direction in which we thought the log cabin lay and whoever found it would hoot like an owl and would keep this up until a reunion could be effected.

For a short time we practiced owl sounds, but not too loud, but loud enough in that still cold air to have scared any late traveller on the highway below into instant flight. But as the owl noises frightened us almost as much as they would have frightened the lone traveller, we soon desisted. We also abandoned the idea of separating, not from any feeling that the carrying out of the plan as suggested would have resulted in ultimate success, but each suddenly fearful of going out into the black wilderness alone and in the dead of night. Ralph's leadership was not therefore challenged and after we had filled our cheeks with awkward lumps of treacle toffee, we set forth again in <sup>q</sup>formation which would give resemblance to a huge three-sectioned crawling insect.

For what seemed hours, we wandered up and down and across the wilderness. At last, working down the hill from a higher level and mistaking the roof of our shelter as part of the terrain, we all fell headlong through the roof of our cabin and landed, a struggling mass into its collapsed framework.

Building our log cabin and its subsequent acceptance by us as our home gave it an importance in our eyes hardly justified either the quality of its shelter or the comfort of its accommodation. Almost any boulder or bush of bracken would have served equally well.

Extricating ourselves from the masses of branches and bracken we groped our way to what had once been the threshold of its front entrance. There we settled down and soon forgot our desperate position on the stark hillside and the blackness of the long night's vigil before us by making a sound meal of the stale cakes, the apples, the remainder of our sandwiches and the last of our treacle toffee. Our meal was taken in the true spirit of backwoodsmen returning to their homestead after a long days tracking and hunting for pelts and shooting and dodging Indians. Traditionally, we decided to 'turn in'. This meant boring in under the trampled and massed brushwood and trying to find some softness and warmth from our compacted bodies and using the scanty lacework of the stark branches above our heads to give us.

Huddled there in the dark the full texture of our isolation from the whole of the vast, unpredictable world about us pressed on us with ever increasing poignancy. Slowly at first and then in sharper and sharper gusts the wind got up cold and searching. Coming unheralded from out of the beyond, murmuring over the boulders or whispering in the bracken, it descended upon us, waving and rustling our crazy protection, sweeping over our cold bodies and, with a sinister flick of promise of further and more malicious tortures to follow in its wake, sighed away again across the barren hillside.

Down in the valley below, like a devils-gong sounding the hour of torture, a railway engine shrieked its unnatural, primaeval note. Then came a silence so deep and vast as if all noise had been sucked

away into some vast distant chasm. From away behind us on the hill came a sound like a metronome ticking out time as a woodpecker tapped at some dead tree trunk in its search for its nightly meal.

Then came rain. At first each single drop making its tiny dropping sound; then closer and closer the drops and faster and faster the notes of sound until the ear could no longer separate them one from another and a vast whirr of noise filled the air. At last our discomfort grew unbearable. The rain, after only a short, sharp burst, had stopped. But sleep was further from us than it had ever been in our lives before. Painfully we extricated ourselves from our hole in the brushwood and crouched before the entrance, resolving to sit out the night in stoical spartan endurance until the dawn came. Hours and hours went by without a word passed between us, each of us wrapped tight in our misery, each of us determined to be the last to give way and weep from cold and loneliness. The last to break the spell, get up and scramble down the hill and take the road to home and comfort. We huddled there while the woodpecker pecked on, the shunting trains crashed together in the valley below and the engines whistled. Wind and rain had died away but the sky was black and starless and we, each a little centre of shivering life, lived on interminably in the dead, dark universe.

At last, and simultaneously, we all moved and found ourselves scrambling down the hill. None of us had broken down but all accepted that our challenge to adventure had been honourably fulfilled. Having spent the night on the hill we could now return to

civilisation and home, buoyed up by the knowledge of merit in our accomplishment and that without any loss of face, even to ourselves, we had proved strong enough to carry through our make-believe adventure to the bitter end.

There is little to tell of the rest of the adventure. The street below when we descended into it was a river of darkness between the overhanging hills giving way, after half a mile or so, to the silhouettes of the scattered houses, which gradually grew into continuous masses followed by the gaping black fronts of dead shops; not a glimmer of light anywhere and only occasionally the distant padding, of some patrolling policeman or the scuffle of some late returning reveller.

Turning off the main road, through the side streets, we soon reached the bottom of Turner Street and turned at last into our own house. The front door was unlocked as usual, (we never locked our front door as there was nothing worth stealing). We entered directly making as little noise as possible so as not to disturb the household. The voice of my father was nevertheless heard from the room above, "Is that you Ralph?" To which we all answered "Yes", achieving by this brevity a complete picture of the composition of the population below. "You'll find some dinner in the top of the oven, don't make a noise and get to bed as quick as you can."

Our parents knew their children in some circumstances better than we knew ourselves. Our being out at night disturbed their equanimity no more than to put food in the oven for us to fortify ourselves with

on our return. But they also kept an eye open to give us a welcome when we came in, closing it again when our slight noises assured them that we had not broken our necks but, in our own good time, had wandered back to the fold. It should however be added, before concluding this episode, that the actual time of our arrival back in Turner Street was about half an hour before midnight.



<sup>our</sup>  
~~The~~ nearest school for ordinary board school children was a tiny church school in the village of Hay. The elementary school we had been used to <sup>had</sup> catered for one class for each school year from seven to fourteen in standards one to seven, each standard having a separate class and teacher. At Hay, three teachers took mixed classes of two standards each; together with one headmaster, this was the total teaching staff. If a child stayed after standard six it was usually thought to be a form of snobbery on the parents' part in not getting the child away and earning money in the mill immediately this was possible.

The headmaster took the combined standards five and six which occupied the main hall of the building as their classroom. Here, he coped with some forty or fifty children as well as doing his normal administrative work. After a short time in standard four under one of the two women teachers, Bill and I graduated to five from where again we soon moved up to standard six. Whether this last rose was due to our precocity or our being more diligently occupied in the more difficult class and so less mischievous I have no means of knowing. Then out of the blue came a solution of my parents' problem of giving us the best possible chance to pursue our progressive education at least up to our fourteenth birthday.

The house next door to us in Turner Street had been empty for some time. The rent for this house was five shillings a week and this was a shilling more than the rent held to be the reasonable maximum for housing accommodation in that locality. This factor

had held off any rush to take over its occupancy. At last it attracted a young and very superior couple who moved in accompanied by a young and very inferior dog. This dog was nevertheless the means of our being put in the way of a more attenuated if not a better education. The dog might very roughly be described as a black and white fox terrier, but in our opinion <sup>'roughly' referred to his</sup> ~~it was very rough~~ Manners rather than his breeding bred. Fortunately, at our earlier introductions, its hatred of modern youth was only allowed to be expressed by snarling dashes at us when we met it in the street with its master. On these occasions it was restrained from taking pieces out of our legs or <sup>backsides</sup> ~~knickers~~ being pulled up by the strangulating pressure of its collar at the end of a long lead. Otherwise it spent its lifetime running loose in the paved back yard next to ours and, when we were about, voiced its disapproval by a snarling, barking accompaniment of a magnitude almost fabulous in so small a dog.

A snarling and barking dog that hates to have children playing outside its prison is fair game for that cruel streak that sometimes induces children to torture their enemies whenever they can safely do so. With us, or should I say with Ralph, it took the form of climbing up on to the back gate of the W.C. compound in which the cur was loose, and, from this vantage point, poking at it with the top of the hard broom, swinging the broom from side to side to encourage the dog to make snarling grabs at it so that it became wilder and more frustrated at each impact of the sharp bristles piercing its nose.

Bill and I leant over the wall a little distance away and enjoyed the fun from that safe place. Back and forth swung the broom, fiercer and fiercer the barking. ~~Then on one occasion~~ <sup>it happened that</sup> the dog ~~unexpectedly~~ got a hold on the bristles and was swept off his feet. Loud shrieked the audience, higher and higher swung the broom until overcome by the exhilaration of the game, Ralph swung the broom over the fence and dropped the cur on to our side of the barrier.

The scene changed, three nasty little brats were then leaning a boundary wall, their juicy calves suspended in the orbit of a young and vengeful cur. We became fixed and suspended, fearful of either overbalancing and falling inside the yard in trying to withdraw our legs from the dashing rushes of the dog or, failing to maintain our dubious equilibrium and falling outwards, becoming sure meat for the dog to worry at its leisure.

It was at this point that we had our first introduction to Mr. Mitch, our next door neighbour. He must have heard the final stage of our fracas on entering his house from the front and, unaware of ~~the cause~~ <sup>its history</sup>, had jumped to the conclusion that somehow his dog had got out and was worrying the children of the people next door. He burst out of the back door, hauled Ralph tenderly off the back gate, grabbed the dog, gave it a clout and thrust it back into the yard. Then he watched the remaining two of us climb safely down and made his apology to the trio for any inconvenience the dog may have caused. He nevertheless protested that the dog only wanted to enter into our games with a genuine spirit of playfulness. This he proceeded to demonstrate

returning into his yard and bringing the dog forth - a yapping mass of furious, murderous dogginess - tight gathered in his arms. Seated on his back door step he tried to get acceptance by both parties of the whole business as only lighthearted fun. The dog now being completely under his master's control, we tried tentative approaches by making 'good doggy' remarks and trying to get a hand into a position to stroke any part of his anatomy while remaining a safe distance from it's face which lined a scarlet cavity of about twelve square inches of snarl and jowl. On this occasion neither we nor the dog could be considered to have got even on to the fringe of a condition of general mateyness. Later on our fears of each other modified and we at least tolerated the other's existence with politeness.

Mr. Mitch, we later discovered, was the gymnastics master of a newly-built elementary school which we later boasted was the largest and most modern elementary school in the whole country. The new school was situated about a mile and a half from Turner Street and about half way between our house and Oldham. Following our introduction to Mr. Mitch, and his apology for his dog's ungentle conduct, and seeing my father and, being appraised of Bill's and my schooling prospects at Hay, suggested we might like to become pupils at the school where he taught. This school was called 'Derka'.

The buildings, and the equipment of Derka school, which I came to attend in the year 1907, arose from the somewhat contradictory demands of an expanding society. On the one hand the amenities and the teaching curriculum at Derka were designed to produce a generation having

much more cultured standard than any of its predecessors. On the other hand the nation's economic structure demanded a generation which could be happily absorbed into the working class.

At Derka the conflict of policy was shown by the teaching of French and German, Algebra and Geometry, Physics and Science, and the appreciation of Literature, Poetry and Drama and similar subjects. These subjects occupied a considerable part of the learning time of children who in most cases would be tipped out to earn their living at twelve or thirteen years of age. All we could assimilate was a smattering of the subjects taught; in our allocation into menial manual or craft occupations, the learning we assimilated would be of no direct use and would be quickly forgotten.

A further factor that undermined the teachers' efforts to impart cultural values in their pupils was a quite widespread feeling among parents, passed on to their children, that the period of compulsory education was a waste of time and a delay in getting out to work and earning a living.

In Lancashire, at that time, the cotton industry was booming and needed a great quantity of child labour. To fill this void educational authorities were constrained to modify the compulsory Education Act, which demanded a child's attendance at school until fourteen years of age, by accepting that at twelve years of age a child could be assumed to have <sup>gained</sup> a satisfactory <sup>level</sup> ~~standard~~ of education and could pass a qualifying examination requiring a minimal understanding in the three 'R's'. This permitted the child at twelve years of

to be gainfully employed for half of each school day and to attend school for the other half. This was called "The half time" system it also allowed, following twelve months on half time, that the child could leave school at the age of thirteen.

The headmaster of 'Derka', a Mr. Price, was quite a young man to occupy this position. In our experience of schools, headmasters were usually bearded high priests, walled in by a thick atmosphere of unapproachability. Mr. Price was in his early thirties and had been given a wider freedom to innovate outside school activities than was usual in elementary schools at that time.

*A part of the gymnasium master's duties was to arrange*  
~~The fully equipped gymnasium, under the control of Mr. Mitch,~~  
*periods of formation drilling*  
~~brought opportunities of formation drilling in the large asphalted~~  
playground, ~~for~~ *and* occasional gymnastic displays and tableaux ~~x~~ *there.* For these purposes, the parallel bars and vaulting horse were hauled out and set up in position with cocoanut matting put down to modify any youthful determination to break a neck or damage any less vital parts of the anatomies.

Each week, under another master, those of us who volunteered for swimming instruction were mustered at the school entrance. We each clutched a towel which, according to the cultural standing of our homes, ranged from being a tattered rag of greyish hue to a new, virgin, white-and-striped affair. Wrapped within this would be a pair of bathing knickers which might be the genuine shop article, or a scanty piece of clothing whose previous use had been a small <sup>but important</sup> part of the feminine raiment of a near relative or, as in our case,

something Mum had knocked up on the sewing machine.

Thus equipped, we marched off to the local swimming bath to spend an hour in an atmosphere heavily pervaded with the smell of chloride of lime, and reverberating with the echoing resonance of children shrieking and shouting, where all noise was magnified by the hard glacial tiling of the bath house walls.

Under these circumstances I learned to swim. But Bill never mastered the art; his stockier build, or the way he was put together seemed to ensure that his backside was projecting above the surface of the water at the times when his head should have been coming out to get a fresh supply of air. His regular breathing apparatus being in the normal position, over persistence in the exercise would have inevitably resulted in him drowning himself.

Lessons were also given in the top standards in French and German. French was taught as an extra subject by the normal class teacher but German was taken by the teacher of standard two - a Mr. Schultz. He embodied every characteristic which our somewhat insular imagination ~~tended~~ <sup>then tended</sup> to associate with the German nation. He was short and broad-chested, spoke with a guttural accent (which we delighted to mimic); he had a square head surmounted by a bristle of iron-grey hair cut en brosse. At our formation marching displays in the playground, he always appeared carrying a huge drum which he beat with two woolly-headed drum sticks. The drum was supported on his rotund stomach, supported by a distortion of his spine which brought the back of his head plumb over the back of his heels with his back and legs in profile forming a perfect arc.

was kindly, painstaking, but humourless. He was <sup>also</sup> a musician whose greatest love was brass bands. Beside beating the drum for our drilling in the playground he helped to satisfy his musical urge by volunteering, as an extra subject, the production of a brass band.

Bill and I were very envious of the snootier among our playmates who were to be seen carrying various types of brass instruments on their way between the school and their homes. Not wishing to be deprived the opportunity to indulge in a similar snootiness, we made enquiries about joining the band

The band class was held in an attic right at the top of the school. To attend, one had to go back for an hour after school between seven and eight in the evening. The two of us would discuss endlessly the possibilities of a musical career. We imagined audiences of thousands, receiving us with deafening applause, as we rendered a cornet solo. So we decided to join the band.

On our first attendance at the band class we found about a dozen boys assembled at the door of the rear porch of the school waiting to go in, where we were soon joined by Mr. Schultz himself. Without a word Mr. Schultz unlocked the door and lit the gas from the pilot light at the bottom of the stairs and on succeeding floors as he went. We boys all followed in single file, turning the gas off again behind us. The attic was on the fourth floor and again Mr. Schultz unlocked the door, lit the gas in the room, and we all filed in after him.

