Children Never Tell

by Gwendolen Freeman

THE HOUSES BEHIND

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Contents

1. MYSELF

2. OTHER CHILDREN

I

MYSELF

They Never Tell

I REMEMBER, when I was six, making a vow.

"I shall never forget what it's like to be a child. And when I have a little girl of my own I shall *never* treat her as people treat me."

I have not kept that vow. I have almost forgotten what it is like to be a child. Only a few scattered scenes remain. But at least I remember making the vow, and I have tried, since I have been grown up, to keep on a level, as it were, with children ; to treat them as much like adults as possible. The result is that their mothers say I spoil them and that they are particularly unpleasant when I am about !

Perhaps children are not all alike in their sense of grievance. Perhaps my feelings of hurt pride were an exception. It is impossible to judge, for they give so few indications. My memories of childhood are mostly unpleasant, but my mother said later that we seemed a very happy group, and the letters we wrote to her—which she treasured and we have found since—corroborate that. They show us as affectionate, cheerful, open-hearted. We were, no doubt, writing as we thought we ought to write. We gave little sign of what was going on inside.

Perhaps the best way to understand children's behaviour is to grope back after one's own recol-

lections ; to practise that "never forgetting" which I vowed at six. I have therefore begun here with my own family.

SURROUNDINGS

WE WERE a family of four children, three girls and a boy, with six years between the oldest and youngest. We were fair-haired, healthy, and, later, good at lessons and bad at games. We were well-drilled in table manners, and the girls had to help a good deal in the house, since we were poor and could afford only daily women. Mother confided once to an aunt that "Children are so everlasting" ; but on the whole we were regarded as an ideal group, the parents affectionate, the children obedient.

We were lucky in having a good many elderly relatives to send us presents. Our four grandparents lived within a mile of us. We had few cousins, but we did not miss them. Four children are enough for themselves anyway.

We lived in a suburb about twelve miles from London during the first world war. It was a pretty place, full of flowering trees, with fields still lurking in odd corners and real country a little way up the road. Our own house was ugly, old-fashioned and inconvenient, four storeys high, always cold, with eight front steps and a semi-basement, part of a mouldering terrace. It was a hateful house, but it was retired. It had a thick dusty shrubbery in front, where most of the trees seemed on the brink of death yet lingered on, and a back entrance through almost a

wood—poplar, sycamore, holm oak. At our back door a massive oak soared. Euonymus bushes, with their shiny green leaves and many caterpillars, clustered round our windows, and in our back garden, once an orchard, were many fruit trees and beneath them old-fashioned gooseberry, currant and raspberry bushes. However much gardening was done there was always some corner that was a wilderness, so that one could hide from that gaunt rough-cast terrace with repairs across its face as if it were a patched soldier. And at the end was a field belonging to a big house, and through the chinks of the fence we could see wild daffodils in spring ; and sometimes a line of geese went by, and in the summer there was the pat of balls from the tennis-courts and the scent of hay.

I was the second, the typically "good" child, not always very well, too timid to be naughty, but domineering in the only province where I felt at ease—the intellectual. Our father provided us with prayers to fit our own particular sins. My prayer ended: "And make me a good girl not be cross or whiny amen." Being "whiny" was about as far as I went. My sisters claimed something more spectacular in the way of tempers.

Perhaps my chief virtue was an interest in learning. My mother's chief memory of me at two, she used to say, was of a flaxen-haired dirty little girl scrawling round after her as she went about her housework and saying, "Gook, mummy, gook"—a request to be read to. My speech, however, did not keep pace with my mind. I talked a great deal but almost unintelligibly until I was six, and my elder sister used to

translate for me. An aunt told me later how she took me for a walk and I chattered the whole way, but she had not the slightest idea what I was saying and annoyed me by answering "Yes" and "No" in the wrong places.

I domineered intellectually in spite of my faulty speech. I can see myself at the age of six kneeling with my elder sister at what we called "the window-seat" in our dining-room, a padded seat where we always knelt to read. Barbara has an exercise book open in front of her, and the page is divided into two columns. One side is a singular word, and she has to find the plural.

"What's the plural of ox?" I test her, knowing that I know.

"Oxes."

"Wrong," I say triumphantly.

But I was not as triumphant one day when I was talking to Mother and an aunt about a neighbour't child. Helen was all right, I said; only she didn's know how to pronounce words.

"She can't read. She calls it *truant*."

"And what do you call it?" they asked amused.

"*Traunt*, of course."

They assured me that I, who was always right, was on that occasion wrong. My pride was hurt.

At the same time I was very tender hearted. An aunt used to come up to read to Barbara and me. Taking us one on each knee she chose fairy-stories from a big book—stories that we knew already. When it came to "Beauty and the Beast," she could go only half way. For, at the Beast's words, "I am

dying, Beauty" I would burst into tears, and she could not end.

Perhaps it was this softness, together with intellectual pretensions, that made me so hurt at the way adults treated me. At the age of six I was bitterly offended by being called "a little girl." I was, of course, "a big girl." Recently, I heard a child say, "I'm only a little boy" with a kind of pleasure in his littleness, and was greatly surprised, for all I—and the rest of us—wanted to do was to grow up and be powerful. When you were grown up nobody was cross with you ; you weren't served after everybody else in the shops ; you had your own property, and you weren't afraid.

And when you wanted money you just went like our father to "catch" a cheque at the bank.

NIGHT FEARS

THERE ARE two reasons, I think, why children hate going to bed. One is the feeling that they are missing something ; leaving grown-ups downstairs still to enjoy the day. The other is the fear of the dark and the things that haunt it.

I never used to think of the night as containing hours as the day did. It was like the distance between our home station and the sea-side, which did not contain miles but was just a gap which you got over by sitting in a train. The gap of the night you got over by lying in bed, and what happened to you then was quite apart from anything that happened in the day.

I have heard it said that children are afraid of the dark only because adults suggest the fear to them. I have no knowledge of any such fear being suggested to us, but we were terrified of the dark. Sometimes on winter evenings, when we were all sitting together in the warmth of our morning-room in the semi-basement, we would want something from our bedroom four flights up. In wartime we had to go up without turning on the lights if the curtains were not drawn, and anyhow the top landing had no light and the switch in our bedroom was at the far end. I remember the sick feeling of dread as we groped through that dark room so far from civilisation, the windows blinking greyly; and the moment of tension as at last our finger pressed the switch and the light sprang on and everything was as usual, with the pink china pig with the faded red candle in his head grinning from the mantelpiece. Yet, though we had seen that no burglars or spirits were there, when we turned off the light again to go downstairs the same horror returned. We thundered down from storey to storey, switching off each light as we fled past. And how warm and comfortable and safe the morning-room seemed when we opened the door at last!

It must have been when we were about eleven or twelve that all this altered. Fear of the night turned into love of the night. We began to enjoy standing alone by windows and looking out at moon and stars—the moon and stars which I can hardly remember noticing in my early childhood, so drowned they were in the dreadful darkness. Now we wandered into the garden after dark to smell

lilac or jasmine. The lurking horrors had gone, and instead there was a pleasant hope that fairyland or heaven might be just round the corner, and perhaps one night we should step into it and never return to this world of unkindness. For, by this time, if we loved the night we often hated our relations.

Apart from the dark the actual process of going to sleep had its terrors. My earliest memories are of certain sensations which recurred again and again, possibly every night. My elder sister and I compared notes long afterwards, and it seems that they were much the same for both of us. There was the feeling that the room was growing bigger and bigger and getting farther and farther away. The ceiling went up and the walls receded, and the poor little pip of a body in the bed sank away to nothingness. There was the feeling that you had lost your bearings, did not know where you were, thought the lump of darkness which was the chest of drawers was the bookcase, lost the sense of where the bed was. Worst was the whirling feeling, rather what I have felt since under an anæsthetic. There was a singing in your ears, and you went round and round in the dark quicker and quicker till you whirled to nothingness. We never mentioned these feelings to our parents.

Even after we were asleep, terrible things might happen. Once I woke suddenly to a wolf in the bedroom. I heard his rasping breath going through the silence, regular and relentless. I shrieked.

"Daddee! Daddee!"

Daddy's pattering steps came up the stairs. He switched on the light. "What's the matter?"

"There's a wolf under the bed. I can hear it breathing."

But that fearful sound had unaccountably stopped. My sister turned over and muttered something.

My father, humouring me, was looking under the beds. "There's nothing there." Silence. "And I can't hear anything."

"Wha' is it?" murmured my sister.

A sudden understanding dawned. The sound had stopped. Barbara had wakened. I knew now who the wolf had been. But I was too much ashamed to say.

The dreams we dreamed at that time—or at any rate the dreams we remembered—were nearly all horrible. The things we had heard quite calmly in the day took on a ghastly significance. There were two stories specially I must not think about as I went to sleep or I should have terrible nightmares. Both had been read to us by our father, and I imagine that during the reading I showed not the slightest sign of being frightened. But they never left me afterwards. One was Edgar Allen Poe's story of the traveller in the inn—in the bed that began gradually to descend through the floor to where his murderers were waiting below. I have read it since and have not turned a hair. The other was a Sherlock Holmes story about a man who died saying, "A rat"—and the mystery was finally traced by Holmes to Ballarat in Australia. I have never read it again, and it still makes me shudder slightly. The "rat" in it is so horrible.

But worse than my rat was my cat—a poisonous cat. That I invented for myself, and like other nightmares it recurred. One night as I lay on my left side,

facing away from my sister and into solitude, I dreamed of a large cat, possibly as large as myself. It had short tabby fur, and fiery eyes, and its bite was like a snake's and killed you. I woke, stiff with terror, and when I dared to move heaved myself over to face my sister and the human world. After that I knew that every time I lay on my left side, facing the darkness, I should dream of the poisonous cat. The trouble was that I turned over in my sleep, and would suddenly find myself facing the wrong way and the dream beginning. Then I heaved back as if devils were after me—as they were.

A minor nightmare which recurred many times was having to climb a very steep slope and falling. Sometimes it was connected with a rather steep road —which we saw but did not take—near our station. It was a nightmare easily explained since I was unathletic and afraid of heights and had at various times got caught in precipitous places in the country or by the sea and had had to sit on my behind and slide.

The usual flying dream we all had. Mine was quite pleasant and connected with the trees round our house. I would stand on top of the oak outside our back door and take a tremendous bound. And instead of falling, I would make a curve upwards and then float very lightly down. Or sometimes, after I had learned to swim, I moved in the air like a swimmer, breasting the invisible waves.

Later on, when I was about ten, bed became much more pleasant. Instead of fear, delightful visions used to visit me before I slept, and I used to look forward to lying on my back and being entranced. Once I re-

member being sustained somewhere on a cloud and looking across a vast chasm of sky and seeing Jesus and his angels calling. There were depths of colour —reds and blues—and I had a deep peace at my heart.

I dreamed of both heaven and fairyland, at much the same time. The dream of heaven came on me when I was in hospital with diphtheria. Life by day was strange and uncomfortable, and I suppose I was compensated at night by this piercingly sweet vision. I stood, very warm and quite hidden, behind a thick plush curtain, like the black plush curtain we had against our drawing-room door at home. I looked upwards, but instead of seeing a ceiling I saw the heavens opened. The sky went up and up, a dark blue, and then I saw stars and then beyond that, flashing golden movements and golden figures. And there was music, and I knew it was heaven and I was happier than I had ever been before.

Fairyland brought precisely the same happiness, but it looked different. I saw it in two forms. In the first I was walking with somebody along a white road, and on either side were orchards. The trees were in bloom, covered with mauve satiny flowers like the bows of wide satin sashes. I knew it was fairyland, and I felt a great unwillingness to go back to the ordinary world.

In the second dream there was a lake deep in woods. It was spring, and the trees were all half out, a haze of fresh green. I walked by the lake on low paths with a slope on my right hand, and here and there among the trees of the slope were spring flowers. Then I found a wood anemone. But it was

not an ordinary white anemone but the palest pink, and I felt the same delight as I felt on our walks in the country when we found a new rare flower. Then I came on a group of anemones, pale blue. And then I knew it was fairyland.

I also went to a witch's cave, but that was much more conscious. It was a device I used sometimes to send me to sleep. There were one or two mysterious things in our bedroom. One was the Venetian blinds. On summer evenings the sun used to come through the slats and lie in orange streaks along the ceiling, and on windy mornings when it was light the curtains, a faded green cotton with a whitish pattern, would billow out and then be sucked against the blinds, each time making the form of something—a moving knight, a ship, a maiden. And the medicine cupboard was mysterious. White, between our beds, with my most treasured possessions, two bottles of scent which I smelt but never used–it was so precious–on it, the medicine chest was a jumble inside. It held pink thermogene wool, ordinary cotton wool, tins of Fuller's earth cream nearly finished with a scraping only in the cracks, a tin of "Rubwell," which was green and slimy and used for our chests, camphorated oil and ear-oil and sometimes a piece of soda for midge-bites. Every medicament in that cupboard seemed well-used and old and rather dusty. The oldest thing was a glass pot of powder which we had had since we were babies. The metal top did not fit properly because one of us had bitten it.

But most romantic was the cupboard to the left of my bed. It was set into the wall, and was full, in the lower section, of thick things hanging—dressing-

gowns and Mother's old costumes. If you opened the door the things were so thick that you could not always feel the wall behind. This was the beginning of my fantasy.

When I could not go to sleep I imagined slipping into the cupboard among the hanging things, and closing the door behind me. I felt for the wall. It was not there. Instead there was a dark slope gradually leading downward. It led, not as it ought to have done to our neighbour's sitting-room, but out of the world altogether. It was a smooth rocky-floored passage, and I went down and down, and presently far in the distance was a green light. Then I knew that there was a witch's cave down there, and she was waiting for me. I think she was generally going to turn me to stone, but this seems to have been a soothing thought, for I seldom reached her cave. I was asleep.

This was consciously invented, but what am I to think of the people who visited the bedroom? They were so vivid and unexpected that even now I am not sure if they were only imagination. Once I woke early just as the room was emerging out of blackness. Standing in the doorway was a tall still figure, with a squarish man's head and broad shoulders. I thought at first that it was my father, but he did not move or speak. I waited, my eyes fixed on him. Still he stood. Gradually the room grew lighter, but he was still there. Finally, I fell asleep, and when I awoke it was sunny and he had gone.

Another visitor was even more real, for he moved. We kept our money-boxes on a low chest between the windows. One early morning, again in the twi-

light, I awoke to see a figure bending over the money-boxes. It was a man. He stooped and made no sound. I immediately concluded that he was a burglar come to steal our savings. I watched. Having examined our boxes, he straightened, and turned and glided noiselessly towards my bed. He came close. He bent over me. I was so terrified that my voice died in my throat. I could only whisper, "Oh, please don't hurt me." At that he moved away again, and went towards the window, and presently was lost in the dimness of the room. I lay awake in fear till morning. Afterwards, I examined our money-boxes, but nothing had gone.

Though I was so terrified by both these creatures I never mentioned them to anyone.

I had one ambition both for my afternoon and evening sleeps. I had read in the pious books our aunts and great-aunts gave us of children who pointed up to heaven and impressed their relatives with their saintliness. I very much wanted to be found, when my mother came to call us for tea or kiss us goodnight, with my finger pointing upward. I used to lie on my back in the right attitude, my first finger stiffly up, hoping I should stay like that when I went to sleep. Then they would find me and say, "Look at this wonderful child thinking of heaven!" Unfortunately, fingers won't point when you are asleep, and I always woke to find myself on my side with my fingers floppy and buried in the covers.

DAY FEARS

ONE OF MY EARLIEST memories is of a barking dog. Mother is wheeling the pram with my younger sister, and my elder sister and I walk a little behind her. We are in an alley-way with open wood palings and gates skirting a line of back-gardens. Out of one of the gardens has come the dog. I don't know what he looks like. All I know is that he makes a fearful barking and jumps up, and to me he is about what a tiger would be to an adult. Mother hurries us on, but we feel her perturbation. Later we hear her talking indignantly to our father. Nipper is dangerous, she says. He is always molesting the children. Shall she complain to Nipper's mistress and ask for him to be destroyed?

Possibly from Nipper began my terror of dogs. I was afraid that every dog I saw in the street was going to jump up and bite. And so often, it seems, dogs take a fancy to you and come after you with a purposeful air. And if you run they run. I have never liked dogs to this day.

There were those notices about dogs too. There was a notice when we went round to see one of our grandmothers. (We called her "the pussie grannie" because she was so fond of cats, and altogether we were a cat-loving family.) There were two ways we might walk to Grannie's—one dull by the main road and the other by little roads with odd scraps of fields left at corners and a stream and a small pinewood. We naturally liked the back way best, but near its end a villa gate bore a bronzed notice: "Beware of

the Dog." Little did that unknown family realise what fear it put into our hearts. The dog, of course, must be dangerous if there was a notice, we thought. We kept on the other side of the road, but for long before the gate our hearts were throbbing, and sometimes we ran. Our fear was not lessened by the fact that we never saw the dangerous dog.

The funny thing was that, although we felt all this fear, we continued to go the back way to Grannie's.

Grannie was delicate, religious and nervous, living a retired life with her two extremely unhygienic cats behind the big aspidistra in her front room. She was nervous of the most unexpected things—chiefly of snakes. Our suburb had trams and rows of shops and gas-lighting. Still she urged us to beware, driven on in her phobia possibly by the story of the Garden of Eden. So whenever I was in long grass I was always afraid of a sudden death from snake-bite. It has been strange to me since to meet children who are not afraid of snakes at all.

Wasps, of course, were real horrors. One of my early memories is of kneeling reading at our window-seat. I have on white knickers open at the bottom, and a wasp alights on my leg and begins to crawl upwards. He gets within the knickers and I can feel the soft tickle of his legs going up and up. I bear it immobile for a minute ; then lose my nerve and make a dab at him. Then comes the sting and my shrieks.

There seemed something vicious about wasps. They attacked so persistently as if they wanted to sting. And their yellow and black stripes were an evil colour, and the soft yet sharp end of the body seemed quivering with continual excitement. Our

father, with a show of bravery, used to kill wasps with his thumbs, squashing the heads. The bodies squirmed and curled up, and we were sorry and yet glad for their pain. I wonder now if we should have been so much afraid of them if our consciences had been quite clear towards them.

The railway was always a fear, whether we went over or under it. To get to the town and to school we had to do one or the other. It was a pretty way to the station, with heavy chestnut trees through which we used to look up to see "sky diamonds" as we called them—the spots of sky that always seemed very bright between the thick leaves. But after came the station steps, and they were old warped wooden steps, with gaps. And it always seemed possible that we might go through. I tried to walk with my eyes up, looking through the dusty panes at the far green railway-banks, but every now and then I glanced down, and there was the world of rails very clear, miles, it seemed, below through a crack. I might fall through at any moment. I held tightly to whatever adult hand was there. The odd thing was that though *I* expected to fall through I never had the slightest fear that either of the sturdy figures of my sisters would disappear.

Perhaps it was worse going under the line—by "the arch." "The arch" will always mean only one arch for me—a solid grey metal arch, making an arid world beneath where wind scarcely blew and no rain dripped or plant sprang. Not that we minded that. We minded the noise. Ours was a busy line; trains were always slipping up and down. They seemed to slip from a distance. Near by they were

worse than thunder. You could not hear yourself speak if you stood under the arch and they were overhead. Yet, as with a train tearing through a station, the shock was not worst when it was fully on you. It was worst when it approached. And every day when we walked towards the arch we used to be suspended and waited for that tremendous increasing roar. When we were alone we used to run. Being right under the arch was like being in some terrible danger, and we did not feel safe till we were fifty yards off.

We were not specially afraid of getting lost; we were always about in groups anyhow. But I was afraid of the land outside our own small beat. It was sinister, an enemy's country. We lived on a main road that went south over hill and dale. So far we used to go up it on Sunday-afternoon walks with our grandfather; but always, at about three miles away, we turned back. From there the road ran on between low hedges and broad grass banks, without a house in sight. It had a peculiar hostile look to me—that road where we never walked. I dreamed about it sometimes.

Similarly, when we went to school by tram, there was a wide main road curving up a hill. We descended at a side road, and on the tram went, clanging up the slope into the unknown. I was always secretly afraid that I should not get off the tram at the right moment, and be carried on. That road ahead was a no-man's land; one could not return from it. It had no earthly geography, and the tram no terminus. Once one entered the territory one was lost. That road, too, came in my dreams.

One special fear was connected with our walks with Grandpa. He came punctually for us every fine Sunday afternoon when we were not going to church, standing at the door very neat with his white beard, stick and well-polished boots. He always took us too far, so that we used to be so tired that we would labour ahead to have a brief rest on railings till he caught us up, and sank down when we arrived home as if we could never move again. (I have been afraid of over-tiring children ever since.) He used to tell us rather shortly to "Mind the cow-dung"—which we always thought was "Cow-done," what the cow has done. He used to catechise us about the names of the trees we passed, and when they were bare we never had the faintest idea what they were, and couldn't see how he could have. He used to discourage our hopes of finding flowers—though we generally found something. When, desperately weary, we asked him how many miles we had been he always underestimated it. He was rather strict about our keeping up, and called me "cow's tail" because I lagged behind. But he introduced us to the fields of the neighbourhood, so that they became part of our lives and each took on a different character from the flowers that grew there. There was the field with the shallow depression (possibly a clay-quarry) where ladies'-slippers grew; the field with the dip which had milk-maids; the field with wood violets growing along the hedge; the field that was perfect summer with elm trees at the end and buttercups and sorrel up to our waists. (But Grandpa, being country-bred, was very insistent that we should keep to the path at haying time.)

The scabious field was my fear. It was the thunder field. We didn't like it much anyhow, for we could only get to it by miles of a long dreary road. But to me it was dangerous too. I was terrified of thunder, again possibly influenced by my grandmother, who bracketed it with snakes among the world's dangers. Now once, when we were miles from home in the scabious field, coppery clouds had billowed up and there had been an ominous low rumble in the distance. Grandpa had hurried us on, but before we had gone very far the rain had caught us and we had sheltered under an oak. I was terrified. I expected lightning to strike me dead immediately. And ever after I was afraid of the scabious field, and used to watch with anxiety which way Grandpa would turn when he led us out of our gate. The scabious field lived for me in a perpetual coppery glare and low rumble.

We were afraid of the unknown, and when we were young many things were unknown. I remember one morning when my younger sister and I were on our lawn. It was one of those muted summer days when the sky is grey and the sunshine orange—a day that has a menace about it anyhow. "Hark," said Rosemary. "What's that?" We listened. The sound came again. It was a croon from the field at the end. We stood our ground for a minute; then took to our heels.

On the steps down to the kitchen some adult met us and asked what was the matter.

"There's something awful in the field," we said.

Again came the uncanny sound. The grown-up laughed. "Wood-pigeons. That's all."

Once when we were sitting at dinner, Rosemary went to the kitchen for a fork. She was gone some time, and returned with a solemn face. "There's something on the kitchen floor. It's *moving*".

I, as usual, was superior. "*I'll* come and tell you what it is."

I followed her out, and she showed me the thing on the floor.

It was pinky grey and it had many threadlike legs; was roundish in shape and glistened slightly. It moved a little way towards the door; then back again. It would not stop moving. We stooped, afraid to touch it. I, too, had no idea what it was. I held out for a moment, then with Rosemary retreated hastily.

Mother came out and laughed. It was a piece of fluff from the carpet blowing backwards and forwards in the breeze.

THE WAR

IT WAS the first world war. And we were going to school; we were not babies. Yet I remember almost nothing about it. Our own private life was so much more important. For that reason I have not agreed with people who said in the recent war, "I'm sorriest for the children." Children are living with their own problems and not with world politics.

Our war, at any rate, brought as many pleasures as pains. One pleasure was that our father became a special constable. He used to sit in a sentry-box by a field under an electric-light works, presumably guarding our light supplies. I suppose he knew what

his duties were. We didn't. But we enjoyed his prestige, especially when we were being persecuted by the half-witted boys up the road.

Mother used to send us up the road with shoes to be mended. In a small side-street lived a family of defective boys, creatures with squints and great boots and mumbling ways of talking. Now and then they attacked us, and I can remember the worst occasion, when they accompanied me down the hill policeman fashion, one holding each arm. I was upset, but I managed to assume some dignity when they released me near our gate. "I shall tell my father," I said. "He's a special constable." As far as I remember that made them sheer off nervously.

And to have a father who was a special constable meant that we could amuse ourselves by making crackers. For we used to visit him in the afternoon and take him presents. The crackers were easy to make. You got a chocolate and rolled it in drawing-paper. If you knew a riddle you might write it out carefully and put it in as a motto. Then you went up to the dining-room cupboard where under packs of cards and boxes of fish knives and forks were rolls of red, green and pink crinkled paper intended for electric-light shades. But we appropriated it. You cut out your rectangle of pretty paper, rolled it round the drawing paper, tied each end with silk cord or baby-ribbon and then jagged the ends with scissors. The crackers looked very real, except that they were lumpy ; and we didn't mind there being nothing to pull. I hated bangs anyway. We would bestow them on our father, and then come home to tea.

The war also made us acquainted with the flags

and songs of the Allies. The flags appeared in our children's encyclopædia held by chubby children in national costume. We even had handkerchiefs with flags on the corner. The flag we liked best was Japan's with its charming rising sun ; but the black, yellow and red of Belgium's, in spite of all we knew of "Brave little Belgium," always seemed to me slightly sinister.

Mother had a book of national anthems with their tunes, and as they were as easy to play as hymns—except for "The Marseillaise" with its difficult time—I used to play them for myself, very slowly and solemnly as the words were so moving. The National Anthem I liked best was Russia's—not Soviet Russia's, White Russia's. "God the all terrible . . . God the all merciful . . . God the omnipotent"—splendid long words. I know it by heart still.

Then there were the war songs. Few could have thrilled to their poetry more than we did. I used to think

> Where the nightingales are singing
> And the white moon beams

the most perfect poetry. Then there was

> There's a silver lining
> Through the dark clouds shining,

which made me think of the moon and great skyscapes. We used to sing this song with verve, although we did not know all the words. I think it was my younger sister, who had a reputation for bloodthirstiness—the end of her witch stories always was, "And he knocked her down to deadness"—who provided us with one line :

When we cut off all their heads
And the boys come home.

Another pleasure provided by the war was the tram-conductresses. We were young and we travelled a good long way to school, and some of the conductresses got to know us and were charming to us. We had three favourites—"Pinny," "Flowery" and "Penny." Pinny gave us a safety-pin when a button came off one of our shoes. Flowery gave us a bunch of sweet williams. And Penny lent us a penny when we had not brought enough for our fares.

Then there were those glass-topped games where you ran a silver ball representing the Allied armies through various pitfalls till it reached "home"—Berlin. From one of those games I first learnt the names of Dresden and Leipzig ; and they have had a faintly sinister ring to me ever since. So had the word "German" for a very long time—possibly till I spent holidays in the country. When our brother Peter was naughty he was always exhorted by our sterner grandmother not to be "a little German." And I remember Mother coming home indignant one day because a woman meeting her with her fair-haired troop had said, "They look a lot of little Germans." By such important events are the child's ideas of other countries built up.

The war brought some fears, of course. One of my most serious was over margarine. Mother used to send us to shop, and the shops were not very polite to children. And it was a new word. Did one say mar*gar*ine or mar*ger*ine? I repeated them over and over to myself as I walked up the hill. I should

say it wrong, and then they would laugh at me. I compromised by asking for "marg."

Then there was the Kaiser. I was always afraid of him with his great twisted moustache. There was a great deal of talk of spies, and I was sure the Kaiser was a spy. I kept on meeting him, particularly in trams. He could disguise himself as anything, but he still kept his big moustache. So whenever I saw anybody with a twisted moustache I thought I ought to inform the police. There was one ticket-inspector with extremely sharp waxed moustache points. He presented the problem to me every day. Or, of course, I thought, it might be Lord Kitchener instead. He had a big moustache, too. So I did not inform the police.

We were afraid of being lectured for turning the lights on when the blinds were not down, for our house stood high and twice a policeman had knocked at our door and said that he would report us if our lights were not covered. So casual was black-out in those days! We were rather afraid of air-raids, and would shout to our father after he had said goodnight to us, leaving our door open so that there might be some communication with the world, "Goodnight Daddy. No thunderstorms. No air-raids. No earthquakes," those being the three dangers we expected to afflict us at night. He always said "No" cheerfully, but one night he was wrong. A zeppelin was cruising about overhead, and we were fetched downstairs. I remember a panic as I was left alone upstairs fiddling with my bedroom slippers after the others had gone down, and then the dazzle of light and sick feeling of sitting upright on the

sofa in our morning-room instead of being asleep. Whether it was that time or not I don't know, but there was a good deal of excitement about a zeppelin that was "brought down." It was, people said, like a red-hot bar, and it made a great glow in the sky. I think, with all the triumph, people telling their experiences as they did in this war, I had a vague feeling of uneasiness about the passengers in the zeppelin.

I was old enough to be affected by the anxiety in the spring of 1918 when it seemed that the Germans might "break through." I asked my father very earnestly if they would. He knew everything, and replied blithely that they would not. And they did not.

I also remember asking what would be in the newspapers after the war was over. To us there was no news but war news. And what would the streets be like when the lamps were lighted again? I did not like it—those sordid little pools of orange light after the majesty of the heavens.

Wartime food leaves almost no memories. Certainly our mother managed well. It used to be one of her boasts that she had kept us all strong and healthy throughout the war. And certainly we all ate well, and made fusses about things like mutton-fat and swedes. But as for what we ate deeply affecting our happiness—that would not have occurred to us. The only thing I remember considering much was butter. I can remember my first slice after the war of bread and real butter and marmalade. Before, if we had had marmalade we had had margarine. Butter and marmalade together were heavenly, as good as

cream. In fact, I loved butter so much that I nearly made myself sick one day.