This room was built into the framing of the roof with part of the ceiling sloping beneath the rafters, and having the cheeks and angle



of a long dormer window built high up in one wall. Standing against one wall of the room were a number of tripod music stands in various stages of disrepair, all jumbled together and looking completely inextricable. Around other walls were bassoons, slide and ordinary trombones and the larger types of band instruments which were too cumbersome for the boys to take backwards and forwards to their homes. In a cupboard in one corner were stored all the bits and pieces necessary to replace any parts in broken instruments and smaller instruments of the clarionette or cornet class. Most of the boys had been enrolled in the band at an earlier date and had brought practice instruments, mainly cornets and clarionettes, with them.

For the next hour Bill and I stood in a corner trying our best to look excited and interested while Mr. Schultz had various members of the band trying out scales on the instruments of their choice. The band had only recently been formed and the bandsmen were all at the very elementary stages of learning to play or blow the various notes required. There were no chairs for Bill and I to sit on and we had to stand up in a corner, out of the way of the 'music' including the incalculable radius of slide trombone operators.

The sloping ceiling at our backs prevented us from getting any sort of comfort; its very presence seemed to exaggerate the disadvantage of standing still for a long time without support. An hour of our waiting, until the class was dismissed and Mr. Schultz could attend to us, was an hour of the most excruciating torture that I can ever remember. Whether Mr. Schultz, having had many

previous dealings with young aspirants to musical fame, made it his business to see them endure this form of torture to test them there was no way of knowing. During that hour, he took no more notice of us than if we had been two additional music stands.

After the class was finished we remained behind with Mr. Schu while he repaired the stops and re-reeded two cornets; these were for us to take away to practice on. Then he gave instructions on the stop depressions necessary to produce the different notes and we did a trial run at producing successive notes of the scale. Our efforts were quickly and perhaps understandably terminated by Mr. Schultz saying in his guttural accent, "That is enough for now my boys. Take them home and practice a lot, a very lot, and we will see what you can do next week."

Clutching the cornets tightly, shielding them from the rain under our coats, off we went, our memories of our recent tortures quickly put away in the back of our minds in the exhilaration we now felt in having these instruments in our possession.

Our intention to join the school band had not been mentioned <sup>so on returning home we</sup> to our parents, ~~although we~~ naturally had expected a joyful welcome <sup>and congratulation on</sup> to the steps we had taken to bring sweet and joyous music into their prosaic lives.

Arriving <sup>there</sup> ~~home~~, we found my father seated in his armchair by the side of the kitchen grate smoking his pipe, and Mum, darning some stockings, seated opposite him. On the table the paraffin lamp, under its pink glass shade, shed a soft glow over the scene

and the warm fire sputtered and flickered in the grate. There was an atmosphere of uncultured, lethargic contentment. Into this scene we burst, bubbling over with excitement at the prospect of recounting our enterprise in joining the school band; we thrust forward our instruments for our parents' inspection.

Allowing us to simmer down a bit, Dad and Mum took up the cornets in their hands, inspected them closely, stroked their convolutions, looking into the horn and pressing down the stops. A deadly silence ensued as Mum looked over the instrument she held and Dad minutely inspecting his own. Dad answered the look. Quietly and without haste, he slid his spectacles up to his forehead and carefully lowered the cornet to his knees.

"I hope you don't think you are going to play this <sup>blasted</sup> thing in this house," he said quietly, "because if I hear one note come out of these hellish contraptions, back they go to your school immediately. Then his voice rising louder, "Understand, not a note! What in the name of blazes made you think that we could stand you two caterwauling with these things in this house I can't imagine!"

"But Dad, we've got to practice; the teacher said so."

"I don't care what the teacher said, you'll not practice here. You can take them out to the far end of the tip, and make as much row there as the neighbours will stand, but not here."

With that he took the cornet off Mum's knees and handed it to Bill, and the one he had been inspecting he gave back to me. The pulling his spectacles back over his eyes, he spat into the fire,

put his pipe back into his mouth and silently took up his reading again. Hum glanced at him, glanced at us and said "Put them away now children and off up to bed. Goodnight."

We did, on the following evenings, make some effort to practice our instruments at the far end of the tip, but the criticism and sneers of all the moronic youth of the neighbourhood, who gathered about us to help us on these occasions, were too much for us to continuously accept. We went on the following week to return the instruments. Mr. Schultz, by his placid acceptance of our defects suggested to us that these two cornets had gone out many times before and been returned with much the same alacrity.

In the street opposite Derka School, there was a Health Food Shop. There are probably people of mature age who have never been into a Health Food Shop in their lives. But to my mother the contents of Health Food stores were basic. Her search for foods which would give her family both brains and brawn, inoculate them against all ailments, and be within her means, started with the theory that all Health Food Stores merchandise was of optimum value for her need.

When we mentioned that there was a Health Food shop in the street of our school where we could make these basic purchases, my mother took this as a God-send to her shopping problems. But, for us it meant a dedicated acceptance of the burden of lugging, over one and a half miles, heavy loads of some of the fundamentals between our school and our home. The three main items of diet involved were tins of a lard-like looking substance made from nuts, (a substitute for lower vitamin content and almost cannibalistic foods like butter, margarine, or lard), a gritty, grey powder which made up into bread <sup>a meal</sup> about as unpalatable as a diet of coarse sand, and large quantities of bone-building, brain-developing and appetite-destroying seeds - peanuts.

When we went to the Health Food shop our purchases would be something like this - a tin containing up to four pounds of the lard-like looking substance, seven or fourteen pounds of the grey powder, and a pound or two of the seeds. These we got home by clasping them to our breasts, humping them on our shoulders, by distending the bones of our fingers, arms and shoulders, or by swinging the burden at our sides to bump against our legs.

Chew brook, the source of the river Hersey, starts as a stream in the moors above Greenfield. The brook then meanders on to Manchester where it changes its name to Hersey dodging the Manchester Ship Canal on its way to the sea. Just before the brook arrives at Greenfield it runs through a deep gorge where the hills at either side rise three or four hundred feet and are parted from each other at the top by little more than a quarter of a mile. This gorge was a boy's paradise. The crystal clear water tumbled into the gorge forming, in its passage, jewelled waterfalls and placid clear ponds and backwaters as it surged through the encompassing rocks and fanned out at the broader levels below.

Smooth boulders which had pitched down from the faces of the hills above dotted the channel of the stream. Some of these were as much as eight feet high and eight feet broad, ranging down to small pebbles of a wide variety of colours which littered the bed of the stream embedding themselves in the deep layers of golden sand. Pocket-sized, sandy beaches fringed by tall trees opened out from steep gorges. On the hillsides themselves, great trees towered up toward the sky screening the top of the gorge and presenting from below a steep succession of diminishing vaults passing away into final obscurity.

Four boys, three from the congested streets of London and Joe Johnson, a native of Lancashire, discovered this virgin paradise, occupied it and took possession. Steeped in the customs and way of life of the North American continent at the middle of the nineteenth

century, they peopled the place with Red Indians and white trappers with wigwams and log cabins, measuring their wits against scalping Indians, and stuffing their sacks with the pelts of white fox and beaver. We ate strips of dried buffalo meat, baked cakes of flour water, and salt on flat stones surrounded by fires of blazing brushwood. We made canoes and shot the rapids, taking enormous salmon from the swift stream, wrapped them in dock leaves, roasting them in the brushwood fire. We made expeditions to discover the hunting grounds of unfriendly Indian tribes, shot their chief and some of his braves with our long rifles and scared the rest away. Then we held a solemn burial service over the bodies of our dead enemies.

Starting from our home in Turner Street we assembled our kit for the adventure into our unexplored territories. After some discussion of our minimum requirements in the matters of food tools and equipment we loaded our sacks with ~~provisions and equipment.~~ <sup>the choices we thought necessary for the</sup> ~~One, four~~ <sup>adventure, and among these choices were,</sup> ~~one, two pound~~ nut butter tin fixed with a string loop handle, one, two pound nut butter tin and four or five small nut butter, sample-size tins, one biscuit tin lid, a battered dessert spoon, three short lengths steel bars - (parts of a previously dismantled perambulator), which tied at the top made a tripod - half a dozen safety matches for lighting fires (our efforts to light fires by the traditional means with a pointed stick rubbed into the hollow of a piece of dried bark had proved unsuccessful, so we accepted the more modern technique of getting a light without developing awkward complexes). Also loaded in our sack was a heap of knotted and twisted string which was

considered essential, but which we returned at the end of our adventure still unravelled, and two old knives from which the bone handles had long since been lost.

For food we were supplied with a generous supply of bread pudding, two large loaves of rather stale, home-made brown bread, quantity of peanut butter in one of the smaller tins, a quantity of cocoa essence filling another, and a smaller and meaner quantity of sugar in a third (sugar was a concession to childish prejudice not a nutrient necessity). Also, a bag full of peanuts, an apple and an orange each and a half a dozen or so fairly large potatoes. My mother's suggestion, that we might like to take some refreshing and nourishing raw cabbage and raw carrots to sustain us during our travels, was agreed with ~~us~~ to avoid an argument but, unaccountably, ~~they~~ were left behind.

The quantity of food required to nourish four trappers going out into the wilds for an indefinite period was nicely worked out by my mother. Her principal was that only small quantities of things that we liked should be carried as these would be consumed quickly and we would soon come home for more; but larger and more adequate quantities of the more nourishing things, which normally our stomachs protested against, would keep us out longer and would be eaten eagerly when we were really hungry. Only then, when all was finished, would we wander back home. Our food and kit all packed in the sack or distributed about our persons, I hoisted the sack on my shoulders for the first stage of the journey and we set out.



It was a Sunday morning about half past eight that an adventure was timed to start; Joe Johnson, a school chum, made up the fourth in our band. The streets and roads as we passed along them and the countryside further along all had that look of lonely expectancy, like the interior of an empty church waiting for its congregation. The low sun's rays across the vaulted sky touched respectfully the clean and dusted earth as if inspecting the workmanship of some early band of cleaners. Most people were still asleep in their houses or were just stirring for the first tasks of the day. Further on the shaft of a milk cart came to sight at a bend in the road, and then the man, carrying his large milk can and dipper to the cart to replenish his milk supply from the churn before passing from house to house the morning's half pint or pint of Sunday milk.

As our small group of adventurers clattered along the cobbled roads in the built-up areas or disturbed the heavy dust when we reached the quieter roads our sack of provender and equipment slung over our shoulders, we must have looked like a small caravan of nomadic wanderers searching for new pastures.

Arriving at Chew Brook our day really commenced. First we spent an hour or two exploring the stream and the hillside that bordered it. We climbed on to the tops of the huge boulders and from their summits surveyed the bright and gleaming world surrounding us. We stood at the base of crystal-splashing waterfalls letting the clear water splash and gurgle about our feet. We picked up round pebbles in our hands and passed them to our hands to savour their smoothness; or passed

pebble on a large boulder, competing to see who could dislodge it first.

We got tired of this at last and, feeling hungry and a bit cold from the icy water, we set about preparing for the midday meal. First we gathered sticks and branches and built up a fire on which we slung our tripod and hung up our largest peanut butter tin half filled with clear water from the stream. In the fire we buried our potatoes and sat around poking in bits of stick to encourage it to blaze up; at the same time coughing and spitting at the smoke from the green wood but all the while thoroughly enjoying our discomfort. Finally, when the water had boiled, in went our cocoa essence and our meagre ration of sugar, the whole being stirred until it became a smooth brownish liquid.

It is probable that no brew of versatile and highly qualified witches could have compared with ours for sheer, unmitigated nausea. It is also certain that none of us would have let it pass our lips had it been presented to us in our homes as a beverage or even as a medicine to save us from death. But here in the wilderness, we accepted the drink as an elixir of life. Taking our portions in the smaller tins we had brought with us for cups, we cupped our hands around, blew up and sipped the smoky brackish contents with at least an affectation of appreciation. Then each one of us took ~~an~~ a void, blackened mass that had been a potato and timidly hoisted it to our mouth, crunching through the blackened surface, gnawing at the ware but still half-raw potato beneath, our eyes watering and our lips smarting during the process.

Having consumed our first course, the fire was stoked up to cook

the second. For this the biscuit tin lid was carefully poised on top of the embers, a little peanut butter was melted in it, and slabs of bread pudding about four inches square and one and a half inches thick were dropped into the sizzling fat. The immediate reaction to this culinary preparation was that the contents of the tin became immersed in a sheet of blue and golden flame from the grease in the tin. With our now grimed faces closely watching the process we gradually edged the tin off the embers, sometimes losing a piece of two of the bread pudding in the fire but digging it out and replacing it. Retrieving the tin and its contents and replenishing the fat, we turned the pieces of pudding and repeated the process all over again. This preparation we also consumed with gusto, commenting on the similarity in appearance if not in flavour with the strips of buffalo meat which our efforts were meant to simulate.

After another drink of the now cool cocoa essence, our meal completed with oranges consumed in their natural condition. The afternoon and evening were spent further afield exploring and assimilating the ever changing patterns of the forest, woods, boulders, hillside and tumbling stream in our neighbourhood. Until at last happy in the consciousness of having spent the day well we packed our equipment back in the sack and set off for home.

My father and mother, as I have said before, were socialists. My father having been first of all a member of the Social Democratic Party about the year 1885 this organisation later becoming the Social Democratic Federation. Both these organisations were mainly theoretical in their approach to the problem of bringing about a revolution to transform the capitalist system into the socialist society which they envisaged. My father's socialism might be considered in somewhat the same plane as being a Plymouth Brother or a Seventh Day Adventist, except that it was by a more scientific and materialistic approach that the millenium was to be achieved on earth rather than the hope of achieving a heaven after death.

A mixture of Marx and the Sermon on the Mount with a greater or less degree of each in the mixture, made up the outlook of most of the socialists of those days. They looked forward to a new world in which all people of the earth would be equal, brothers who would use the earth and its products for the benefit of all, each contributing in effort according to his ability and receiving according to his needs. A good socialist was one who acted in his everyday life in his relations to others in the sense of this hope in the brotherhood of man. To them, the sanity of their proposition was so obvious that it only needed explaining sufficiently for all people to adopt it. Each socialist would become the nucleus of a snowball of revelation which, gathering momentum, would soon embrace all the world.

The immediate set-back to this theory was that many people and many interests, although understanding the objectives, just did not

want things that way. The second was that there were large numbers of people on whom the blinding light of socialist sanity had been projected who did not seem capable of absorbing it. From this it was simple reasoning for socialists to classify themselves as the enlightened and all others, for whom the light had not proved to be of any lasting value were lumped together as 'the unenlightened'. Socialists became the chosen people all over again. Nevertheless these socialists knew that the hard core of the first group, those who saw what the socialists were aiming at but did not like their objectives, were those who, from ownership of wealth or occupancy of position, preferred an unequal to an equal state of society and these had to be overcome before there could be any clear path to socialism. The second group, the unenlightened, were so because they had not achieved an educational level at which the sanity of socialist theory could penetrate.

The overcoming of their opponents, some socialists argued, could only be by opposing force with force, using the workers' strategic position of being the producers of wealth to force the opposition to yield power to the overwhelming numbers of the ownless workers. This was to be done by strikes or similar methods of such magnitude that in the resulting chaos the whole of the existing capitalist system would automatically disintegrate.

The alternative theory was that the centre of power lay in the system of government. As enlightenment snowballed on, this would produce increasing representation of the enlightened into all the

of government, national and local and by legitimate pressures, broadening the franchise, there would ultimately be brought about a complete democracy where the universal franchise, coupled with the secrecy of the ballot, would give them the majority of votes to the socialists and thus enable them to take power.

Almost all people who accepted socialism as their ultimate objective came within the range of one or other of these two propositions. There were many shades of opinion between the extreme revolutionary and the mildest gradualist on the way in which socialism was to be achieved and each shade generated different socialist societies. Some of these societies would be break-aways from the groups of the extreme left or right to various degrees of middle way; others from the middleway out to the extremes. Different parts of the country would become centres of strength of particular groups but any socialist moving to a different part of the country would make contact, if there were no group of his own in the district, with the local socialist party group whatever initials it went under and would join in with 'the movement', a term which embraced all socialists from the extreme left to the extreme right. So it was that on going on to Oldham, mother and father joined the Independent Labour Party - the I.L.P.

The Oldham I.L.P. met, deliberated, passed resolutions, kept minutes, sent delegations, held study circles and in generally followed the basic principles of all similar democratic organisations. One of its activities in winter was to hold a 'Social' every Saturday evening in an assembly room just off Mumps, the main street of Oldham.

The room itself had accommodation for possibly fifty or sixty people seated round the walls with a dance space in the centre sufficient for a dozen or so couples. Being allowed to accompany Mum and Dad to the I.L.P. Social was my first introduction to both socials and socialism and I could hardly be blamed, at my then tender age, if I was inclined to confuse the two. It must be remembered that, in the early years of this century, apart from the theatre, legitimate or variety, and special functions of musical or other cultural societies, "The Social" was one of the most exciting forms of entertainment to be found; and to a boy of twelve years of age it was intoxicating enjoyment.

The talented among our members would come forward to render "The Last Rose of Summer", "Down Among the Dead Men", "In Zanzibar", "Kathleen Favourneen", "Simon the Cellarer", or any other of the popular songs of the day which gave the best range for the type of voice, vocal ambition, or virtuosity of the renderer. The pianists vamped out chords on a piano which, no doubt, my father had tuned at a cut rate. A piano solo always preceded the other platform items and was listened to by everyone in respectful silence, applauded with great appreciation, although many may have wondered why it was necessary to have it at all. A recitation or two was always interspersed between the vocal numbers. My father on these occasions always asked to give the Lancashire audience his Cockney rendering of a popular ballad of his youth called "Running up and Down our Stairs", and for encore a second and similar item "When I was a Boy" both of which I never failed to enjoy despite the repetition.

When dancing time came, the M.C. would step forward into the centre of the room, the pianist would settle herself more firmly in her seat, and the call would go forth to "Take your partners for the Lancers", "The Valeta", "The Polka", or any other of what are described nowadays as "Old Time Dances". Away would go the dancers on the candle-waxed floor.

Sometimes, to make up the numbers, I was brought into the Lancers, never failing to cause a lot of amusement by wanting to move in directions opposite to the routine ones, being dragged back by the lady nearest to me to be twirled unceremoniously into the rhythm of the dance again. I never learned to dance properly; my tendency to do exactly the opposite to the accepted proceeding although amusing enough in the homely atmosphere of a political social, was not appreciated later on more formal occasions. This induced in me a self-conscious shyness, resulting in my soon ceasing to want to take part and gave rise to seeking to substitute for any thrill I might have enjoyed from the dancing itself a feeling of superiority over those that did; I thought of myself as one of those who had passed through the fire and had come out cleansed of any desire for any such primitive amusement.



On <sup>the</sup> long Sunday walks, to which we were driven because of not being properly dressed for the day of rest, Joe Johnson frequently accompanied us. On <sup>one</sup> ~~this~~ occasion Ralph, Bill, myself and Joe Johnson set out from our house in Turner Street to go over the moor in the direction of Holmfirth. The route was planned by Ralph and Joe with all the optimism of the young, overestimating their capabilities; but no consideration was given to the lesser capabilities of the small fry who were to accompany them.

In the first quarter of a mile or so we passed between terrace houses and cotton mills. These petered out, giving place to grey and impoverished farm lands encompassed by irregular and sometimes dilapidated dry stone walls. These walls were everywhere and seemed to meander up and down the hillsides wherever one looked. Beyond this, the terrain became more and more formidable as we progressed.

Greenfield was a small village at the meeting of the intersecting valleys, an oasis of greenery amid the grey countryside, its surrounding hills being cut by narrow valleys down which turbulent steams gushed between wooded banks.

Our destination - 'The Isle of Sky' - was a public house set on the summit of the moors before they descended again to the Yorkshire plain to the north. The distance was about seven or eight miles from Greenfield, rising in waves of moorland from about six hundred feet to about fourteen hundred feet above sea level.

I had been brought up among the houses and streets of London where the largest open space I had known was Hampstead Heath, and Highgate Hill was the highest hill. An enormous broadening of outlook came with our removal to Manchester and later to Oldham. The world became much bigger; the new countryside added to the kaleidoscope in my mind, multiplying the patterns it could produce from added experiences. But up to the time of my going on this walk, my experiences had all been developments of my earlier ones; different houses, different fields, different people, different streams, different woods, different hills, but all extensions of my own beginnings, all encompassed and flowing naturally from my previous experiences.

Coming up the steep hill from Greenfield, the road was fringed with dry stone walling, with a view of occasional clumps of trees in the sheltered gorges. At the roadside, here and there, small blocks of terraced houses ranged like saw teeth up the sharp ascent. Occasionally too, cold-looking farm houses and buildings were set down amidst the stony landscape.

Coming to the top of the last rise we entered suddenly into a world which bore no comparison with any world I had ever known before. An invisible barrier between the natural and the unnatural seemed suddenly and mysteriously to break through; it was like a time change from the present into a prehistoric age.

Before us, except for the white riband of road, nothing belonged to my previous world, the earth and sky had no boundaries. In all directions there was nothing even remotely suggesting a human peopled world. No buildings, no animals, no cultivated fields or flowers, only an endless vista of bracken covered mounds, rising like an archipelago of islands in a sea of solid earth the colour of soot. On and on and up and up the mounded landscape rolled in its black sea apparently into eternity.

Anything could happen here, prehistoric monsters could come slithering round the hummocks, their gigantic heads breathing fire through gateways of enormous fangs. Parties of green capped gnomes and red bonnetted pixies might be disturbed in the next hollow having a birthday party and bringing laden acorn shells piled high with miniature fruits as presents to their fairy queen. Many-headed giants swinging great knotted clubs might suddenly appear from over the horizon driving a team of silver unicorns to crop the purple heather and the prickly furze.

The sun, masked momentarily by a cloud behind us, would slowly plunge us into a shadowed darkness as of the approach of the end of the world. Then as the cloud rolled away it released the enshrouding pall, replacing it with spreading waves and bands of coloured glory over the primaeval landscape.

Mile after mile we four boys plodded along up the riband of road going further and further into the wilderness; in that

undisciplined wilderness we moved as four black dots followed by tiny puffs of white powder from our footsteps disturbing the dust on the sun-drenched road. Except for an occasional word or phrase between us, or the sudden sqwawking flight of a covey of partridges the whole firmament was still and as silent as sleep.

At the top of the last rise we came to a cluster of buildings which was the Isle of Sky, the inn which we had plotted on our map as the objective. From there the moors rolled on again in descenders and ridges into the northern horizon. Opposite the pub there was a signpost pointing to the left that told us that a place called Melksham lay two miles in that direction. This was a time and place where pubs were legally open on Sundays for the sale of intoxicating liquor; on the benches, and at the tables, and in the parlour beyond the open windows, the Sunday customers, all men, sat enjoying their midday pints.

We were hungry and thirsty, most of our food had been eaten hours before and what was left in the satchel was too dry to be enjoyed without a drink. We had a few coppers between us - sixpence or sevenpence in all. But <sup>even</sup> in our limited experience of pubs <sup>we knew</sup> the mineral water we wanted <sup>would be</sup> ~~was~~ twice the price there that it would have been in an ordinary wayside tea-place. Also, the dedication of the place to adult beer-drinking frightened us away from daring to ask for a drink of water.

After carefully considering our finances and weighing the prospects of being able to get sufficient pop at a penny a bottle and perhaps cheap cake and broken biscuits as well if we went further on, we passed the pub and turned off left for the two miles which the signpost had told us was the distance to Melksham.

Bill's legs were a little shorter than mine, he was also a little plumper - not the bag of bones and piano-wire Dad had described as constituting my anatomy; consequently, the long and dusty walk with in addition, the discomfort of a blister which had appeared on one of his heels, had put him in bad shape to keep up with us. He complained for some time of being tired and of his heel being painful but with the prospect of at least having something to drink if we carried on

for a mile or so further there was not much we could do for poor Bill but firmly urge him to keep up with us. Endurance and a sore heel have their breaking points and Bill finally cast himself down on the grass verge fronting a group of cottages and refused to go any further.

At this determined deflection from the close ranks of our mutual purpose we, the remaining three, held council together. After some discussion it was decided that Joe, as captain, accompanied by myself would go on to Melksham to prospect for food and drink, while Ralph as lieutenant, would stay behind with Bill to await our return. Of ~~us~~ <sup>and I</sup> we trudged down the road. It was still about a mile to the village. Looking back before rounding a bend, we could see Bill, still nursing his foot, while Ralph, lying back on the grass verge, his hands behind his head, enjoyed the rest. With one hand he waved lazily to us as we turned out of sight.

We found that Melksham was a long straggling village of nondescript houses and a few tiny shops. The time was somewhere between one and two o'clock and on this hot afternoon not a soul stirred, not a cat or a dog was awake enough to bring even a semblance of life to that somnolent scene. Our hopes were shattered. Although we passed through the village from one end to the other, not a shop was open anywhere, nor did any shop seem alive enough for us to dare disturb its Sunday peace by knocking to ask if we could buy something. Disappointed, we gave up our mission and turned disconsolately back up the hill to where we had left Ralph and Bill.

Coming round the last bend we saw a group of three or four women surrounding the spot where Ralph and Bill had been, but no sign of them themselves. Apprehensively hurrying forward we at last got within range of the group and, peering between them, saw Ralph and Bill comfortably ensconced against a convenient turf mound, being administered to by a stout lady in a shot-silk dress protected by a large cretonne apron. She was bathing and bandaging Bill's foot while Bill, grinning from ear to ear, was scoffing a large wedge of plum cake. Ralph, by Bill's side, was resting on one arm, lovingly grasping a big mug of tea from which three parts of the contents had

already disappeared.

We were soon introduced and <sup>in our turn</sup> ~~soon in turn~~ provided with mugs of strong, sweet tea. We were also pressed to take a sample of each of the ladies home-made cooking - plum cake, currant buns or sponge cake. We each chose a section of plum cake but, to prevent any embarrassment from our obvious preference, took helpings of the others as makeweight.

It transpired that, after Joe and I had gone off toward the village, Ralph had stirred himself sufficiently to try to get a drink of water for Bill and himself from one of the adjacent houses. Explaining at his first call that his cousin was with him, he asked the lady to lend him a mug to take the water to Bill. The lady, befaced with such an unusual demand from a very dirty if not exceptionally ragged urchin, who spoke with an accent very different from the local dialect, and perhaps fearful that her mug might never find its way back again, fetched a jug of water and a cup and decided to see for herself exactly what was going on on her threshold. Her coming out to her front gate had been watched, as had Ralph's original approach by other women neighbours through the front window curtains of the adjacent cottages, this being the standard form of recreation whilst awaiting their husbands return from the pub up the road. Curiosity quickly dragged these ladies to their feet and also out of their front gates to see what was happening.

The first lady's motherly heart must have been touched on finding the plight Bill was in with his sore heel. Quickly returning to her house, she had soon brought out a basin of warm water and some torn strips of linen and proceeded to dress Bill's foot. Meanwhile the other ladies, tipped by the leadership of their motherly neighbour over the edge of disapproval which the presence of foreign urchins on their thresholds of a Sunday afternoon would normally have produced, rose joyfully to the emotions of vicarious motherhood and like bringers of gifts to the infant Jesus, brought forth their presents - if not of gold, frankincense and myrrh - of tea, plum cake, buns and sponge cake, a variation from the biblical gifts which Bill irreligiously appreciated.

We two, joining the party as late arrivals, were soon included in their ministrations. In return we gave a broad outline of our adventures trying, somewhat unconvincingly, to explain why four home children should walk over the moors a distance of ten miles or so to come to a dump like Melksham to buy four bottles of pop. As there seemed no other way in which we could have got where we were except in the manner and by the route described, our explanation had to be accepted. By the time we had consumed the hot tea and cake, were well rested and had assimilated the full flavour of the ladies excited cries of astonishment at our stories of our prowess, we were reasonably certain that our exploits could be considered to have a slight edge over the exploits of the mythological heroes themselves.

Returning up the road toward the Isle of Sky we soon lost sight of the houses and passed into the open country again. We had not gone far when we saw, on the horizon, sundry groups of figures filtering slowly down towards us.

Just as the ladies had allowed a Sunday afternoon's motherlines to break down their conventional indisposition to bother with stray urchins, so a couple of pints of beer brought to these Sunday lunch-time escapists an interest in these boys whom an hour before they had seen pause undecidedly in the road before the pub.

The tale was retold, the exclamations of astonishment re-savoured. Our new beery friends, entering into a spirit similar to that which ancient hearers of mythological tales might have had, decided to subject us to one further test, success or failure in which would prove our immortality or otherwise. The urge to generosity which two pints of beer can often account for, clinched the idea of setting us to run races for monetary rewards.

An organising genius among them soon had the dusty road marked with a ~~starting and finishing line~~ <sup>starting and finishing line some forty yards apart</sup> and ourselves ranged in handicapped positions according to our sizes, ~~some thirty or forty yards away~~. Halfpennies were then dropped by our generous sponsors on the finishing line. Bill, whose blistered foot had been made much more comfortable by all the bathing and bandaging, had started walking with us almost normally on our return journey. Nevertheless he was excused

participation in the proposed trials and thankfully sat himself down on the bank at the roadside to enjoy being a spectator of our contest.

With the drop of a cap we flew off up the road. Whoever reached the finishing line first gathered the prize money. Other groups from the pub arrived on the scene and joined in the sport. We were all re-handicapped in such a manner as to put the first winner quite out of the running. Again with the drop of a cap we rushed forward to get our halfpennies, Bill meantime receiving a halfpenny as a consolation prize for being unable to take part with the rest of us. In all the annals of athletics, ancient or modern, there was never probably a better meeting than ours. The spectators all enjoyed themselves thoroughly. The contestants, who all in their turn won their races, gathering prizes of equal value, could not help but be satisfied with the contests. And Bill, as the wounded hero, could complain at his share of the prize money. Considering, too, that the races were over such a short distance and that our total winnings plus Bill's consolation money were three shillings and sevenpence halfpenny, a 'rare do' could be claimed by all who took part.