I was to have bread and milk. Some slices of bread and butter were left over, and I argued with mother that, since bread and butter is nicer than plain bread, so bread and butter and milk would be nicer than plain bread and milk. She let me try. I cut the bread and butter up, sugared it, boiled the milk, poured it over. The butter came off the bread and floated to the top in little patinas of orange yellow. It was very greasy, very horrible. I have not liked bread and milk since. But I was obstinate. I said it was lovely, and then had a bad conscience for days because I had told a lie.

Armistice Day leaves just one unpleasant memory. The others remember how we put up a big flag, but that has gone for me. I only see that cross woman in the street. Presumably, we had a holiday from school, for the three of us were walking in a crowd among the shops. I was in my most moral mood, and seeing a frowning face said loudly that I couldn't think why everybody wasn't looking happy. I had meant her to hear. She did. She turned furiously.

"Some of us have lost dear ones."

It was a double shame—being rebuked in the street by a stranger and being in the wrong.

One last picture I see of myself just after the war is over. I am making tea in the kitchen. On the table a newspaper is spread out, and I read it as I wait for the kettle to boil. Staring out at me is an appeal for the starving children of Vienna, with a pitiful line illustration. I am horrified. I am also virtuous. I run up to Mother.

"Mother, can I give all my money for the Austrian children?"

In my crocodile-skin purse is exactly four-and-four.

MELANCHOLIA

ONE OF THE THINGS we forget as we grow older is homesickness. That sick misery seems quite out of proportion to its cause—the lack of familiar surroundings. It is connected with going to bed away from home ; you do not get it if you are only out to tea. And it comes on always at dusk when bed is near. It comes on even when you have your whole family with you ; so it must have its roots in things and not people. Luckily it does not last the whole time you are away ; it goes after the first three or four days.

I was supposed to be less homesick than my elder sister ; so I was sent on state family visits. These had disadvantages and advantages. One great-uncle where I stayed was known as a "tease," and I remember a bewildering conversation I had with him one morning before breakfast.

"And what did you dream about?" said Uncle Ned.

"Nothing," I said.

"Come now. You can't dream of nothing."

Couldn't you? I cast my mind back. The night was a perfect blank.

"But I did dream of nothing," I said tearfully.

Here his daughter came in and abjured him not to tease me.

But he always gave me sixpence when I left. I went straight round to a small fancy shop, and spent it on presents for the family—five presents.

Sometimes I slept with Auntie Mary. I remember twinges of homesickness then, because there was gaslight instead of electric light and everything was dim and flickery. And there was a feather bed, very soft and limp at the edges. I woke when Auntie came to bed, and watched her brushing her hair in front of the mirror. Grown-ups' preparations for bed always seemed complicated and rather noble. They had a great many mysterious garments that we did not—corsets the chief. And we never saw them naked. They pulled their white night-dresses over their heads, and then their silk combinations dropped down.

I think my worst homesickness was when we stayed at Bournemouth. We stayed with a second cousin twice removed whom we called auntie, who possessed a grand house and a cook who had a shelf of a bosom and a white starched apron over it. There was a conservatory with geraniums, and many soft rugs, and rows of gold-tooled leather volumes of the English poets in the library. And we had morning prayers when the servants came in and our cousin read a portion of the Scriptures, and then we all turned round and flopped down by our chairs—the cook with a particularly large flop—and our cousin repeated a collect and the Lord's Prayer. Afterwards there was a whispered conversation outside the door on food for the day, for our cousin did not think we should know what was going on in her housekeeping. And we were never allowed to go

into the kitchen. Knowing this, the cook inveigled us in if she could.

It was exceedingly kind of our cousin to have four young children, but she was easily offended. Once I offended her. We spent the morning on the shore each day, and she always gave us our mid-morning lunch. It consisted of two dry arrowroot biscuits each, and there all round us were ice-creams being advertised—real cream ices. How we longed for the ices! On this occasion I came up from a bathe. Mother offered me my two dry-as-dust things.

"I *hate* these old biscuits," I said.

I was not observant. Somehow our cousin was there without my noticing it.

"I'm sorry you hate my biscuits," she said in tones icier than any ice-cream. She hardly spoke to me the rest of the day. It worried me very much.

Sometimes we could not sleep at Bournemouth through sunburn or holiday food. Once after blackberries I lay awake half the night and then was sick. At that time of the night I hadn't a good eye for colour, and I thought it was blood and I was dying. But though the fear of a restless night contributed to homesickness, homesickness was something much more. It was one of those mysterious miseries about nothing of which childhood is full.

I had another peculiar visitation for which I never found a name. It was homesickness intensified—but homesickness without a cause. It affected me physically. I wanted to stretch, and tears came to my eyes. Sometimes twilight brought it, but it was worst on summer Sunday mornings at home.

Those mornings were charming otherwise. Waking early, we would dress quietly, creep downstairs and get basins. Then we would unbolt the back door on to a world of sun and dew, and go down the garden to pick fruit for the pies that would be made later. Diving into the tangled bushes for currants, raspberries or gooseberries, we would enjoy the hidden feeling and the knowledge that we were committing the sin of being on the beds, and yet we were being good. When our basins were full we would come in to a breakfast we loved—fried bread and sausages.

Idyllic memory; but just before breakfast when I was washing in the bathroom the plague would fall. I knew it. I would stand still with my hands in water until it went over. It was a rising in the throat, a darkening of the sunlight, a longing for something that was not there, a feeling that life was nothing. As I never mentioned it, I never knew if my sisters had the same nostalgia. It left me—anyhow in its worst form—finally in my teens, and I was in a religious glow by then and explained it to myself as "a longing for heaven."

The teens themselves, of course, brought all sorts of quite irrational melancholies. If only somebody had said to me: "You have odd worries now, but they won't last"! But nobody ever did. One incident I remember was completely idiotic. No wonder I tried my mother! We were staying at a cottage in the country, and three of us had developed whooping-cough. Perhaps that stirred up the emotions. I do not know. Meanwhile, a young cousin had been in contact with us, and had developed whooping-

cough at home. Her mother, our mother's sister, wrote to announce this, adding possibly rather sharply, "We can't help blaming you for letting Jane visit you without telling us that your children had coughs." Mother was indignant. She quoted the "We can't help blaming you" to the rest of our relations in the country, saying that it was "too bad" for Meg to write like that.

For some unknown reason that phrase went to my head like a great tragedy. I procured the letter and read it, and cried over it. Then I began to go up to my bedroom every afternoon—after a good dinner —and cry over the letter. Nobody knew about it at first, but presently Mother noticed my absence and my red eyes. She came up one day to find out what was the matter. I was crying with the letter as usual. Then there was a scene. I held the door. She pushed her way in and took my hand. Still sobbing I fled from her, down the crooked stairs and out at the back. Over the fence I went and away to the pond where I could hide.

She gave me up. She did not pursue. I hid there sobbing, smelling the rank scent of nettles and the sickly scent of meadow sweet. Presently there were sounds in the cottage garden. All the family was going out. I let them go, glad of solitude, glad to cry in peace. Then gradually the sun was obscured, and dark clouds began to steal across the sky. And I stopped crying, and forgot the terrible "We can't help blaming you," and began to be afraid.

A thunderstorm was coming, and I was alone. I left the nettles and meadow-sweet and pond and climbed back into the cottage garden. I went in and

put the letter away in a drawer. Everything was hot and silent as the grave. I pulled every curtain in the house, and sat in twilight longing for the family to come home.

They came at last before the thunder. And Mother was amused about the drawn curtains, and said no more about our afternoon struggle. Until I told her long afterwards she had not the slightest idea why I was crying so much. And when I look back on it I haven't the slightest idea either.

SINS

I CANNOT REMEMBER a time when I did not earnestly wish to be good. The things we were blamed for were generally just accidents. We splashed raspberry juice on to a clean cloth or dropped a cup, or sometimes our bodies betrayed us and we burst into tears. But I early learnt that it did not pay to burst into tears, run out and bang the door. There was always the embarrassing return when one had to apologise. And even if we cried in secret our red eyes gave us away. Mother told me that a mother always knew when her child had been crying, and I believed that, because she was my mother, she had some secret way of knowing that other people had not.

Sometimes we were accused of things we were not at all sure we had done. Once my father came from nowhere, carried me upstairs, put me on a bed and smacked me. He said it was because I had pulled wallpaper off the wall. This surprised me. I had no idea if I had done it or not. I remember lying on the

bed when he had gone downstairs and crying and kicking my legs in the air and hating him.

Similarly, my younger sister was accused of writing her name in pencil on the ceiling above the stairs. There it was in staggering round letters. Yet she swore she hadn't done it, and probably really thought she hadn't. But she was a wicked child anyhow, and punishment was a regular thing with her. Nearly every morning she was put into the corner for something, and then she used to lick the wallpaper.

One strange deceit I practised at about the age of seven that no one ever discovered. Lying was our sin against the Holy Ghost, yet somehow I did not feel depressed about this ; only vaguely triumphant. The deception was forced on me by an inner need.

I was extremely unobservant. Mother used to send us on small errands. She wanted something from a drawer or her workbasket. I could never find what she sent me for. Then she would come herself, and there would be the missing object right in front staring me in the face. "You couldn't have looked," she would say crossly. Presently I got the reputation of never finding anything, and she would say sarcastically, "Gwen hasn't any eyes in her head." So I grew nervous. I knew that, whatever she sent me for, I should not see it.

So I arranged a counter-demonstration. I used to hide something necessary ; Barbara's comb, for example, that I slipped into my own drawer. Then there was a hue and cry. Then I would creep up, take it out and emerge triumphantly. When they asked

me where I had found the things I would make a place up.

"Oh, on the floor in the corner," I would say carelessly, and they would believe me and thank me for having sharp eyes.

So, in my need, I was deceitful, and was quite elated when they praised me.

But generally we were tender in our consciences. We pilfered very little. In the larder we might stick a finger into the sugar-bowl and lick it, or pick up a currant or a piece of fallen icing off the cake-plate. But not more. In the garden we might take a raspberry, but then we would regularise our position.

"Can I have a raspberry, Mother?"

"Oh, I suppose so," she would say.

Then we would not take another.

Possibly our most unpleasant traits were our quarrels. They were continual. I remember making a pact with my elder sister that we would go an entire day without quarrelling; but we did not manage it. So regular were quarrels and not speaking that we devised a formula for ending them. It began by being "Sorry I have been nasty"; went on to "Sorry Nasty," and then became "Sorry Na," and then just "S.N." When "S.N." was said by one opponent, the other in graciousness had to reply "S.N." This generally happened in the evening, for we had some idea that we should not "let the sun go down on our wrath." This, I think, we had learnt from Louisa Alcott's *Little Women*.

Since there were four of us, various balances of power were possible. We were always very nice to the remaining one when the other two were against

us. And we did not war only with words. My elder sister was strong and used to infuriate us by holding our wrists while we squirmed and tried to bite her big coarse-grained hands. My younger sister used to bite and scratch. Once she scratched me right down my neck. I was too pious to tell tales, but I wanted somebody to ask me about the wound. So I went round with my head well up. Somebody did ask how I had been scratched, and then I told with pleasure.

Once when I was fairly old, in my teens, coming into the morning-room with a jug of water, I sportively thought I would drip a drip on my brother's head. But my hand slipped, and without any provocation he suddenly found a deluge descending down his neck. He was furious and complained to our father while I stood trembling, having no excuse whatever. But it was such an odd crime that I was merely told, "You are not to pour water on Peter's head in future," and no more was said.

I was very fond of Peter when he was a baby, but when he was older we all turned against him because he was boring in his play, which was so much behind ours. He was sensitive about his youth. We used to make him wild by calling him "only a poor little baby." It must have been some such taunt that I used one holiday night after night when he was in the bath. He would be bathing himself in a rather isolated bathroom in a big house, and I would come in and sit down on a chair. Then, without compunction, I would "tease" him till he cried. Nobody found out. It went on evening after evening.

This "teasing" of a young child by an older is odd because the young child remains so thin-skinned

even when the same insult is repeated again and again. Peter, later, used to tease a neighbour's little girl and automatically make her cry by saying, "I don't like piggies."

Incidentally, our bathroom was a place for eloquence. When Peter was about five, he and Rosemary would rock with laughter while he declaimed in a high squeaky voice, "Clara Simpkins, my love. Will you marry me?" It had no meaning.

We girls had a very strict code of rules which we never questioned. We took a week each for peeling the potatoes. One got the meal and cleared away; another washed up; another wiped; and we changed in rotation. We liked singing or saying poetry aloud, but we hated hearing anybody else doing it. So if one said, "Be quiet please" to the declaiming one she had to be quiet. We had to ask permission to go into one another's rooms.

Peter was a bit outside the rules. He didn't help in the house anyhow, and he didn't say poetry. So we behaved with less formality with him. I liked his room for doing homework. It was at the top, and quiet and warm. So I would take possession. He might be on the lawn far below tinkering, perhaps, with his bicycle. I would shout through the window.

"Can I sit in your room?"

"No, you may not," he would shout back.

"Well, I'm going to any way," and it was such a distance up that he would not take the trouble to come and chase me out.

Once when I was in my teens I read about hypnotism, and decided I would try it on Peter. The thing was to wait till he was asleep—and that was fairly

easy as he went to bed first. Some time after he had retired I crept in with Rosemary. There he lay, his eyes shut, and I remember a feeling of affection and pity for him lying so quiet. But we commenced our experiment. He used to stay late in bed; so we thought it would be fun to get him up early. We bent down and whispered in his ear, "You're going to get up at five o'clock. You're going to get up at five o'clock." The trouble with hypnotism was that you could not tell when it had "taken." We hesitated. Then he suddenly sat up in bed, his cheeks red.

"I wasn't asleep. I heard every word you said. Get *out* of my room."

We got out. He did not rise at five.

Another source of quarrels was resting in the afternoon. Afternoon rests continued with each of us till we were six. As we grew towards six we could not sleep and were bored, and wandered round the room softly looking at our ornaments, or spent the time rolling the eiderdown and quilt as tightly as we could round us. We were supposed to rest for two hours. Thus the earlier we reached our bedrooms the earlier we might come down. After dinner there was a mad rush.

"Can I get down, please?"

"Can I get down, please?"

"Take my feeder off, please."

"Take my feeder off, please."

Then we would fly up the stairs.

Once I woke, and all was silent and the afternoon light was golden and I thought I had been forgotten. I crept, avoiding creaks, down the stairs to reconnoitre. The house in the afternoon stillness was quite

different from usual, the light clear and still and empty. On the last landing I leaned over the bannisters and listened. Mother was dressmaking in the morning-room, and talking amiably to my elder sister, who by this time was allowed to stay up. I could hear the clip of the scissors, and Mother saying, "Now hold this for me," when she wanted to cut something. I stayed there for long minutes with a feeling of doubt and wickedness. I had broken the rule. I had come down without being told. In the end they grew aware of me, and Mother said quite kindly, "Oh well, you're half an hour early, but as you're down you'd better stay." I was puzzled and delighted—puzzled because grown-ups were cross when you didn't expect it and not cross when you did expect it (and yet, I thought, they were always right) and delighted because I had stolen a march on Rosemary.

But once the reverse thing happened. Rosemary stole a march on me. Mother's parents were coming to tea, and I suppose she was too hurried to bother about our rights. I had been deeply asleep, and was wakened by her telling me to hurry as Rosemary was up and dressed already. That was the deepest insult that could have been offered me. Rosemary, the younger one, was up first! I sulked. I cried. I took a long time in putting on my frock, dreading to see her triumphant looks when I joined the party. Finally, when I arrived in the garden, I refused to say a word to anybody. Grannie, who was always kind, stooped and said:

"What's the matter, darling?"

I did not explain. She would not have thought it important if I had.

Our umbrella also caused perpetual argument. It was a large Mother Gamp which the three of us were made to carry when we walked to school. In our usual self-governing fashion we made the rule that each should carry it part of the way; but we never mapped out which part. So the one who was carrying it would say, "I've had it enough now. *You* take it"; but the one addressed would say, "No, I had it last last time." Then an argument would develop. Finally, the one carrying it would issue an ultimatum. She would place the umbrella on the pavement, and would walk on. We would all walk on, glancing out of the corner of our eyes at the others to see who would give way first and go back. Finally, a quarter of a mile on, one would say furiously, "It's not fair," and retrace her steps and pick the umbrella up.

But once, while we were all walking on as hard as we could and the umbrella was lying on the path, a woman saw it and came running after us.

"I think you've dropped this."

We received it with blushes wondering whether she had seen one of us carefully place it in the middle of the pavement.

At about the age of nine a curious phase came on which we called "confessing." "Confessing" was a nuisance to our mother and father and a pain to us. If we had committed the smallest indiscretion, or thought we had, we could not be happy unless we had laid the sin before our parents. They did not want to hear it. It embarrassed us to confess. Still we had to

do it. Sometimes we had to invent long conversations just for the sake of slipping the confession unobtrusively in.

It was Mother's fault in the first place. I remember how it happened. I was one morning in the dark passage by the stairs where we kept the bigger toys —Peter's red wooden train, and his dark brown plaster lion called Honeysuckle and his milk cart. In the dimness I trod on the milk cart and broke the side. Mother was irritated. "You'll have to confess to Daddy when he comes home tonight," she said.

That started us off. I think it was years that we went on confessing.

I went through two days' misery after I had cried at my music-lesson. Crying was still a disgrace. It must be got off my conscience somehow. Finally, I plucked up courage one early morning, and confronted mother with this confession of crime as she stood at her washstand in the damp smell of soap. She did not seem much interested.

Once I had actually to lie to work off a confession. It happened on Easter Sunday, an exalted day for us now that we were approaching adolescence, with "Alleluia, Alleluia" in church and coats and skirts, very tight about the waist, worn for the first time. Our room had just been spring-cleaned, and Daddy had given our beds a coat of white enamel. We were told to be careful as it was not quite dry. I woke in the early morning and perceived, just above my head, a fascinating fat little drop of enamel that had run down. I touched it. It was soft. I pushed it. It went in. I spent a happy quarter of an hour playing with my drop, pushing it till it was flat and slightly

grey and little cracks had appeared in it. Then I woke to reality. I should have to confess.

I dressed, and with a beating heart went down to mother. It was Easter Sunday. I must confess at once. But I could not say that I had been *playing* with the drop. "Mother," I said, "I've squashed a bit of paint on my bed. You see, I sat up in a hurry and forgot the bed had been painted and took hold of the rail without thinking . . ."

She accepted it. It was all too easy. My heart sank when it should have lifted. I went upstairs, and knelt by the spoilt bed and prayed to God to forgive me for telling the lie. But I did not feel absolutely comfortable. It was so much simpler to pray to God than to tell Mother the truth.

One sin I never confessed, and it cast a blight over what, again, seems years. I scorched a tea-towel; or perhaps I didn't scorch it, but I might have done. This frightful crime happened one afternoon when Mother went out. I wiped up the dinner-things, and then put the tea-towel in the morning-room to dry by the fire. When I took it away later I noticed that it had a scorch I had not seen before. But then I was unobservant. It might easily have been there already. I kept on turning the matter over in my mind. But when Mother returned I was too much afraid to say anything.

Later she asked me, "Was it you who scorched the tea-towel?"

"No," I said. And, though I had not been sure before, now, when I denied it, I believed my guilt.

From that moment the tea-towel was as heavy as a murder on my soul. I was rejected by God. I could

not say my prayers with an open heart. For a few minutes I would forget it, as one forgets a death, and then wake to the reality again. I still dared not mention it to Mother, or try to slip the confession in in casual talk, because I thought the incident was as weighty in her mind as it was in mine. I did not, in fact, mention it till I was grown up, and then she only vaguely remembered the matter. The guilt was bad all day, but when twilight came it was fearful. I had only one refuge.

The refuge was *Dauntless Patty*. At this time we were reading girls' school stories, and *Dauntless Patty* was my favourite. "Dauntless Patty" was an Australian girl who came to England, was clawed by a maddened cat, involved in a burglary, played tennis divinely, but had her eye injured in a tennis match, was misunderstood at school, but finished by making friends with the girl she secretly adored by being cut off with her by the tide and nearly drowned. It was a perfect book. Only by kneeling at the window-seat, catching the last gleam of light in the sad dusk and losing myself in Patty's adventures, could I keep conscience at bay.

But at last, gradually came a time when we began to feel that our consciences were our own. We might keep some things secret. We did not have to expose every fault to the light. I remember a wonderful feeling of freedom when this attitude first occurred to me. Perhaps our parents felt relief too.

At about this time came the discovery that we could "cheek" our parents, if we chose the moment well, with impunity. Especially our father. If we could make him laugh it did not matter how "rude"

we were. And the feeling that our parents were some remote deities, always moral and perfect though unintelligible, began blessedly to give way to the idea that they might be human like ourselves.

Once our father said that he was tired of our calling one another "mean." The word "mean" was not to be used for the rest of the day.

I dared. I flashed out, "I *mean* to be perfectly good today."

He laughed. I had brought it off.

CRUELTIES

LIKE MOST CHILDREN and perhaps most adults we personified everything. The objects of our world became good or bad. We had to be kind to the good things, but with the bad it did not matter.

Flowers were good. We early ceased to make daisy-chains as we felt it hurt the daisies to have their stalks split. When we picked flowers on our walks we made it a strict rule always to take them home and put them into water, however much they might have faded in our hot hands. We never threw them down. Flowers that had been thrown down by somebody else and lay dying on the road were a problem. We were told not to take them home ; they might be "dirty." So we had to find some local refreshment, and carefully arranged them in a ditch or puddle, so that they would live out their lives in dirty water if not in clean. We specially liked to do this when people were passing, thinking that they would admire us for our kindness. I remember being

pleased when a clergyman passed and smiled at seeing us spreading old buttercups in puddles.

Almond flowers blown down by March winds were difficult to save. They had no stalks, and there were so many of them all over the path. It was not our fault. We would pick up a few, and then give it up and throw them away.

Worms were good. They did something helpful to the earth. So when we found them we used to treat them like fallen flowers ; give them back to life, find a nice bit of earth for them. Sometimes if there were no nice soft earth available we would cast them over hedges into gardens, hoping that nobody was looking out of a window to see them come hurtling across.

Wasps were "bad" and we squashed them with horror and delight when we could. Caterpillars were bad—or bad until they became butterflies, though I don't think hairy caterpillars were considered as bad as the others, as they were more rare. The euonymus bushes round the house were the haunt of small white, black and yellow caterpillars that turned into white, black and yellow butterflies. We did not ask what the caterpillars' sins were—if they had eaten the euonymuses down to the ground it would not have troubled me, for I have always disliked those dark evergreens—but we punished them. We would spend whole mornings collecting them and squashing them on stones. Their blood was a sticky yellow-green with a vaguely sweet scent.

Sometimes we did worse. We sported with our caterpillars. Under one euonymus was a tub of rainwater—black oily water with a layer of leaves at the

bottom and a stagnant smell. We would float the caterpillars on the black sea, using sticks and leaves as boats. Sometimes they were good mariners, and would cling for a long time. So then we would poke them off with sticks and watch them writhing and drowning. The tub must have been full of caterpillar corpses.

However, we grew up and sickened of the sport. Later, when our brother floated caterpillars on his own, we called him "a crool boy."

One murder of caterpillars I did not intend. At the age of about ten I was becoming interested in science. I wanted to breed butterflies. So I spent a busy afternoon procuring caterpillars, dropping them higgledy-piggledy into a cardboard cornflour packet. I was called in to tea; so in my kindness I cast a lot of leaves on top of the squirming mass to save it from hunger, closed down the flaps and put my incipient butterflies on to a shelf in the greenhouse.

That evening Mother was sewing-machining in the greenhouse. Presently she was aware of a procession of caterpillars advancing towards her. There were caterpillars on the shelves; caterpillars on the floor. She had a horror of caterpillars. She fought them right and left. The next morning I was grimly told to take a brush and dustpan and sweep up the remains, and never to do it again. The remains were not nice. I wept and was nearly sick.

I remember pausing on the brink of the age when one ceases to kill for fun. One evening I found a large spider in our outside lavatory, and killed it meditatively, seeing how the thin dry legs dropped off. It was fascinating because I felt sympathy for the

thing at the same time—getting much the same pleasure, I suppose, as sightseers used to get at public executions. Then I began to think that through me that body that had been crawling so determinedly up the distemper would never crawl again, and the mystery of death struck me and I was sorry to have put an end to something for ever and ever. I felt guilty and yet proud of feeling guilty, since so many people killed spiders without thinking about it. Afterwards I never killed anything if I could help it.

We had a shady, ferny path where frogs abounded, and sometimes we used to chase them. But not to hurt them; merely to show our goodwill. We would take them in our hands and watch their brown-green slimy throats throbbing. We wanted them to love us, but they did not. When we let them go they hopped away with alacrity.

We reached a lofty peak of charity before Peter, and often complained to Mother of his cruelty. Once our ginger-coloured cat was asleep on the lawn in the sun. Peter had a new magnifying glass, and he had been reading adventure stories in which you made fire by concentrating the sun's rays. He knelt beside the unconscious animal and with his glass concentrated the sun on its back in a golden spot. Presently a faint thread of smoke arose. We were furious, and beat him off, and then went in to Mother to complain of this strange sin. He himself seemed a little startled at the smoke. The cat slept on peacefully.

One piece of savagery emerged in me when I was as old as eleven. It was again under the guise of

doing something good. We had hens in a run at the bottom of the garden, and one afternoon a White Leghorn got out. Mother asked me to get her in—always a long job because if you opened the door too soon the others strayed out and sometimes, if you didn't open the door, you got her into a corner, but could not open it in time. She was lean and wary and led me a dance. Presently I became furious, and began to chase her for the sake of chasing. And then I grew exalted at her squawking and fluttering and fear ; the spirit of the hunter rose in me. I chased her round and round the beds, not cautiously but openly persecuting her. For about half an hour I didn't give her a moment's rest. She was exhausted. Then Mother came out and said she might die, and I suddenly woke up and was frightened.

So guiltily I got her in, glad to part from her. She did not die, but went off her "lay," and I received a severe reprimand.

Cruelty and kindness exist so easily together. I remember at about this same time being sorry for our old cat, the one before the ginger. She had not had much of a life—only scraps to eat, too many kittens, which included, in her old age, some abortions, a good deal of roughness from us and now a discharging ear. I stroked her thin body, and she purred, and I thought in my moral way, "I will do this every day, and then she will love me." But I forgot again, and one day when she disappeared none of us asked where she was. Mother had expected questions, but they did not come, and at last she told us. My kind resolves had been too late. The old cat had been sent to the vet.

AMUSEMENTS

MOTHER SAID that when we each got to the age of four or five we began to ask her, "What shall I do *now*?" and then she knew that we were ready for school. But looking back I do not remember boredom. We always had a great deal of housework to do, so that the spare moments were precious, and we used to race through our jobs and race away to the top of the house or the bottom of the garden so that we should not be asked to do any more.

One of our jobs which was not an amusement was to "amuse Peter." As he was so much younger, we found this frightfully boring. One of the games that pleased him most was to sit at the top of our kitchen stairs and bounce a ball down, while we at the bottom threw it back up to him. It was not exactly stimulating. Then a little later he would insist on talking about the numbers and routes of buses, or about cigarette cards. I tried to be polite, but lacked enthusiasm. Sometimes I kept him and Rosemary good by reading to them, but here again our tastes did not tally. He would stand *Alice in Wonderland* and *Little Men*, but he drew the line at my schoolgirl romances. *Meddlesome Mattie* he would not listen to at all.

We laughed at him a good deal—when, for instance, he talked about "Naiplon" and "Beetlehoven." I did not say that I for years had had my own Go-eethy, encountered on one of those calendars with a maxim for every day. And my Bow Legs was

already ancient history. That was when our literary grandfather, not the one who took us for walks, had asked me what was the nickname of Edward I. "Long Shanks"—I knew it but could not think of it. "Bow Legs" was the best I could do, and "Bow Legs" Edward remained for us.

We played most of the ordinary games with plasticine, scissors and crayons. There was a battered tin box in our morning-room with a changing collection of bitten and scratched pencils, and one fat pink crayon that never changed because no colour would ever come off it. We played cards, irritating our parents by the monotonous undersong we chanted without ceasing in "Beggar my Neighbour" —"You've got to pay me three. I've got to pay you one. Oh—you've got to pay me four." But the garden was the scene of most of our games in summer.

I remember playing shops with Rosemary on an old green bench by the water-tub. We had spread out a number of valuable rose-petals and stones, and I was the shop-keeper.

"And your address, madam," I said.

"Pink," she said, "with lace." She had never heard of the word address, and thought I was talking about dresses.

Later she used to persuade Peter to play "house-games" with her and her dolls in a small lean-to draped with a vine which we called grandiloquently "the summerhouse." He was the husband, but a singularly uninterested one. She would only procure his co-operation by many entreaties, and in the middle he would wander away. Then she would call

him "mean," but she was in his power as the game depended on him. We two elder ones were not interested.

Rosemary used to tell people that she would have "a hundred children" when she grew up, and she was a great collector of dolls. Belinda was her best with real hair, and then came a baby, white and sickly, Daisy Crystal. I was never much interested, and in spasms of generosity used to give her my dolls. Afterwards I would want them back, but she had a strong sense of property and held on to them. My last was a small doll called Gladys, because I thought that the name meant "Glad Eyes," which seemed to me poetical. Gladys was passed over too, demanded back and refused. Very battered, she is now the property of my niece.