Reluctantly our new friends parted with us; they, to go down the road to their Sunday dinners kept hot in the oven by their Melksham wives, some of whom had probably been our earlier friends, we, to proceed back up the now deserted road to The Isle of Sky. We turned right at the pub and made our way over the white ribbon of road through the prehistoric wilderness on our long journey towards home.

Our return to London was sudden and, for us children, quite unexpected. There was, in this going back to London, none of the anticipation nor the same excitement in the prospect of change which coming to Lancashire had induced earlier. Whatever my parents felt in going back there, all it held for me was the closing down of dramatic living and a return to a life of known uniformity. All their lives, before going to live in Lancashire, my parents had been part of the north London scene. The place had become so stamped in their personalities that they were conditioned into being so much a part of London that being away from it was never more than an intermission in living.

A chance to get back came when Dad was offered a reasonably attractive job back in London and there was sufficient money saved up to cover the cost of the family's removal there. The piano firm in Manchester, where Dad had worked for three years, tried to get him to stay with them by offering him a job as shop foreman, but the tie of home was too strong even though he knew there was a risk of periodic unemployment if he returned.

Our numbers for the return journey were increased by two from the numbers who had made the original journey northward.- Grandma, whose coming into our household I have already recounted, and Dick who had been born some two and a half years previously in New Mosto. Until Dad had had time to find a new home for us, we went to stay with my aunt Annie in the same house in Rathcoole Gardens from which our original northwards exodus had been made.

The house where Aunt Annie lived was really a bottom flat in a two-family dwelling, and normally accommodated five people, my aunt and uncle and my three cousins - Winnie, Ivy and Dora - aged twelve and eight respectively. Their total accommodation in this flat was parlour, a living room, a kitchen, and a scullery and one small bedroom. In our family there were now nine all told, making a total, with Aunt Annie's family, of fourteen. The problem of fitting us all into such limited accommodation might seem impossible, but it was nevertheless



accomplished by a stolid indifference to facts, with good-will and considerable improvisation.

Bill and I slept in the kitchen on a sort of cage of trellised metal lathing that normally folded up into a box formation and was concealed, in the day time, in a space beside the chimney breast where it was further masked by an armchair. At the foot of this contraption David was bedded in a position where our feet would have been if they had been allowed to stretch out. The armchair, which in the daytime concealed the folding metal trellis, was lined up front to front with a second armchair and, in the space between, Ralph and Dick slept. Although I believe on one or two occasions, a gap opening up between the two chairs during the night had resulted in Dick being found next morning, lying on the floor with his head wedged underneath the bottom rail of one of the chairs, but unharmed and, when found, still fast asleep. Somewhat similar arrangements with the remainder of the family draped over the furniture in the remainder of the two rooms and scullery must have applied, though I have no memory of them.

The other member of the family - Jack, who was now almost seventeen years old - overcame his sleeping problem for himself by managing to get re-employed at his old job as page boy in the Junior Constitutional Club in Piccadilly, where he had to live in!

Our cramped stay at aunt Annie's only lasted a week or so before we moved to a house in Noel Park, a district of Wood Green.

The purpose of the elementary schools in Oldham had been to turn out a labour force for the local industries and subsidiary requirements. The cotton mills would claim the largest proportion of them where their advancement would generally depend on their following the trades of <sup>weaving</sup> wefting, warping and spinning, minding the cotton looms or carrying out the loading, carting or dispatching of the manufactured goods. The assimilation at an elementary level of the three R's was all that was necessary and this was expected of the normal child by its twelfth or thirteenth birthday.

The needs of the education system in London were somewhat more diverse. More of the labour was required in the clerical and

commercial spheres, beside more to follow crafts, become shop assistants and engage in all forms of domestic and catering service as well as factory work. The curriculum of the London schools was therefore tuned in to these wider requirements. When Bill and I went to Noel Park School we found ourselves puzzled and frustrated in a daily battle with English Grammar and French. When describing Derk school in Oldham I mentioned that French and German were among the extra subjects taught at that school. These were taught to those children whose parents specially requested them and then only in the top classes after thirteen years of age. At the time of our leaving Oldham I was only twelve and a half years old, but at that age these subjects were already included as an ordinary subject at the Noel Park School which I now entered.

In our new school Bill and I were seated together at the same desk. In times when we were more in tune with our surroundings and were able better to understand what the teacher was getting at, this would have been a fatal proximity in any hall of learning. Our mutual jealousy and the unconscious drive for each to prove himself cleverer than the other would soon have required our separation for the sake of peace. But this time our dual ignorance pulled us closer together in a cell of resistance to learning.

For Bill and me, grammar had no meaning. Our three years in Lancashire had slurred our native cockney pronunciation with Lancashire idiom and intonation. Our writing was the nearest equivalent in symbolic form of the dual pattern of ungrammatical sentence formation. We had endured English grammar lessons in our school in Lancashire but had found these lessons a tedious game of word-juggling. They did not even register as having a real relation to the way one spoke or wrote.

The grammar lessons at Noel Park were a particular trial. It appeared that not only had one got to understand what a written sentence was trying to say, but to understand in some sort of mathematical way all the values of the various parts. A sentence would be selected by the teacher and written along the top of the blackboard. Below this he would, by vertical and horizontal lines,

construct a series of columns in a tabulating framework. Then each word in that sentence had to be defined in all its subtle relations with all the other words in the sentence.

"The Queen was in the parlour, eating bread and honey." This was a statement quite clear in its meaning to me. To work out that "The" was a definite article governing Queen, that "Queen" was a proper noun and the subject of the sentence, etc. etc., seemed to me a bit laboured, especially when it took a whole lesson of three quarters of an hour to get all the parts into their correct columns in their tabulation and that there were thousands and thousands of other sentences which all required tabulating in a completely different way.

Then again, "The Queen was in the parlour" appeared to me to be a quite reasonable statement. If anybody asked me where the Queen was and I answered "The Queen was in the parlour," that would be the answer and if you wanted to find her it would be there that she could be found. She might have been reading or darning her stockings for all I knew, if she was eating bread and honey or jam tarts or any other tit bit, it was very nice for her, but not terribly important. But our teacher insisted that she wasn't in the parlour at all as a primary statement; the main point was that she was eating bread and honey and the parlour bit was to tell us where she was having her snack quite apart from the fact that most Queens, I reasoned, would have been too formal to have dreamt of having their meals anywhere else than their dining rooms.

But if English grammar posed insurmountable problems of mental gymnastics, French was even worse. I suppose it can be said that most English children, learning at school that they are to be taught French, go home to Mum and Dad with eyes gleaming to tell them about the new doors being opened on a foreign world. Our being issued with our first French primer and being introduced to our first French lesson had the effect of registering learning French as an accomplishment similar to that we had needed to acquire to make up and use a cipher and codes which we had played with as children. Often we had found a fascination with symbols in place of words, or a code of made-up words in place of real ones which enabled a group of us to evolve a

secret language for communication among ourselves.

It was in this sense that the possibility of learning a new language had its appeal. New words only understood by the elect could be used in place of the accepted ones. One could say "Bong," spelt 'Bon' and unless the person you were speaking to knew you were only saying 'Good' you could enjoy a subtle sense of superiority in showing up their poverty of understanding. When you go so far in the language as to be able to say: "Fermé la porte," you could enjoy the stupefaction you felt your parents must have in the recognition of your cleverness in having attained to a new cultural level where you could speak correctly without the necessity of being understood at a

As far as I can remember the teacher at our first lesson unrolled from its hook on the wall a large coloured chart. On this was depicted a number of separate pictures of things, such as the pictures a child is given when it starts to learn to read. A cow, a horse, a cat, a house, a window, a door, a farmhouse, a man, a woman, a boy and a girl. The teacher would indicate with his pointer one of the pictures, and the class would gleefully shout, "Vash, sheval, sh mayzong, fenetrer, port." The teacher would hold up his hand and instruct the class that one didn't point to something and expect intelligent children, when they identified it, merely to say cow, horse, or cat; they would say a cow, or the cow, a house or the house, it was the same thing in French. He then went on to demonstrate that it wasn't the same in French. All nouns were either masculine or feminine in French, he said; you had to say ern sheval, or ler sheval, or yewn mayzong, or ler mayzong, and it wasn't ern mayzong, or ler mayzong as mayzong was feminine. A gleam of my former brightness seeping through my mawkish intelligence at this point I held up my hand, "Yes Goss," "Please sir, is there any way we can tell which is masculine or feminine?" "You mean, I suppose, some way of telling whether it is masculine or feminine because of what it defines or because of the way it is spelt." I accepted this with an embarrassed nod. "Not entirely, Goss. There are some helpful leads that perhaps we shall look into later, but at present we shall have to learn the gender of each word as it comes along." Deflated, I retired into my shell.

From then on, as far as I was concerned, I would use ler, or lar, ern, or yewn indiscriminately as a refinement to any noun that presented itself; I was never able to think of any other way to overcome the problem and it was unlikely that anybody I ever spoke to in French would be likely to be certain whether I was right or wrong, ~~so I thought at the time.~~ *the problem did not seem worth worrying about.*

This chart and the identifying of the pictures by their French names and saying them out loud, and adding the ler, yewn etc., as the case seemed to call for, occupied the first three lessons. If we had followed on, after about another dozen or so lessons like these first three, the basic principles of the whole thing might have been assimilated, and from then on the going might have been easier. But for the fourth lesson another chart was unfolded. The principles underlying the designer of this - a Mr. Snitchelwanger - was to illustrate a codified system of phonetics. It appeared from this chart that sounds, like words, had related values. Labial, nasal, guttural, dental, and breathing-in and breathing-out sounds, with mixtures between any and all of these, and many others ranging between an uncultured grunt and a bronchial sneeze. To learn French properly some of the grunt, wheeze, cough, gurgling noises which were missing or uncommon in English had to be mastered.

Our Lancashire experience had taught us that the English word for a receptacle in which water is often carried could be pronounced bucket, bucket, or boocket. The chart's suggestion that French was untroubled by such refinements must have cast doubt in our minds as to the value of the chart for the purpose it set out to explain.

We had about three lessons with this chart, but the class showed little progress and settled down to an atmosphere of boredom and indifference during the French period. Then we proceeded in the seventh lesson on the quite unjustified assumption that we had sufficiently mastered the ler and lar technique and had also assimilated the Snitchelwanger thesis, so that now we could reasonably pass on to learning French verbs.

At this period not only had I to contend with the effort to assimilate the grammar of my own language and simultaneously the grammar, pronunciation and irregularities of French, but I also had to have my mind opened up to absorb that there is a grammar also in music. This was really the result of my mother's wish to have a musician in the family.

Mum had suffered for years from one great frustration in her children's cultural development. It seemed to her unreasonable that my father's close association with the piano-making industry, even if only in the minor degree of ~~mechanism~~<sup>the mechanics</sup> that there should not be someone in her family to whom the piano was something more than a piece of furniture with mechanical refinements.

Unfortunately, having a piano in our house, even as a piece of furniture, was usually only for periods of short and irregular duration. Pianos, for Dad, were not musical instruments but a means of livelihood. To make a bit of extra money in his spare time he would, whenever he had sufficient money for the purpose, buy as cheaply as possible the most dilapidated old-fashioned piano there was to be found in the market at the time. This he would fetch away in a handcart and instal it in our front room. Then he would proceed to make a new, modern piano out of it. Working in the evenings and in his spare time he would make the piano ready for sale in a week or so. When this time arrived, a card would go up in our front room window to advertise to the passer-by that we had a piano for sale.

Between the posting of the notice and the sale of the piano varied periods of time would elapse, according to the luck of the game or the state of the market. During this time the piano was a playable instrument. It was within these periods of waiting for a sale that Mum would try, in turn, to induce each one of her children to learn to play it.

She tried Ralph but he had his homework from the Grammar school to master and could not therefore be expected to give piano playing his proper attention. Bill showed no desire or interest and was given up as a bad job after his first lesson. Then my turn came

and I was found to be more amenable material and was started off on five-finger exercises. The monotonous sounds of these exercises filtered through to the kitchen where Dad was enjoying a pipe and a book before the kitchen fire. Becoming restless he would ask Mum if she could either modify or stop "that bloody row" emanating from the tips of my tender fingers in the adjacent parlour. For this but to bring a sense of variety and accomplishment to the youthful musician, I was introduced to Smallwood's Manual for Beginners. The first piece in this manual was a simple statement in the key of 'C' natural - the "Keel Row" followed by "Home Sweet Home" in 'B' flat and then by the "Bluebells of Scotland" in two sharps.

During most of the time in which a piano was available, Dad who, you will have gathered, had no ear for music, bore my repeated renderings of these works without his complaints ever going to the length of denying me the opportunity of training for a musical career. I seemed rarely to get <sup>beyond</sup> ~~as far as~~ "The Bluebells of Scotland" before a knock at the front door announced an enquiry from a possible purchaser. Dad, dominated by his need for the money and a more favourable vision of spending his evenings rebuilding another second-hand piano and avoiding my piano playing, probably beat his own price down to suit the highest offer of his customer. Almost immediately, it seemed, the piano was ~~quickly~~ sold and replaced by another old crock requiring to be modernised. In the period between the outgoing of one piano and the playability of its successor the standard of efficiency I had achieved on the previous one was forgotten and I had to start again from scratch.

It never suggested itself to my father that it might have been my accomplished rendering in fortissimo, giving all I had of my musical talent, to be heard by any passer-by within a hundred yards which was in fact the advertisement that did more to sell his piano than anything else. Salesmanship had not developed in those days at the pitch where the Juke Box brings the customers in, <sup>and it's absence sends them to the pictures.</sup>

At last, as I gained in my efficiency up to the "Bluebells of Scotland" standard, Mum adopted the best precepts of piano-playing instruction and turned my attention to scales and arpeggios. With

the loud pedal pressed down to the floor, and the damper pedal working to perfection, I could really get down to enjoying myself. Chords, and arpeggios, played with joyous disregard to any minor hesitancies in their rendering or major errors in fingering peeled forth with a volume which transported me into the atmosphere of performing a piano concerto in the Albert Hall. Dad, on the other hand, from enduring a minor irritation which interfered with his reading, was transported to the border of contemplating infanticide. He came to the point where he flung down his book, spat into the fire with a splash that denoted the limit of his endurance, and shouted out in a voice that burst through my dream of fame with, "For Christ sake Jim, leave that bloody piano alone and let's have a bit of peace."

Perhaps I was sensitive enough to see his point of view or perhaps I was a little tired of there being nobody to appreciate my talents, isolated as I was in the front room. Be that as it may, I accepted being summarily dragged down from the heights of musical ecstasy, meekly desisted from my arpeggios and, shutting down the piano, returned to the kitchen without protest.

This was not to be the end; Mum had not spent her life overcoming impossible situations to be defeated thus simply in her urge to develop any possible talents her children might have. Her younger sister, Grace, had a piano and, what is more, knew enough about piano-playing to be able to take private pupils. As she lived only about a mile and a half from us, my mother arranged for Auntie Grace to give me lessons from three o'clock to four-thirty every Saturday afternoon.

Each Saturday then, at about half past two, I set off. Auntie Grace's front parlour was larger than any I had previously been used to. It was also very tidy, with each piece of furniture, each ornament, cushion or antimacassar so exactly placed that they might have been glued into position. A large mirror repeated the set arrangement in another dimension.

My Auntie Grace was very refined. Her life had made her into that very unfortunate type of personality who accepts reality as being the affected, and the affected as being reality. Apprenticed when very young to becoming a milliner at a large dress establishment,



Bollerton & Dymdale in Oxford Street - where she had 'lived in' on the premises, her early years had moulded her to judge that a girl's main safeguard against the savage world outside the doors of her establishment, lay in refined respectability. In the atmosphere of prim austerity in which establishments of this nature controlled their young ladies, she worked among beautiful clothes and pandered to wealthy women on a wage arrangement which provided dormitory accommodation, a bare sufficiency of food, and a salary of a few pounds a year. From a situation of this sort there was only one way of escape. That was to find a husband who could provide a continuity of the prim respectability she had accepted as the premier satisfaction in living, and a home which would be a smaller edition of Bollerton & Dymdale. This she achieved and passed the remainder of her days clothed in dresses of taste which she made herself, gliding through life, a pale wraith revisiting like a reincarnated spirit the scenes of her past happiness. But her marriage was a break-through to reality in a sense. Life at the milliners had always held the prospect of freedom and happiness in the years ahead when, instead of Bollerton & Dymdale, her husband would support her in a manner which would be as near to heaven as any mortal could expect. Unfortunately, the contract implicit in her marriage lines held no clause offering such a freedom from a husband who was, in fact, a happy, lively, coarse little fellow whom she first despised for his limited stature and later hated for his coarseness.

As a teacher of the pianoforte she may have been very good but as an aunt to a small nephew she was a thin, cold figure of almost inhuman impersonality. Her first requirements in her piano tuition was that I must leave the pedals strictly alone, thus countering any exaltation I may have felt in surrounding my inefficiencies in a splendid volume of uncritical noise. Her second stricture was that I could only learn to play if I practiced over and over again, five-finger exercises and chords and arpeggios such as those I had been introduced to previously. Having instilled this into me she placed before me a manual of such exercises, told

me which I was to confine myself to, pulled the front room curtains to hide me from passers by, lit the candles in the sconces at the side of the piano, and departed; <sup>and</sup> I ~~used~~ firmly ~~to~~ believe she disappeared through the wall that divided the parlour from her living room without going through any door or opening.

If there had been the spark of genius, or even a glimmer of music in my soul, I might have survived all this. But I certainly had not sufficient to survive the misery and loneliness of that darkened room; often the rain beat on the windows mixing in with my tuneless playing and created in me a spiritual chill kept below zero by the flickering light of the candles and the wraithlike apparition that slid in through the walls to look at me for a moment then to disappear.

At four thirty my aunt would appear, floating into the candle-light and say in a far away voice, "It's time to stop now." My irresponsive fingers, closed the practice manual on the music frame closed the front of the piano, and picked up my cap from an adjacent chair. Sliding slowly off the hard seat of the piano stool, with a "thank you Auntie", I shambled out from the shadows of that ghastly room into the depressing rain and the dreary streets all the while enclosed in a shell of uncomprehending misery as I dragged myself homeward.

Perhaps I could have gone on beyond "<sup>Blumenlied</sup> ~~Lumenlied~~" and the "Overture to William Tell", which was the stage my aunt eventually brought me, to playing the great classics to a concert audience; perhaps I could have become a conductor or a composer or even just an impecunious music teacher if I had been given an occasional pat on the head, a smile of appreciation, or rewarded with a biscuit indicating that what I suffered was understood and the effort value and appreciated. A performing dog or seal at least gets these.

Perhaps my mother knew as, without protest, she let me give up my weekly journey. In doing so she herself gave up the hope that through me, one day, one of her children would justify to the full that deep urge that lay in her maternal bosom, that one of her family should be able to play the piano.

In the year 1497 John Cabot, accompanied by his brother Sebastian Cabot and his own two sons, sailed from Bristol and discovered the mainland of North America. Some centuries later, in 1909, in company with my grandmother, my mother, four brothers one sister and one cousin<sup>9</sup> took train from Paddington Station ~~and~~ discovered Bristol.

What vicissitudes the Cabot family experienced in their journey is probably historically recorded. The most marked in mine was a long argument between my mother and the ticket collector somewhere in the neighbourhood of Box Tunnel, that the return halves of four tickets issued for a half days excursion from Bristol to see the sights of London hardly constituted a reasonable return for the transport of three adults, and an uncountable number of children, ranging between the ages of three and fifteen accompanied by about a hundredweight of luggage.

The ticket collector was faced with the impossibility of either counting the children or weighing the luggage. He had also to deal with my mother's placid insistence that her husband had sent her tickets and told her that they were sufficient for the journey and being her husband should know what he was doing if anybody did. The ticket collector, finding there was nothing he could do about it, finally capitulated and our discovery of Bristol was allowed to go forward unhampered from that point.

Arriving at Temple Meads Station in the small hours of the morning, we were met by my father who had a perambulator with him which was itself loaded with a push cart. Our luggage was then assembled and loaded into the perambulator, or the push cart, or shared out between us. Then the ten of us threaded our way through the deserted streets of the ~~reputedly~~ wealthy sea-port which contained our new home.

The entourage consisted of my father, a short stocky man about five feet three inches tall, wearing a cloth cap slightly askew, lips set firmly beneath a brown walrus moustache. He was pushing a perambulator loaded up with parcels almost to the height of his shoulders. Following Dad came brother Jack, almost as tall as

his father, neatly dressed in a grey suit with a crease in the trousers and well-polished black shoes, trundling along a push cart similarly loaded but including the baby, Dick, perched on the front. Next, arm in arm, came my little mother and still smaller grandmother. My mother looking as if it was the most normal thing in the world to be taking the air in the centre of Bristol at 2 o'clock in the morning, and as if the walk had been specially arranged for her enjoyment. My grandmother wearing a high-necked sequin encrusted bodice, a long trailing skirt and a black bonnet which bobbed up and down on her head walked slowly and a little haltingly holding on tightly to my mother's arm; that arm ~~was~~ her only anchorage with normality in an otherwise confusing and unstable world. Following these in straggling, alternating order came Ralph, Bill, David and me, each of us carrying a bag or parcel; and even Nance, refusing to be left out, clutched tightly to her chest a brown paper parcel containing her grandma's slippers.

Policemen on their midnight patrols through our great cities must see some queer and unusual sights in their passage through the dark deserted streets. Perhaps there is one still alive today who still remembers seeing our queer cavalcade crossing Bristol Bridge at about two a.m. one clear September morning; <sup>and</sup> coming across to and eyeing all of us reflectively. ~~He~~ said "It's a grand night for a moonlight flit" and, smiling at us, passing on his way.

Presently, we arrived at our new home in Morgan Street, <sup>which</sup> Dad had previously made all ready for us so we were soon in bed and asleep. But our journey earlier in the night through the slumbering sea-port had excited our imaginations; by seven o'clock that morning Ralph, Bill, David and I were all awake, dressed and downstairs curious to see our new surroundings.

We commenced by an inspection of the house and the small garden in the rear and followed this by going out into the street to have a look at our immediate neighbourhood. This did not take long as we were too hungry to contemplate going too far afield. By eight o'clock we were back in the house again where all the rest of our family were still fast asleep. This produced for us

the problem of what we were to do next.

Our house, that morning, was silent as the grave; we spoke together in whispers to avoid waking our parents, and we sat around the kitchen table and shuffled our feet. Getting bolder, but without collective thought our hunger suggested that we might explore what there was in the house to eat. Some sort of stocks had been got in for the weekend, and we were soon hacking away at loaves of bread spreading the chunks thinly with margarine, our ingrained frugality being stronger than any careless ignoring of the narrow margin between there being something to eat and the closeness of poverty and hunger.

Almost automatically, and still without any decision seeming to have been made, we continued our bread hacking and spreading after our hunger had been appeased and made up small piles of food including some slabs of bread pudding we had found and a pound or so of apples. These we wrapped up in pieces of newspaper and stuffed into our pockets.

There was no need for any formal discussion as to our object. We all knew in something of the same way that birds must know about migration, that the sea was not very far away and that it awaited coming. About nine o'clock we gathered our parcels of food together and set off after leaving a note to tell our parents where we were going.

It was a Sunday in late September, and a perfect morning, which had that special quality of clean atmosphere and that quiet peacefulness which a city holds to itself <sup>at such a time</sup> as if in anticipation of its rebirth. Such noises as there were cut into the silence like a sharp challenge on the door dividing dreams from reality; the rattling of a milk cart from a nearby street or a distant hoot of a vessel in the port were a command to lower the drawbridge to admit the hosts of awareness.

Down Morgan Street and along Newfoundland Road our little band of migrants raised its faces to the sky and sniffed the direction of the sea. ~~With our backs to the sun followed our noses westward.~~ Coldsdon Square we stopped at a fountain where bronze dolphins spur

water from their stained green mouths into the basin beneath; and each of us in turn took a drink of the clear sparkling water from the chained bronze cup.

At Bristol Bridge we stood a while to take in the unfamiliar sight of masted ships tied up to the wharf, and rowing boats and skiffs wallowing in the ooze at the edge of the deep water or stuck fast in the deep slime of the grey banks. We saw the faint plume of smoke issuing from the galleys of the steamers. The only sounds to break the stillness of the Sunday morning calm was a solitary rowing boat, its oars clicking against the rowlocks, and the splash as a sailor from a steamship threw a bucket of slops overboard into the muddy water that lapped against his ship's sides. Deep beneath us, seemingly indifferent to the load of craft that scored its surface, the river paused at its lowest tide for the influx of sea water to awaken it to the life of a new day.

But the west wind blew softly from the sea and our way led on to find the source of the incoming tide. The river ran due west to Avonmouth, we knew, lay on its north bank. So we took the route along the causeway and beneath the steep cliffs which rose up hundreds of feet at each side of the river to anchor the threads supporting the suspension bridge which tied together the two sides of the gorge. The low road under the suspension bridge was our direction and continuing along the north bank of the river going straight westward we should come to Avonmouth, and the sea.

Gaily and confidently we marched straight forward. After a time the road narrowed and twisted back and forth, running sometimes near the river, sometimes bending away, but always returning again to its general direction. The river when we were close enough to see it lay at the bottom of a deep mud gorge, repellent and forbidding. Then without warning the road came to a sudden end. Straight before us beyond a wire fence an intersecting gorge cut into the river from the north forming an impassable mud barrier; either we must return by the way we had come or adventure into a narrow track that ran along the top of a bank following the direction of the inlet northward. We took this new, rutted path

until it lost itself among tufty hillocks and grey muddy ditches. We negotiated these as best we could, sliding down slippery banks jumping between tufty hillocks and over the muddier places until a dirty gorge, too wide for us to pass over safely, turned us again at right angles back in the direction from which we had come.

This sort of arrangement of the countryside was not at all what our geography lessons or our previous town environment had led us to expect. Rivers were expected to hold themselves within the nice boundaries lines shown on the map, and all rivers should obviously have roads or at least footpaths following their courses and raised cleanly on banks. No pattern of countryside which we had ever previously seen looked like this wilderness. This was dirty and disgusting, *uncontrolled, and smelt sour* ~~uncontrolled~~ and fairly putrid.

On the low horizon before us was a line of fence running again at right angles to our course which, from occasional movement of dark spots on the far side of it, suggested that it might be a road. But between us and the possible road were more humps and hummocks stretches of ~~tufty~~ <sup>tufty</sup>, reedy grass and grey, damp ditches. One after another we surmounted these obstacles until a great stretch of fence separated us from our objective. But <sup>new</sup> ~~new~~ obstacles barred our way.

Although, as I have said earlier my mother was a vegetarian and we had been constrained, as she was the provider, to accept her diatetic strictures, <sup>ignoring our own</sup> likes and dislikes, nevertheless meat was not entirely foreign to us. In our younger childhood, our attention had been drawn to pictures of cattle but our familiarity with the animal had been mainly through the picture book or the more gruesome reality of the butcher's shop.

Sometimes, on our way to and from school, or in our wandering we had seen cattle herded along the street toward the slaughterhouse; and at their approach had kept as tight against the wall or doorway as possible or made a detour up a side street to avoid them. In all these circumstances these huge beasts had been disciplined and under the control of those who seemed to find no difficulty in mastering and directing them. But cattle free in a big field, able if they so wished to revenge themselves for the

indignity of being herded into slaughter-houses were another matter. Bulls, too, we had heard of, as being a special type of very dangerous cattle that toss and gore people if they had half a chance. Bullocks we had not been taught about. Therefore any cattle which did not show clear evidence in their silhouettes that they were the milder, gentle sort of kine were, so far as we were concerned, 'Bulls'. Between us and the hoped-for roadway was a field in which twenty or thirty 'bulls' roamed freely.

~~The field was circumscribed along by a deep ditch at the top of which ran a light wire fence, and between us and the fence was a deep ditch of which ran a light wire fence.~~ <sup>animals in the field were constrained from wandering by a light wire fence, and between us and the fence was a deep ditch of which ran a light wire fence.</sup> Having mastered the ditch and having only the fence between us and the fearsome beasts, we paused to consider whether a valorous approach could be undertaken with reasonable safety. Ralph, who was the eldest among us, voiced his understanding of such situations. He began by <sup>explaining</sup> extolling man's superiority to the whole of the animal kingdom, saying that if you looked dangerous animals straight in the eyes they would shuffle away from your proximity with a sort of apology for daring to try to stare out one of God's anointed; he added that cattle were so short-sighted they could not see you properly beyond the range of a few yards and that, in any case, their eyes magnified so that we presented ourselves to them as enormous creatures far bigger and more dangerous to them than they appeared to us. He was for getting through the fence and pressing straight forward.

But we younger ones had little faith. As we saw it, before <sup>get into the proper stance and associated eye level to</sup> we could impress one of these monsters with human superiority, ~~using the proper stance and associated eye level,~~ the animal would have evaded our hypnotic beam and got the points of his dangerous looking horns embedded in our stomachs; or even if we had got one where we wanted him, an unsporting attack from a freebooter in the rear might have resulted in <sup>a similar disaster from that quarter</sup> ~~our disaster~~. Moreover we were not satisfied that if one of the beasts got us in line with one of his own kind, he <sup>might not put two and two together and</sup> ~~would not~~ be capable of working the magnifying proposition out for himself.

We therefore kept the fence between the 'bulls' and ourselves. "Take no notice of them," said Ralph, "they won't bother us if we



take no notice". So we firmly adopted a 'taking no notice' attitude and in single file pressed along the fence side moving westward.

The intensesness with which we 'took no notice' did not seem to have the desired effect on the 'bulls' who walked parallel with us on the other side of the fence and might, because of their apparent indifference, have been suspected of adopting the same tactics as ourselves; spread over a quarter of an acre, they kept along with us pace for pace.