I was fonder of my teddy-bear, who had been with me since I was three. He had crooked black button eyes, a nose soft through age, and one arm hanging empty of straw. He was nameless for a long period. Then Rosemary suggested he should be called Limpy. I had been reading Greek stories at the time, and was mixed in my impressions, thinking that Olympus was the Father of the Gods. "Limpy," I thought, was just a familiar form of Olympus, and how splendid to have a teddy bear named after the Father of the Gods! Later she told me it was Limpy just because he had a limp arm.

On hot summer days we used to make a "tent" in the garden. My memories of summer mornings includes having no shoes on and feeling the difference between the soft cool grass and the warm stony path. It was on the path that we had to make our tent, as it

was only there that bushes were near enough for us to tie across our old red tablecloth as a "roof." The stones of the path were not ideal for sitting on. We spread newspapers, and then several layers of tablecloths, but still they came through. However, it was quite fun sitting there and reading and sipping weak lemonade among the twinkling sun and shadow. At a level with our eyes would be the moss-bed under the laurel bush. I have never seen such thick green moss, with its little ferns standing out and black ants running about it. Sometimes it was so lovely that we buried our noses in its soft sponginess. It was scented like wet earth.

In summer we made ourselves into queens, splitting the leaves of one-day-lily plants down the middle and poking our heads through. The leaves did not make very good crowns because a long spike stuck out back and front. We also collected the great satiny pink and red petals of peonies—as we collected horse-chestnuts, not because we could do anything with them but because it was a pity to waste them. One of my ambitions was to make a "Pin-a poppy show"—

Pin-a pin-a poppy show
What sort of flower oh?—

for which I believe you use petals, but I didn't know how to do it. (It was the same with that lovely thing that comes in stories—a cowslip ball. We wanted it, but nobody knew how to make it.) So our peony petals were held in our hands and sniffed and then dropped about the lawn. And then we were told we had been untidy and must clear up.

The summerhouse provided one simple game.

Helen, a neighbour's child, came in one morning to play, and for a time we looked at one another wondering what to do. Then, "Let us," said Helen, "stick thorns in." There was an arch, near by with a Dorothy Perkins rose with a main stem with big thorns which came off neatly, leaving little scars. The lattice-work of the summerhouse was of soft wood. We spent the whole morning breaking thorns off the Dorothy Perkins and pressing them into the wood.

We always fervently wanted to go forward, to grow up ; but I remember one conscious return to the past. Another child came to tea, and we discussed what we should play. We must have been about ten. "Let us," we said at last, "make ourselves as dirty as possible." So we each rushed to a flower-bed and smeared our faces, arms and hands with wet earth. Then with much laughter we showed ourselves to our mothers, who were decently horrified. But then it was tea-time, and we had to wash, and I remember being quite relieved. The old days when we were careless of dirt—when, according to Mother, I had sat in the coal-scuttle and eaten the coal—had gone for ever.

One of our chief pleasures was our "ornaments." In our bedrooms we each had a small table with a cloth and a miscellaneous collection of china animals, figures and vases ; it was on "ornaments" for the family that I always spent the sixpence my uncle gave me when I had been staying at his house. The favourite in my own collection was a raspberry tea-set, cups made of little pipped red berries and saucers and a tray of green leaves. It was what a fairy

might have used. I also possessed several of those Gosse china souvenir vases with the arms of Stratford-on-Avon or Edinburgh. I considered them very valuable. The most unpleasant thing in my collection —and I did not like it much even then—was a collie-dog's head. It came from a church bazaar, and it was meant, I think, to hold matches. At any rate it was nearly all hole. The collie had a sly expression, and he was in white glazed china with pale blue hair.

I must have loved postcards, for I still have a collection of cards sent me from the age of three or earlier—for one with Father Christmas is marked "Baby." They are rather touching, these early postcards, mostly from people who are dead now, thumbed well, with bent corners as if I looked at them many times. One of a Union Jack ("The colours that never run") sent by an aunt in wartime says, "I often tell Dandy about you four children, and he wags his tail and says, 'Bow-wow-wow,' which means, 'I *do* wish I could play with them.'" One is from Mother away from home when I was three. "Go on being very good. I hope Rosemary is being good too"—a hope seldom fulfilled. My greatest love, the incredibly beautiful card, is a valentine—but without any message on the back. I do not know whom it came from, but the date shows that I was five. Its charm for me then is impossible to describe. It has a heart-shaped flap covered with red and pink roses, and bears the legend at the bottom : "Under the picture the secret is revealed." It has also a verse entitled, "From the Depth of my Heart."

Sweet are the roses
And sweet my love to me.
May the scented breezes
Waft a kiss to thee.

But I never read these Tennysonian echoes. I looked at the "secret" under the flap—the photograph of a pretty girl with puffed hair and a party frock holding rather unexpectedly a heart made of wood or plaster. But chiefly I loved the card for those prolific bright all-over pink and red roses.

Sunday evening was always a special play-time for us. Mother went to church and our father read to us and set us drawing competitions—rounded up by slices of bread and thick dripping with some of the gravy from the bottom. We all had talent in drawing, but Barbara had the double advantage of being the eldest and having the most talent. At the end of a quarter of an hour our efforts were judged, and it must have been hard for our father not to have given her top marks every time. When I did win it was generally through some careful avoidance of difficulties, such as in the competition entitled "Missed." Barbara drew a little girl missing the post; but I, knowing that I couldn't draw animals or people as well as she could, decided on a dragon and a fairy whose anatomy was not fixed irrevocably by natural laws. And of the dragon I drew only great snapping jaws, something like a crocodile's—not very difficult. The fairy was just eluding him, and also wasn't difficult since I had been drawing fairies for years. So my "Missed" won.

Christmases were æons apart in their pleasures. Once one was over we could not possibly look for-

ward so far ahead as a year to another. Therefore, we thanked heaven for birthdays, which were like little Christmases. Christmases were always windy and warm and wet, with the line of lamps going up our road "like silver lamps in a distant shrine"; only they were green-yellow, not silver. We woke before it was light on Christmas morning, and hauled our soft lumpy stockings, crackling with paper, into bed with us. They were full of various small things, but there was always scented soap and a tangerine at the bottom. Later, we put up holly, rather dirty, from the garden. Our mother's parents came to dinner, and afterwards we had all our presents under a cloth in the middle of the table, and took it in turns to draw. Then we ate as many chocolates as we liked, instead of being rationed to one a day, and Mother played carols and Grandpa, with his gruff voice, took a spirited solo part in "Good King Wenceslas." Like all children, I suppose, I misunderstood carols. I could never see—I do not see now—what the moral at the end of "Good King Wenceslas"—"He who now will bless the poor"—had to do with the rest of it or who found the blessing. The "See" in "See amid the winter snow" I took for a noun—some kind of Papal see possibly—and the Virgin unspotted always called up the image of somebody spattered with mud—only she wasn't.

Then came Boxing Day with a visit to our other grandparents and a "bran pie" of presents. That was nice, but one Boxing Day evening gave us something even better. I remember it as a perfection of pleasure that you never get after childhood. "You're wanted,

Barbara," said an aunt mysteriously, and, looking startled, Barbara got up and went out. She did not come back. I felt somewhat apprehensive. I was always nervous in those going-out-of-the-room games. It came as I had half-dreaded, "You're wanted, Gwen." Up I got and went through the door. Along the passage a light was burning. It was in an aunt's bedroom. I went inside, and there was a stout fairy. It was Barbara, with her hair loose, in a blue muslin dress of the fairy type, tight bodice, full skirt, sewn all over with tinsel and little blue flowers. And on her head was a wreath of tinsel and flowers, and in her hand a flower wand.

My dress—did I love it more than hers? It was a bright green, made in the same way, but sprinkled over with tinsel and little yellow flowers. I saw them as buttercups. I saw the whole dress as spring, about which I felt as romantically as any mediæval poet at the time. And then in came Rosemary, a little doubtful, and on her was put a rose-pink dress with blue and pink flowers; and then we all went to show ourselves to the company.

I never said to the aunts what those dresses meant to me. They meant, on that dark winter evening, fairies and spring and sunlight and flowers; and each as I looked at it seemed more beautiful than the other. Unfortunately, fairyland faded. We were asked, now that we were dressed up, for some performance, and we offered to "say poetry." Our poetry, at that patriotic time, was Kipling at his worst, and the bluebell fairy and the spring fairy, standing together, intoned most unfairylike lines about "All you Big Steamers":

. . . And the joints that you carve
They are brought to you daily by all us big steamers . . .

They applauded, our relatives. Perhaps they did not feel the chasm between bluebells and joints. But I hated those jocular lines.

Our chief amusement at all times was reading. Our aunts remarked complacently that there was no need to worry what to give us for birthdays. Books were always right. Between the four of us we gathered quite a library, a good deal of the *Naughtiest Girl of the Fifth* type ; but even then we frequently reread each book. To read a new book was like hearing a piece of music for the first time. You missed a lot. You liked it better with repetition. I remember kneeling down to *Little Men* and thinking, "This is the fourteenth time."

We were also allowed to go along the adult book-shelves and take out what we liked. Soon each of the book-backs had its own face—grim, inviting, not to be bothered about. In this way, by trying without advice, we acquired prejudices against some literary treasures. *Kim* I must have tried ten times before I finished it. I hated *Huckleberry Finn* and *Sylvie and Bruno*. I also hated a book of poetry, with *The Ancient Mariner* with illustrations. To seven-year-old eyes *The Ancient Mariner* goes on for a very long time, and there is no sense or reason in it. I have never liked the poem since. On the other hand, when we were about nine, we enjoyed a great deal of romantic fiction of *The Prisoner of Zenda* type, and were ready for something better later.

When we did not understand anything we ignored

it. Looking through one's childhood books later is an odd experience. One finds that one must have read only about half, but thought one had read it all. (If there were too many unintelligible words we just called the book "nasty" and abandoned it.) "Soporific" lettuces in *The Flopsy Bunnies*, for example. I read the story again and again, but must have quite passed over the lettuces, for I was surprised to find that passage later on.

As time went on I came across one or two books which gave me a faint sense of guilt. One was a book on biology by Haeckel. I did not read it, but there was a page of photographs of the human fœtus at monthly intervals. It was a little reptilian creature with an enormous bent head, staring eyes, a pot belly, paws for hands and feet and a great spine; but as the months went on it became more and more human-looking. It fascinated me, but I told nobody that I had found the picture. Then I came across Renan's *Life of Jesus*, and was deeply shocked at the unbelieving attitude—the curt way the Resurrection was dismissed. But again I said nothing.

I had another shock when I read *Paradise Lost*. At this time, when I was about thirteen, I had realised that there was such a thing as literature, and an invincible morality made me determined to read only the best. Each evening, after tea, I allowed myself half an hour for "pleasure" reading before I started homework. But *Paradise Lost* was not exactly a pleasure. Apart from its length and the dullness to me of those resounding lines covering page after page, I was extremely shocked. Milton was a great poet. Therefore, what he said about heaven and hell

must be true. But they were dreary places with nothing but speech-making. I hoped I should not have to go to either of them yet. As for God the Father—he seemed narrow-minded and bad-tempered. He depressed me.

The result of reading so much too early was that I assumed that any "good" or "great" book of prose was bound to be boring. Not poetry always. I was growing excited about that; but Scott, Thackeray, Kingsley, Charles Reade—what an effort they were! George Eliot and Dickens were a little better, but still there was a struggle to get through the first chapters. *Jane Eyre* was probably the only book that we both enjoyed and knew to be "literature." It was not till my late teens that I discovered with a little shock of surprise that good books really were "good."

Cooking was a duty rather than a pleasure; but we got a good deal of pleasure out of it. When mother was away we used to fill jam-tarts up to the brim with jam, because she never put enough—and afterwards spent a long time scraping the boiled-over jam off the tins—and made pancakes very small and thin so that we could have the pleasure of six or seven each with lemon and sugar to each. It was always nicer to make cakes than pastry; for you put in cakes anyhow and they rose to the right shape, while you put in pastry nicely rolled and shaped and it swelled into something different. And then, if a cake broke when you were taking it out, you could, in those good old days, hastily fit the pieces together and ice it.

My younger sister and I were quite good cooks

till we began to try experiments. The trouble was we used our reason, founded on *a priori* tenets. I remember arguing to myself that raspberries were nice. Therefore, they must make a cake nice. I tried it. I mixed my cake in the usual way, but stirred in uncooked raspberries instead of dried fruit. The result was disappointing—a heavy cake with little damp browny-pink holes where the raspberries had been.

Well, then, what about jam? Jam was nice, too. One day I stirred quantities and quantities of black-currant jam into a cake. You would think it would have been bound to flavour the thing. Actually, it coloured it; made it look rich and chocolaty. But the cake did not taste of chocolate. It tasted of almost nothing.

When we were older Mother used to go to church on Sunday mornings, leaving Rosemary or me to cook the dinner. Mother on her Sunday cooking mornings had always made a covered apple-tart, with currants and spice added. We asked ourselves: Why not put in more nice things? The more the nicer. We began a rivalry. Every Sunday each outdid the other by putting one more thing into the tart. We mixed in golden syrup, jam, lemon curd, marmalade, fresh fruit, dried fruit, spices and even cut-up sweets. There came a Sunday when Rosemary announced triumphantly that she had put seventeen things into the tart. The family tasted it, and there was rebellion. "Like chicken-food," somebody said. So we began to discover that art lies in limitation.

In our adolescence, in the long summer holidays, came desires to make life more interesting. Suppose

you stayed up all night and slept in the day! Suppose you walked tremendous distances! Rosemary and I tried one adventure—a walk of six or seven miles one dusty summer afternoon to pinewoods that always before we had reached by train. It was rather fun at first, with an early start and sandwiches in a bag and instead, when we got to a certain distance, of turning round and coming back, a continuation along unfamiliar roads. We sat in a field and ate our tea, and found wild strawberries and ate those too. Then we went on among trees and fields.

But it was hot; and we had forgotten that there are such things as blistered heels. We began to limp. We had done, I suppose, with detours, seven or eight miles. Finally, we reached the woods; only we were too tired to enjoy them. And we had had our tea. There was little to do and a train back quite soon. We caught it. We, the heroines, arrived home at something after six—far sooner than we were expected. Nobody was much impressed.

We were late in cycling, partly because we were poor and bicycles were expensive, and then walking was a family tradition. My first ride ended in disaster; I practised in a lane, and found it difficult to get off. So I continued wobbling down hill along a narrow tree-shaded road. Farther and farther from home I went, trembling a bit but putting off the moment of getting off to turn my bicycle. Then came a car skirting me, and whether it came too close or I wobbled I did not know. All I knew was that I was off and the bicycle crumpled up. The car—as cars always seem to do to cyclists—stopped for a minute

and then went on, and I was left with the crumpled bicycle miles from home.

It would not wheel front-ways ; only backwards. So I started a slow and odd progress, wheeling it backwards with the front wheel up in the air. Presently there came a clopping behind me—a bright little ice-cream cart with a pony. Here was a good Samaritan. He picked me and the bicycle up, and, hearing of the accident, promised to deliver me at home. And he did.

But so conventional is youth that—though I had done some pounds' worth of damage to the bicycle and though I had escaped death by inches (as the man who repaired the bicycle said later)—my chief shame as we clopped up the road was my vehicle. Suppose the elegant neighbours looked out of their windows and saw me returning in an ice-cream cart!

The cycle was repaired, and made longer excursions possible. The limits of our world fell back and we went over the winding bungalow-spotted roads of Surrey. But one excursion I remember particularly. It was a secret, a dawn, excursion. It was conceived in those long summer holidays when the trees were heavy with foliage and the air was thick and oppressive and there was not enough to do. It was again an attempt to ginger up life. I thought, "I've never seen a sunrise over fields. It would be nice to see the sunrise right away from anywhere." That desire to "get away" was always strong in adolescence.

I made a secret resolution to get up at five. It was not easy, of course. It meant waking at intervals all

night, and getting up when you were just sleepy and comfortable. But I did it. And I sneaked down quietly so that nobody heard me.

It was a grey but a surprisingly light world when I unbolted the back door. I should have to cycle like mad to reach the fields in time. But dawns are long in early August. I raced along roads and lanes, and the sun waited for me. The sky was grey; then the clouds parted a little; then they were tinged with pink. Then there was a streak of gold on the horizon. I stood at a field-gate as I had intended, and saw the clear neutral world take on colour, and the sun, a lemonish glow, appear over a rather paltry fringe of dried grass stems and dusty hawthorn.

But then it hid among cloud. The cloud drew together again, so that there was a uniform grey all over the sky. I got on to my bicycle and went on to see the world, but presently a drop fell. Then many. I reached a small town, and stood under an arch while the rain teemed down. The world had become ordinary and dreary. Early workers hurried by with absorbed looks and collars pulled up. The gutter dimpled under wet tickets and old newspapers.

In the end I had to come home. I got very wet. It was a little after seven when I entered the house again. The house was still and dim. Nobody seemed to have moved; but Mother heard me as I went up. She called me, and I drifted into her bedroom. She was still in bed, and the curtains were drawn, and it was exactly as if it were still night. I sat on her linen-chest and casually told her how far I had been—leaving out the sun part because that was secret. She seemed interested.

And I, with the sense of that early world now comfortably behind—a glimpse of something special while the others were lying in bed—suddenly felt a heroine and elated.

SCHOOL

THE MEMORY of my first school is clearer than of my second. The first had only six children. It was easy to grasp. But also in my second school I was always afraid; and fear does not leave a clear memory.

About a mile from us, down the hill and under the arch, was a retired road with narrow gabled houses and high front steps. In one of them lived two sisters who had been taught by our mother at a local school, and now were grown up. Miss May Smyth gave music-lessons; Miss Marjorie Smyth took kindergarten pupils. Miss May Smyth was older, dark and rather brisk. Miss Marjorie Smyth was fairer and gentler. She had a thin face and a habit of using both hands and slightly moving the tip of her nose with her handkerchief when she blew it, which we found highly genteel.

Barbara had started at the school at the age of six. She had not entirely enjoyed it. Some older girls were there then—almost women; nine or ten—who used to bully her. In their mid-morning lunch-hour they used to chase her round the little garden and not let her stop, rather as I had chased the hen. However, she said nothing to anybody about this; not even to me.

She did, on the other hand, cry in public about

"Greenland's icy mountains." Miss Smyth had given her the hymn to learn for homework, and she could not remember it. In the end our father sent a note, saying she was a bit too young to understand about "the heathen in his blindness," and might she be excused? She was. But meanwhile I, in my anxiety to excel, had been fascinated by the hymn and learnt it then or just afterwards and know it to this day.

Unaware of the bullies and already poaching on Barbara's lessons, I had no objection to beginning school. And luckily for me the big girls had left. I was never chased round the back garden. However, even without them, and though I domineered privately, I was abject enough on that first morning. I stood in the dark passage. Barbara had vanished into the schoolroom chatting with friends. I held my coat, and the pegs seemed miles above my head, and I didn't know what I was supposed to do. Then I heard a soft voice above me.

"Shall I hang it up for you darling?"

It was Miss Smyth. Later, at lunch-time, we used to compare her with all the beautiful things we could think of, and write on the blackboard that she was our pearl, our lily, our rose. We adored her. But she probably never knew how much, or what perfection her kindness seemed to me on that first day.

The schoolroom itself would not compare in interest with a present infant-school. It was chilly, with a small fire in an old-fashioned grate and the window wide, for Miss Smyth told us that you felt the draught more when a window was nearly shut than when it was well open. I suppose this is true. I took it for granted then. The five or six of us sat

round a table with a green-grey cloth with ink-splashes on it. Miss Smyth sat at the end. In one corner was a cupboard with sliding doors holding our books and slates. It was too high for us to reach, and Miss Smyth had to get our things down for us.

Outside the schoolroom the house was mysterious. We had to be quiet, because Miss Smyth's old mother was somewhere about. She wore black and looked like Queen Victoria, but we hardly ever saw her. Sometimes we ventured into the mysteries when we wanted to go to the lavatory. Then we encountered something that gave us great pleasure—the bead curtains. We had to go through two lots when we went upstairs. They were composed of heavy strings of long brown and blue beads, and they clicked as we passed through them. They seemed to shut that dark upstairs away into an exotic life of its own.

Then there was the conservatory, up four wooden steps opposite the front door. We waited there when it was wet and we were being called for with umbrellas. It was one of the most beautiful places I had ever seen. It had a clear grey light with the rain pattering on the glass, and a damp tropical smell. The floor was of wooden slats, and there were rows of tiny pots on the shelves—of cactuses, the first we had seen. There were tiny cactus trees of a bright green, and spider-web cactuses, and cactuses that grew out of one another in lumps. To add to the mystery of the place was a fine little creature with a snout and a tail. Miss Smyth said it was a skeleton of a sea-horse, which her brother had brought "from

abroad." I only half believed her, knowing, at the age of six, that horses did not live in the sea.

Another interesting thing in the house was Alice, the maid. She was a pale woman, with bits of hair trailing down her neck. But she was very proud of one feature; she had a brown eye and a blue eye. When nobody was looking she used to squat down in front of us so that we could study her eyes. We thought that very kind of her.

Miss Smyth gave us a "good grounding." We began with the Lord's Prayer in the morning, said by Miss Smyth in a special reverent voice while we closed our eyes and drooped our heads. Then we read a passage of the Bible, taking a verse each. Then we started work on our slates, using grey slate pencils, which came off whitish, and small perpetually wet sponges which got grey themselves and smelt in hot weather. On one side of the slate we wrote out our tables, ruling careful lines down and across and going as far as we knew.

I still remember Miss Smyth saying to Peggy Pears and me, "Now work out your twelve-times," and there was already so much on the slate that our twelve-times strayed over on to the other side. Mine was quite right. Peggy had one mistake, and Peggy was older than I! My pleasure at this first twelve-times was partly due to my immense triumph, but also, I remember, to the fact that we were going on to something fresh, opening new doors. So often I was to have that pleasure of new things at my various schools, and so often the expectation was disappointed. It was not only the nature of the teaching, though that probably might have been

improved. It is that the first step in any subject is the easiest and most exciting, and after that comes the hard labour.

On the other side of the slate, turning it up longways, we wrote the word "Avoirdupois," with a line under it, not having any idea what it meant. Then we wrote out inches, feet and yards, gills, pints and quarts, ounces, pounds and hundredweights and other tables. When these had received Miss Smyth's firm tick we were glad to wipe our slates and put them away. "Avoirdupois" did not exactly appeal to the imagination.

Our following studies were varied. There might be "Transcription"—which simply meant copying out—in exercise books. There might be geography, which consisted of learning by heart the English counties, county towns and rivers. With what energy we would begin: "Northumberland, Newcastle, Tyne; Cumberland, Carlisle, Eden; Durham, Durham, Weir," but after that we forgot. Our history was from a slim book which gave fewer than two pages to each reign, from William the Conqueror onwards, with the result that we got through quite a number of years. Miss Smyth was very pitiful about Prince Arthur and Hugo who came to blind him, her voice taking the same reverent tone as she used for the Lord's Prayer. Or there might be French from a pink book with line illustrations of the 'nineties. It was about "la petite Sophie et ses souris," with additions on "le canif de mon frère."

We were at school only for mornings, with a break in the middle when we had milk and wrote lovely things about Miss Smyth on the board. I

cannot remember the time ever hanging ; probably we had too much individual attention. But I do remember a moment of shame. Barbara, drawing a map, kept on tilting her chair and humming. She was always noisy. We hated her humming at home anyhow. Miss Smyth twice said, "Be quiet, dear," and twice the tilting and noise began again. So the third time it was :

"Put your pencil down, dear."

There was deep silence. We both blushed. That was enough to quell us. We had been well dragooned at home.

When holidays came we asked Miss Smyth if she could lend us any books to read. Once she laughed and said, "Yes, fairy-tales," and I was filled with bliss, for at that time I loved fairy-tales better than anything else. She reached up to the cupboard, and brought down a thick brown book that looked as if it had hundreds of stories. And then she opened it, and it was a joke, for the book was in French! I remember my disappointment, and my realisation then that if I wanted to read everything that was nice I must learn other languages, a realisation that made me experiment a good deal with language-learning later.

I don't think we felt much affection for the other children at school. Four children at home is enough. My chief companion was Peggy Pears, who had a thin pale face, and delicate features, and was very very quiet. She seemed to me very rich, too. She had a wonderful pencil-box, Japanese, with a coloured flower on the shiny top and three compartments. And she had a fountain pen, and pencils with

silver holders with deep blue or deep red bands round them. And once she told a lie. She came with a very thin pencil, and on the end was a silver knob and a shiny dark ruby. I admired it enormously —so much that she promised it to me. But when I asked for it later, she said she hadn't meant her promise. In my family it was a point of honour to keep our promises. I disliked and despised her.

Then there was Pet Lee, a girl of great social accomplishments, an only child, a real "pet." She handed round a postcard photograph of herself in a frilly dancing frock standing on the tips of her toes, with laces crossed round her ankles. When we saw the photograph we went through all sorts of contortions trying to stand on the tips of *our* toes, but we could never get up there. Mother consoled us by saying it must be "the shoes."

But soon we were to have some training ourselves in dancing—country dancing and physical culture. Miserable training, which began one of the worst periods of my life! It was after I had been at Miss Smyth's a term. Vaguely we heard conversations between mother and a teacher friend of hers. Then the fiat was announced. Every Wednesday afternoon Barbara and I were to go to a Miss Spring's physical culture classes in a Congregational Hall a tram-ride away. Miss Spring was known to the teacher friend. She was young, with a large chest, wavy pretty hair and a fresh complexion. She was trained in "Swedish drill," and on the strength of that had set up a kindergarten school. And on Wednesdays, while admiring mothers sat around, her pupils, dressed in

red costumes with knickers all in one, and black belts, very dashingly paraded.

In our blind way, not thinking much about it, we heard that we were to join them. Our red suits were made. It was arranged that on Wednesdays we were to have dinner with our grandparents who lived near, and then to catch a tram. We went. We said nothing. But it was hell.

All the other children knew one another. We knew nobody. We had to get into our red suits in the cloakroom. A bigger girl asked me how old I was. I was in such a state of nerves I just did not know. I pretended not to hear, but I was always afraid that she would ask me again. And then we came out into the hall, and Barbara and I, being new, didn't know what to do. We weren't any good at drill, anyhow. And then Miss Spring shouted at us. Once she told me "not to do the goose-step like an idiot."

Each Wednesday I tried to think how I could evade the class. Did I feel sick? Of course I did—just at the thought of it. Could I increase the sickness into real sickness? Once I managed it, refusing Grannie's sausages and making such a fuss that I was sent to lie down and missed the class. But one couldn't do that every Wednesday.

When I think back on those times I am convinced that children should not be made to do what they hate. They suffer a great deal, and they get nothing from it. But then, did our parents know that we hated Miss Spring's gymnastics? Probably not. Probably we never said what we felt.

Then something worse happened. Miss Smyth's school was dwindling away. Old children left and

new did not come. Finally, Barbara, Peggy Pears and I were the only survivors. It was not worth Miss Smyth's while to continue. She told us, with some artificial cheerfulness, that she was going to join her brother "in business."

And we? It was obvious. We had been going to Miss Spring's classes. Miss Spring was college-trained and a friend of a friend. There was her kindergarten waiting, with thirty girls or more. We two older ones should now do afternoon school, and Rosemary, not quite six, would come with us, attend school in the morning and rest in the afternoon. Our parents were satisfied, and we never thought of protesting.

So there began a curious dreamlike period for me—dreamlike because I was perpetually frightened. It seems that the things you remember are the things that happen when your faculties are alert. Mine were paralysed. Miss Smyth had told mother that I was a clever child. I doubt whether Miss Spring thought so.

It was fairly comfortable for Rosemary. She worked with the babies in a downstairs room with a piano, small chairs and bright pictures of children in different national costumes. Kind, white-haired Miss Bell took her; and in the afternoon she rested on Miss Spring's bed. But Barbara and I were in the upstairs room, and all day we had to endure Miss Spring's tempers.

There was one salvation. She had a very bad memory. She never knew what she had said. Thus at the beginning of the term she divided the fifteen children upstairs into an upper and lower division. She hesitated about me, and I did not know where I

belonged and was afraid to ask. So I learnt with whichever division was being taught, involved in a series of double lessons of two grades. Miss Spring did not notice. For weeks I was expecting to be found out and shouted at. Finally, I enrolled myself definitely in the upper class, and nothing was said.

With Miss Spring we studied "nature," and we were supposed to keep a diary. We had to draw earthworms—which should not have been difficult, but mine were wavering and first bulged, then were thin. Once we were told to take our books home and draw something we saw in the week-end. I kept watch, it seemed, for a very long time, but—it was bound to happen—I saw absolutely nothing. I might have been living in the Sahara. Finally, I cheated. I made up a blackbird, and added the lie that I had seen it in our shrubbery. That put another burden on conscience.

For that was the trouble. We were still at the age when we thought all adults were perfect. Therefore, if we did not get on with Miss Spring, it was our fault. And every lie we told made our hearts heavier.

The strange thing was that all Miss Spring's temper did not improve my memory. She made an edict that we were to leave books with homework exercises in her study before morning school. I wrote the compositions, but nothing could ever make me remember to leave my books early. I would find myself in the schoolroom, and school would begin, and then the pang would come. I had forgotten again. The book was still in my satchel. Once I tried in lunch-time to sneak into the study with it, but got such a withering lecture I never dared again. Some-

times when the passage was empty, Barbara, helping me, would go down on her stomach outside the study door to try to spy beneath if Miss Spring was absent, so that I could sneak in late without danger. Once she thought the room was empty and went in herself, and Miss Spring was there. But that time we were received quite affably. You never could tell with Miss Spring.

So I was finally driven to making up my own marks. When all the books had—or should have—been corrected, Miss Spring returned them, and then went round the class noting our marks. As I had not given in my book I made up mine, and she never knew. I had had a C at the beginning of the term. I went on giving myself C's. After some weeks I did remember to give the book in, and was surprised to find myself with an A. So possibly I failed to do myself justice. What my report was like for the term I can't imagine.

But needlework was the worst. I already knew I was not good at it. I was untidy ; and my two sisters were both interested and, in that way one has in a family to differentiate oneself, I became the duffer at it—and have been a duffer ever since. At the beginning of term Miss Spring handed out some pieces of coarse white cotton material and told us that we were going to do "drawn-thread-work." We had, she said, to count so many threads from the edge ; then to draw out so many threads and then, with needle and cotton, to loop up the weft that remained in little curtains. I understood all right, but I was full of fears. First, I was afraid I had not counted the right number from the edge. Then I was afraid I had

drawn out the wrong number of threads. And I was much too terrified to ask Miss Spring.

The other children got through their work quite quickly. I did not get through mine, for when I had come to the end I undid it again, just because I was afraid of showing Miss Spring. It was summer, and the lessons were in the afternoon and the work had begun by being white. It was not white at the end. So I grew more and more afraid of showing it. When Miss Spring went round I bent my head and tried to seem absorbed. And as she was careless she went by.

My desperation was so great that when two ladies appeared as visitors one afternoon I appealed to them. It was no good, of course ; but if I had been more aware of what that visit implied my heart might have lifted. For Miss Black and Miss Graham had come with the intention of taking over the school. Miss Spring was going.

I remember holding out my grey rag timidly to Miss Black as she wandered round. She was a middle-aged small woman with pince-nez, no chin and a chuckle. We were to be fond of her later.

"Show it to Miss Spring, my dear," she said. I was cast back into despair.

The next week the dreaded moment arrived. "Gwen," said Miss Spring, at last becoming aware of my existence, "let me see your work."

It felt like the end of the world ; and certainly she was pretty furious. She called me "a dirty little girl" and shouted, "Go and wash your hands at once."

But as I held my hands under the running tap in

the bathroom I can remember almost a sense of peace. It was at last over.

No doubt Miss Spring was well intentioned. Once, after she had blazed something fierce out at us, she stood in the hall as Rosemary came downstairs, put her arms round her and enquired, "Do you love me, darling?" What could any child do but perjure her soul and murmur, "Yes"? And once, when we were sitting eating our lunch in the dingy back garden, with its worn grass and ugly pillars supporting a veranda, she came out and asked if there were "any little rabbits here." I thought she literally meant what she said, and tried to conciliate her by getting up to hunt, peering hopefully into a green water-tank that had gone dry. But all she meant was: Would we like some lettuce? We thanked her humbly, but found the lettuce, actually as well as metaphorically, very bitter.

She left the school, I believe, because she had a good physical culture post offered her. The parents congratulated her, saying that Miss Spring was wonderful. They did not know what we knew. Sometimes I ask myself if children now are going through similar experiences.

When Miss Black and Miss Graham arrived the world for me suddenly woke up again. I began to notice things; know what I was doing; even enjoy learning. My memories are immediately much clearer.

We grew in our four years to have a feeling of friendliness for that upper classroom in the rather dull road of small villas. It was cold in winter; heated only by a gas-fire, so that sometimes Miss

Black would let us push our desks back and sit in a semi-circle round the fire, which we enjoyed. There were flowers on the mantelpiece, plenty of white paint, and a board on which were pinned the best paintings of the week—mainly paintings from "Nature" with Virginia-creeper leaves or wall-flowers.

But there were two decorations which particularly fascinated me. One was an illustration from *Hiawatha* in poster style, rather dark, in greys and browns. It showed an old Red Indian woman with a baby, a tent beside them. But it was not the picture that pleased me; it was the words underneath. "Who is it that lights the wigwam?" I had no idea who it was who lighted the wigwam, but there was a weird beauty in the words.

The other thing was a map of the world—a large map covering almost all the far wall. I knew nothing about the distortions of a map when the globe is flat. All I knew was that the South Pole and the seas round it, just on a level with my eyes, were vast and overwhelming. They were also a pale romantic blue. There was South Africa's stubby Cape of Good Hope going only a short way down. There was Australia's little group, clustering together away from the solitude. There was South America trailing forlornly into the great emptiness. Here and there were little dots of green islands, and right by the Pole inchoate shapes lettered vaguely with people's names and then a "land" after them. I used to stand and study the spaces, and feel a pleasant shudder of fear. It was so lonely; so dangerous; so cold.

We had no slates with Miss Black, and we got on

to money sums and further, though, not having a mathematical mind herself, she sometimes found things difficult to explain. She spent a long time, I remember, trying to explain to Barbara, who also had no mathematical mind, what the difference between a number and its square was. But she took one and the square of one as an example!

Our geography was not the counties of England. We wandered about the world with tales of gold and wool. For history we started with William the Conqueror again—how many times does one start with him in one's school career?—but learnt him a little more thoroughly. And in French, la petite Sophie gave place to la petite Charité—a fairy story. We learned to read simple French, but we could not have pronounced it much, for I remember when I went on to a secondary school at eleven having an argument with a classmate on the word *voilà*. I "knew"; but had been away while the class learnt to pronounce it from phonetics.

"It's pronounced 'wolly'," said Gertrude loftily.

"It's pronounced 'voylar'," I contradicted.

But the lesson we liked best was just "reading." On one morning a week, from twelve to half-past, Miss Black settled herself before the class, opened a book at her marker and produced heaven. Heaven consisted of Scott and Longfellow — *Marmion, The Lay of the Last Minstrel, Hiawatha, Evangeline.* I don't know if Miss Black read well. I only know that we looked forward to that reading as to no serial, no other pleasure. Perhaps it was the verse rhythms. Sometimes we nearly cried, and when the clock's relentless hand reached the half-hour at

the bottom we held our breath, hoping that Miss Black would not notice and would go on for a few minutes into the dinner-hour.

We might have had more reading if it had not been for Rosemary. It was her atrocious spelling. The upper room was still divided into two grades, and Rosemary was now in the lower grade. Before our reading the young ones had dictation, and when it was done Miss Black would go from book to book correcting the mistakes. The more the mistakes the longer the correcting, and perhaps she was always over-hopeful, for she never left enough time to get round and was still bending and underlining and clucking her tongue when the hand was on twelve. With fury in our hearts we would watch it move on to five, to ten past. And once Rosemary had twenty-one mistakes, and it was nearly a quarter past before reading began. We could have killed her. We tried coaching her at home, but she was a poor pupil.

Again, I don't remember being particularly fond of any child at school. There was the mischievous boy who inked our necks when he sat behind us, the little girls who lifted our frocks to see what kind of knickers we were wearing, the eccentric child with the squint, who had been brought up in India and had never heard of Cinderella, and the mother's darling who never had to eat margarine, even in war-time. The girl I chiefly formed an alliance with was Gladys Griggs, who had a square red face and a mannish abruptness and sat next to me. One day we were repeating "The Church's One Foundation" to one another. We had to learn it for homework.

"She is his new creation
By water and by word."

"Silly thing!" said Gladys. "By water and by word! Whatever does that mean?"

I did not ask her if she knew what the hymn meant anyhow.

We used to eat a sandwich dinner in the little ones' downstairs room or in the shabby garden behind. The eccentric girl with the squint used to eat it with us. Her parents were in India, and she lived with fond aunts who cut her chicken and other delicate sandwiches, while we had clumsy slices with Bovril and dripping or raspberry jam that soaked through the bread while the edges curled up. We had a mania for exchanging in those days. We exchanged pencils, pens, crosses for our Bibles—and sandwiches. We used to persuade Christina to give us her dainty cress triangles for our lumpy bits of bread, and she was good-natured, and for a time we all had extra variety—Christina's lunch mixed with our own. Then Christina's aunts heard and sent a message that it was to stop. We were a little ashamed.

We could not play much in the small garden with its worn-out grass and one frail white lupin that always smelled of pepper. But there was one popular game that Barbara invented for mid-morning break. Crouching in the corner by the empty green water-tank she made an ugly face, curved her hands into claws, and intoned,

"I'm a-coming to join the dance.
I'm a-coming to join the dance."

She was a witch, and we were fairies racing past her. Now and then she would snatch at us or rush

out, and we would all huddle screaming into the far corner. It was a popular game because it was so terrifying, but unfortunately it was noisy too.

Miss Black came out very annoyed. "I cannot have you making that din. You are all to come in at once and sit in your chairs quietly for the rest of the lunch-hour."

The witch straightened herself and walked in blushing at the tail of the procession.

At the end of our four years with Miss Black, Barbara and I were the top girls and the school felt like home. But then we changed to a secondary school, and I found that I was not at all grown-up, but just as much afraid. There were the same old-new trials—fear of crossness, fear of things going wrong.

What is one to do, for example, if one is bulb-monitress and waters very conscientiously—so conscientiously that one day one sees a spot of green mould on the skin of one of the daffodil bulbs? Perhaps it will go. Perhaps it won't go. One lies awake at night. The daffodils are coming up luxuriously, but still that spot of mould is there. Finally, conscience wins.

"Miss Lancaster, I think there's a spot of mould on one of the bulbs."

She seems amused. I realise that perhaps my crime is not as great as I thought. Later the bulbs flower perfectly.

Or there is the time when I am about fifteen when the head mistress, who believes in treating the Bible as history, offers to let us study any book of it we

like. By this time I love poetry, and I have heard that one book is full of poetry. I put up my hand.

"The Song of Solomon," I request.

She ignores me.

RELIGION

OUR FATHER'S FAMILY was rather pious, our mother's very pious, and so we were early familiar with church. Indeed, my grandmother would later recall my first Matins. I was five, and I sang "We plough the fields and scatter" at the top of my voice two lines ahead of everyone else.

From about the age of six onwards Barbara and I went to St. Matthew's regularly. St. Matthew's lay down a pleasant avenue with lime trees and gardens, and it had a whitish spire which looked nice from a distance, but I never felt much affection for it. Perhaps it was because we sat so far back in our grandparents' pew. Dressed in our Sunday best of, in summer, starched white muslin frocks with broderie anglaise and straw hats trimmed with artificial roses or buttercups, and, in winter, velveteen coats with felt hats trimmed with artificial cherries, we could see only adult backs which were wearing *their* Sunday best which was not nearly as interesting, mainly black with some women's hats which hid our view.

We were, however, aware of prestige, for our grandfather was a sidesman and used to collect. During the last hymn he would glide quietly out of his place and presently appear behind us, accompanied by chinks. Then the soft little bag with

sticking-out handles would arrive at our row, and we would slip our pennies in and hand it back to him, carefully avoiding his eyes and looking distrait. When he had finished his beat he would return noiselessly to the back of the aisle, and then somehow forming into couples with three other gentlemen, walk with a world of dignity in his white beard, black coat and well-polished boots up to the clergyman waiting to bless our gifts.

Indeed, Grandpa was dignified all through the service. Other people brought Prayer books. Grandpa brought quite a pile of books. One was a book of the Lessons, a well-worn leather-covered volume, in which, before the service, he would carefully find the place, showing us with emphasis where he put in his marker. Then, when "Here beginneth the — Lesson" resounded, he would open the book and motion to the child next to him to share. The child found the type pleasantly large after the double-columned pages of the Prayer Book, but got rather a neck-ache and rather missed the sense of the lesson, waiting for the moment when Grandpa, having moistened his thumb in his white beard, neatly turned a page.

Secretly, we were bored with Matins, and always hoped that we should not have the Litany to make it longer. And there seemed a lot of inconsequential things about that morning service. Why in the General Confession did we start with "we"—"We have erred and strayed"—and end up with "they." "Spare thou them who confess their faults"? And why, in the Absolution, did the clergyman, beginning by addressing God, suddenly start talking *about*

God—"He pardoneth and absolveth . . ." ? And then the King obtruded rather startlingly in the Responses —"Oh Lord, save the King. *Answer :* "And mercifully hear us when we call upon Thee." The two hardly seemed connected. And then that psalm we sang nearly every Sunday, "Oh come let us sing unto the Lord," what an unchristian end it had—"Unto whom I swear in my wrath that they should not enter into my rest." It seemed to me that the congregation wailed those words as if they were very sorry.

All through the service we were unconsciously looking for something allied to our own world—and finding precious little. We welcomed the psalm, "Oh all ye works of the Lord bless ye the Lord," not only because it was easier to sing but because of the Nature notes : "Oh ye sun and moon . . . Oh ye stars of heaven . . . Oh ye showers and dew." But the psalms, on the whole, though they were written by people in God's confidence, we found forbidding. Alien people ; alien landscape : "I am become like a pelican in the wilderness : and like an owl that is in the desert . . . Mine enemies revile me all the day long." And so on, warbled by black suburban backs, with, outside, sunshine flickering over gardens of delphiniums and rambler roses. The two worlds simply did not go together.

It was the same with the Lessons. One tried to like them, and one did not. The Parables nearly always had something unfair in them. The fighting and God's curses were bloodthirsty. I took the Book of Revelation as literal truth, and its beasts and famine and blood filled me with uneasiness. I only hoped it would not all happen yet. And Isaiah's

angels with their six wings—"With twain he covered his face, and with twain he covered his feet and with twain he did fly"—what monsters! However, since the Bible said so they must be in heaven, I preferred fairyland.

The hymns, on the whole, were much better—especially the last hymn with the organ roaring, everyone singing heartily and thoughts ahead of lamb and raspberry pie for dinner. Some of the lines will always remain beautiful to me:

Before Him on the mountains
Shall peace the herald go.

and

Casting down their golden crowns
Around the glassy sea

and

O'er earth's wide fields, and ocean's wave-beat shore

and

The golden evening
Brightens in the we-est.

It was mainly, again, the Nature touches that I enjoyed, and there was also the pathetic motif

Lone and dreary, faint and weary
Through the desert Thou didst go.

and the pomp. People are quite wrong in thinking that children like simplicity. That comes only with maturity. I hated

Now the day is over

which seems to me so neat now. I hated

We are but little children weak.

I was not a weak child. I was a big girl. What I really liked was

The Potentate of Time
Creator of the Rolling Spheres,
Ineffably sublime.

As for the sermon, I can remember nothing about it in those early days. It must have been wasted effort as far as we were concerned.

Once a month, again dressed in our Sunday best, we attended an afternoon children's service at St. Matthew's. It was a different church then, for few children were there and we all sat right in front where we could examine the grim expression of the wooden eagle holding the lectern's Bible on his outspread wings. Another mystery : Why did they make such a fierce bird for a church? But I did like the stone panels to the choir. I did not see them as stone. They were in streaks and folds of dark grey, making patterns like the sea in Chinese paintings. I knew nothing of Chinese painting, but I used to imagine them as great waves and be carried away in imagination on those rolling billows as I was carried away by the South Pole at school. I should have agreed then with the child who once said to me that her favourite words were "far away."

Mr. Pinson was a lay-reader, and his services were not exciting. We had some childish prayers and hymns "For the Young" which I despised. Then he would come forward and stand on the chancel steps, an ample surplice round his stout form and a small card in his large red hand. He is connected in my mind both with Father Christmas and a benevolent bear ; he had a small moustache and a shiny bald head and an impediment in his speech that did not go with the rest of him. He told us stories from the

Bible, I believe, but again I cannot remember one thing he said. At the end he went down to the swing door and shook hands with each of us. His hand was what one might have expected, warm and benevolent with a firm pressure.

Every summer Mr. Pinson staged a dramatic event. The children were asked to bring flowers for hospitals. The flowers we always seemed to take were Seven Sister roses—those creamy little prolific roses with a sweet but not quite roselike scent. During the service we eyed other children's bunches to see if they were better than ours. They generally seemed to be. At the end we all had to march up the aisle and offer our gifts to Mr. Pinson, so that finally he stood with an armful of nosegays. We were glad. We respected him very much.

On our way home from the children's service we used to call on our nervous grandmother. She was very fond of us, and, though we had probably been at church with her in the morning, she liked to see us again. Sitting in her warm little front room with china dogs on the mantelpiece and the parish magazine on the little table by the aspidistra, she would ask us gently:

"Do you love Jesus, darling?"

What could one answer but a blushing yes? Her talk about Jesus or "gentle Jesus" always embarrassed us, much more so than the mention of God. There was something much more personal in Jesus than God.

It was those afternoon services that introduced us to "The Scripture Union." The Scripture Union meant to us a folded closely-printed card with every day of the year and a suggested Bible reading (about

ten verses) next to it. Each day, if you joined the Union, as we did, you had to read a passage of Scripture. The card was not inviting to children of seven or eight. Nor were our Bibles, though mine (given to me on my sixth birthday) was better than most with a bright blue cover and rather faded blotchy photographs of a coin of the time of Tiberius and an Arab grinding corn. The one thing that made our Bible readings sweet were our celluloid cross book-markers. We had a passion for them. They were cool and slightly transparent—crosses in ornate shapes with lettering in gold or silver saying "Holding fast" or "Hold Thou me up." They were twined with roses or blue flowers, or sometimes shaded into faint purples with greens, and there was silver or gold ornamentation on them and a silken tassel at the bottom. They were charming in a way nothing after childhood is charming, and we exchanged them at school, so that sometimes we had two or more in our Bibles.

But even those and tender consciences did not make us good members of the Scripture Union. We would fall behind, and then make a great spurt and catch up and do a week ahead—and then fall behind again. In the end we ceased to go to the afternoon services and so ceased to collect the cards at the New Year.

At about the same age we attended on Wednesday evenings what we used to call "missionary meetings." Some ladies of the district had the idea of interesting the young in missions overseas, and one of the ladies was a friend of our parents. We were called the Y.P.U. (Young People's Union) and we met in a

hall in what, in our self-sufficient way, we considered a "poor" district. There were little general shops round, and little red villas with pocket-handkerchief gardens ; and on summer evenings big boys would be loafing in the road.

The hall itself, a church hall, was not very inviting either. It was vast with a high roof and high windows down two sides and a platform at the far end. The light was always yellow and glaring. The unpolished wooden floor stretched away bare except for stacked wooden chairs at the back and a frail double line of chairs under the platform. Those were for us.

We came in, left our coats on the stacked chairs and sat under the platform with perhaps ten or a dozen other children and one or two ladies. Two ladies emerged on the platform. One announced a hymn, a favourite being, as I thought, "Let the sun go round the earth. Jesus Christ is King"—sentences which were not only somewhat disconnected but hardly scientific. I have concluded since that the "sun" was "song." We sang rather timidly as we were few and the hall was large, while the piano was played in a dashing manner by the other lady. Then we stood, clasped our hands in front of us and said the Lord's Prayer in a breathless murmur. Then we separated into groups, drawing our chairs into circles ; and finally we had another prayer and separated through the swing doors into what invariably seemed a wet night.

Soon after we started, the leader of the missionary meeting—charming, she was, with a soft voice and pink and white complexion—got married. At the

age of six I was the youngest member, and so was selected to present her with the Y.P.U. present—a clock. The ceremony took place in her garden—a great parklike garden, for she was very rich, and you nearly got lost among the lawns and shrubberies. My father coached me in what I was to say, and I remember standing on the lawn in a small group of people, and Miss Billing being there before I saw her, and somebody turning me by the shoulders and my saying my sentence about "accepting" and "good wishes." They told me I did it well and I was kissed and petted, but I was less successful in a subsequent conversation.

"How old are you?" one of the ladies asked.

"Six."

"And how old is your sister?"

"Six months older."

I had no idea why they laughed.

The missionary meeting provided varied activities. I kept for many years a certificate decorated with palm-trees which said that I, aged six, had passed some Church Missionary Society examination with the minimum necessary marks. I was not depressed about the minimum marks, since some of the older girls did not pass at all.

Then we took part in the Christianisation of Britain. It was in a series of tableaux arranged for our families and friends. I was Queen Bertha, sitting on the platform in long blue silk with my king beside me, and Augustine had come in, and I, already Christian, had to kneel and ask for a blessing. Our missions roved about in time as well as place.

Once a year we held a bazaar for the heathen, and

we children were provided with circles of cardboard and wool to make woolly balls for babies. It was pleasant to sit winding and winding until the hole in the middle of the cardboard was filled up. Then one of the ladies took big scissors and cut the wool round and bound it and slipped it off the cardboard, and there—I shall never forget the surprise—was a many-coloured soft ball. We were a little disappointed later to see our balls on sale for twopence or threepence only. Mother said they ought to have been more expensive.

Sometimes we cut out pictures of kraals or pagodas and stuck them into scrapbooks. Sometimes the lady who took our group told us missionary history. One conversation comes back to me out of the blue because of the embarrassment it caused me.

"Who is your greatest hero?" asked the lady going round the ring.

"The Black Prince," said Barbara.

Now that was too bad, since the Black Prince was *my* favourite hero. I racked my brain, waiting for my turn. Should I say King Arthur or . . . ?

"And yours, Gwen?"

"The Duke of Wellington," I said hastily. He was somehow connected with the Black Prince as having won battles.

After a time, when the glamour of novelty had worn off, we did not much like the missionary meetings. They were an effort after school, and the rough boys used to shout at us as we went home. So our father sent a note, and we gave the meetings up.

At home we dabbled in religion. We were taught

prayers and said them regularly, having the impression that if you gabbled them with your mind on something else it was more acceptable to the Throne of Heaven than not saying them at all. We did not say grace at meals—except that Grandpa, when we went to dinner at his house, said very shortly, "For what we are about to receive may the Lord make us truly thankful. May I give you a little mutton, Cis?" We were embarrassed by our friends who did say grace. I was always secretly afraid that I should be asked to say it. But in one family we knew we were safe. The father always said it—a long personal grace—and he had invented his own invariable formula to bridge over the gulf between sacred and secular at the end.

"Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. Up Guards and at 'em."

On Sunday evening Mother used to play hymns, elegantly sounding the bass chords a little after the treble—a performance we used irreverently to call "perlonkety-plonk." She used to gather us round to sing, and did her best to foster our gifts. Barbara had, Mother said, "a pretty voice," and I, who could not keep tune, had "a deep voice." She played "Eternal Father strong to save," for my deep voice, and I liked it with its sound of storm and have ever since regarded it as "my" hymn.

I was always pedantic. One day I pointed out to Mother that the hymn-book did not know how to spell. It put, "All glory, laud and honour," whereas, of course, the line was a polite address to God:

All glory, lord, and honour.

I was also anxious for instruction. At the age of six I asked the meaning of

The manifold temptations
That death alone can cure.

Mother told me they were lines she never liked, and, anyhow, I would understand later. Immediately the hymn took on some vast mystery to me—a mystery which in fact it has not.

A romantic picture remains to me of that hymn-singing, Mother raising her hands dashingly and the evening sun sloping through our greenhouse glass. We did not keep only to A. and M. Mother had some revivalist hymns from a deaconess aunt of hers, and it was two of those which seemed most wild, most beautiful, to me.

When He cometh, when He cometh
To make up His jewels . . .
Like the stars of the morning
The night sky adorning
They shall shine in their beauty,
His loved and his own.

Even more solemn with its weight of monotony was the invitation :

Shall we gather at the river,
The beautiful, the beautiful, the river?
Shall we gather at the river
That flows by the Throne o-of God?
Yes, we'll gather at the river . . .

We knew the Pilgrim's Progress story. I always connected the beautiful river with death.

From nine to fourteen I must have been very, very pious. I remember kneeling on the kitchen floor cleaning Peter's shoes and instructing Rosemary

who stood before me. I disapproved, I said, of the hymn that ran :

> But when I see Thee as Thou art
> I'll praise Thee as I ought.

That was not good enough. One ought to praise God properly in this world too. Rosemary, for once, was impressed. She said she agreed with me.

A little later I changed my church. In the eyes of our grandfather our nervous grannie had one serious fault. She had "high" tendencies. There was good low St. Matthew's with their pew waiting for them ; but Grannie liked an occasional trip to places where there was incense and a changing of vestments. She was strong-willed in her vague way, and finally they compromised. She should attend St. Matthew's every Sunday evening, but in the morning she should go to St. Mark's, which was not high but higher. As she never went out alone an escort was needed. So I went with her, and Barbara stayed with Grandpa.

I did not mind those Sunday-morning excursions, though they had certain eccentricities. To begin with I started an hour beforehand to walk less than a mile. For Grannie moved only at a snail's pace, and she liked to "get her breath" before the service—which meant arriving half an hour early. It was a queer little figure I called for—in a black satin coat pinched at the waist, a long black skirt, boots and bonnet of the eighteen-nineties with black sequins and black ribbon strings. She stooped very much, so that I was already taller. At every crossing we waited minutes and minutes with many glances in both directions

lest a bicycle should be coming. For a religious woman she was strangely afraid of death.

Arm in arm with many flutterings lest there should be snakes about we crept up the hill. St. Mark's lay embowered in trees, and the scent of lime-flowers reminds mé of it now. Once inside, Grannie became remarkably bold. There were free seats in front, and she was a little deaf and liked to hear ; so she led me each Sunday morning to the front pew but one, ignoring the sidesmen who came forward to find us a place. I had begun to have fainting fits ; so mother told me to "sit down in the Psalms." I imagine the well-to-do congregation, if they noticed us, must have considered us a queer pair—she in her old bonnet and I blushingly seated in front while everybody else stood up.

We were united in our devotion to the vicar. Grannie said he smiled at me. That touched my heart. He was a middle-aged man with a dulcet voice, given to preaching uplifting sermons. Now the sermon became for me the glory of the service. I waited for it with longing, and wished it would go on for ever. At the beginning of every service I had great pain with my feet. Whether I was growing fast and had too small shoes I do not know ; but in my Sunday best I suffered agonies. But gradually as the service went on the pain subsided, and when we reached the sermon it had gone, so that I could concentrate on spiritual matters.

I remember coming out recklessly among the twinkling green and yellow trees and feeling I was willing to walk straight into the road and be killed by a bicycle. The vicar had made heaven so sure and

so attractive. And once Jesus came out with me, and hovered behind me all Sunday and on into the Monday. I felt him closer than hands or feet when I walked across the kitchen to get the potato-peeler, and there was no happiness like it. All problems were wiped out. But he did not stay.

Grannie died after a few days of delirium with pneumonia when I was fourteen. I was with her a good deal of the time, and, though her actual death was something like the deaths in our pious stories—with a coming to herself, a regret that in her struggles she had been "unkind to Gwen"—yet what led up to it had nothing to do with "gentle Jesus." It was our first near death; our first sight of inexorable nature. At her funeral on a January day, in all the muddle of the shock, I was sub-consciously aware that the cheerful words, the thanks to God, did not really fit the event. But I said nothing; not even to myself.

Then Barbara and I were confirmed. And that was an experience of dreary disillusion. We were sent instructive books by aunts. One was called *Guide to Confirmees*, and our father said, "Confirmees! What a word!" We attended evening classes in St. Matthew's Vicarage. They were taken by a nervous curate, and tongue-tied great boys seemed our chief companions. At the end the curate said he would answer absolutely any question we liked to ask. I wanted to ask why, if God was good and all-powerful, there was any evil in the world. But I was too shy.

I remember on the evening before our Confirmation standing by our bedroom window in the dark

and thinking, "From tomorrow everything will be different." But in my heart of hearts I knew it would not; and this feeling of deception—of not being as exalted as I ought to be—continued and made everything distasteful. We put on our veils, which made us look like nurses, and people made a lot of fuss that they and our white dresses should be pretty. In the church we were mainly afraid of doing the wrong thing, and my thoughts were not at all holy. And how nice it was to get it all done and go home to tea!

It was the same at our first Communion—our mother and father coming with us, the instructions that we weren't to eat anything beforehand, the fear of doing something clumsy, the smell of wine which reminded me of public houses, the emotional attitude of everybody, the feeling, still deeply covered, that the whole thing was false. And there was again the relief of returning—to the respectful eyes of the younger two and a breakfast of sausage and fried bread.

I read my *Guide to Confirmees*. But I also read Shelley. And there was no question which I liked better.

For a time, however, we continued to go to church. Mother had begun to go in the morning, leaving the dinner to one of us, and she, like her mother previously, developed wanderlust. We sampled two little country churches, both with a dreary service but both with tree-shaded churchyards and fields round. Peter was now one of the party, and perhaps it was he who sent us off into such fits of laughter. We had become "superior," as Mother

said, and we used to imitate one vicar, who was a Welshman, and listen for his favourite phrases. Sometimes, sitting with our handkerchiefs in front of our mouths, we were almost sick with mirth, and Mother used to lecture us afterwards. Sometimes Peter, as well as taking string and fluff and marbles out of his pockets during the sermon, took a book inside his Prayer-Book and read it.

Finally the slow revolution came to a climax. We refused to go to church at all. Mother was hurt. Not only were we offending God ; we were deserting her. We used to have futile arguments on Sunday mornings.

"Now," she would say briskly, "hurry up and get ready."

"I'm not going."

"Now, come along. You know it's right to go."

"Why is it right?"

"Because the Bible says so."

Our arguments never got anywhere. Sometimes I went to please her, but felt furious as if I were acting a lie. In the Creed—"I believe in the resurrection of the body"—I kept my lips tightly closed, but I was in a very bad temper as we walked home. No ; it was unbearable. And then at last all I had been feeling gradually emerged into consciousness. I knew what I did not believe. The makeshifts, the uneasiness, were over. I had a wonderful sense of freedom. Church became something which had no longer any claims.

But I never said a word to Mother about my joy in my new freedom.

ILLNESS

WHEN, AT THE AGE of eight or nine, I got up in the morning I used to go over to the mirror. I could never be sure which way I preferred to look. Did I want to look rosy and pretty? Or did I want to look pale and pathetic? Generally, I wanted to look pale.

I didn't know why at the time. Now I know. There were four of us of much the same age, all striving for individual attention. To be ill was the chief way to get it.