The human ascendancy over the animal kingdom, lies very much in its ability to assess a situation and then by means of strategy and tactics to master it. So after about a hundred yards march in procession - the 'bulls' on one side of the fence and we on the other - we concluded, after a short conference, that if the 'bulls' would not lose us, we must by strategy try to lose them. To do this Ralph proposed that we should quietly turn away from the fence and hide out of sight from them in the bottom of the ditch. Then when the 'bulls' had lost interest because they had lost their quarry, we should double back along the bottom of the ditch in the opposite direction.

The manoeuvre was completely successful. <sup>Having got well away from the Bull</sup> We all got through <sup>forward</sup> the fence and in single file moved <sup>forward</sup> across the field. All seemed to be going according to plan. For a few moments the 'bulls' remained in their corner of the field with their backs towards us. Then, almost as if they had telepathic communication, they all turned their heads <sup>through a half circle</sup> together and looked hard in our direction. Having assured themselves that we were indeed trespassing on their territory <sup>got their hindquarters in line with their heads and</sup> they ~~unhurriedly~~ began to move forward on a path which would intercept us at about the point where we hoped to get off the field on to the road. We could, of course, have retreated back to the fence and started again but once launched into the arena a tenacity perhaps inherited from our cockney forefathers arose within us causing us to continue in the way we were heading. Perhaps we increased our pace a little but if we did the 'bulls' regulated their pace to ours and no change in our relative positions arose to comfort us. We dared not run and we could no longer reach safety

by retreat. As an experiment, we tried what standing still might do; the approaching herd instantly seemed to swing menacingly <sup>through a few degrees straight</sup> towards us and there appeared a great likelihood of their cutting us off before the shelter of the fence could bring us to safety. we had no alternatives. We could not stand still as our ruse had immediately countered. We dared not run as we had little doubt that the beasts, once encouraged to gambol across the field, would be immoderate in their understanding of the new development and come charging down upon us. Keeping an even pace we made straight for the fence; a clash was inevitable. It was just as simple as that. We met. The 'bulls' came forward looking hard at us, swinging their heavy heads backward and forwards. Then, with the most welcome but unflattering indifference, they dropped their heads and began nibbling the grass at their feet. Some more curious than the rest came closer until we could feel their hot breath; they made no effort to gore us but, with an awkward side-step, swung heavily at us. To these thirty-odd bullocks, the four boys who had passed through their field meant no more than a slight relief from the monotony of their placid existence.

Quickly getting through the last fence and up on to the road on the other side, we felt, perhaps, a little ashamed at our unnecessary fears, but also a little exhilarated at having accepted the challenge even if only against an imaginary danger.

#### Mexokimbedza

So far we had been about two hours on our journey and covered about two miles. A light breeze reached us from the west, bringing with it a mixture of smells - ozone, rotting seaweed, mudflats and insufficiently diluted sewage. But touching the tender chord of our finer instincts the smells told us that still in that direction lay the sea.

Quite soon we came to a village, the one we had seen but found inaccessible in our earlier wanderings. There we found a cottage that sold pop and another where we bought a cottage loaf and some cheese, as our original food parcels had become considerably lightened during our journey.

Getting on toward one o'clock we entered the outskirts of

Avonmouth which, apart from depressing looking blocks of flat-fronted houses with intermediate stretches of wasteland leading to nowhere, was otherwise lined by tall warehouses, breweries, gas works, junk yards, timber yards, scrap metal dealers, boat builders and lodging houses. Finally our progress was completely blocked by an iron fence and gates about nine feet high stretching from side to side across the road - an impassable barrier.

For a few moments we pressed our faces against the bars in the hope of at least getting a glimpse of the sea on their other side. But all that lay within the limit of our vision was a dockside approach with ships lined up at the wharf side on the left, a railway track supporting a line of trucks in the middle and, on our right, further great shed-like buildings. The whole area was indiscriminately patterned with heaps of ropes and cables, bollards, tarpaulins, bits of hoisting machinery, stacks of metal plates, cog wheels, shafts, trolleys, carts, drays and a hundred other things. There was no sign of life nor of the restless ocean.

But the sea must be there somewhere. Did it not lie at right angles to the river Avon at its mouth, as we had been informed? Only by travelling north was there any possibility of our making contact with it.

Again we marched, northward this time, until at last the factories, sheds, warehouses, workshops and junk yards petered out and only a vista of miles and miles of mud flats separated us from the sea - its blue waters gently lapping our island shores. Tentatively we made sorties into the inhospitable mud, taking as our route any dried-up mud ditch that seemed to lead us in the direction of our goal. But it was all useless. The flat sea in that flat landscape - if indeed it was there at all - merged into the haze of the grey horizon.

Our geography lessons had lied to us. The areas around our island coloured blue on the maps were <sup>distortions of the truth</sup> ~~symbolic for non-land~~. As we sadly turned our backs on the promised sea to treck the weary miles homeward, Ralph argued that it wasn't like that everywhere; <sup>somewhere there was a sea that</sup> ~~there the sea was blue and~~ pictures of seaside places proved that

people could get close to it and that children played and swam in. But our experience had made us sceptical. There was no blue sea. Rivers were not routes of blue water meandering through the hedger until finally discharging themselves into a blue sea that lay at right angles to their entrances. The streets of cities had meaning, purpose, conformity, control; the wateryworld was a shocking, unregulated, overflowing sewage system.

Four very tired, hungry, disillusioned children got back to Morgan Street about eight o'clock that night. David who was only nine years old had to be carried pig-a-back by Ralph for short stretches, and a young man walking his bicycle up the hill towards Clifton Downs had put David on his saddle and walked with us a mile or so to help put us on our way.

So ended our adventure, leaving me with a deep impression of frustration for a long time. Later I perhaps came to realize that it is not entirely the achievement of the objective which brings lasting satisfaction, but the living in the doing of it, the feel of it while it is being done, or endured, or hated.

As a family we <sup>were very united, nevertheless, although</sup> ~~seemed to have been very much together.~~ Although I suppose I must have slept in the same bed as Ralph for much of my first fourteen years of my life there was a large age gap between us as there was also between me and my next younger brother David - which it was impossible to bridge and which deviated our activities into paths not toward fraternity but rather away from it. Nevertheless until any of us left school, there could not help but be an intimate cohesion in our home lives arising from our being constantly in each others presence as well as there being need for the exercising of a degree of care and protection by the older ones for their younger brothers.

The greatest severance of fraternal ties comes when the older child goes out to work and enters into a completely different time programme in his daily life. On going to work the elder brother gets up earlier, is away from home longer, and often in the evenings stays up later than his younger brothers who still go to school.

My eldest brother Jack had become almost a complete stranger and out of my ken. Again, when we went back to London from Oldham, Ralph had to give up his secondary school to go to work and so dropped out of any intimate boyhood relationship with me.

On coming to Bristol even my cousin Bill, who for five years had been my boon companion, had come within a few months of his fourteenth birthday which made going on with his schooling valueless; he started work as an errand boy delivering newspapers and was no longer a school mate of mine. So that when I entered the final period of my own education, at Newfoundland Road School in Bristol, I had been severed from many of the factors which had tied school and home intimately together. I became further enmeshed in the world outside my home and school, more involved with outside interests and more conditioned by outside influences as time went on.

At Newfoundland Road School, which I attended during the twelve months we lived in Bristol, my closest friends were Henry Porter, Howard Masters and Gilbert Stott. We had all got as far in our schooling as the curriculum could cater for. There was only sufficient accommodation in the school to cater for six standards, and we had

'graduated' into a non-existent seventh but we were required nevertheless still to attend school regularly until we reached fourteen and to put in time as best we could, learning what we could from the back row of the standard six class.

We had been stuck up there at the back of the class and tried to make ourselves as inconspicuous as possible, inventing a game of noughts and crosses using thirtysix squares in a knock-out competition which went on interminably. Our teacher sometimes rose to a guilty feeling that he was not properly carrying out his responsibilities towards us and hauled us up in front of him, impartially giving each of us six strokes on our left hand with his pointer as our ration of punishment for not paying proper attention.

The four boon companions in each of our weeks five schooling were always to be found together, but on Saturdays jobs of various kinds ruled out any chance of us getting together. The need to find some way by which we could join each other on the Sunday will be well understood by those who know what boyhood loyalties can demand.

I was the odd man out of any Sunday get-together; not having any other clothes than my workaday ones I was not suitably dressed to join the others either on their Sunday walks or to attend Sunday school with them. These obstacles were overcome when I was presented with a new suit of clothes.

The suit was not exactly new, <sup>but</sup> the jacket and the trousers had originally been ~~made~~ <sup>the same</sup> parts of ~~two separate~~ suits. Preserving as always that equality of treatment between me and my cousin Bill, Mum had got from an old clothes dealer two identical navy blue suits of boys' cast off clothes both of which were Bill's size. As I was <sup>for me</sup> thinner, Mum had <sup>for me</sup> lengthened the sleeves and let down the trousers to the limit.

Nevertheless this suit was a real break-through to respectability for me. It was the first, all one-colour, one style and at least superficially new suit, I had ever possessed. There was even a crease in the trousers which I managed by diligence to preserve for some time. ~~Children~~ For children to whom conformity is normal, nonconformity is an adventure. With me it was nonconformity that was the normal; conformity was the adventure.

It was the Wesleyan church at the corner of Ashted Row that got me into its fold. Howard Martin, who was a quiet boy a little better turned out than the rest of us in our gang at school, had, on one or two occasions, suggested that I should go to the Sunday School which he, Harry Porter and Gilbert Stott attended. This would complete our quartet on that day. Also, as a special inducement, attendance at this Sunday School for twenty one weeks, out of a possible twenty six in the half year, entitled one to go to the school outing, which would take place in June of the coming year.

The Sunday school was held from three until four-thirty in the afternoon. The scheme was for the earnest young men and women who acted as teachers to take on a group of a dozen or so youngsters whose parents had realized the advantages of such an organised body of Sunday afternoon child-minders. The young women would take the girls and the younger mixed groups while the serious, bespectacled young men would take the older boys. Each group would be assembled with its leader and be effectively isolated from the rest by turning the ranged forms into a box formation. The teacher then gave forth the lesson he had prepared over the previous week. Simplified versions of the standard biblical stories were used as a basis for these talks for the younger children, but my friends and I <sup>having</sup> ~~were~~ <sup>arrived</sup> ~~ashamed to be~~ at almost the highest literary level we were ever likely to attain to <sup>felt ourselves</sup> ~~and~~ capable therefore of taking our theology neat.

Mr. Peterly, our Sunday School teacher, therefore used the bible itself enclosed in a calf skin cover <sup>with dangling from it a</sup> ~~and~~ <sup>at the</sup> red silk page marker <sup>which was suspended</sup> ~~with~~ a gilt cross (a present from Miss Martineau, who took the elder girls in the body of the hall).

In the first lesson I attended, the first lesson of that particular session, a start was made with the first chapter of Genesis. It was a good place to start because it would leave, even if all the stories were taken in rotation, quite a lot of bible stories still untold at the end of the year, if the pace and speed of digestion were not too voracious.

Each week a new story was unfolded and Mr. Peterly, in the ti

that he was supposed to point out the moral of the tale, was beset with those sort of awkward questions which Satan puts into the mind and mouths of <sup>early</sup> teenage impious youngsters, with the result that he the best part of twenty six weeks in wading through Genesis alone; just what happened to everybody through Exodus and the other chapters as far as Mr. Peterly was concerned, we never were to become any the wiser.

Fortunately, those who organised the Sunday School programme, had been wise enough to know that our attention could not be retained for a full hour and a half of bible stories. It was arranged that after half an hour or so of bible study the organ would peel forth and we should all stand up and sing hymns. I liked this part of the proceedings. To me it expressed the collective soul of all mankind. Out of us came volumes of noise which strengthened or weakened at the direction of the choir master who beat out the time for the hymn from the rostrum.

After a few Sundays this hymn singing was abandoned and, in its place, the choir master endeavoured to produce a rather grand musical work arranged on the lines of the "Mendelssohn Song of Hope" with loads of hails and paeons of praise. It was the grandest thing in music I was ever to be involved in.

The choir master divided us up into sections and waved us into the general melee with his baton. It started with the thin treble of the younger children followed by our crowd, who would be swept in to body the thing up a bit, then the young men and women borrowed from the church choir proper would swing in to round the whole thing off. Softer softer, softer the noise was batted down by the conductor until it seemed that it might fade out of the doors like an expired breath, then up, up, up, all earth, all things, all people were swept up into the welkin and the bare roof timbers above our heaven-raised eyes seemed to pulse like the strings of a harp which if not quickly muted, might burst the roof of the whole world asunder. I cannot now remember one word of the oratorio, but bits of music unroll under the needle of the record of my music memory; I find myself hailing, or praising quite soundlessly and almost unconsciously.



to this very day.

The Sunday School broke up in the spring, but not before I had managed to get in the number of attendances to qualify me to go on the summer outing. This was to take place on a Friday in mid-June to Weston-Super-Mare.

On the appointed day about two or three hundred of us assembled at Stapleton Road Station, an excited crowd of children between the ages of seven and fourteen, accompanied by our Sunday school teachers earnestly carrying out their last duty to their flocks before the summer recess.

Mr. Peterly and Miss Martineau were there of course. Miss Martineau had an enormous picture hat secured on to her piled up, fair hair by a strip of veil tied over her hat and under her chin. A long sweeping cretonne dress on which a succession of rosebuds climbed tangled green, thorny branches in a cross formation made her the belle of the party. She had, of course, no legs or feet, these all being discreetly hidden beneath the sweeping cretonne folds.

Mr. Peterly was also beautifully dressed, with an unexpected regard for the holiday spirit, in a blue and yellow striped blazer, white trousers and shoes, and a cream straw hat.

Having checked us and seen us safely into the compartments of the train which was standing in the siding waiting for us to go on board and having issued us with our special food tickets, Mr. Peterly and Miss Martineau disappeared to a quieter and, I expect, a more decorous part of the train.

The Children's Annual Treat Sub-committee of the Ashley Row Wesleyan Church Council must have had some justification for assuming that, in packing two or three hundred children into a slow train on a warm Friday in mid-June, and then shunting them in and out of the normal train service for an hour and a half to make a twenty mile run from Stapleton Road Bristol to Weston-Super-Mare, ~~they were constituted an important part of~~ ~~starting off~~ 'a children's treat' ~~in fine style~~. They must have known that, on arrival at Weston-Super-Mare, after a hot walk through the town and a three-quarters of an hour wait in a queue for a paper bag containing a sausage roll, a large sticky bun, a large wedge of

fruit cake and an orange, that their bill of fare would, in their children's eyes, constitute a welcome exception to their normal diet.

In all their earnest deliberations, their organisation, their allocation of duties, their negotiations with the railway company, their arrangements for catering, for booking a hall in case the day should turn out very wet, for stewards and stewardesses to take charge of classes, groups, battalions, companies, their concern for safety, first aid, lost property and the hundreds of other duties which the organisation of a three-hundred-strong Sunday School outing entailed, not a single member of the sub-committee had thought to raise the question of whether there would be any sea at the seaside on the day and at the time proposed.