We used to wash our faces hard in the morning and then go down to the kitchen. All our colour would be scrubbed away for a moment, and Mother would say, "How ghastly you look!" I liked that. I wanted pity.

And really, as far as I remember, half the time we did not know if we felt ill or not. Emotion made us sick. Peter said every morning as he went to school, "I feel a little ill, Mother." Once I got up feeling wretched and had an unpleasant shock when I got downstairs full of my woes to find that Barbara and Rosemary felt ill too—and they had got in first. I very sensibly decided that functions must be differentiated. I could not compete with them; so I would be nurse instead of patient. I read to them and waited on them all day, and at the end I was praised for being a good girl. And the odd thing was that when I had decided to be a nurse my ill feeling had gone.

Childhood seemed full of minor ailments—coughs, colds, sore throats, wounded knees, teeth

dropping out, blistered heels, sickness. When I was nine and in hospital with diphtheria the doctor asked me how I had felt in the first stages.

"Bilious," I said.

"Bilious," he answered rather sharply. "What do you mean by bilious?"

His tone made me think that it was a made-up word—one of those words that emerge, generally for unmentionable things, in families and have no existence in the outside world. I was ashamed, and enquired afterwards if "bilious" was only "our" word.

"No, of course, it was quite right," said Mother. I was glad to retain the word. It had been familiar from earliest youth.

It was not so bad being really ill. We would wake up with a rash on our chests, and go down to Mother and she would send us back to bed and call in the doctor. Then there would be a fire in the bedroom, and meals brought up on trays, and our temperature taken morning and evening, making us feel important. All this was much preferable to crawling down in the morning with only a slight ailment and being told to "work it off."

Diphtheria, too, wasn't bad at all. I was the first to have it, and I had it seriously. Mother said I "clacked" with my obstructed throat, and she thought I was going to die, and then was upset because I had to go to hospital, and so was cheerful and tender. I liked the fuss that was made. And when I got to hospital I was rather hazy in the head, and they turned me over and seemed to break glass in my back. Later I heard the nurse talking to a doctor.

"I've never seen such a good girl."

If that could be I, I thought. What heights to be praised by a hospital nurse. I wondered who the paragon was, and if I should ever see her.

They came over to my bed. "Here she is," said the nurse.

Incredible! *I* was that good girl.

We made friends with a number of people in the hospital, but one mystery I never solved—at least not till years afterwards. Round the ward came a dark man with glasses, and everybody called him "Doctor." Now we had a dark uncle with glasses who had gone to Canada five years before. I was immediately convinced that "Doctor" was Uncle Jack, and waited with some shyness for him to make himself known. He didn't. He passed by our beds as if he did not recognise us. Then, I thought, Uncle Jack must be disguising himself for some reason. Still I waited. I waited every time he appeared during the six weeks we were in hospital, though I never told anybody of my expectations. Finally, we departed, Uncle Jack reticent to the last. Afterwards I learned that he really was "Doctor" and not Uncle Jack, and he lived in our road.

When we left hospital our legs felt as if they were weighted with lead, and we could not run. But there were compensations. We were given Ovaltine every night for so long that I have never been able to bear it since.

My most unpleasant illness came two years later. I was eleven, and it was tonsilitis. I look back on it as one of the worst times of my life.

Yet it began auspiciously enough. It began with

my being sent to bed, which I liked since it meant that I was recognised as ill. I had come home with a sore throat from school, and expected that Mother would tell me as usual to "work it off." But she didn't. She probably remembered the diphtheria. "You'd better go to bed," she said, and I crawled there thankfully. Then the doctor came.

It was all right. It was only tonsilitis, he said. Only! Diphtheria was a dream to it. For this tonsilitis meant an attack of frightful earache every day, and soon I did not mind a bit about the attention; about being the grand ill one. If only I could have got rid of the earache. But it went on and on, and I lost weight and my ears discharged, and sometimes I had a day in bed and sometimes I got up; but nothing seemed to make me any better. Nowadays, I suppose, I should have been sent to a specialist, but then the only remedy supplied by the doctor was a tonic and a small bottle of oil which my father euphoniously labelled as "earache oil." The family's sympathy grew thin, and Rosemary remarked virulently one day that she didn't see why I should lie there keeping the fire off all of them and making awful faces.

Finally, nearly stone deaf, with wool in my ears, I crawled back to school. It was not very nice. I had to sit in the front row because I couldn't hear, and pretend to hear things I didn't. And I was cut off from the rest. I was glad that it was nearly the Easter holidays.

The Easter holidays came, and then a shock. After much arguing and pleas against it from me, I was told I must have my tonsils out.

I don't know why I made such a fuss about this. Most children have it done. But perhaps eleven is rather old. Eleven is a nervous age, and I had been through a lot. I remember that morning after I had been told the doctor's decision how I wandered down the garden, which was full of spring fluffiness, in despair, and sat on a stone step, feeling the cold on my behind and thinking that I should die. I was sure that I should die under the anæsthetic. Presently I got up and wandered back to the drawing-room, and began to play *Barbara Allen* with one hand.

"And I shall die tomorrow."

The spring, the tonsils, the sad tune filled me with a great sweet soul-sickness.

From that day until my tonsils were out I bore a heavy weight of dread. My birthday was in April, and I kept saying to myself, "The irony of it. The irony of it." "Irony" was a word I had just learnt, and the irony lay in having my greatest event of the year spoiled by tonsils.

But I kept a glimmer of scientific curiosity. I wanted to know how much you could move when you were under chloroform. Did you feel as if you were bound hand and foot, or could you, with a great effort of will, make yourself move ?

Finally, the morning came. Peter, who was to be "done" too, lay with me breakfastless in mother's big bed. There were steps on the stairs. Then I, since I had made such a fuss, was called first. In nightdress and bedroom slippers I marched to the top room, which was to be the operating theatre. It seemed full of strange people. I lay on a table, and something was put on my face. Then I began to whirl faster and

faster into blackness, and then I made the effort. With intense concentration I waggled one big toe. "Don't be frightened," someone said. They did not know that the big toe represented scientific enquiry.

Immediately after the operation, even as I was carried from the room and realised that something had been propping my mouth open, I was immensely elated. The fear was over, and I was not dead. In between being sick I talked in a loud high-pitched voice to Mother, explaining later in my noble way that I was trying to keep her from being anxious about Peter who was now being operated on.

Through the following week in bed the sense of relief was wonderful—only a little modified by my uncomfortable nose and throat. I remember saying that I was tasting Irish stew all the time. Probably I was thinking of the sharp taste of the onions.

After I had my tonsils out I became, as Mother said, "a new girl." Childhood began to sink behind and with it those monotonous small ailments when you really did not know if you were ill or not.

FLOWERS

A RUSSIAN ONCE SAID to me that it was strange that Shakespeare, in the middle of the tragedy of Ophelia's death, should begin to describe flowers. If to be unreasonably moved by flowers is Shakespearean, I was Shakespearean from at least the age of three. But probably most English people are—English girls at any rate.

I can see white bluebells growing tall and drooping in a dark little bed. They are a clear perfect white,

and they are near my face. I am not very tall, for this was our first garden, and we moved before I was four. The white bluebells, a robin perched on a spade, a walk through fields and the fierce dog Nipper form my first memories.

I have always had to struggle against flowers; struggle not to let my judgment be vitiated by them. On our morning-room mantelpiece was a pot which held old hair-pins and safety-pins, a tube of seccotine, a button-hook and other unbeautiful oddments. Round its drab brown ran a cream-coloured inscription: "Pleasures are like poppies spread." I did not know that the words came from the poet Burns. I did not know what they meant. But the word "poppies" gave me a lovely feeling. I used to pause and read it when I dusted the mantelpiece.

Sometimes when mother was at church in the evenings we used to learn poems to say to her. One evening I went through a children's annual and immediately chose this:

I wonder, I wonder, if anyone knows
Who lives in the heart of this velvety rose.
Now is it a fairy or is it an elf,
Or is it the queen of the fairies herself?

That seemed to me genius—merely because of the rose.

Similarly studying my birthday book with its virtuous lines, mainly from the Victorians, for each day of the year, I was delighted with my own April verse:

Down in a green and shady dell
A modest violet grew.

So it was with our rose quilts, which were put on each spring after spring-cleaning. Barbara's quilt was of pink roses with bright green leaves. Mine was of yellow roses with dark green leaves. I loved them both, and could never decide which was prettier. During afternoon rests when I could not sleep one of my amusements was to wander in imagination among the quilt roses, down the trellises.

So it was with the cushion-covers that mother embroidered. I used to kneel down by the chairs and study them. One I particularly liked was white and black daisies on a green ground, and there were also stylised pink roses with gold centres on dark holland ; and chairbacks with flowers without names —pale pink and pale blue sharp-petalled flowers. Perhaps it is a pity for little girls that we have no flowery antimacassars now.

Even when I was as old as seventeen and making canvas rugs I chose the most evil amorphous many-coloured borders just because they represented flowers. And I early found, though I did not know why, that a representation of a flower was often more moving than the flower itself.

Does anyone, thinking back of childhood, not think of flowers? Even the flowers I scorned I remember. I scorned dandelions because they were common, did not last in water and exuded sticky "milk" which left marks on the hands. I scorned the plum-blossoms that fell on to our lawn in March, often with only three petals like damaged butterflies, because, though they had a sweet, almondy perfume, they had no stalks and so could not be put in water. I scorned one-day lilies because they were

more faded-looking than our orange tiger-lilies and went slimy after a day ; and campanulas because they were commoner than Canterbury bells ; and marigolds because they grew so abundantly, and Solomon seal because it had such dreary little white-green flowers. We were snobs in our love of flowers. Perhaps everybody is. Value in our eyes depended on rarity, so that the same species might change in preciousness during a few weeks. We would run across half a field in March for one of the first hairy little close buds of buttercups, but by the time they were in their millions in May we turned from them to search for wild roses.

We had our gardens, of course, and like other children brooded over the catalogues that the postman delivered from nowhere at the end of January. Those flower descriptions, read by the fire with electric light and close curtains and the smell of toast, were little pleasures in themselves—those adjectives, "rich," "scarlet," "giant," "purple-flecked." Each sweetpea sounded better than the last, but we always chose a "mixed" packet on the principle of getting everything for threepence. The pictures on the seed packets were invariably liars. Our results were never like them. But the pictures were so charming that we felt cheated when packets came that were only buff-coloured envelopes. And if all our seeds failed, as they often did, there were always a few nasturtiums from the year before to scrawl over the garden and fill it.

Good Friday was generally a day of gardening—romantic as well as holy with stars coming out

behind the plum-blossom. But quarrels intruded even into this mild pursuit on this holy day.

"I want the trowel now, please."

"Well, I've only had it half an hour."

"Well . . ." And so the argument.

Or, "Do you know that every stone you've shied out has come on to *my* garden?"

Or, on a narrow path, "I wish you'd keep your behind out of the way. I can't bend down properly."

One or two flowers remain to me as individuals—individuals that meant more to me than many a person. One was a squashed yellow wallflower. I must have been about nine when I found it flat and dry on the schoolroom floor, and I thought it must be in great pain. I put it in a vase on the mantelpiece with other flowers, yet it was so papery I didn't expect it to revive. But presently the stiff thing began to droop its head. Then it swelled a little so that it was no longer flat. Then it drooped more and its head of buds and flowers splayed out. And finally it stood stiff as a living if battered flower. I felt as if I had brought the dead back to life.

But I was not consistent. For at the same time we ourselves were "squashing" flowers; we always said "squashing" and not "pressing." We put them between blotting paper in books, and screwed them in an old press. They came out after three days with a greenish patch on the blotting paper where their life's blood had run out and themselves quite dry and preserved with a faded sweet smell. Then we put them into an album and printed their names underneath. But I think I always felt a slight pang when I

first closed the blotting-paper over the lumpy living flower.

Then there was a red tulip which came from nowhere and never appeared again. That was like a vision ; something that never would, and never did, happen again.

It was one of those spring mornings which have a cloudless soft grey-blue sky promising heat later. We had rushed out after breakfast and mounted on the logs by the lawn. The logs had come from a tree that had been felled, and because they were so vast and heavy had been left for the time being on the path. Sometimes we lifted them half an inch with difficulty, and saw the gravel underneath almost turned to earth and a host of flat wood lice scrambling from the light. But that morning we did not lift the logs. We merely jumped up and down on them and in our spring spirits sang at the tops of our voices.

When the others had gone in I went alone down the garden. The apple-blossom was coming. There was a cloud of forget-me-nots. I ascended the two steps behind the gooseberry bushes, and then stopped. For there was a totally new flower. It was a tulip—and we did not have tulips in our garden. But it was not an ordinary tulip, but a wild thing, with jagged red petals the shape of flames and black stamens and a black centre. I was past the age of believing in fairies and yet, "Perhaps." I thought, standing and gazing. And the red flower, the grey sky, the fruit blossom and then a near cuckoo, all together made the world shift a little, be not quite what it usually was.

My sweetpea, too, remains an individual, though

it was a most melancholy one. My sweetpea came later, when we had our first gardens, when I was about eight. Our parents were not, at first, very generous in allotting us land. They gave us a shady corner by the wall where little would grow and nothing would flourish. On the wall were painted over their respective patches our initials—B., G., R., and P. B., being the eldest, had the outermost sunniest patch, and P. had the patch in the corner—but it didn't matter because P. didn't care about gardening anyhow. He was about four at the time. G.'s and R.'s patches were in between—pretty miserable, and it did matter to them.

I was given a sweetpea plant from one of the family pots. It was the first sweetpea plant I had ever had of my own. I planted it in my shade. I watered it. I sticked it. It became more than a child to me. But it matured very very slowly. The rest of the sweetpeas from the pot, planted out in favourable places, had bloomed, had their flowers cut for vases, had even begun to yellow. And still my thin plant showed only one tight green bud. I dreamed of that bud. I was passionately anxious to know what colour it would be.

And then, before it had opened, we had to go away for a fortnight's summer holiday. I was desolated. Mother said she was "sick of that sweetpea." Though I enjoyed the sea as all children do, the thought of that sweetpea was at the back of my mind all the time. I thought it would not wait for me; would bloom while I was not there.

We returned. The garden looked as it always did after holidays—overgrown, autumnal, with apples

fallen along the paths. Coming through the gate I dropped what I was carrying and ran straight down the garden, my heart in my mouth. And then I stood half comforted, half disappointed. In the damp of that September afternoon the sweetpea bud was still there, still green, hardly any bigger. Such a puny thing it was, and it had been so important.

It did bloom in the end, among the dews of October. It was a pale whity-green which I suppose had been meant for white. It was about a quarter the size of an ordinary sweetpea, and it had almost no scent. And after all the summer excitement now, when autumn's smoke was rising and there was the first touch of frost, I felt almost indifferent.

And there was a similar story about a lily; the same desire, the same disappointment. That was years afterwards when I was in my teens. Romantic, almost Pre-Raphaelite, to be feverish with excitement to see the first Madonna lily in the garden, only —I couldn't see it because I had mumps.

They were my lilies, of course, as it had been my sweetpea. Ownership heightened the emotion, which was this time mixed up with all the chaos of adolescence. For my birthday that year Peter had given me four white-lily bulbs—Madonna lilies which we had never before had in the garden. They caught my imagination. There is something about a lily—the perfection of form, the churchiness, the strong scent—which makes it different from any other flower.

I planted the four. Half incredulous I saw the blunt green points emerge, and then the whorl of leaves round the squarish stems, and then two—for

two, for some reason, withered away—splays of sausage-shaped buds, so familiar in stained-glass windows. And then, in July, I developed mumps.

Mumps are both painful and grotesque. When I first caught sight of myself in the glass I could not believe the reflection. My face ran down to my shoulders without a neck. Then I was afraid it would never go back to normal. It was hot weather, and I was at the top of the house which was more breathless than the rest, and the cloudless skies and my giant face resulted in a piercing poetic melancholy. I read *The Oxford Book of English Verse*. I wrote a poem about death—though it was death generally, not death from mumps :

Dawn brought death to me over the shining hills,
And death's dark wings fanned my hair.
And there were hurrying steps and frightened faces
And darkness everywhere.

And more on the same ecstatic level. And through all this ferment there was the thought of the lilies.

No lingering with them. They were blooming. I asked for bulletins about them every day. Nearly out. Out. And I was desperate. I must see them. I made Mother ask the doctor if I could go down just once, but he said no. I wept. I crept down to the top landing window that looked over the garden, but they were at the end and the heavy foliage hid them. And then I began dreaming of them in those hot nights when my neck was stiff and the sheet in wrinkles ; and I felt I half hated as well as loved them.

Finally, I was allowed downstairs. I went at once to see them. The garden was dry and cracked.

Everything was hot and brooding. And the lilies were still there, but the dark green leaves were turning yellow and dying off and the flowers were soft and shrunken, not pure white because the great golden stamens had scattered pollen all over them. And the scent was exotic but decayed. And again, after all the excitement, I felt my heart grow detached and careless.

My feeling for the sweetpea and the lilies really did occupy me for some weeks to the exclusion of most other things; but then, of course, it was a snobbish passion. We had our flower hierarchy, and sweetpea and lily came near the top, being expensive, rare and the lilies holy, too. Such despair would never have been felt about chickweed or cauliflower.

ADORATIONS

IT IS GENERALLY imagined that adorations, fallings in love, begin in adolescence. As far as I can see, with girls at any rate, they begin the moment the child leaves the home at all and has personal relationships of its own. For us adorations began at five or six. At first we were very open about our feelings, fighting over our objects of affection, claiming them as "mine" not "yours." But later we said nothing about them and blushed at the mention of their names.

The people we adored had certain characteristics in common. They might be any age from twelve to fifty, but they were all of our own sex. They were kind. They had some contact with us. But they had to be somewhat remote. Familiarity bred—affection

but not adoration. And the adorations were, as it were, light-hearted. If we did not see one goddess for a time we forgot her, and put somebody else into her place. As far as I can remember there was somebody being adored all the time, but each came and went with the utmost ease.

There was Miss Smyth, of course, at our first school. We spent odd lunchtimes writing all that she was to us on the blackboard. A pearl and a rose were easy metaphors, but we used to take it in turns to write one lovely thing under another, and near the bottom of the list it used to be hard to think of compliments. Once, *faute de mieux*, I called Miss Smyth an amethyst. But she did not know. When she appeared to continue lessons we sprang to the board and rubbed everything out.

At our next school, Miss Spring's, there was Milly for me. Milly was nearly grown up. She was twelve, and was so good morally and mentally that she was considered the head girl. She had pink cheeks and a soft voice and tidy brown plaits. She lived in a world of big girls. She probably never spoke to me. But sunshine was in the room when she was there.

Sometimes adoration was a bud that died before it became a flower. We almost adored Miss Black, our next mistress, but she, though kind, was not exactly romantic, with her twinkling pince-nez and her chuckle. So, though there was a hot embarrassment in thinking of things to talk about when we walked beside her to the park for rounders, with the embarrassment there were never the heights of glory that there were, say, with Nell, our Bournemouth aunt's housemaid.

Nell, with her pink face and starched white apron, was a holiday affection. So was Mary. Mary was the daughter of an Essex farm where we stayed several summers. The farm had a number of attractions—the half-cut corn-stacks where we could climb and read out of the wind, at our backs a rampart of stiff prickly straw; Esther Chewy, the sow that had so many babies; the horses we used to ride bare-backed though the sweat made our knees sore. But Mary was one of the chief attractions. She was eighteen, a land-girl. Her father was a foxy-faced little man who had not much to say and mostly went out with his gun. Her mother was a Dutch-doll lady with a figure like a cottage loaf, who had a soft voice, could not say her R's, always said "pwehaps," and when she heard we had music lessons asked us "to play a waltz." And in front of Mary's home was a pond where the ducks swam, and behind it was the stackyard.

Mary had a pinky-brown complexion and gold hair and wore gaiters. She smiled easily, and had a soft voice like her mother's. She did a great many different things on the farm, including driving the old wooden float in to the town, seven miles away, to get stores. She was like a goddess in the float, in perfect command of old brown Prince, clicking her tongue and showing us how to use the reins. Once she went to a blacksmith's for Prince to be shod, and I watched horror-stricken. First the smith cut pieces of Prince's foot; then he burnt it and an evil smoke arose. Then he hammered in nails. We thought poor Prince would be in agonies, but he seemed quite comfortable and amiably held up his

great hoof. Mary smiled with her white teeth when we asked if it didn't hurt. She did not talk much.

She let us see the cows milked. That was not as successful as the trips to town. I, who had always seen milk delivered in cans, felt sick. It was disgusting—squirting it out of an animal like that. I said I would never drink milk again. My resolve lasted a full twenty-four hours.

One year when we returned to the farm Mary had gone. She had married, and her younger sister had taken her place. We had adored her. Now, philosophically, we let her go. There was still the prolific Esther Chewy with another ten pig children.

We adored a painter friend of our aunt's—Miss Harrison, called "Harry." She was Scottish, and had a soft voice different from ours, and was beautifully dressed and had wavy dark hair. Sometimes she drew us for illustrations for magazines. Sometimes she sang us Scottish ballads. The favourite was :

There were twa sisters sat in a bow'r.
Stirling for aye.

With her Scottish accent she said "Styerling" for Stirling, and I always thought styerling was something the twa sisters did for aye, like spinning or weaving.

There was Nurse Johns at our isolation hospital. She, too, had rosy cheeks and a kind face, and was only about twenty-one though that was as good as a hundred to us. A cross red-haired pale-faced sister was in charge of the ward, and so Nurse Johns, in comparison, seemed a darling—even when she brought us another salty gargle or the everlasting mince and tapioca. She was a being apart from

ordinary people, too, with her white cap and starched shiny white cuffs. We grew so fond of her that mother asked her to tea after we had left hospital. But it was not the same. She wore an ordinary grey coat and hat; and she had lost confidence. She was shy. And she talked to mother nearly all the time about her family. The relationship drifted away from us. It was a strange woman talking grown-up talk. Then she left the district.

One friend I adored for an almost impersonal reason. She was neither young nor pretty, and we did not see her very often. I adored her because she made the earth seem full of treasure.

Miss Greenside was tall, with a strong chin and straight brown hair done in a knot behind. She wore hand-woven tweeds, and the coarse stuff in "natural" colours seemed to us like men's clothes. And her shoes were big with low heels, and she had a deep manly voice. She had been an art student and had come in, I suppose, for the end of the Morris movement. For she believed in hand-made goods and in the crafts—weaving and pot-making and metal-work. She herself made jewellery, heavy silver stuff sometimes exhibited at local exhibitions.

One summer Miss Greenside invited us three girls to a picnic—in the pinewoods some miles from our home. Since we were fond of her, we accepted with alacrity, and looked forward to the day very much. We were to start in the morning and spend all day with her. And so there we were one sunny August morning, wandering down a sandy path with the dark woods on either side. Miss Greenside had a knapsack on her back. That was our dinner;

and the sand was honey-coloured and fine with little pebbles among it, and there was a pinewood smell and nobody could have been happier.

Then Miss Greenside made a startling offer.

"If you'll each find a pretty pebble I'll make you brooches with them."

"But don't you have only *precious* stones in brooches?"

"Why not anything pretty?"

Excitement sprang in us. Previously there had been two kinds of stones—"precious" that cost a lot of money, and "ordinary." Now the distinction had been removed. Something you found on a path was good enough for a brooch. I don't think that our emotion was entirely at the thought of beautiful things everywhere. It was at the thought of valuable things everywhere—things that you might buy in a shop. We had always been poor.

We spent a long time wandering along looking for pretty stones. What we found in the end were the prettiest possible, but they were rather like Miss Greenside's clothes in comparison, say, with a Royal garden party outfit. While emeralds and rubies sparkled, our stones were dull cream with slate-blue streaks or brown like toffee. Nevertheless, Miss Greenside seemed pleased and pocketed them.

Presently there was another revelation. The pines changed to oaks and hawthorns, with thick undergrowth. Now Miss Greenside began to step into the thicket and pluck a branch here, a plant there.

"You never know," she said, "what colour you'll get from them."

For she did not, she said, believe in aniline dyes.

She liked "natural" dyes from plants. She and her artist friends were making experiments to see what plant produced what. You could not tell by the look. Onion-skins, for example, gave a pretty yellow. So on her walks she would pick new twigs and plants, and take them home and boil them.

Immediately, the woods became for us a source of excitement; again, I am afraid, not because of the beauty of plant dyes but because they offered you something which otherwise you had to buy in a shop. We helped Miss Greenside to find new specimens.

Then, as a climax, she said she would show us how to build a woodland house. She chose a glade with a flat grass floor, and then collected branches, sticking them into the ground in a small rectangle, and then planting others between them. Others went criss-cross over the top, and then we gathered armfuls of bracken and filled in the gaps. We had not believed how easy it was to make a house.

The sunshine had faded. The sky had clouded over. A drop of rain fell. "We can have our lunch inside," said Miss Greenside.

The four of us squashed into the woodland house. It was close quarters, but the freshly-picked greenstuff smelt sweet. Miss Greenside unpacked bulky parcels. We were a little disappointed, though we would not have said so for the world. There were no iced cakes; only rather thick meat sandwiches—piles of them—and then rather sour apples.

The rain fell faster. We could hear it beating on the trees. "We must stay here for a time," said Miss Greenside. She did not suggest how we could amuse ourselves. We played "I spy" rather languidly. Now

the rain was beginning to come into the house. It had got between the bracken roof. There was a drop on my head; another on Barbara's knee. Then it became a steady drip-drip.

"I'm afraid we shall have to go home," said Miss Greenside.

We were not sorry. We were feeling cold. We crawled out.

Filing between the sopping trees we turned for a farewell glance at our house. It was crooked, low and untidy, and looked as if it would soon sink back into the earth.

It was a long walk back. The sand on the paths was wet. There were puddles. The wind buffeted us. The world that had seemed such a treasure-house now threatened us, and we wanted home.

We had to wait a long time at the station. It was middle evening when we got in, and we were worn out. Unexpectedly, I suddenly found myself crying and crying and crying. I was sent to bed.

Miss Greenside never made our brooches. Perhaps the stones we had found were not pretty enough after all. Nor did we hear what colours came from the plants she had picked. But we did not cease to adore her—when we saw her and remembered.

Then we changed schools again, and had a fresh lot of goddesses to adore. My passions presently fixed on a history mistress whom we shared. She was like an angel, the three of us said, as she ate her school-dinner of meat pie at a small separate table. And then came a gentleman for the first time—Keats.

HAZY WORLD

IT TAKES TIME to learn the world—the scientific facts, such as, for example, that the vapour rising from mother's handkerchiefs drying by the fire is steam, and they are not on fire as I thought they were. It takes time to learn your own body—that tears, for example, are salt, and that you curl up when somebody tickles your neck, and that you have tiny hairs all over you only seen in sunlight, and that you can get little rolls of dirt out of yourself by rubbing. At one time we even tried what tongues tasted like, very gently licking one another's. They were rough and warm. But we were told that this was "dirty."

But it is not only that the world is unknown. It is vague. Half the time you don't know whether things happened or not. They loom out of a mist. The mist closes again.

Once we had a guinea-pig. We lost him, and Barbara asked the next-door neighbour, over the wall, if she had seen him. She came in with a poetic answer from Mrs. Gordon.

"I have not seen your little beast,
Your beast, the guinea-pig."

We were a little sceptical as to whether Mrs. Gordon had really said that. Our father suggested that she might have said :

"I have not seen your little beast,
Your little beast, your little beast.
I have not seen your little beast
Your beast, the guinea-pig."

Well, Barbara did not know. She might have said that.

I was a specially "moony" child. ("Moony" was one of Peter's terms of scorn when he was at the stage of calling his friends "man" and hating girls. But we had our revenge by making him read aloud "iced ink"—a vulgar joke we had learnt at school.) Once, when I was about six and we were staying at Lyme Regis and I had fallen behind the others, I wandered into our lodgings and on to the first floor, and opened a door—and then stopped. For the room was different; the bed was in a new place. I suddenly woke up. This was not our landing. I had come into the wrong house. It was silent, and there was nobody about. I tiptoed down the stairs again and out of the gate—a lucky escape. A policeman might have come and put me into prison for trespassing.

A little later, on another holiday, at Rye, while we were doing our daily tramp across the marshes to the sea, I suddenly felt that my arm was light and cold. I had been carrying Barbara's mackintosh. Now it was there no more. I looked back; not a sign of it. Always cowardly, I tramped on—with a heart like lead—and gave a well-simulated start of surprise when I was asked a mile further on where the mackintosh was. Later it was recovered from the police-station. Somebody had picked it up.

There was a notice in our trams: "Do not spit. Penalty forty shillings." It filled me with an irrepressible desire to spit—but I did not really know what spitting was. One day, sitting alone on a seat in the tram, I put my hands up to hide my face, and

bubbled my saliva a little between my lips. That was "spitting." Then conscience caught me. I now owed the Tramway Company forty shillings. Ought I to tell them? Or go to a policeman and confess? I was too much afraid, but I had weeks of worry.

I was vague even about my own appearance. My hair was straight and Rosemary's was curly, and people were always commenting on the difference. "What pretty hair Rosemary has! But Gwen, how different!" I was not hurt by it. The world never seemed to think much of me. But one day an aunt said sarcastically:

"What lovely curls you've got!"

And for one blessed moment I did really think that everybody up to that moment had been wrong, and I had curls after all.

One day we were out for a walk with some girls we knew and their blunt maid. She said to me, "You've got a big potato in your stocking."

I had never heard the phrase before. I looked down interestedly to see how I could have picked up a potato without knowing it.

Maids and charwomen were responsible for some confusion of thought. One girl, supposed to take us for an afternoon walk, enjoined us one afternoon "to promise never to tell your mother and father." We were in her power. We promised. Then she took us a long, long way by back streets we had never seen to a little house, and then she went round to the back and pushed us into a kitchen. There was a fat woman there and a man in his shirt-sleeves, and we were petted and had much animated conversation and some strong tea. We were enjoined again never

to tell. Then, with heavy consciences but our mouths sealed, we were tramped back, It was not till long, long afterwards that it occurred to me that nothing very wicked had been done ; that we had only been to Ada's home.

One charwoman, in her talk of operations and extraordinary complaints, told a lugubrious tale of a little boy who had developed lockjaw through his big toe. He had got a stone into his big toe, and had been taken to hospital, and he had lockjaw and died. After that I always thought of big toes as a particularly tender part of the anatomy, the only part leading to lockjaw ; and when we went barefoot in the garden I carefully walked with raised big toes, letting the little ones go to the devil.

Breathing, I thought for a long time, was a very dangerous exercise. I came panting into mother's room one morning, and she said, "Don't do that child. You'll injure yourself." After that I believed it was safe only to take the smallest of breaths, and if you breathed with your whole lungs you might die.

The physical details about how babies came worried me little. I seldom thought of them, for I knew already. I knew that babies came out of their mothers' navels. That was what the navels were there for.

Fairies were a much more interesting problem. They were necessary for our stories and the pictures we drew, but I think that always deep in my heart I knew they did not exist, and I very morally refused to clap my hands in *Peter Pan* as I thought it would be acting a lie. Yet as late as nine or ten years old I was making dirty little pots of the clay I found

in my garden and hiding them in the ivy over the fence at the end. My motives were mixed. If there *were* fairies, though I knew there weren't, they might be pleased and do something for me in return for my works of art. And then there was the showing-off which is so perpetual in children. If there had been anyone watching me—though again there was not—what a charming simple artistic girl he would think me!

The mystery of Father Christmas I solved comparatively early. But it took much thought. I remember pondering one morning as I made my bed, walking round and round it till suddenly light broke. Triumphant, I ran down to Mother.

"Mother, I've found out who Father Christmas is."

"Oh, have you?"

"Yes. It's the King."

There were those other beings, not nearly as attractive as fairies or Father Christmas, who we had to conclude were real. We were as familiar with angels' physical peculiarities as with fairies'. Fairies had butterfly wings with spots in the middle; angels birds' wings with feathers. Both types of wings might be all colours of the rainbow. Fairies, except for the Fairy Queen, wore short frocks; angels long frocks like nightdresses. Fairies held wands with stars at the end; angels lilies. Fairies, again except for the queen, had short fluffy hair; angels long straight hair. Fairies had crowns of flowers; angels haloes. Fairies had small shoes; angels went barefoot. Fairies were young and angels grown-up, but there were little naked angel babies called "cherubs."

Then there was the Second Coming, which might spring on us at any moment. Our mother and aunts were particularly generous in passing to us their girlhood books—books such as *Misunderstood* and *The Wide Wide World.* Many of the children in these saintly stories, if they did not die with a smile to the sound of Sabbath bells, went round looking for the Second Coming and asking their relatives if they were "ready." *We* said nothing to our relatives, but we ourselves began to be prepared for the Last Judgment—rather in the way people are superstitious about walking under ladders, believing and yet not believing.

When there was some dramatic sky effect—dark clouds before a storm, red sunset, rays shining from behind a cloud—I held my breath and waited. Far-off music—even merry-makers yodelling down the road on a Saturday night—gave me the same solemn expectation. Was it angels in the distance? I generally hoped it was. We were sure of being forgiven, and it would be a wonderful experience to be drawn slowly up into the air to meet the shining throng. I did not ask exactly what would happen when I had met them.

Later, with a breath of pagan freedom, came the gods and goddesses. In the hidden uneasiness I was beginning to feel about church, Pan, Diana and Apollo were a relief—creatures untouched by the religion of grandmothers and aunts. I never actually believed in them as real people, but it was comforting at least to believe that Nature was a great mother and cared for me, and there might be dryads smiling from the trees or nymphs from the water. I walked

along the Cobb at Lyme Regis, after mother had been cross with me and I had dropped behind sulking, and the wind came gently waving my hair, and I comforted myself by the thought, "At least the wind loves me."

Now there were two escapes when people were beastly. You could retire to Mother Earth and lie on her breast. Or you could fall back on the old comfort —the thought of running away or jumping from the top window and lying a crumpled heap on the gravel by the front-door steps and the whole family weeping round and saying, "Now, if we hadn't been so unjust, so unkind . . ."

Our notions were hazy even about speech. In the early days grammar was a problem. I remember how once we were going to a party—a party we always enjoyed with a treasure-hunt—but all I could think of was: Should you say "I was" or "I were"? I repeated them both many times to myself, and in the end plumped for "I were—I were ill yesterday, Mrs. Short." It sounded more correct.

Later, when grammar was settled, relations with people became dark and embarrassing. Mother had always had the habit of saying at a misdeed, "I'll tell Daddy when he comes home tonight," so that I fully believed that over supper they talked of nothing but our sins. In my teens I grew even sillier, and thought that every time mother said anything to the family I did not hear she was saying nasty things about me. I probably at this stage did come in for a good deal of criticism. Then there was a period when I was deeply embarrassed at being with Mother alone. I could not think what to say to her, and used to plan

out conversations as one might with strangers. Yet when long afterwards I read letters I had written to her at the period I was surprised to find them quite ordinary and affectionate. I must again have concealed what I felt.

Queer moral phobias grew up, probably because of our saintly books. A cheerful little girl used sometimes to meet us on the tram when we went to school. She had a very affable mother, but Mrs. Jenkins was, we decided, vulgar and wicked. For Mrs. Jenkins wore clip-on pearl ear-rings. The begetter of this fantasy was no doubt Louisa Alcott, who in her *Eight Cousins* lectures the heroine for having her ears pierced.

Then there was wine. So many of our books had stories of drunken fathers—either perishing miserably or being finally persuaded to sign the pledge by saintly little daughters. And once a man, from the public house at the cross-roads, followed me when I was going to see Grannie and made smiling unintelligible remarks which horrified me. So I regarded "drink" as in much the same category as poison, except that there was sin and shame mixed with drink. Sometimes we used to be invited out for the evening by an old Mr. Veil—white-bearded, cheerful and kind—and we would have a lovely tea and play cards. But then, just as we were leaving, he would say, "Now you must have some ginger wine."

"No. *No* thank you," we would say.

But mother would interrupt us brightly, "Well, just one glass."

So they both drank while we watched uneasily. We had a long tram-ride home. Would she stagger?

Would she shout? Would she cease to be herself? But no. Perhaps Mr. Veil's ginger wine was not quite the same as neat whisky. But her breath smelt!

At one time I would never carry an umbrella. Perhaps it was a relic from the days when we had to take the Mother Gamp and had quarrelled over it. Now I used to set off in a drizzle with my best hat on, and mother would pursue me to the gate, umbrella in hand, ordering me to take it, and there would be an argument, and I would finally run away. Certainly I made life difficult for myself. At the same time I had a period of shyness, and when mother asked me to go and buy a pair of navy-blue gym knickers for myself I refused. I could not mention "knickers" in public.

One of our schoolmistresses to whom mother told this story said, "Well, I never really like going to ask for knickers either." This unexpected sympathy from an adult was a great comfort.

Now I had a few friends at school, but in general I found people, particularly at home, cut off by unleapable barriers. I used to look out of tram windows and wonder what people in the streets were talking about. They knew how to talk. I didn't. I was the stricken deer, the exile in the world. I wanted union with Nature. I wanted death. And then I went to college, and, in the midst of cocoa parties and the intricate relationships of one young girl with another, became almost perfectly happy.

AMBITIONS

AN OFFICIAL OF A Juvenile Employment Bureau once told me that boys' and girls' ambitions are quite out of keeping with reality. Their choice of careers is motivated by quite irrelevant details. Girls will want to be film-stars because they have seen photographs of film-stars; boys to be bus-conductors because they want to punch tickets.

In the early days our ambitions were similarly out of touch with the facts. But then we did not know what the facts were.

Before we could write we used to "write letters," imitating our father's scrawl, making long wavy lines. And who knows, we thought each time, if we are not writing real words? We may have formed just the right shapes without knowing it.

We were always going to be "great," though we were not sure how. When I was about seven I used to spend long long periods in the lavatory carefully nicking out the edges of toilet-paper. I thought I was making the sheets look pretty. I also thought that if anybody could see the nicked toilet-paper he would say, "Here is a great artist."

I thought the same when I bit pieces out of bread and butter to make animals or pretty shapes. But we were stopped in that. It was "rude."

We received only a penny a week pocket-money, and we wanted to be rich. We dreamed of wealthy old ladies unattended in bath-chairs. The chair begins to run downhill. We rush to the rescue. Then she says, "I will make a new will and you shall be heir."

But since there were not many bath-chairs about we turned to the garden. Along our ferny shady path was a plum tree that used to ooze gum. The gum lay in small shiny knobs on the rough bark, and when we pulled them off they came with long trails like golden syrup. They were soft if we found them soon enough, and yellow as amber, and if we could have thought of something to do with them they might have been a source of great wealth.

Then there was balm—lemon balm. It grew very profusely with its dark green shiny fleshy leaves and its little mauve-white flowers. Its scent was sweet, if faint, and every summer we made perfume. Our method was to cut or shred the leaves, put them into a medicine bottle, add cold water and shake well. There was not much scent, or if we left it there *was* scent, but it was the scent of old flower-water. But each time it seemed possible, as no doubt it seemed to the alchemists, that by some chance just the right method might be found. We should then have invented a marvellous new scent. We should sell it.

The seeking for treasure in the world around us, initiated by Miss Greenside, lasted some months, and was revived from time to time. At the farm where we stayed there was a long stony drive leading to an unfinished house. We spent whole mornings sitting on the grass at the end of the drive and chipping at the stones. Under those dull brown or greyish exteriors we did find greater brightness—streaks of grey and blue, toffee-like brown, faint pinks. Each stone was a prize-packet, and we chipped partly because we liked the colours. But always at the back

of our minds was lurking a hope : We might find a jewel.

In Cornwall it seemed possible that we really might. In that district, near Helston, there was talk of rock-crystal and serpentine. We saw some rock crystal in a local museum—rather like cut-glass chandeliers slightly dusty. And if we found nothing else there might be a valuable fossil. I remember wandering over cliff-paths with an azure sea below and the sun shining, a breeze stirring the rock-pinks and every prospect pleasing, but my eyes bent only on the worn winding path. Well, I did find half a fossil.

Then there was the Spanish galleon. We never knew the truth of that. There was a legend of great treasure on the coast. People in the fishing village told us—slightly confusedly, for their knowledge of history was rudimentary—that after the defeat of the Armada, when the Spanish fleet was forced to sail round Scotland and down again, one ship had been wrecked just at that spot. It had been full of gold doubloons, and every now and then somebody found a doubloon on the shore. "Particularly in weather like this," they said, for it was stormy with great winds, and a section of the cliff, under the beating of the waves, had slid down to the shore. "Ah, with them landslides you never know what may be uncovered."

Rosemary and I were fired with a fierce desire for doubloons. We went straight down to the shore after breakfast. It was drizzling. The sea was grey and rough. Part of the cliff lay in a soppy slope on the sand. There were a few things to find—fragments of

wood, grass, seaweed, bits of china with the edges ground smooth, tin cans. We stooped and poked and stood at the edge of the tide waiting for what the sea would cast us. The sea cast us nothing. It only wetted the bottom of our frocks, so that the salt damp hems flapped against our bare legs and made them sore.

We returned for dinner and went back again. We were down the next morning again. Then slowly our enthusiasm ebbed like the sea. All we had found was a large copper nail bent to a right-angle and greened with salt and age. The people we showed it to said yes ; it had come from a very old ship, possibly the galleon, and we took it home with us. But it was not exactly valuable.

I had one pious ambition from the age of about nine—again possibly emanating from our Victorian reading. I was going to "help the poor." Once our father took us along the "Cut" in London, and I saw the old women with their shawls, red hands and lined faces, and the ragged children scrambling among the barrows. I made a secret resolve then that, when I grew up, I would make these wretched beings happy. How, I was not very sure. I should be rich then, of course, and I would give them all my money so that they did not have to stand selling kippers under a November sky. And then they would be grateful and bless me with tears in their eyes. It was a feudal picture.

Later my ideas of the future grew more detailed. I would work tremendously hard between twenty and thirty and be famous. At thirty, that age near the grave, I should be so famous that I shouldn't need to work any more. Then I would settle down and adopt an orphan.

THE ARTS

THE MUSES were early with us. My mother said that at the age of six I leaned out of the lavatory window and composed my first poem. It was :

As I looked out on a warmish night
I saw the moon shine very bright.

Drawing, crayoning, painting were, however, the first arts to flourish among us. They began so early I do not remember them beginning. There were crayons and pencils in our old tin box. There were plenty of old thick pieces of typing-paper. We knew what fairies looked like. Nothing else was needed. Afterwards the drawings were given to relatives on the slightest pretext. When I was four and an aunt was getting married I announced that I would give her a wedding drawing. I remember the occasion because with my bad speech somebody thought I said I would give her a "wedding-dress." That seemed to me tremendously funny.

There is still a sheaf of our old drawings left, done by us three girls between the ages of five and twelve. Thinking of flimsy pretexts for bestowing drawings on adults, I came across a "card" of three roughly-cut small squares of paper tied with white cord. In front is "the hether sprite boy"—rather a dwarf of a boy with long green shoes and a long purple night-cap and mauve wings. The very untidy inscription written inside in pencil is "best wishes for a very hapy Easter to dear darling dady." I was just seven.

An even thinner pretext is in an even smaller three-page "card" of a few months later. Here there

are two fairies—Fairy Bluebell with a blue frock, long golden hair, blue wings, a French cap of liberty and a third imperfectly rubbed-out leg between her two others, and Fairy Sunbeam, a boy in yellow with a sun very much out of the round above his head. The inscription runs: "Many wishes for a happy summer to dear daddy from Gwen."

A picture on a postcard, with square creatures with two arms issuing, one above the other, from their right-hand sides, a sun with a face and a pollard willow on the horizon, has been noted by our parents as "a valentine from R." She was not yet six, and the only message she could put on the back was "R.R.R.R.R.R.R."

Barbara, of course, led us in our drawing. It was all fairies at first, generally with a sun setting with beams on the horizon because it was easier to do that way. Rabbits were put in because they were easy to do, and butterflies were not difficult, and birds were just V signs in the sky in various stages of openness. Sometimes we gave elaborate explanations on the back. A drawing of Barbara's, with a green meadow scattered with fairies—all running in one direction because she could do side-faces better facing left—and a queen in a pink flower coach pulled by rabbits, is inscribed on the back: "August 34th," and wishes dear daddy a happy birthday. (His birthday was early September.) She continues lyrically:

> The silver dew is on the grass
> And the flowers are all awake,
> For Titania's riding through fairyland
> To row on the fairy lake.

She, Barbara, was eight.

I, at much the same date—it was not "August 34," but "Agust 12"—fell back on poet's poetry. My picture shows a balcony with two ladies in high Richard II period hats, two identical twins of page boys with their right hands held out, cloaks and pompoms on their shoes, and a very little King kneeling before a golden-haired beggar-maid about twice his height. My inscription runs: "To dear Mother with love from Gwen. x x x x x x x. This picture is king Cerfechuler asking the beggar maid to mary him the potry is about it.

Her hands across her breast she laid.
She was more fair than words can say
Bare footed came the begger maid
Before the king Cerfechuler.
In robe and crown the king steped down
To meet and Greet her on her way
It is no-wonder said the lords
She is more beauiful than day."

I imagine from the spelling that I knew this stanza by heart and had not copied it.

But perhaps the best inscription among these faded crayon efforts of the far past is Barbara's when she was seven. The picture shows a very flat golden-haired pink-robed lady lying in the foreground superintended by an elf with a fan. Above on one side flies a naked cupid with a bow and arrow. On the other a prince with a sword, fat legs and jewels on his shoes, is suspended in air gazing down. Barbara wrote on the back, "This is Prince Forget-menot falling in love with Princess Gracefull while shes a sleep."

We each had our styles. Barbara was the most ambitious, alternating fairies with revolting religious pictures in the church-calendar tradition. A Nativity remains—done rather unseasonably in March—with Virgin and child, angels, haloes, lilies, stars, a lamb and a dove. The adults have nightdresses on; the child a green pilch. I thought it lovely at the time. A resurrection has more night-gowned ladies, and the haloed angel with a lily, and a sunrise.

I was rather good at snow-scenes. It was difficult to portray snow since the paper was white, but you used grey and made little curves which were meant to be snow heaps. I was fond of snowmen with pipes in their mouths, but usually I put them into boots, not asking how they got the boots on.

Rosemary, in her usual violent way, preferred witches to fairies. One of her paintings—she got to painting but did not continue long after that—when she was not quite eight shows a "birthday witch." No longer do the arms come out of only one side of the body—a style she continued for years—but the creatures have skull-like faces, bright smiles and tiny feet. They wear high hats, and there is a wizard with a little black beard. They seem to have dropped their usual black for the birthday occasion, and, soaring in the air or chucking what looks like a money-bag at the birthday witch who sits on a red stool and holds out her hands, they wear orange, red, mauve and green gowns with red and green bands round their high hats. I am sure Rosemary would have added a cat if she could, but cats are the most difficult animal to draw.

We spent hours over our drawings, and I even

seriously considered the theory of art. If you drew a face according to pattern, with two big dots for eyes, two smaller dots for nostrils and a line for the mouth it looked like a face. But if you drew a face as it really was, making lemon-shaped eyes with pupils and a nose that was really a nose (the shape of a vase) and two lips and teeth, you got the effect of a cross school-mistress with glasses. I never understood why.

Drawing was to lie heavy on my conscience, like so many other things. Rosemary gave it up ; but then she had never been as ambitious as Barbara and I. Then, having reached the stage when I painted flowers from the garden but not Bible scenes, I quite naturally dropped it too. Then Mother interfered. Barbara was going ahead, even turning out books of verse and illustrations for long-suffering second cousins. "And you," said Mother," were at one time nearly as good as Barbara. It's wicked to give it up."

The urge was gone and conscience took its place. We had measles at about this time, when I was twelve, and in our convalescence sat in our bedroom at the top of the house and wanted something to do. "Draw," said Mother. So I got out my paints again. But it was a most distasteful experience. My thoughts had moved on, but my skill had not. I could still produce the elves I had been producing three years before, but I did not want to paint elves. I tried drawing faces. They were not as good as they had been years before. Whatever talent had been there had ebbed as naturally as it had flowed. I gave it up, and Mother, seeing it was no good, ceased to tell me I was wasting my talents.

But I was still interested in pictures. Sometimes

we were taken to the National Gallery. What chiefly struck me was the frightful ugliness of the babies. Did Jesus really look like that?

"Acting" we also inflicted on our relatives—when they came to tea. I don't know if they were much amused. Sometimes they went on talking among themselves after we had begun our first act. Then Barbara, ceasing to be a king or whatever she was, said, "You might be quiet," and they subsided with murmured apologies.

In our bedroom at the top of the house was an old trunk in which gradually collected our acting things. A black tablecloth was always the witch's cloak. A red open-work quilt was always the king's robe. The queen wore curtains with purple flowers on them, and there were always silk sashes and long strips of green muslin to hide deficiencies. Sometimes Mother gave us old blouses she had got from aunts, but you really could do nothing with a flounced, shaped, hooked blouse of about 1912.

We acted outside or in, arranging chairs in a row and emerging from behind laurel bushes or the door. Our first effort was inspired by a play we saw school-children do. It had a heroine called Greta. We had no prejudices against plagiarism in those days, and we took the play and adapted it as best we could for three or possibly four actors. Our first written programme remains, tied, since they were days of war, with red, white and blue tape. The play is called *Magic Ring*, and the scenes include "Greaters lost," "Coming home from school," "Dragons cave," and "Greater found again." The play was

"Acted by B.C.F. aged 8, G.F. aged 6, R.F. aged 5, praps P.L.F. aged 2."

But P.L.F. did not generally act. We persuaded him once to be an ugly sister in "Cinderella," since you really could not have a ball with only three people; and he went berserk, and, instead of dancing, cast off his scarves and sashes and rushed round trying to trip us up in our long skirts. The audience laughed. We were furious.

Our most usual production was *Sleeping Beauty*. You could manage that on three. Barbara was the King and Beauty. I was the Queen and Prince, thus being her wife in the first act and her prospective husband in the last. Rosemary, who was known for her ugly faces, was the witch with the tablecloth to hide her curly hair and an old walking-stick. We did not learn the words. We "made them up" as we went along. But after a good many performances we knew more or less what we were going to say. I liked being a weak woman in the first act, clasping a doll princess to me, and saying, "Oh, my lord" many times. But I did not like the last act where I had to be the prince. Barbara, as the Sleeping Beauty, would settle herself tastefully on some cushions with her eyes closed, a faint smile on her face, and her hair—she was proud of its length—loose and pulled out to hang gracefully. I had to wander round and round on lawn or dining-room carpet carefully not looking at her and saying, "It is strange. I haven't seen a living creature. But ah! Here is a winding stair"—and so on in a long monologue till I gave a start of surprise and cried, "But who is this?" Then I had to say how lovely Barbara

was—which I didn't think—and had to end fatuously, "She is so beautiful I *must* kiss her." Then she woke very pleased, saying the traditional words, "Is it you, my prince? I have waited long for you," and jumped up and stood beside me a bit fatter and two inches taller.

But acting, too, faded out as we grew self-conscious.

Writing, however, was different. Writing was part of life. That stayed.

From the age of five or six we had always, when we were walking without a grown-up, told fairy-stories. The duty evolved on the eldest one there. If Barbara were absent I had to do the telling, but she got most practice. The plot followed a classic pattern—lovely princess, misfortune through witch or other powers of evil, prince, rescue, marriage, living "happy ever after." Only Peter was a bit of a nuisance. He did not care for princesses and demanded rabbits.

When we were in the sevens and eights we began a magazine. It was called, because we were so moral, *The Sunbeam*. It was only an exercise book, but we embellished it with paintings of flowers and a fairy and angel or two, and Barbara, very conscious of her future readers, wrote an introduction explaining, rather unnecessarily, that we were recording "our little stories" after "we had made the mup" (sic). Our little stories did not go far. We wrote one each and a bit of another one, and then abandoned the magazine.

The stories that were finished represented our different ages. Barbara, turning for a plot to real life

though her spelling was weak, produced a war-time romance beginning, "How dull Christmas will be without dady! said Molly." (Shades again, of Louisa M. Alcott!) "Dady" was away at the war. He returned, unexpectedly, however, to find a "craddle" with a new baby, and Molly remarked, "Christmas will be Christmas after all."

I was still in fairyland. My heroine was a lily fairy who went out one day and got caught in a storm. A rose fairy invited her into his house; they slept together, and the next morning they said, "We had better get married."

Rosemary was wilful, and had to be pressed to her effort. She could not write yet; so Barbara wrote it for her, and possibly made it mostly up, though keeping the Rosemary tradition of violence. It was the story of a little pig called Stuffy. Stuffy would never stop eating. "One day his brothers heard a loud pop. Little Stuffy had burst."

The Sunbeam was abandoned, but we still sometimes amused ourselves with literary composition. Once long afterwards, when we were in our early teens, we started on a communal sonnet, taking a line each. It was just before Christmas, and we were sitting together in the morning-room very busy with raffia and needlework. It was a grey day, but outside the window we could just see the shrubbery. Somebody began, "Oh laurustinus glowing on a bush"—but it certainly did not glow on that December morning:

Oh laurustinus glowing on a bush,
It makes me think upon my fairest love.
My heart flies upwards to the realms above,
My heart flies upward without any push.

"Oh, we *can't* do any more." For it was all very well for the first two who did not have to think about rhymes. But after that a sonnet is all rhyme, and what can you do with "bush"?

Sometimes we had a game of saying quotations from the poets to one another and guessing where they came from. It was a triumph if your opponent could not guess ; a still greater triumph if you could make up a quotation yourself and foist it on the company as Shakespeare or Milton.

Rosemary once had me with, "It sets my pugging tooth on edge." Who would have thought that was Shakespeare? I accused *her* of making it up. She also repeated "Romola, Romola, Romola catsmeat" so many times that I asked in the end if George Eliot had really said that.

But later I was the deceiver. One evening before I got into bed I stood before our window and said dreamily :

Colossus webs that fortune weaves
Around the lives of the unfortunate.

Barbara responded : "Who said that?"
"Guess."
"Shakespeare."
"No."
"Shelley."
"No."
"Give it up."

"Me." But in my triumph I was a little worried—and still am—about that queer "colossus."

By this time, Barbara, as well as being the family artist, was the family poet. She did not hide her light under a bushel. She produced books, garnishing her verse with flowers rather in the fashion of mediæval scribes. She wrote very good verses—on flowers, on "Blackberry Wood," on the sea. I used to think they were charming. What could be more perfect than this, written when she was about eleven?

> Far away, dim in the distance
> Where the seagulls never dip
> And the bathers never wander,
> Gleam the white sails of a ship.

She was praised by aunts and friends. She was wonderful. And it never occurred to me that I could write verse too.

Then one evening it came. It came as a sudden gift from heaven, so that I have never forgotten the moment. And, indeed, I treated it like a heavenly gift, saying nothing about it, scribbling for years on the backs of old envelopes with an ever blunter pencil since I kept it in the bedroom and never sharpened it, and then putting the dirty little bits of paper away in a drawer with a stone cross, hair-ribbons and safety-pins.

I must have been about twelve. It was a spring evening, and I stood all alone by one of our bedroom windows. Twilight had fallen, but I did not put on the light, for in the deep blue cloudless sky a full gold moon was rising. It was warm. It would be May Day on the morrow. And in those years I

longed like any mediæval peasant for the spring. Spring. May tomorrow. I put my head down on the window-sill and smelt the smell of paint warmed by sun. Everything was so beautiful that I wanted to cry.

Then suddenly I was making up a poem on summer. The first verse came without the slightest effort; the rest almost as easily. It seemed to me a very good poem. With trembling pleasure I put on the light, tore open an envelope and scribbled it down in my untidy dirty writing.

Summer is come with her glory and brightness,
Bringing us sweetness and longing untold.
Summer is come. You may see her descending,
Charming our eyes with her soft blue and gold.

Out in the meadows where buttercups cluster,
Over the woods where the bluebells are shy,
Flies the bright spirit with warmth all-pervading,
Kissing the banks where anemones lie.

There were two more verses with pale blue skies and dew and a final moral with a thump:

"Let us be grateful for summer is here."

Well, it certainly sounds now as if it flowed easily. But I did not criticise it then. The words had come from nowhere. They made me immensely happy. I put my envelope carefully away under black hair-ribbon.

In all the hurly-burly of youth I now had some secret pleasure that nobody could touch.

NOW, I . . .

GOING THROUGH these memories of childhood and finding so much pleasure, I ask myself again: Why is the main impression unhappiness? Why am I so glad that I am grown-up?

I have found three chief reasons. The first is that we were always at the mercy of other people, intruders into their world; offending them without meaning to; being hurt by their crossness.

Then we were always at the mercy of ourselves. Later, as experience grows, the watching part of the self can say to the suffering part, "This will not last for ever," or "You feel like this because it is night. You will feel better in the morning," or "You have been in a tight corner like this before." In a childhood crisis there is so little previous experience that you have no hope. Each clash seems the end of the world, and as if it would go on for ever. And at the same time your feelings, fresh and unworn, are more easily hurt than they will ever be again; and as for your conscience—arrows of fire are not in it.

But the greatest disadvantage is that you are alone. You don't tell anything about yourself—anything of importance. You are inwardly incoherent anyhow. You probably don't realise that there is anything to tell. And so you don't know that other people have felt the same as you. You have no means of comparison. You have no door on the human world. "We mortal millions live alone." Never as much as in childhood.

But the position is not hopeless. Everything flows. Time will do for you what you cannot do yourself. When you have gone through fifteen or sixteen years of solitude you will find yourself perhaps on a dusty road with a case of books in your hand and a school-friend beside you. You will be talking about politics, literature or God, and with a wonderful feeling of self-importance, affection, release, you will begin, "Now, I . . ." and open your heart.

Then the worst of childhood will be over.

2

OTHER CHILDREN

Other Children

THE REST OF THE STUDIES in this book—about other children—can only, of course, be superficial. When one meets an adult for the first time one knows the tricks of establishing contact; knows that if one is frank and friendly one will probably get the same back; talks about his family, his work, his amusements. When one meets a child for the first time one is at sea, racking one's brains for an approach. I remember walking down a road with a friend, and coming upon a child of about five who seemed lost.

"You speak to her. I don't know what to say," said my companion.

I did not know what to say either. I asked some tentative question. The child did not reply. She gave me a vindictive look and walked on hurriedly.

Even with familiar children one wonders sometimes what to talk about when one is alone with them.

What exactly does one get from the children one knows well? Pleasure in their unfolding and in their looks, which are so much more beautiful than adults'. Some personal inconvenience—such as I suffered recently from a boy of four who, while I was giving him a pick-a-back, broke a clip on my dress by light-heartedly bashing me with some nut-crackers. Something is always breaking or getting crumpled or dirty. A good deal of amusement at fresh and piquant sayings. A weariness of their company, and yet a gladness to see them again. "I

get fed up with her when she's here all the time, and yet I miss her horribly when she's away," said one mother. A good deal of pleasure from the handling of them, the affection—and an almost complete ignorance of what is going on within.