For hours that sultry Friday afternoon we four boys, too old to play with sand, silt and buckets of water, too young to have the collective courage to have any interest in girls, wandered aimlessly over the uneven surface of silt and basins of sea water that lay between the promenade at Weston-Super-Mare and that part of the Atlantic Ocean called the Bristol Channel. At first we hopefully assured ourselves and each other that the sea was coming in. As there was really no sign of it to justify our hope, we then became pessimistic and agreed that it must still be going out. For quite some time we tried hopefully to cross the hinterland between us and the sea to find a depth of water sufficient for us to splash happily around in. But short of putting our swimming costumes on and tying our clothes on our heads in a pack by means of our braces, such as we had seen in pictures of African natives fording jungle rivers, it was hopeless to try; between us and the sea lay nothing but innumerable barriers of dirty looking ponds and channels many yards wide, up to a foot in depth and of infinite length. We turned our backs on it and returned to the promenade.

The rations issued to us in the paper bags had soon been disposed of. Soon also we had disposed of the few coppers we had been given for spending money for our outing on ice cream of poorer quality than that we could have bought nearer home and lemonade more expensive and in smaller bottles than our local product. Aimlessly we

sauntered over the hot pavements, down one road and up another, unattracted by the sweet shops, the toy shops or the 'Presents from Weston' shops until, two hours before the time for the train which to take us home, we found ourselves at the railway station. In the atmosphere of the complete cessation of all life that drops down on a railway station between train times, we plumbed the depths of boredom.

We tried all the slot machines to see if, by some miracle, they might render a service or produce some sustenance without being fed with coppers. We inspected the periodicals displayed on the book-stall in the hope of finding some interest <sup>from the exposed front pages of</sup> in the comics. Then, at last, <sup>wandered</sup> back to the promenade and the sea.

This time we were more fortunate for the sea was now in sight not a hundred yards from the promenade. We could see the broken white edge of it through an untidy foreground of holiday mothers, fathers and babies who had chosen a time for making its acquaintance more keeping with its visiting hours. Our eyes brightened and our pace quickened as we pressed on, skirting the ponds and rivulets until at last we were there - where land and sea met.

But it was too late. The time of the sea's arrival coincided with the time for our return. Back we went; to the station where we were herded once more into groups under our teachers and checked in, passed through the barriers, stacked into the trains compartmented and shunted through the countryside, back to the city and our homes. Then we each went our separate ways, recounting to our separate parents how much we had enjoyed ourselves and what a glorious day it had been. We could not have admitted, even to ourselves, that we had been irritated by regimentation, bored and tired most of the day, hot and confined during the long railway journeys. ~~It had been a wonderful time.~~

Newfoundland Road School itself was a small grim looking building squeezed between the backs of the houses in Reardon Street and the banks of the river Frome. Its entrance was reached through a passway between a high brick wall round the playground and an equally stone wall dividing the passage-way from the river.

The playground was the bit of waste ground left over from the irregularities of the school building after it had been dropped on its restricted site. An architectural afterthought, further restricting the play area, was a partially covered-in urinal and a holely covered-in but doorless and seatless watercloset. The dilapidation of this w.c. was calculated to deter any but the most frantic against wasting good school time enjoying its amenities. Nevertheless the urinal also had a secondary and perhaps a more valued function not anticipated by its designers. For the space between the internal stalls and the outside wall was used as 'prison' and it was through this that I was initiated into rugby football.

Bursting out from the classroom for my first playtime at the school I found myself in a seething mass of wild hooligans whose immediate purpose seemed to be my complete dismemberment. I was not alone; other boys, seemingly as unpopular as myself, were to be seen struggling for life beneath other clumps of writhing bodies. I twisted and writhed within the octopus-like tentacles. The wrestling matches I had had years before in the brickfield stood me in good stead and some minutes elapsed before I collapsed beneath a tortuous mass of arms and legs. Being finally overcome by the conquering horde, I was unceremoniously lifted up and hauled over to the urinal and thrust in the space between the outside wall and the urinal stall. I found, when I had assembled my parts sufficiently to get a cogent idea of what had happened, that a number of other boys had preceded me into this confined prison and we were being prevented from escaping by the half a dozen guards who commanded the entrance. When the bellrang to end our playtime, the guards disappeared and we were free to take our places in class.

It was some days before I puzzled out the reason for ~~the~~ all this; but when I did get a rough idea of what it was all about I

entered into the spirit of the thing with the same gusto as had my original assailants. At the end of the week I was approached by the biggest boy in the school with the offer of a place in the school rugby team. It was only then that the whole purpose of the playtime activity became clear. The restricted playground was a rugby field. The nearness of the river Frome made it necessary to have 'rugby practice' without a ball. The essential part of the rugby game is to weave ones arms or legs around any human object and bring it to the ground; alternatively, to avoid such an attack from any figure which might hurl itself in your direction. A similar sort of procedure had to be reenacted in the playground. Each side swarmed over anyone of the other side they could isolate with the aim of putting them out of action by imprisonment in the urinal. The side getting the greatest number in prison could be assumed to have won, although this simple calculation was often clouded by doubts by the individual players as to which side they were on.

In later years organisations were set up under military establishments to interview newly enlisted or otherwise possibly suitable material for promotion into the officer class. The panel of interviewers from a well considered list of questions elicited from their interviewees, a general picture which would suggest to them the category into which their applicant should be placed.

Among other questions <sup>Some were</sup> ~~were some~~ put in to find out the sports or hobbies of the applicant and the answers to these carried considerable weight with the panel. The status value of one who answered the question "Did you play football at the school that I see you attended?" and was answered, "Yes sir, we played Rugby at..." "And did you play Rugby yourself in your School team?" "Yes sir, I was wing threequarters, or scrum half," was normally sufficient to decide the issue of suitability or otherwise, all previous questions being of minor import when set against such an obvious officer material characteristic.

~~At Newfoundland Road Boys school we played Rugby~~

To correct any impression that there was ever the least likelihood of my being thought of as being suitable to make 'good officer material

I must confess that, although I often played Rugby, I never really knew what the game was all about. In later years, in watching a live game or getting a better view of one from a television screen, I have been able to come to no other conclusion that this failure is common even amongst the more polished players themselves.

There must be some very secret, high-level organisation, meeting at least once every season, whose purpose is to prevent any possibility of the previous rules of the game from being understood and to make new amendments accordingly. From this secret society instructions must go out to the corps of referees. These are the servants of the society and are given strict instructions to prevent any clarity emerging during the game. They are also each given a ~~whistle~~ powerful whistle. If, at any time, the game they are controlling untangles itself sufficiently for any clear object to seem possible, they are required to blow. Having stopped the game they then proceed to tangle up the contending forces to the degree that makes any enlightenment impossible.

As a member of the school Rugby team I was, in the following weeks, introduced to another factor in the game which our playtime practice at school had not made self evident. The most satisfactory games were always to be played in the worst possible weather.

Although the ball we played with had been developed to bounce or move with the highest degree of unpredictability, the possibility of a clean springy turf, a clear atmosphere and sunshine gently filtering through a fleecy sky might give rise to a faint possibility of the ball moving and bouncing to some regular pattern which the keener experts might master. This had to be avoided. Referees had obviously been instructed that on no account were they to turn up for the matches likely to be played in such conditions but were to spend their time in tidying up the garden or taking the baby for a walk in the sunshine.

But the games we did play, provided the weather was sufficiently unfavourable, were a pure joy. I remember one when we played Whitacre All Saints. The rain fell steadily at something like half an inch an hour during our game but even on arrival the field had

three large, elongated pools strategically arranged - one in the center of the field and the others on about the twentyfive yard line at each end.

The game started with Whitaker All Saints lining out at the top of the field a little higher up than the pond which crossed the field below them. We Newfoundland Road Boys were lined up about fifty yards away with only two ponds to cross (as against their three) on the way to the Whitaker All Saints goal.

Whitaker All Saints kicked off. That is, the biggest boy on their side, carrying the elliptical ball in both hands in front of him, took a short run and booted the ball as far as he could in our direction. Simultaneously he dramatically fell full-length on the sodden earth while his fellow team-mates, like a long line of Matabeles, surged forward towards us over the first pond. Not to be frightened or scattered by the hordes of oncoming savages, we tumbled into the rain to meet them.

The ball made a neat parabola into the obscurity of the rain soaked sky, appearing to hold still a moment at its zenith, as if cogitating whether to join the howling mob in the ponded field below or to make a twisted turn to the northward in quest of peace and solitude. <sup>in the adjoining canal.</sup> By the time it had made up its mind and was falling quickly, the scene below had lost all semblance of orderliness. Of the thirty boys in the two teams there were only five perpendicular survivors. Seven had slipped over backwards in making the initial dash, four had pitched forward when their feet had caught at the water at the margin of the second lake the remainder, as if drawn together by a magnet, had closed with each other near the centre of the main pool where they appeared to be occupied in trying to drown each other. The five whom the ball saw beneath it before it struck the water with a soft plash, had waded out in the general direction which they hoped it might decide to fall. As the ball hit the water the five dived for it ; there was a moment of intense underwater fighting which was saved from the tragedy of "boys drown at Rugby football match" by the referee's acumen.

The referee was our own class teacher, a Mr. Proberts. He was

a serious, studious-looking young man who controlled us in our class by introducing a mesmeric effect by the glitter of his small, dark eyes through the lenses of his thick glasses. He had come to the match fully accoutred in the standard football regalia - studded boots, white shorts and singlet, suitably embellished by the referee's regalia green woollen jersey and blue school blazer. From the pocket of the blazer dangled his referee's, chromium-plated whistle hanging from a long, chromium-plated chain. After his initial blast on the whistle to start the game, he lost sight of both ball and players as a layer of mist deposited themselves on ~~his~~ his thick glasses. By the time he had got the rain off his glasses and the pea in his whistle moving again in its damp barrel, the orderly array in which the two teams had started the match had entirely disappeared. Peering about he saw to his left a grey mass a little greyer than the general murk, that suggested that the game had developed in that direction. Whistle in mouth he dashed forward with the intention of ~~not~~ nobly interfering with the struggling combatants should there appear that either side were taking advantage in the general gloom to commit any of the statutory infringements of the rules of the game he had spent the previous evening swotting up. Galloping forward blindly he had no time to condition himself to the changing nature of the ground over which he was passing before the margin of the pond gripped his ankles and precipitated him full length into the water. Coming up for breath after his immersion, he must have sucked so sharply at the whistle that it gave a gurgle which cleared the water out of it into his throat and then a shrill blast when he reacted, discharging the mouthful back through the whistle. Obedient to the blast the game stopped, thus allowing everybody who had precipitated themselves into a horizontal plane to return to his normal vertical. Mr. Probert, soaked from head to foot but his eyes gleaming with enthusiasm, massed the herd of players together, enjoined them into a compact swarm, presented the ball to a waspish looking boy who was buzzing about outside the struggling, kicking mass, blew his whistle again. The ball was propelled into the thick hedge of wildly kicking feet and the game was <sup>rescued</sup> carried on.

A succession of similar episodes to the one described, with att



and counter attack ranging between one pond and the next, went on throughout the game. The nearest I ever got to the ball was when its soggy mass struck me in the middle of the back and knocked me down; for this, the referee gave the opposing side a penalty kick from which they scored.

We defeated Whitaker All Saints, I think, by eight points to four, which demonstrated our referee's <sup>inadequate</sup> sense of his responsibilities to his own school's side; for, in a previous match with Whitaker All Saints, their referee had finished it with a result of forty three points to nil in his school's favour.

On another occasion we played Canon Cordelier Boy's School from Screwell Lane. This was a special match and took place in Eastville park on a Boxing Day morning. At the time the two teams were assembled, and the two teachers who accompanied them had decided who was to be referee, the weather was not sufficiently bright and clear to present any pretext for calling the whole thing off, nor had the festivities of the previous day dulled our parents' wits to the degree of their forgetting to insist on our absence from home during that morning to run off the biliousness of <sup>which that day's feeding had possibly</sup> the ~~previous~~ day. <sup>enough</sup>

The match started in good order ignoring the fact that, during the time we had been in the park, visibility had become confined by fog to just beyond the periphery of our pitch.

For some reason in this match I was playing out on the extreme wing. <sup>with head down and</sup> aimlessly kicking the tops off lumps of turf that <sup>found I</sup> as I wandered about, <sup>but</sup> I ~~found~~ <sup>found I</sup> on looking up I had entered into a completely silent and lonely fog-bound world. My world had become transformed into a fairly large igloo, a hemisphere of cold whiteness of ten or so feet in radius and a similar height. As I moved the hemisphere moved with me. For the moment I panicked and dashed here and there but the sound of a whistle over to my left adjusted me to my surroundings. As I galloped quickly in the direction of the sound there soon appeared dim grey shapes on the outside of my igloo wall. I had returned to the fold and immediately entered into the struggle of a hurtling mass of bodies that came within my orbit. From this new contact I was shot out from the centre of activity like a pebble

thrown off a spinning wheel to find myself isolated in my lone igloo once again. Learning my lesson from my first experience I no longer panicked but stayed quietly waiting until another whistle was heard when again I could hurtle off to enter into the melee.

My experience in the matches I had previously played had brought me to the conclusion that one of its important achievements was to pick up the ball, knock down any opponent who tried to stop me and try to carry the ball over a line identified by a couple of white posts with a crossbar joining them together. If he succeeded in this the player was hugged and cheered by the other members of his side to taste a glory which I deeply envied. It was my greatest ambition at that time that sometime before I died, I might become one of the <sup>coops</sup> ~~cops~~ of heroes who had achieved glory in this way.

My opportunity came upon me quite suddenly in this match. Coasting along in the direction of the whistle I hurled myself among the grey mass of players, and pushing and shoving with the best, found myself for one brief, instant extruded from the mass and hugging to breast an object which I had at first thought was an opponents head, but which I soon realised was the treasured ball.

My great moment had come, somewhere there was a line and goal posts marking it. All I had to do was to find the line in the fog and, hugging my slippery burden, slip across it quietly, put the ball down on the ground and await the referee and the rest of my team come to honour my accomplishment. By the greatest of good luck the goal posts came up out of the mist. I was home. I crossed the line and touched down the ball. As predicted, the referee and the players, having lost the precious ball, swept down in my direction and discovered me proudly master of the field. The referee pushed me roughly to one side, picked up the ball and carried it back to the other side of the line to the point where I had first got hold of it; ordering a scrum he blew his whistle and the game resumed.

I could only think I had committed some infringement and my try did not count. I only found out during the scramble that followed that I had strayed on to an adjacent pitch in the fog, almost scoring a try - but in somebody else's game.

In that final twelve months of my schooling, I enjoyed the harvest of my childhoods development. I was strong, healthy and full of energy. I broke out from the close circle of the home environment and learned of the satisfaction of being a boy among other boys, of being on equal terms with boys of my own age, no longer suffering the subtle domination of the elder over the younger, but free to exercise my own personality, and to choose my playmates as I liked. It was as if I had come into my inheritance and all the factors which had so far enjoyed priorities over me, had curbed my ego, constrained and confined by freedom, had moved to the sidelines as I now took my place as a fully authentic player in the field.