The story is incomplete when one writes of one's own childhood because one does not know the outer effect. It is more incomplete when one writes of other children because one does not know the inner workings. It is almost like watching a plant grow; there is the same sense of natural yet secret processes. But since one has been through it oneself long before, with children one can translate just a little.

Not much. "I treat her like an idiot though she's probably got more brains than I have," said a mother of her daughter of two.

We treat them like idiots. And they retaliate by shocking us. And the most we can do is to watch and not be too surprised.

Susan

THE SAINT

WE ARE visiting Susan's grandmother. Sitting in a polite semi-circle in the drawing-room we talk of the family, local news, coming holidays—all the things one does talk of before tea at 4-30. But Susan does not talk. She is sitting on the settee, very still with her hands in her lap and a polite smile on her round face. When anybody asks her a question she says just yes or no in a soft hurried voice.

Susan has gold silkworm-silk hair drawn back smoothly and tied on the nape of her neck with two green ribbons. There is always an untidy fringe at the back between the tufts, but the hairdresser says it will grow. Susan has saucer-blue eyes, long red-brown eye-lashes, a snub nose, pink cheeks and a fine complexion. She has a long thin body and enormous feet. Today she wears a green check cotton frock to match her green bows. She is seven years old.

Next to her on his mother's knee sits her cousin John. John is three, with flaming red hair. He wriggles and frets, tired of the drawing-room atmosphere. "The children would be happier in the garden," says their grandmother.

Susan rises at once, quietly, obediently, and takes John's hand. She is very tall beside him. They go out.

Later, "Look at them," somebody says. We look through the window.

John is doing the honours of the garden. He is showing Susan the pinks and campanulas. She is very obliging. He sniffs and motions to her. She sniffs. Then he bends to the lawn.

"What's John doing ?"

"Picking a daisy."

John offers the daisy to Susan. She stoops to take it, smiles, politely sniffs again.

Somebody says, "What a photograph it would make !"

SINNER

We are at Susan's home in the kitchen. Susan is on my knee, a great bony weight, her heavy shoes kicking my ankles.

"Wead to me"—she cannot quite say her R's yet —"and tickle me too." She loves being tickled so much that I have invented a story of how she will have to go to the Employment Exchange to hire a tickler for the job.

"Seven o'clock," says Susan's mother. "Time for bed."

"No." She makes a face and an angry gesture of dismissal. "Auntie Deanie's going to wead to me."

"Now, Susan, no nonsense."

Susan's cheeks become crimson. She thumps off my knee, advances on her mother and begins slapping at her hands.

"I'm *not* going. It isn't seven."

"Now Susan, not again please . . ."

"I *won't* go, you—you silly old thing."

"Look at the clock."

"It's only a minute to anyway. You're a bloody liar . . ."

"She's trying to shock me," says Susan's mother *sotto voce*. The slapping match continues. Finally, she loses patience. "We really will send you to boarding school if this continues . . . Susan's behaviour lately ! The other day she told her father she hated him and he would go to hell. That's the kind of language she uses. Did you ever know such an unpleasant child ?"

Which is the real Susan ?

BABYHOOD

My memories of Susan begin when she was a day old—a rather red baby with a glint of red-brown down on her head—sleeping in a nursing-home. Since then I have had to garner every memory I possess, for she is always asking, "Tell me about when I was a little girl." When I tell her—things that seem to have happened only yesterday to me—I am often surprised at her own forgetfulness.

"No—I don't wemember."

She seemed to be enjoying so much, fearing so much, learning so much at the time—when she was three or so—that I should have expected more to remain. But then, of course, our time systems are different. Our years are almost her weeks.

I can tell Susan only odd adventures of her first year, as I did not see her much. The chief story is of

the kitten at Christmas time. She, Susan, at five months, used to be brought in in her basket and placed in an armchair while we had tea, and would make speeches without words at the top of her voice, till her father said his head ached. A solid baby otherwise, sitting on one's knee with her legs straight out and her head, still with only a red-brown down, sunk on her chest. "Little Stodge" to her mother. But with these tremendous monologues in the evening with hands and feet twitching in company.

The kitten, two months, a tabby, did not care for the monologues, but he did like the twitching toes. One evening Susan stopped her conversation and began to cry. She was picked up, and no more notice was taken. The kitten had been running round the room jumping at the tablecloth and anything else dangling. Now, when Susan was bathed, it was found that her toes had a number of scratches. While we were engaged in tea the kitten had been leaping at those too.

Not much of an adventure to tell Susan now. Not indicative of much except the extraordinary speed of the cat baby to mature compared with the human baby. The human baby, three months older, lies there with helpless twitching toes while the cat baby leaps and rushes round the room.

"But you remember the ration books, Susan." She has never forgotten those. She blushes even now and looks uneasy.

For she, like all children, lived through her period of idiocy—the period when they will touch and interfere and have a genius for the most unexpected forms of silliness. It was the first year of war, and

Susan

Susan was two, and growing domesticated, her mother wrote, following her round the house dusting and sweeping with her own little duster and brush. But why, when there were numbers of old letters and pieces of paper about, should she light just on the ration books? They were within her reach. She sat down and tore them not into even decent-sized pieces but into confetti. It was probably the most wicked thing she has ever done. Her father spent the whole morning trying to fit the pieces together. In vain. Then, of course, there had to be tiresome visits to the Food Office.

"And do you remember the safety-pin in the porridge, Susan?" No. But she has been told about it many times. That was nearly suicide. The saucepan of porridge was cooking on the range, and, unseen, Susan dropped into it a large opened safety-pin. When the porridge was poured out the safety-pin, still unseen, was in her own plate. She very nearly ate it.

"I came to see you when you were two, Susan, and you were very shy." She likes to be told how silly she was then, with the implication that she is much wiser now. It was to Cornwall, across a blacked-out England, and arriving late I first saw Susan, now with golden hair, asleep. And it was odd the next morning to hear the baby, always wordless to me before, talking in a deep voice. It was as if she had suddenly become one of us.

I tell the present Susan about "the pretty hand." On that visit, to conquer her devastating shyness, which made her rush and cling round her mother's skirts when I so much as glanced at her, I offered a

war-time amusement. I had my torch with me. "Hold out your hand, Susan." The light behind the pudgy fingers became brilliant stained-glass red. It was an unfortunate invitation—far too popular. When I bathed her I even had to take the torch to the bath to keep her happy. Most of my battery went in that week.

How much a child of two has still to see! I showed Susan the moon, and after that, in the dark "summer time" winter mornings, she would go out into the garden looking for the "moonp." I showed her her shadow. I tried to teach her the word "elephant," but she could not say it, and was cunning, slapping over that page of her animal book quickly so that I should not ask her. But she could say her own word for birds very well. It was "dirdle-dirs."

At two she had a curious devotion which was to last many months—to her pillow. It was called a "husher," and its limp corners were toes which she fondled, and it came down with her in the morning, sat on a chair and was a refuge all day. In any kind of disturbance, "Husher, Husher," Susan would cry, and race across the room and embrace it. It had meals with her. Of course it went up to bed with her. It went with her in her first—extremely unsuccessful—attempt at school when she was three. She sat clasping her pillow with big tears rolling down her cheeks. When the pillow-case had to be washed some sleight of hand had to be used to get it away from her for a minute. It was such a long pillow-worship that Susan's parents began to wonder if there was something emotionally odd about the child.

But now if you ask her if she remembers her husher she says vaguely that she thinks she just does. So rapidly do very young affections change.

"There were other times I came to see you in Cornwall, Susan. And each time you'd forgotten me."

For, returning some months later with memories of being an accepted nurse-maid, I was greeted by the old shyness. A cross, flushed Susan, as we stood beside her cot, sat up, clasped her mother round the waist, and said in the high nasal whine she still keeps when she is annoyed, "I want *you*. I want *you*." The rejected visitor soon dropped into place, however, as chief reader. I shall never forget "The Fee Bears" as long as I live. We had it four or five times every day for ten days. She knew it by heart. I knew it by heart. Still it was the cadence that sounded sweetest in her ears.

I was interested to see how soon an ear for rhyme would develop. It was not there at three. I tried her with verse from one picture book.

To market, to market to buy a fat pig,
Home again, home again jiggety . . .

"Jod," she would say.

"Jig, Susan. Now :

To market, to market, to buy a fat hog,
Home again, home again, jiggety . . ."

"Jid," she would say. We decided that she would never be a poet. But we were wrong. She is one already.

She was a sheltered mother's child at three and four. The "Little Stodge" had turned out to be nervous and full of fears. Once when her mother had

left her a short time alone in the house she came flying down the road in her white nightgown to meet her. Once she was waving me off at the gate as I waited for a bus, but all of a sudden she turned tail and fled into the house. A minute later I saw why. Mary, the eighteen-year-old girl who came to mind her, was approaching—a good kind girl, but Susan was mute while she was about. Once I went to the station to enquire about trains, Susan, rather apprehensive, with me. She was used to a car ; not trains. An engine was puffing backwards and forwards. She started and clung to me, her eyes wide with fear ; then tried to drag me away into the safe street. I remembered my own childish fears, and came as soon as I could.

Then there was "The good ship Ada." "The good ship Ada" lay high and dry on the shore, and for sixpence you could climb a ladder and see over her—her nautical instruments, the photographs in her cabins. Susan had always wanted to see over the ship. So one morning I said I would give her the treat, and we padded across the bay at low tide, the good ship waiting for us in the shadow of the cliff. We arrived, and I too felt a sudden chill in the atmosphere. It was cool in the shadow. There were slimy stones and the smell of mud. The ship lay apparently deserted, a steep iron ladder going up her side. Susan reacted strongly. "I don't want to. I don't want to," she said in sudden terror, and taking my hand dragged me away. I went. There is no need to be afraid if you needn't. She was silent and held my hand until we were far out into the sun of the bay again.

It was the same over ice-cream—her first ice-cream or what should have been. Again a treat was offered, one afternoon when we were strolling in the gardens. Old men were playing bowls. All was peaceful. And *we* had so seldom had ices offered us when we were children by the sea. "Let's all have one," I said.

"What's ice-cream?" said Susan apprehensively.

"Cold," we said.

She actually turned pale, and tried in the usual way to drag us on. "No, mummy. I don't want to, mummy." She was almost hysterical. So we bought only two ices, and then she became suddenly light-hearted and talkative. But she would not taste.

She thinks now that she remembers how silly she was. It is a different story now. Whenever one takes her into the town shopping, the first request is for "a cone." Then she has a second. Then she says: "You know, I'm still hungwy. Could I have another?"

Apart from timidity she seemed an ideal child in those halcyon days. She had one or two habits which were slightly irregular—such as pulling handfuls of grass and stuffing it into the gaping eye-holes of a doll whose lost eyes clicked about in its head. I suppose it was the pleasure of poking things through small holes. She also picked all green poppy buds as "nanas"—for she still remembered that pre-war fruit—for her dolls, which I thought was rather hard on the poppies. And when we went up on the head-land to "see the noise"—an electric motor—her balls were always running away, sometimes into

other people's gardens. But what could you expect with a child of three?

Otherwise, she was almost too good to be believed. I remember going with her one morning down to the bay, and when I said, "Don't go too deep" she came back; and when I said, "Get the ball," she got it. The only difficulty I had was with a butterfly with a torn wing resting by the steep little path up to the road. Susan's heart was over-tender—she was always asking questions about horses and whether they were whipped—and now she hung over the maimed butterfly wanting to know what would happen to it. I told her, with the ready lying of which I really disapproved, that it would go home to its mother. Then I got her home to hers.

"Any child is good if it's treated reasonably," I thought.

But is it? One day I was not so sure. We were playing with plasticine by an open window, and every now and then Susan would take a bit and poke it through the window.

"Don't do that," I said. She waited a moment; then gave me a look and did it again.

"Don't do that, dear. You see, it only falls onto the earth and gets lost." Surely that was plain and sensible enough.

She paused a moment, and did it again.

"Susan, if you put any more through the window I shan't play with you." Thus one is driven to threats.

The demon peeped out. She gave me a defiant look, and poked another piece through.

I gathered up the plasticine and put the box away.

She watched me, and then burst into noisy sobs which continued for some time. She hardly ever cried, and her mother said this time it was because she felt a fool.

Thus, however reasonable you try to be, you finally become involved in "discipline."

NIGHTS

YOU GET INVOLVED in more than discipline. You become the spectator of troubles which you don't share and can't help. Then, again, you remember your own childhood.

At the age of about a year Susan had evolved a peculiar way of putting herself to sleep. We called it "eeing." She knelt up, rocking her bed backwards and forwards and uttering a monotonous "ee-ee-ee-ee-ee," for half an hour or more. It was not good for the bed, and from underneath it sounded like a factory at work. I asked her how she got to sleep when she was kneeling up. She said it was quite easy. She also said when we protested :

"But I can't get to sleep unless I ee." She still ees occasionally, and we were to hear more of this "can't get to sleep."

Sucking her fingers was, of course, a normal pleasure in bed. She put in two fingers at once. (Her brother, seven years younger, sucks just the same two fingers, while her friends, a brother and sister, both suck their thumbs. Presumably heredity has something to do with which fingers you suck.) Once we were talking about the early morning. Susan

woke early, but was very good and quiet. I asked her how she spent the time. She replied :

"I sutt."

But presently she was not being so quiet in bed. It was a period when, because of the war, she was moving about a great deal, and perhaps her nightmares came partly from a feeling of insecurity. But I knew very well from my own experience that there was more to nightmares than that.

She was four. She would go to bed quite blithely, and the house would be quiet. Then, at about ten, frightful roars would be heard. Somebody would run upstairs to find Susan sitting up in bed, her face like a lobster, her hair sticking out, her covers thrown off, her cheeks rolling with tears, choking with wild sobs. But that was not the end of it. In the day she would be full of affection to me, "I love you. Live with us. My daddy will pay for you." But at night, if I approached, the shrieks would become more hysterical.

"Dow away. Dow away. I want Mummy. I must have Mummy."

Mummy would generally oblige, and would tidy her up and gradually get her quiet. But once Mummy was in the bath, and then the shrieks and struggles and hysteria increased in fury till she came.

In the morning Susan would remember nothing of it, and would be her normal affectionate self.

Night cannot, however, have been all terror for her, for once she told me she dreamed of fairyland. Like the fairyland of my own youth, it had flowers in it.

"And you were there, too," she said to me.

What a pity I didn't know!

After some months the worst of the nightmares died out, but there was another trouble. Susan began to say she could not get to sleep. She lay sometimes for hours, and then again she grew hysterical and said she would die. "I shall die if I can't sleep." Sometimes it was ten before she settled down.

All sorts of indulgences were tried. When I went to stay I was shocked at her evening perambulations. She would have her bath and get into bed. Then she would carry on a long shouting conversation with her mother who might be washing something in the bathroom. The next thing we would know would be that she was "hungwy," and she would pad downstairs in her bedroom slippers and long white nightdress—but sometimes without the bedroom slippers —and have some biscuits or even an egg. Then back she would go again, and more shouting would begin. Then she would prance down a second time. So the evening would pass.

I was doubtful about this freedom. When we were children, I said, we should never have dreamed of getting up once we were in bed. "Well, what can you do?" said Susan's mother, and what could she? And now I am inclined to think that she was right. For it was only a phase, and by coming down Susan may have saved herself from any number of horrors upstairs.

One night her tiresomeness reached a climax. She shouted. She came down and had her biscuits. Half an hour went by. She shouted again. I went up. But she had reached her furious night mood. She would not look at me. She wept. She must have mummy.

Mummy was busy and refused to come ; so a long monologue of shouting went on upstairs. Then there was silence.

At a quarter to ten, as Susan's mother sat sewing and I sat reading, we heard cautious steps on the stairs. The door clicked open. There was the lean figure in the white nightgown again. Susan's mother said crossly, "Go back to bed at once," but Susan advanced and sat down conversationally on the rug by the fire. I was offended with her, and went on reading as if I had not seen her.

"You've got a nice fire," said the society voice.

"Susan," said her mother, "I *am* fed up with you."

"What are you doing, mummy? Mending daddy's shirt?"

"Susan, do you know what the time is?"

"I found a fossil in the garden today."

It was such a Mayfair voice that I nearly laughed. But I was the offended aunt. I went on reading.

"What's Dwen doing?"

Silence.

"Is it a nice book you're weading, auntie?"

Silence.

Silence for a very long time. I kept my head bent, but glanced from the corner of my eye. Susan had risen from the rug, and after exchanging secret looks with her mother was advancing towards me on tip-toe. The clock ticked. I sat on. She approached with vast precautions. Suddenly there was a spring. She had flung herself on my knee, bony arms straining round my neck.

"You didn't know I was there, did you? Wasn't it a spwise?"

It was not. But we all burst out laughing. Then she went back quite goodly to bed.

Now that she is seven most of the night difficulties seem over. I see her only, of course, with the eye of a visitor, and she gets far more attention when I am there so that she may proportionately make less fuss. But now I quite enjoy the seven o'clock preparations. She remains cheerful, too.

Half-past six is a time when we meet again after she may have been playing outside most of the day. She will appear at the back door and say wheedlingly, "Please will you wead to me?" with the hope, I think, that by engaging an adult in activity she can gain support if she begins to argue at seven. I say, playing the heavy mentor, "Only a quarter of an hour left."

"Aw wight," she says obligingly. We read.

Then, "Bedtime Susan" is called from somewhere.

"And clear up before you go," her mother adds.

And Susan to me, in an excess of affection, "Barf me and tell me a story in the barf and wead to me in bed."

"Come on," I say, because I am only a visitor and it is tradition.

When she is in the bath, with her toothbrush on the edge and a red mug from which she drinks, there often comes a demand I dread. "Tell me about when you were chewdren."

I have ransacked my memory. No great adventures ever seemed to happen to us. The stories Susan likes best are about naughtiness—with the inference that she herself is much better. But, unfortunately, we were not very naughty. In self-defence I embark

on another kind of story—*Cinderella* or *Sleeping Beauty* told as a modern novel, with great emphasis on feelings, clothes, hair and above all food and drink. Thus elaborated, one story will last for several nights, which is lucky since I find I am forgetting some stories that I thought I could never forget. What exactly happened, for example, in *Snow White and Rose Red* or *Rumpelstiltskin?*

"Now hop out." She does it, after some horse-play of sliding down the bath on her stomach while the water runs away.

"Now bed."

"Wead to me."

"Not a minute after eight o'clock."

Facing her on a shelf as she lies in bed are about twenty of the most frightful-looking dolls I have ever seen—all sizes, legless, armless, hairless or with home repairs in the way of darning-wool for hair. Susan is very tenacious of her property. She does not give her dolls away as I used to do. But the spiritual home of most of that crowd is the dustbin. On the chair by her bed are more treasures—books, a box of scraps of silver paper which she "smoothes" at her leisure, golliwogs made of darning-wool, snail-shells and a box of scraps of birds'-eggs which she had picked up. (She thinks it "crool" to take eggs from nests.) Her mother is constantly exhorting her to "tidy your chair."

Susan sits up in bed with the covers tucked round her. I sit on the bed. I have to hold the book sideways so that she can follow my reading. She corrects me if I make a slip. We race away with a fairy-story, Beatrix Potter or the ubiquitous Enid Blyton. She

has already read every story I read to her, but like all children she is still pleased with repetitions.

I finish a story. "I'm sure it's eight," I say.

"Yes," she answers honestly, for she is honest, "I heard it stwike."

"Will you have your curtains drawn?"

"Auntie Deanie, I've got a pwecious jewel I want to show you."

"Tomorrow. Is that right for your curtains?"

"*Let* me get out of bed and show you my jewel. It's an emewald."

"Not tonight. Which doll will you have?"

"It's so lovely, my jewel. It won't take a minute."

"Which doll?"

She capitulates, and begins to consider the usual nightly problem. For various reasons—that they are too dirty, or too hard, or that their heads would drop off—about fifteen dolls out of the twenty are disqualified from sleep with Susan. But five are enough to argue about.

"Now I might have Isobel, or I might have Jill. Or there's Buttercup."

In this difficult choice I have resorted to one of the old methods we used as children. You give the five candidates the names of something else. "Will you have amethyst, emerald, pearl, diamond or ruby?"

"Emewald," Susan says.

"That's Jill." I carry Jill across. She is a hard wartime doll, but the bed is fairly large.

"Goodnight, sweet. Door open like that?"

"Yes. Doodnight."

I walk away. She shouts, "And ask mummy to come."

"All right. Goodnight."

"Doodnight. You know my emewald . . ."

"That's enough."

"But you will look at it in the morning, won't you?"

"Of course. Goodnight."

"Doodnight. What are you doing?"

Silence.

"Doodnight."

I don't answer and she tries it on only twice more.

TEMPERS

EVEN WHEN SHE WAS a little child Susan used to behave strangely when she got into trouble. When she was scolded or smacked she did not cry. She remained very quiet and dignified, and tiptoed away upstairs. For about half an hour there would be silence in the house, and I would wonder what on earth she was doing in her bedroom. Nothing evil at any rate. Nothing would be disarranged when she returned. She would re-emerge in the same reposeful manner, and begin talking in her society way about trifles. Actually, though she did not know it, this was a method of making the adult feel slightly ashamed of himself.

"At three I used to think she was the sweetest little girl I'd ever known," says Susan's mother. "But now . . ."

For suddenly, in place of the old dignity, there developed the most fiendish tempers.

Susan had some excuse, of course. There were two war-time moves in a year. And then there may have been some emotional difficulty when they went to visit her cousin John. Cousin John was ten months, and the attention which Susan had had concentrated on her all her life was now turned on the baby. People stood round John to see him have his bath. Susan came only second. Her reaction was to learn to spit.

John spat; or at least they called it spitting when he bubbled at the mouth. They laughed, and Susan wanted to be laughed at too. So she spat too. But her spitting was much more powerful. It was real spitting. She was reproved, and then it turned into an act of defiance. She resorted to spitting when she wanted to show her fury.

These furies, this Jekyll and Hyde character, came to me as a sharp shock. I arrived for a visit to find the same affectionate child, but on the third evening I saw the first transformation. What seemed to me strange at the time was that, while she was making these extravagantly loving remarks in the day—"Don't go home. Live with us for ever"—her evening furies nearly always were against me. Perhaps it was because I was the visitor, the disturber of routine.

(But Susan also understands the D. H. Lawrence thesis of love and hate combining. Recently, when I was telling her the story of *The Frog Prince,* I touched on this theme. "The princess hated the frog,

and yet in a way she loved him too. You do sometimes love and hate people at the same time."

"Yes." Susan perfectly understood that. She rather dashed me by adding, "Like me with you.")

That first fury broke out after we had been playing ball on the lawn just before her bedtime. (The tempers came on generally when she was tired.) Susan missed a catch, and the ball hit her chin—not at all hard. I was surprised that she streaked in without a word. She went straight upstairs to her mother and announced that I had thrown a ball on purpose to hurt her. (Always this playing of one adult off against the other!) Then she stalked down.

I was sitting reading. The apparition stood before me with flaming cheeks.

"Go away," and though she said "Dow," it was all impossibly dramatic. "Go away from here. I hate you. I shall never love you again. I can't bear the sight of you. You've got to go home at once. I never want to see you again—ever. Pwomise me"—an odd appeal here—"that you'll go at once. Tonight. And never come back any more. Now—go."

It was natural drama. It was not learnt from the cinema. For Susan had never been to the pictures. She had told me she had, but it had turned out to be only a performance of *Julius Cæsar* at a boys' school.

This was such a new being that I did not know how to deal with it. I told her rather weakly not to be silly, but "I *hate* you," she answered, and stalked out. That night I did not bath her, nor did she call to me when she was in bed. Apparently she was very loving to her mother.

The next morning the house was quiet. She did not come to my room as usual to be dressed. I wondered bleakly how long the feud was to continue, and descended alone. She was sitting eating her porridge. I began mine. Almost at once she began conversation in a light airy tone.

"I can get five animals into my dollies' swing."

I was so much relieved that I answered cordially.

But a few evenings later there was another quarrel. I asked her to get out of the bath. She refused. I lifted her out. Then she became a kicking, biting, scratching, screaming fury. I could not dry her. I could not get her nightdress over her arms. Finally, she ran half-clad into the passage, screaming at me to go and kill myself. She was so violent that her mother drew her into her bedroom and shut the door on her.

The next morning our reconciliation was slower. Susan kept her head averted at the breakfast-table. I kept mine averted. Presently she was glancing at me out of the corner of her eye. I still looked away. Then she made one of her society remarks, stammering a little. I was not cordial, but she persisted. And so gradually we worked back to the usual "I love you" ; but I said that that day I would tell her no stories. It was a silly penance, however, for I read to her instead.

The third temper had nothing to do with me, but again Susan must have been tired. And again the chief fury was visited on me. We had been for a long walk, and her father was giving her a pick-a-back. And then they came to an argument about cats. Susan wanted a cat. Her father said he did not like them. They killed birds. Susan was indignant at this

aspersion on her favourite animal, and called him "a liar." He was annoyed and put her down. Immediately fury broke loose.

"I hate you daddy, and I hate Auntie Gwen, too. I wish you were both dead. I love mummy, but I *hate* you two. Go and kill yourselves. *Please* go and kill yourselves. I never want to see you again. And I don't want Gwen here. I don't want her in my house . ." And much more, accompanied by screams.

She snatched a stick from the ground, and began to strike at my arms which were sore with sunburn. I had a hard struggle to get the stick, for she was big for five and had the strength of her temper. Then she nearly tore to pieces the hat I was carrying. Her father took her under his arm. She kicked and yelled. He let her go. She ran back away from us, screaming still that we were to kill ourselves. Her mother went back after her. She still retreated. Then she shouted that her head hurt her. She had a frightful headache, and *she* was going to die. I suggested going on and leaving her to quieten, but motors sometimes came along the lane. So her father and I walked on in front and her mother cajoling her, with much progress backwards and forwards, behind. It took us a long time to get home.

Afterwards I sat in the garden. Then Susan's mother came out.

"Susan's been spitting at you out of the lavatory window for the last half-hour."

Luckily I was out of range and quite unconscious of it.

We discussed these tempers. I wondered if something could not be done just to show that we were

displeased about them. Susan's mother asked what she could do. I thought some kind of going without, a touch of Lenten atmosphere.

Actually, we did nothing, which was probably best. For the tempers were only a phase, and if they were passing anyhow what was the point of punishment? Susan called "sorry" to me out of the window that evening, and I saw only two smaller outbursts after that—one against her mother, when for a change she was very affectionate to me, and one against her wooden horse, who was supposed to be galloping to Bournemouth across the lawn and would not go fast enough. How she belaboured him with curses, and then suddenly stopped and was herself again. Since then the ungoverned tempers seem almost to have died out.

In all these problems Susan's mother comforts herself with the story of a friend of hers. Mrs. Smith had a child who *would* suck her fingers, and Mrs. Smith could not break her of the habit. So she asked the doctor for advice.

"Don't worry," said the doctor. "She won't be doing it at twenty-one."

And that is probably the answer to most parents' problems.

COMPANIONS

SUSAN WAS SHY and solitary before the coming of Robin. Her world was a world of grown-ups. Robin has made all the difference. Not that he is much of a companion yet, being only seven months,

but the adults of the family are occupied with him, and that has sent Susan out to find companions of her own age.

It is a good thing. Before, she was too parent-bound. For years her shyness was an embarrassment to us. I remember an occasion in Cornwall when Elizabeth, aged six—a stout child with stout plaits—was invited to tea for Susan's sake. Susan, meeting her sometimes in the little town, adored her. But with Elizabeth there, at the tea-table beside her, she was mute. She would also eat no tea. Luckily, Elizabeth was like an express train in her conversation; so there were no awkward silences. Afterwards Elizabeth and I made a dolls' town with Susan's toys at the end of the lawn, but Susan was too shy to play. Her only contribution was a few leaves and marigold heads to act as dolls' vegetables.

But now all is different. She rushes out after "the chewdren," her neighbours, Jane aged six and James aged five, directly she returns from school.

Robin himself was a disappointment to her. She had been asking for a baby in the family for a long time, and she knew that one was coming. But she had wanted a sister, and was not pleased at a boy. She was also desperately homesick the fortnight she stayed away from her parents—her first fortnight away. Her old trouble of sleeplessness returned, and she wrote to her mother every day in large scrawling pencil writing. They were polite letters, with an almost eighteenth-century courtesy in the phrases, "I hope you are well. I hope my brother is well," but reading them afterwards, I could see desperation behind all the loves and kisses.

I asked her later if she was excited at the first view of Robin.

"I was pleased to see my mummy and daddy."

"And the baby?"

"Oh, he was just a lump," she said with some scorn.

She added with despair, "And I *still* haven't got anyone to play with." Perhaps she had expected a baby of her own age.

But she does get some amusement out of him. One evening when he was seven weeks old we let her sit on the lounge settee and hold him. She was careful, and we left them alone for a minute. I returned in the silence to see what they were doing. The baby was very good, lying in Susan's arms and staring at the light. Susan, bent on amusing him, was holding one of her picture books a few inches from his nose and slowly turning the pages.

She gets up at seven to see him fed, and they have a social half-hour. She sometimes helps to gather the things for his bath, and she will put her great head beside his down in the pram and invite him to pull her hair, giving artificial screams when he seizes it. When he is on an adult's knee she likes to come and plonk herself down too, which is not comfortable to Robin or the adult. Once we made a train, with Susan on me, Robin on Susan and Jane, the friend, in front, all swaying and all except Robin saying "chsh-chsh."

Robin, like most babies, enjoys the children, and will stand quite rough treatment. Last time I was there we made him into a beau with two belles. He sat on my knee with one short arm half round the

waist of a gambolling Susan and the other half round a gambolling Jane.

"Robin adores Susan," their mother says.