Memories of that final year at school flood in upon me. An afternoon at cricket in the field above Bodger's farm and making the glorious catch in the outfield which got the wicket of Ted Carter, had been often so obstinate to move. Of me and Gilbert Stott, play centre forward and inside right respectively, weaving through our opponents in a glorious match in Eastville park when he and I got six goals between us. Of hot afternoons at Rennison's open air baths, swimming, diving and tumbling in and out of the water like a young seal. Of expeditions to Frenchey to pick primroses, bluebells and cowslips. Of running the half mile with Sid Bickers to his home to get his cricket things, and running the half mile back to the cricket field where Sid, we boys knew, was subject to epileptic fits, promptly fell down in one; and of how, from experience of similar occasions we stuffed a handkerchief into his mouth to stop him biting his tongue, pushed his head down to his knees, eased the tensions in his arms and legs, got some water and poured it over his head and then on his recovery, started up the game together as if nothing unusual had happened. Of evening journeys to Cheltenham Road Public Library where in the reference section we got out great volumes of the compiled editions of the Boys' Own Paper, the Strand Magazine, or Chambers' Journal and immersed ourselves for hours reading in continuity the adventure stories serialised in those magazines.

I remember, too, of Sunday mornings selling 'Justice' on the

fringes of socialist meetings held regularly in Colston Gardens and warm Sunday evenings after similar meetings on Durdham Downs, strolling about in the calm sweetness of the evening and being conscious of the beauty and scent of the wild roses in the hedgerows.

There was a bye-election, too, somewhere about that time and soap-box street corner meetings which we boys visited one after another irrespective of the party or views of the speaker. On the fringes of the meetings we munched sour apples at three-ha'pence a pound and threw the cores among the spectators before running away. The contestants in the election were a Mr. Birrell and a Mr. Pike, I think, and a crowd of us boys would band together and march down the centre of the road chanting 'Vote, Vote, Vote, for Mr. Birrell, turn old Pikey from the land. If I had a penny pie I would hit him in the eye and he wouldn't come to Bristol any more.' Our grounds for being in favour of one candidate or the other were completely obscure, but the freedom to make a lot of noise all together was an opportunity not to be missed.

Another time I remember when the Most Stupendous show on earth was advertised to be shown at the Colston Hall. In full colour the World's most spectacular and dramatic events were to be shown in Panorama Vista Scope, admission sixpence. It was a wonderful show - a magic lantern throwing pictures on to a large screen with sound effects off.

Yes, for me that was a wonderful year. But my time in the Garden of Eden in which I had wandered so happily, so free, so unsuspecting the dark, inhospitable discouraging world outside was almost up. Very soon I was going to be thrust out past the flaming sword and through the gates into the wicked adult world.

Many are the incidents and adventures during that year that might be worth relating, but one in particular must be added to the record of these days.

"Jim! Jim! Time to get up, or you'll be late for school," my first few minutes of consciousness were occupied by dressing myself and tumbling my younger brother David, who slept in the same bed with me, out of bed and into his own clothes before the two of us descended the

One Thursday morning in April my father came to my bedroom and sitting on the edge of the bed shook me awake saying, "Come on Jim it's time to get up." This was such an unusual proceeding as my usual awakening was by my mother calling me from below stairs.

and my

being

stairs for breakfast. But on this occasion I looked up at my father and became instantly conscious that my father's presence had an unusual portent.

"Dad", I said, "It's early isn't it?"

"It is a bit," said Dad, "but I am off to work now and all the others have gone already. Now listen Jim, Mum is not very well this morning, not bad mind you, but not feeling too good and as Grandma is away in London staying with your Aunt Annie, you'll have to look after your Mother while I am away. Now I have a letter for you here, and want you to have your breakfast and then take the letter to the General Hospital. You know where it is?"

I nodded my assent as he handed me the letter.

"Take this to the hospital and give it in at the desk. A nurse will come to you and you will have to bring her back here and show her into Mum's bedroom. While she is here you must make yourself scarce with David, tidying up in the kitchen. But keep within call, d'you understand?"

"Yes Dad. I am to take the letter to the hospital and bring a nurse back here to look after Mum. Is Mum very bad?"

"No, she'll be all right. Now don't worry. Just do what I tell you and be a good boy".

I must have been at that age a very unobservant and ingenuous child as the fact that my mother was going to have another <sup>baby</sup> ~~boy~~ had not registered with me; even the unusualness of the errand I was asked to perform brought no inkling of the event my parents were anticipating.

Before leaving me, Dad bent over me in bed, ruffled my hair and kissed me. My heart swelled with pride and importance and love for Dad, my Mum and my family.

"Look after Mum," he said again as he left me.

I think this was probably the last time my father ever kissed me, certainly the last time an emotional bond of unity between us was registered in such a fashion.

The kitchen table was littered with cups and plates, a pot of plum jam, a tin of cocoa and a tin of condensed milk. Without bothering about any refinements, I boiled some water, made some

David and I

cocoa and we both sat down and made our meal from what was available.

We were almost finished, when I heard Mum calling me from the front room. Leaving David I went to her door, opened it and peeped into the room.

Mum was lying propped up in bed, and looked just about the same as usual to me.

"You all right Mum?" I asked. "I'm just going to the hospital. I'll be as quick as I can."

Mum smiled at me, and for some reason or other my eyes started to smart with tears but I pressed them back and smiled back at her.

"Off you go then and be back as soon as you can. When you come back I have a big job for you. I want you to take Nance and Dick into the kitchen and the four of you stay there all the time unless I call. You must find them something to play with, get their meals and keep them quiet. Do you think you can manage that?"

I nodded and said "Is there anything you want?"

"No dear, off you go, I know I can rely on you."

Feeling very happy and manly and responsible I took David by the hand and set out immediately for the hospital. There, after presenting my note, we were soon joined by two nurses in blue uniforms, white starched cuffs and white head kerchiefs. Off we all set back to my

That day Joe, my youngest brother, was born.

In my new role of mother to my young family I spent the day with my charges making play of clearing and washing up the breakfast things and anything else of that nature that I could find to wash up, sweeping, dusting and washing the kitchen floor, making the beds upstairs, finding food and feeding us all with anything edible that presented itself to our eager, searching eyes.

How long the nurses stayed I don't remember, but I should think not more than a couple of hours during which they passed in and out of the front room, through to the kitchen, getting hot water and clean cloths. Finally, one of them came in and told me that my mother wanted to see me. Still mantled in my aura of responsibility I was conducted into the bedroom.

There again I found my mother sitting up in bed looking, as far

as I could see, very much as usual.

"Come here, Jim" she said.

I went over to the bed.

"Look!" she said, and turned back the coverlet, opening the top of a shawl, revealing a tiny, black-headed, shrivelled doll of a face.

"This is your new brother" she said.

My acceptance of the situation could not have been more natural if I had been presented with a similar circumstance every other week of my lifetime.

"Isn't he tiny," I said.

"Yes, he will be for a bit, but he will soon grow up big and strong" said my mother.

Sher/ then asked how we were all getting along and gave me some more instructions about food and other things and I departed to carry out my tasks.

For a week or so, except in the evenings and at the weekends, I held my post of nurse, housekeeper, baby minder, and children's play organiser, until my mother again appeared in the kitchen when, even then, she seemed to spend most of her time ministering to the needs the new little brother she had brought among us.

Back at school after my 'holiday', I was asked by my teacher what I had stayed away. I told him I had been very poorly and my mother kept me home because she thought I might be sickening for something, but I was all right now. After all, why should I uncover to any tea the details of our private family affairs.

The job that Dad had at Bristol did not turn out as well as it promised. As we children grew older we came to understand and become more involved in family problems than we had in earlier years. The decision to move the family to Bristol had come as a result of my father being offered a job with better prospects than he seemed to have in his job in London. As it turned out, the promised job was only the result of a temporary influx of work which had flooded the Bristol firm. With Dad's assistance the temporary boom was soon mastered, giving place to an immediate slump and to Dad being put on to shorter and shorter time. The firm had used him to overcome a

temporary difficulty and left him to bear the brunt of the consequences.

Fortunately, by now, some relief from the poverty which this might have otherwise produced was to be found in one after another of his children now being able to be filtered into juvenile employment although the wages for such employment were, even for those times, relatively very small.

Jack left his job in London to come with us to Bristol and went to work at the Bristol Carriage and Wagon works where he earned enough to keep himself and to help a little with the family finances. Ralph who had had to sacrifice the final year of his Grammar School education when the family had moved from Oldham to London, now got a job in Bristol learning upholstering at a wage of four shillings a week. While in this job he picked up sufficient of that trade to enable him at a later date, to reupholster everything in our house that suggested it might benefit from his ministrations.

On our coming to Bristol, Bill had still four months to go before completing his schooling up to fourteen years of age. He put in his bit during the intervening four months doing a morning and evening round delivering newspapers and otherwise helping in the house at home. Later on he went to work for the newsagent full-time.

Bordering on my fourteenth birthday our family, for the last time as a complete unit, packed up its belongings and sought new pastures this time to Birmingham. Unlike our previous migrations to Manchester, Oldham and Bristol, which had excited us with their prospects of new scenes, places and people, the move to Selly Oak provided no such excitement. Probably, with me, the prospect of my school days finished and my having to go out to earn my own living cast over me more of a gloom of ~~apprehension~~ apprehension than a glow of anticipation.

On the Monday morning following our arrival, Ralph, Bill and I set out to find jobs. This meant walking into Birmingham, finding a free library, reading through the 'boys wanted' advertisements in the papers in the newsroom, selecting possible employers, and making our applications in person to the advertisers.

Birmingham was a boom town. Cycles, motor cars, engineering wo



of all descriptions - making everything 'from a pin to a steam engine'. Hundreds of little factories made every sort of gadget for every sort of trade or business. Jewellery, printing, explosives, firearms, fishing tackle, chemicals, cog wheels, wire, buttons, tubes, artificial flowers, ironmongery, tyres, girders, bolts and nuts, screws and washers - in fact everything in metal, paper or wood or almost anything else had a factory to make it in Birmingham. And all these factories were dropped down in an incoherent mass among the alleys, courts and side streets of this city with the larger works developing on the fringes.

Into this maelstrom we were swept by the incoming tide. There were no Labour Exchanges, Youth Employment Offices nor, in our case, any friends or neighbours in the city who could help us in determining our future employment. Nor was Dad helpful in this matter.

As I have explained previously, the working class, in my father's philosophy, were to inherit the earth; the more manual, the more down-to-earth the worker, the stronger was his claim. There was with Dad almost the reverse of the more general attitude today of most parents in this matter. If he had been asked to define what ambition he had for his children he would have replied that they should find a place at the bottom of the strata of productive workers and establish themselves there so solidly that they could thumb their noses at the poor fools wasting their lives trying to 'get on', trying to raise themselves to a higher strata or trying to make a lot of money; in any case socialism was coming and they would have only been wasting their time.

At the same time he would have accepted that the child himself must take the responsibility for his own destiny. If he had illusions of grandeur and wanted to get out of his class, wanted wilfully to enslave himself within the narrow confines which purposeless ambition to get into the higher levels in the occupational strata entailed, that was his business, and although this must mean that they had not absorbed his philosophy nevertheless on their own head be it, he would do nothing to stop them.

Yet Dad was just as much shaped in his life outlook as all the rest; at bottom the glorifying of the lowest strata of the working class was tempered by further merit, to which he laid claim. This

attitude seeped through to his children who set out into the world accepting that the manual labourer was the salt of the earth but that the craftsman was saltier. So in offering ourselves for work we never presented ourselves for jobs where the prospects were likely to retain us at the purely manual level, but only offered ourselves for jobs where a craft or some other interest beside the manual could be expected.

So it was that a week after our arrival in Birmingham, we four Jack, Ralph, Bill and I set off on the Monday morning to find a job. Jack, who had had a partial engineering training while we were in Bristol, went to work at the Austin Motor Company at Longbridge, Ralph who had started to learn upholstery in Bristol now got a job driving a horse and cart for a local baker and later graduated from that into working in the bakery itself. Bill, a newspaper errand boy in Bristol, went into the wholesale clothing trade with an ambition to become a tailor. And I got my first job and <sup>(as)</sup> passed through the double doors at the entrance of my first place of work, passed across the threshold between boyhood and working life.

Fifty years have since passed. In the passage of them, of our of Dad, Mum, Jack, Ralph, Bill, me, Nance, Dick and Joe, one has been killed, two have died, six have married, five have had children and two had grandchildren, one is in the Antipodes and another is in Wales. These children and grandchildren together with those of the generation of those who have lived through their early years since the time of their own boyhood will have lived through an historic period subsequent to their own and will have been the beneficiaries of what might in some aspects be thought of as advantages. Gradually society has given greater and greater considerations to seeing that children were better clothed and better fed. In more recent times some class barriers have broken down and greater opportunities have been forthcoming for children of working class parents to take jobs in the professions. The school leaving age has been raised resulting in an increase in the length of time before they have to go out into the world to earn their living.

But today's children have nevertheless lost some things which maybe children, if they could make the comparison, might feel sad about.

The freedom to run, skip, jump, walk or wander unattended about our roads and highways has gradually disappeared until it is virtual no more. In more modern times the loss of that freedom has imprisoned many children in upstairs flats and buildings when they are away from school; they have to become conditioned into the acceptance of road drills, road crossing wardens, or parental control when out in the streets. The acceptance, even often grudgingly in my boyhood, of a firm class stratification had the effect of freeing many working class children from the stresses now placed upon them to achieve educational values which had then no meaning to them.

The normal child never had to worry about schooling if he had mastered the three 'R's' to a reasonable level; he was then on top of his job and that was all that was expected of him.

Children of yesterday were free from the thought of war or sudden death, free from the prospect which so many have endured of their fathers being away at the wars or of their dying in them, of mothers being away from home all day leaving a cold and empty house for them to come home to from school. Many perhaps, particularly in their early years, have lost the social adjustment that having many brothers and sisters may bring to a child to give it a balanced outlook.

The period of my boyhood might be thought of as a false bubble time, soon to burst and explode into reality. Toward the middle of the nineteenth century a new sun broke through to the prospect of greater physical and mental freedom. The warmth of this sun filtered down through all classes to the masses. A millenium was envisaged where men and women would act in all things rationally and objectively and collectively in a free thinking world. A new civilisation, resembling that of Ancient Greece, but based on universal freedom instead of slavery was in prospect. But the world which was not ready for this maturity closed in on it and squeezed out the prospect of beauty in living. True, it left some of the slogans and symbols of its blossoming but sucked the blood from their vitality; avid materialism and individualism built up on the framework of the high ideals of freedom from penury and want and have established an affluent materialism. Perhaps in time the satisfactions of pure materialism

will be satiated and mens' minds may again become free to envisage  
and live for a real blossoming enabling them to rise out of and above  
the mere satisfactions of their elemental urges.