But there has, of course, been some jealousy. Susan issued strict instructions before the baby came. "You're not to call it love or darling." She reminds us of this when we are occupied with Robin.

"You called him love."

"All right," we say to oblige her, and scatter insults over the unconscious baby. "Slug, Worm, Pig," and Susan rushes in with "Bit of mud."

Susan asked me very earnestly which of the two I liked better. "But I know what you'll say. You *must* like me best because you've known me so much longer."

And the baby s coming has had one—very usual —effect. Susan spends her life now complaining about her health. It is the desire for attention, of course. She complained so much that the doctor was called in. He overhauled her. There was nothing wrong. But still a lurid series of earaches, stomach-aches, "places" and, if there is nothing else, midge-bites unfurls. There was a day when Robin was cutting his teeth and their mother herself had to go to the dentist. Susan immediately had a dreadful sore place on her gum. She sighed and moaned, but had forgotten it by bedtime.

Now her mother writes, "S. ended the day with a 'poisonous' finger—I don't think. But to placate me she made up a poem about a frog who got lost in the fog and fell over a log." For, perhaps typically, with her ailments she is now a poet.

She is, however, finding her own compensations

for less adult attention. She has at last settled down at school after feeling sick each morning and once being really sick over the doorstep. There is a goddess at Susan's school. She is nine, and her name is May Watkins, and her hair is brown and she has grey-blue eyes. And Susan thinks she has spoken to her only once, as May is in a higher form. All the same May is the light of her life. And there is a boy she walks home with sometimes. He tells her he has a grandfather of a hundred and ninety.

But the chief playmates are Jane and James, "the chewdren," who live in the next house. The three spend their time rushing from one garden to the other, or sometimes to the field to see the calves, or sometimes smacking one another's bottom—a word Susan has learned from "the chewdren" and uses far too frequently. But their chief pleasure is playing horses, for Jane and James have a real pony between them, and their parents are interested in racing. The three tie strings round their waists—"It must be tight," says Susan—and collect and leave lying about an endless store of sticks. They canter about whacking their thighs and clucking with their tongues, and set up string jumps for the horses in the garden, going over with much bucking and "gee-ups." When they fail they say, "He was frightened this time," for they are both horse and jockey in one. Each has a horse's name, like Sweet April or Scarlet Runner, and Susan cuts out the racing news from *The Times* so that she can learn more names.

There are other amusements, of course. Standing outside the gate and making faces at the children of the village who "tease" them is one. There is much

talk of this "teasing," and I ask what it consists of. "Oh, they shout rude things and run after us," Susan says non-committally, and adds that the village children began it, and there is a poor boy not quite right in his head up at the village and he sings "Good King Wenceslas" at midsummer, but she doesn't make faces at *him*.

Lately there has been a great vogue for being a wheel-barrow and hand-standing. Susan does superb hand-stands, which is surprising since she is such a tall child. The two little slight brown-haired "chewdren" turn somersaults and waver about, but Susan's long bony legs remain shoes upwards for seconds on end. "Catch my feet," she is always imploring so that she may improve her position; but that is dangerous. Her feet are so large and her shoes are so hard, and they tend to crash down suddenly.

"Oh, daddy, *please*, how do you do a cart-wheel?"

She can do that now, too.

The three lend one another toys and do transfers together. They go to the lavatory in a group. "And *I'm* going to be the one to pretend to put the penny in," Susan is heard to say, and she stands over James and pulls the chain for him because he is so small.

Occasionally quarrels blow up, and I am reminded of Susan's old tempers. They are over the same day. It seems that at present the three cannot do without one another. But while they last nobody could be more vindictive than Susan.

Recently we were in the garden, I reading Beatrix Potter's *Mrs. Tittlemouse* to the three. Perhaps Susan was disgruntled that "the chewdren" should have

joined in the reading. Also she knew the story well, and was rather old for it. Suddenly a fierce argument broke out. James said that the intruder into Mrs. Tittlemouse's house was a frog ; Susan loftily said it was a toad. She was right, as we found in a moment, but she had already sprung up and gone sulking to her swing. I finished the story to Jane and James ; then Jane wandered off after Susan. James stayed a moment with me.

I suppose it was jealousy. Susan shouted, "I shall let Jane have a swing, but I won't let James."

James is the youngest, five. I had to interfere. "*I'm* going to give James a swing." So he took his place on the seat and I pushed him up and down. Susan's cheeks had gone scarlet.

"Well, I've got a secret. I'll tell it to Jane but I won't tell it to James."

"Well, I've got a secret, too," said James hastily.

"I shan't ever tell you my secret."

"Well, I shan't ever tell you mine."

Jane was embarrassed between the two, but brother and sister always hang together in tribulation, and she edged round to James. So Susan was left alone against our three. Then came one of the old outbursts

"Well—you get out of my garden. I won't have you here. It's not your garden, and you're always here. And I don't want you. I hate you. You're never to come back any more. Now—get out."

The two had quietly taken hands and had begun to retreat.

"Susan," I expostulated, but she took no notice.

"Go on. I'll kick you out. Get out."

The two went.

"I'm ashamed of you," I said, and left her.

For a few moments the garden was empty. Then I was aware of a restless shadow. It flitted about for some time. Then it stood behind me in the bright sun so that I could clearly see its shape. It did not turn. It was a shadow with a bow and arrow. I was to be shot.

Luckily Susan's bow is not a powerful weapon. It is made of an old stick bent with a bit of old string, and the arrow is an old stick, too. When she shoots the arrow either drops to the ground or goes in exactly the opposite direction to what she intended.

Apparently now she shot in vain, for nothing touched me. The shadow disappeared again. Five minutes later Susan appeared with her most polite voice :

"Will you wead to me Auntie Deanie?"

This time I did give her a lecture. I elicited the promise that she would go and apologise to "the chewdren." "They've gone out now," she said. She must have been watching them even in this deadly quarrel. "But I will." And she did. They were being horses again in the garden after tea.

The next day I asked her if she had really meant to shoot me.

"Yes, I did," she said, a little embarrassed.

But Jane and James don't seem frightened of this potential murderer. Even while we are still at breakfast some mornings the two brown heads drift past the window, and James calls, "We had sausages for ours. Is Susan coming?"

CONTRASTS

SO THERE SUSAN IS—perfect and silent in company, a mixture and certainly not silent at home.

I see the change from the saintly to the mixed when I call at her school for her—or hardly call, wait in the street, watching the little girls saunter out at the end of the afternoon, slightly untidy, absorbed in one another's company. Susan's tall yellow head emerges between two shorter dark ones. She sees me; hesitates between the two worlds; then breaks away and comes to my side. There is silence for a moment. She is very reserved.

"Well, did you have a nice day?"

"Yes, thank you," says the meek voice.

"I've got a little shopping to do."

The home Susan takes possession. The voice grows eager. "Buy me an ice-cream. You've *got* to buy me an ice-cream."

At home she plays all sorts of silly tricks. She will say, "Let me whisper a secret to you," and when you lean an ear she will blow loudly into it. She will say, "Hold out your hand for a present," and when you hold it out she will give it a hard slap. These habits come from school. So does "Silly thing!" said in a nasal whine. She often refuses her meals and ten minutes afterwards is "hungwy." She makes a very great fuss about doing what she does not want to do.

I visited her recently after her birthday, and she had five letters still to write. She had written me some very good letters in the past, but these formal thanks to aunts she made into a labour of Hercules. Every time we broached the matter there were sighs

and groans. Finally, we got down a pad for her and put a pencil into her hand, and started off on thanks for a doll's frock. With great labour she wrote three lines, pressing so hard that the mark of her round writing came through almost the whole pad. Then suddenly a mad mood caught her, and she began to improvise as if she were much younger than she was. "The dress will be lovely for—for dolly. And—and all my pets."

"Don't be silly, Susan. Rub out pets."

Laboriously she rubbed it out, making a smudge across the paper. We would not risk any more rubbings ; so I suggested a "my" in front of "dolly" to make it sound a little more grown-up. After half an hour's argument the seven lines were finished, smudged and pale, only enlivened by a series of red, blue and green kisses along the top.

But when Susan sees that you are really annoyed she does try to propitiate, so that I have the impression that she has a sweet temper underneath. There was that evening when she called her mother a "bloody liar" and was ordered up to bed. Stopping her slapping Susan said in a dignified tone, "Well, I will then," and stalked away.

There it was—the old chasm. We could not tell if she was suffering or not. She had not asked me to bath her, and I bathed her every evening. Was she miserable in the bathroom behind the closed door? We waited a moment. Then, "Shall I go and see?" I said to her mother. For, if it had happened to *us* when we were seven, we should have been plunged in despair.

What followed was a sudden improvisation,

mother and daughter after their quarrel co-operating in a way I should say belongs only to this freer age—something quite impossible in our own childhood. I went up and called, "Are you bathing?" through the closed door. Susan shouted back, "You're not to come in for five minutes. It's a spwise." So at least she wasn't breaking her heart.

"It's a surprise of some kind," I said returning.

Susan's mother went up to investigate. She said something to the bathroom, learning, so she told me afterwards, that the surprise was that Susan would be bathed and in bed in five minutes. But Susan's mother thought they might do better than that.

Presently she came downstairs. "Robin's crying," she said to me. "Could you go up and see to him?" This was a ruse to get me away upstairs.

I ascended and picked up Robin. Suddenly there was a loud ring at the front door.

Susan's mother called: "Oh, I'm so untidy. Could you go? I'll take Robin."

Down I went. The loud ring was repeated. I thrust Robin into his mother's arms, patted my hair and pulled my dress straight. Then I went to the door.

A peculiar figure was on the step. Susan had on a long full pink nightdress, with over it an old coat of her father's, which looked like a knee-length swagger garment. Her straight hair was loose over her shoulders rather like that of the women artists pictured in *Punch*. Very much on one side was a white cotton "coolie" hat of her mother's. Susan held out her hand with a mincing gesture.

"I'm Mrs. Buggins come to see you." Then with

a shout of laughter. "It's the spwise." Then she went to bed like an angel.

Her favourite games when we are in the car are still an interminable "I spy"—sometimes played with a doll who cannot guess any word longer than three letters—and the equally interminable, "Guess the names of the chewdren in my class, and I'll tell you if you're right." Sometimes she says parrot-like things such as the "I'll smack your bottom" learnt from "the chewdren," or the strange remark when we were talking about sun-bathing, that "Chewdren's bodies are holy, aren't they?" Had she got that from school? But sometimes already a questing self comes through, and you feel that you are almost talking to a grown-up.

"How old is the world?" she asks. Or, "What's it like to be dead?"

I hedge in answer to the second, and say that we shall know later.

"I suppose," Susan goes on, "that it's just like being asleep. I wish I could be dead now and know."

Or there was a time when we were discussing the biting of nails. Susan bites hers; also proudly announces that she bites her toe nails, too. "Look, I'll show you," and she lifts a great foot.

"That's enough, Susan. Can't you stop it?"

"I always think I'm going to," she says, "and I don't. You know you decide you just *won't* do a thing again, and then you go and do it."

She has always been tender-hearted, worrying about the whips in drivers' hands, worrying about the rabbits hanging in butchers'. "It's a shame. I'll never eat rabbit." One day we were out and saw a

pigeon shot. She was upset. "Oh, poor pigeon. *I'd* never eat pigeon-pie."

I reminded her that she ate other meat.

"I know," she said, walking meditatively along a log. "It's very difficult. I like meat, but I don't like to eat animals. I don't know what to do."

I escaped from the age-old problem in the customary way. "Wait till you're grown up. Then you can decide."

Sometimes I wonder, when we are talking so freely, if we, the present adults, seem as far away as our adults did in childhood. On the whole I should say I was nearer to Susan than my aunts were to me. For I did not call my aunts by their Christian names or, sometimes, just "old sausage."

WRITING

IT IS STRANGE how the creative spirit appears, even at the age of seven. Susan, who makes that colossal fuss about writing letters, has of her own accord procured a blue exercise book and for her own pleasure begun writing stories, each with a neat title underlined.

From the letters she was writing to me from the age of three one might guess that she had some creative power. Not in the drawings that gambolled clumsily through them—an aeroplane-like object labelled "horse," an apparent orange birdsnest with multi-coloured eggs inside labelled "cake," a form composed of a purple oval body and green oval arms

and legs briefly entitled "You." Susan's drawings are not ahead of her age, but her powers of expression are. At six she wrote, "I have got a cat. It is very playful. I made it some toys and she loves them. I call her Diamond. She is white with black marks. She is very loving." And the same year described flowers. "We have some violets out in the garden. They smell lovely. We have primulas, poppies, marigolds, Michmas (sic) daisies, eveming (sic) primrose, Japanese anemones out too." Then there was news of school. "I am learning about Eskimos. I am having custard for tea," and of her one operation, "I had my tonsies out and my daddy took me in the car. I help mother with the work." And what could be more adult than the news given when she was six, "Mrs. J. has just had a daughter"?

But now we are dealing with spontaneous invention—these carefully-written pages, these lines ruled at the end all of her own free will. When I first saw the book there were two stories, but there are more each time I go. They are about animals, birds and fairies. I cannot say there is much plot, but the style is lively. Here, for instance, is a passage from *Smoky, the Cat.* A little punctuation has been added.

"One fine day a fox came to the house and rang the bell. Come in, said Smoky the Cat. So the Fox came in and Smoky the Cat said, Sit down sir. So the Fox sat down. Well, said he, how are you. Very well, said the cat. The fox was a friend of Smoky. The fox's name was Renard and he had come to ask the cat to have dinner with him. Would you like to come and have dinner with me, Renard said. Yes,

said smoky. Come on, said the fox so on they went and had a nice time. The end."

I find the old theme of fairyland, with the other old theme of escape from a workaday world. A fairy discovers a little path and meets an elf who obligingly tells her it is the path to her native land and then does the honours. "What a nice place fairyland was. It had flowers all over the place. She went all round with the elf and came home. The end."

Not quite such a romantic note is struck by the story of Spot, who is a "little bee and she had brown wings." Possibly war-time shortages are an influence here. There also seems a good deal of emphasis on the need for rest. The bee went out, but rain came on. So "she went about the place looking for a place to get dry . . . She saw some flowers and she took them home, and then had a lovely tea and she had for tea jam tart, big cake and small cakes and buns. Then after tea she had a rest and then went to bed and went to sleep and dreamt of food."

Of course they are derivative, these stories, but when I think what Susan was seven years ago I find this spontaneous creation marvellous.

The last time I visited the family, verse had appeared as well. There were two poems, each with its neat title as usual. Susan has little ear for rhythm yet, but her rhymes are all right.

The first was to commemorate a trip with her father to Lyme Regis one Sunday. It is called *The Sea.*

The sea is blue today.
As we went down to the bay
We were very gay.

It is foaming and white.
Sometimes the waves fight.
The children paddle in it.
The children's toes it likes to hit.

The other deals with the six calves in the field near. Their appearance has been one of the events of the summer. Susan calls it *The Calves*.

The calves are very sweet
And grass they love to eat.
They are always at the gate.
They aren't gone till I have counted eight.

When I had read this I asked Susan, "Do you ever count eight at the gate?"

"No. It was just put in," she said.

So there it is. Things are "just put in" because they rhyme or because she has read them elsewhere. She is still only seven. She has not got to the point when she can unveil herself in her literary compositions.

And when I am with her I, even knowing her from birth, have a baffling feeling that I don't know her at all. I remember incidents. I know her appearance, and can see in a bird's-eye-view all the changes that have passed over her in the seven years. I know the sensation of the long hard body on my knee.

But what is going on deep within? Hidden.

Ken

HE WAS THE MOST fantastic liar I have ever met. I was six, and he was a little younger.

He was a pupil at my first school during the first world war. He wore a rather loose not very clean sailor-suit. He was rather small for his age, and not at all handsome—dull blue eyes, fairish-brown hair, thick lips. He was stupid at lessons. Sometimes he cried. You knew, the moment you saw him, that he was a nobody.

His name was Ken Brown. Or he said that was his name. But gossip asserted there was something mysterious about his family. Their real name was Braun, and they had changed it when the war broke out. I don't think his German origin made any difference to our treatment of Ken. He was too familiar to be sinister. He was just silly. But possibly it affected him.

"A little boaster," our Miss Smyth called him. And we—we had never imagined such lies.

"Coo," Ken would say. Most of his sentences began with "Coo." "Coo, I could multiply by thirty-nine in my head," or "Coo, I could say by heart every page in the history book." And that morning he would have had three mistakes in his six-times table.

Sometimes we walked home with him. I remember standing still under some chestnut trees,

so shocked we were by his effrontery. We had with us a large grown-up umbrella.

"Coo," Ken said, "I could jump over that umbrella. If you stood it straight up I could jump over it."

I see us again walking beside him along a grassy path. This time he is offering to show us his leg. "Coo, I got my legs full of slugs. I had to have them cut out."

This was probably complete fiction, but it was confused for me by my vision of slugs. I thought he meant garden slugs, and I did not in the least see how those soft bodies got into his legs. I hoped in any case that they were small and not the great creatures that came down our back steps on damp nights.

Ken's most superb boast concerned his journeys over the roof-tops. And those, we knew, were lies. "Last night," he told us, "I climbed out of the window, and I ran all over the roofs, jumping from one to the other. I took a big pair of scissors with me, and I went all over the town."

We told him that he was a "fibber." "Liar" was not considered a polite word.

He held to his story. "You should just have seen me shinning up the pipes and jumping from one roof to another. I can jump as high as a tree."

I remember being a little dazzled in spite of myself. Then I looked at his crumpled sailor-suit and his slack mouth. No point in listening to Ken's stories. He would always be a fool.

A few days later he was away from school. We

didn't mind much. He had been the only boy among five girls. It was pleasant to have an all-feminine atmosphere, and not to be held up in lessons because Ken could not remember how many feet there were in a yard.

But the next morning Miss Smyth was very solemn. She told us the news just before we said the Lord's Prayer, and her voice was the same for both. "I have something to tell you about poor little Ken," she began. She may have sensed that poor little Ken was not very popular. "I have heard from his mother this morning. Something sad has happened."

She looked round the table. We felt a painful excitement.

"Poor little Ken has been bitten by a dog." She put her hand up to her face. "He was bitten here, just by his ear. It was a bad wound."

We sighed.

"But that was not all," continued Miss Smyth. "A dog's bite may be poisonous. So Ken's wound had to be burnt—yes, burnt with a red-hot iron. He was very brave. He was a hero. His mother says he did not cry."

Admiration made our hearts beat. Gone was the memory of the slack mouth and the lies about the roof-tops.

"I am going to write to Mrs. Brown. Will you all send Ken your love and sympathy?"

Yes, of course. Our awe too. Wonderful Ken.

The pity was that he returned. We had stirring bulletins for something over a week. Then the great hero arrived, rather pale, with his head swathed in a bandage rather as if he had toothache. We were

tongue-tied in our admiration. Miss Smyth called him "dear," and was not cross when he got his six-times wrong as usual.

But he was the same old Ken. He announced that he had acquired a fountain pen of pure diamonds. And slowly the real boy, the fool, came uppermost again in our minds, and the St. George vision faded.

Ken left again almost before the cotton-wool dressing had gone from his ear. His family was moving. It may have been something to do with the war. It may not.

I have thought since that a story might have been written of Ken—how he worked so hard to seem a hero and we scorned him, and then greatness came on him unsought, and he spoilt it by just being—himself. But now, when I am thinking of the odd behaviour of children, I just wonder what there was in his life to make him invent such preposterous lies.

But, of course, at six, he could never have told us.

Margaret

I HAD KNOWN MARGARET since babyhood and was fond of her. And now she was fifteen, and had announced that she was going to commit suicide.

Margaret had most things in life that a girl could want. She was extremely pretty in a piquant way, with golden hair turning to brown, dark, bushy brows, a retroussé nose and a pointed chin. She was clever. She lived in a pleasant hilly part of Surrey, and her parents were fairly well to do. She had a sister six years older who possibly tried to govern her life more than she wanted, but there were advantages in having an Anne. Anne made her dresses and prepared her way at school. And there was a younger boy with whom Margaret was great friends.

But now their mother wrote, "Margaret is in a queer mood. She says nothing to me, but she goes about looking gloomy, and Anne"—the two slept in the same room—"says she talks a lot of nonsense about life not being worth living and about committing suicide."

This recalled a letter I myself had had from Margaret. Not that she had threatened suicide in it, but the subject had been mentioned. I had laughed when I received it a week or so before at the extreme solemnity of the tone.

I still have the letter. It is mostly about school. I

am informed that Miss Leather—admirable name—is organising sports practice. "We have only practised our bean-bag twice, and we are all far from perfect," Margaret writes. But examinations are a worse trial. "We start exams tomorrow, with an hour's essay. I am sure we are all dreading it, and it is impossible to revise for it. In fact, one girl said she would commit suicide before tomorrow. I am sure I should not take it as seriously as all that."

"Nor should I," I think.

But now apparently adolescence was causing her to toy with the phrase, and she had seven weeks of summer holiday.

I remembered my own teens—the chaos. If I could have talked to somebody, I thought, somebody not of my family, and been told, "Everybody goes through something like this. But it passes," how much happier I might have been. Could I now be of any assistance to Margaret?

That summer I was taking my mother a motoring tour in the south-west of England. There was room in the car, and I wondered if Margaret would like to join us. Then perhaps she might talk. Perhaps I could advise her.

Mother approved of the idea. She wrote to Margaret's mother, who also approved. Margaret would be pleased. She was not going away otherwise that year. So we made arrangements for August, and I set out from the Midlands on a Saturday to meet the two in Somerset.

"Two's company . . ." I was to find it in that week. For mother was also fond of Margaret, and mother was a mother, and therefore perhaps easier

to get on with. And I was driving, so that the two had more chance of talking together. And when, at our chance lodgings, there were only a double bed and a single bed, mother said she liked to share, and Margaret, always polite, said she didn't mind sharing at all. And I didn't like sharing; so the single bed was left to me. So I was alone with Margaret hardly at all.

We went through Somerset, Devon and Cornwall. We talked of the things we saw. Margaret admired Wells cathedral. The china-clay mounds in Cornwall reminded her of the Pyramids. She was perfectly cheerful.

Twice I had walks with her alone. Once it was on a misty drizzling Sunday at Minehead when we were waiting for a car repair. I remember the heavy late-summer oaks with the glimpses of grey sea between. There were not many people about, and Margaret might have talked of herself for hours. But I was shy to begin, and tried to start her off by talking of her family. Unfortunately we stopped at the family. Anne, the elder sister, was at college. Margaret told me at length how Anne did not know what career to choose. She did not want to teach, but she thought she might have to. I made suggestions. We became confidential. But we were confidential over somebody else. We returned to the dreary boarding-house with nothing said about Margaret herself.

The second walk was near Bude. It was night, and we had found lodgings late at a cottage high above the sea. It had only an oil-lamp, and not much room to sit; so after supper I suggested a walk. Mother was tired, but Margaret said she would come. So out

we went into the moist darkness, the stars very gold and large but no other light except an occasional car sweeping by. The road was hard and comfortable underfoot. There were high hedges on each side, and now and then we smelt honeysuckle and now and then saw a pale cow glimmering above us. It was remote and dim and beautiful, the time for confidences.

I began to talk of how unhappy I had been at Margaret's age; how all the world had seemed against me.

Margaret did not seem much interested. She said that Miss Carter, their language mistress, was going to Italy for her holiday. Miss Carter always took the most awful snapshots, but the girls would ask to see them as that would make the French lesson seem shorter.

I asked Margaret if she read poetry. "I did at your age."

Margaret said she wasn't "very good at English." She was better at foreign languages. She had to choose between Latin and German, and had chosen German. Miss Briggs, who took them for German . . .

I dropped the confidence business. What was the good? I had the feeling that I might be making a great to-do about something that was not there at all. The Plough and Orion looked down on us. The air was full of a scent that was half-summer, half-autumn. Far off, down the road, our cottage shone out with an orange window. It was a night that might have said "Love, life, death," but we returned talking amicably of School Certificate.

We spent a pleasant week, seeing Land's End with its advertisements for dog's food and getting jammed among the cars at Padstow. Mother left us at Bristol, and I motored with Margaret back to Birmingham. Beforehand I had thought I should find it embarrassing to be a day and a night alone with her. Mother had so much been her companion. But we got on very well. It was a brilliant hot day when we motored over the Cotswolds, and there was plenty to see and we talked of school. And at my flat she went to bed early. Afterwards I received a polite note of thanks.

Quite recently, now that she is grown up, Margaret told me that she was really very unhappy in her teens.

When I was a child I determined that I would never forget what it was like to be young; that I would always "understand." But it isn't so easy after all.

Henry

THE PICNIC

WE WERE HAVING a picnic, but it was not a very nice picnic for Henry. For in the meadow among the hills we were discussing his failure. Buttercups, a stream, willows and the scent of hay—and a scolding for Henry about his last school report which had said that he was careless and untidy and could do better. He had been nineteenth out of a class of twenty-one.

"Keep away from those mushrooms, Henry," said his mother. We had found two mushrooms early in a wet season and were going to take them home for breakfast. They lay on the grass, and Henry's boots were dangerously near. Henry, fair, small for his ten years, with big front teeth and big glasses making him look like Japhet in a Noah cartoon, wandered round in circles as we discussed him. Then he took a jump over the mushrooms.

"Didn't I say keep away, Henry? Isn't that typical? He just won't listen." His mother went on to repeat tales that Henry's form-mistress had told. "Once she said to the boys, 'I'll write your homework on the board now,' and before she had turned her back Henry had jumped up and asked what the homework was. Sheer inattention. Or showing off. Like the time when Miss James said that any boy

who couldn't settle down would have to go out of the room, and turned her back a moment and then found Henry gone. The other boys said Henry had not felt he could settle down. So he had just gone out. But, of course, it was angling for attention . . . Henry, *what* did I say about the mushrooms?"

"Well, I was only jumping over them. I didn't touch them."

"That's it. Argue. I've never *heard* such a child for arguing."

We returned to his failings at school. Why, when his first school said he had such a brain, did he now do so badly at his big school? He had a tendency to asthma, of course, and was sometimes away, and with the war and evacuations had led a chequered existence. But that didn't explain everything. Why did he scamp his homework so? Why didn't he listen?

"Let's hear what Henry himself has to say," I suggested. A defendant should be allowed his defence.

His parents were still full of reproaches. They talked him down for a moment. Then at last his mother said, "Yes. Let's hear Henry."

"Well," he began, kicking the grass.

"Henry, *will* you keep away from the mushrooms?"

"Well, I don't understand our divinity. It's impossible to understand it."

"But what about the other boys, Henry? You're all under the same disadvantage."

"And the geography master's frightfully dull."

"But you see, boy, it's the same for all of you."

He thought again.

"Well, I'm younger than the rest. Timpson—he's always top—he's more than a year older than me."

This was greater sense. Henry is five months younger than the class average.

"They've had more time to learn things. That's all."

We listened, half convinced. But there was the carelessness.

"Then why don't you take more trouble, laddie?"

"Oh, *I* don't know." More tearfully, "I don't know." And then, bored, "Don't let's talk about it any more." He wandered away.

"Henry. What did I say about the mushrooms? There, you've broken one . . . You may be younger, but why on earth you can't *listen* . . ."

He had wandered farther to escape the lecture, and I took up the responses. "Do you think he really knows? Aren't you in a fog still at ten?"

Henry did not inform us. He was a long way away now kicking a ball round the field.

AGE OF INNOCENCE

SO MANY MEMORIES come to me as Henry, disgruntled and solitary, kicks the ball—Henry as an eight-pound baby (strong and big then so that somebody prophesied he would be "a hefty footballer," but she was wrong about the heftiness), Henry as a white-haired three-year-old in a blue cotton suit, Henry, golden-haired at four, waiting with his tricycle (which he could ride sitting backwards) to meet my bus.

Life has not been all roses for him. There was whooping-cough at eight months, and that led to pneumonia. He nearly died, and has had chest trouble since. He was a light little scrap then, with a paper-white face, untidy longish silken hair and a wail every time you put him back into his cot. But life prevailed, and I have a photograph of him at twelve months very chubby and crawling among thick daisies.

He was then an only child. He had all his family's attention for those first efforts, so immensely interesting in all children, to understand and make themselves understood. I remember Henry's first real answer. We were sitting round the fire having tea, Henry in his low baby-chair. I was offering a plate of watercress round, and half in jest offered it to him too. He did not want it. Perhaps he knew that it tasted sharp. Perhaps he did not like the colour. He put out a fat hand and pushed the plate away. "No," he said distinctly, and then gave a bright smile and repeated "No," tremendously glad to have found a word.

He, too, had his mad moments between one and two. His mother was planting bulbs in a bowl, and was called away a moment. She returned to find that Henry had put all the bulbs in the bowl upside down. Or there was that other time when she had run the water into his bath and was called to the front door. When she returned she found that Henry had thrown every shoe he could lay hold on into the water.

In the month that France fell I was having a holiday with Henry and his family in remote Wales. He was just four then—pale-haired, red-cheeked,

well-brought-up. His presence there and the sun and the remoteness of the country somehow cushioned us from the bad news. I remember the paper with the news that Britain would fight on coming in the middle of the morning, since at Nevin all the papers were late, and how we knelt by the table feeling sick and reading the paper, and then Henry wanted us to do peas with him and guess how many peas there were in the pod. And we laughed because the patriotic little town did not know whether to put off its Sunday-school treat or not because France had fallen.

My memories of that week are hardly of the war at all, but of evening walks up the hill with the golden ship on top of the church shining, of Henry lingering behind over the stream to see fish, of my teaching Henry to blow grasses to make those ear-splitting trumpeting sounds and of Henry remarking on the pink bluebells in the hedge when he meant foxgloves.

He was quite ignorant of money then. (He is rather ignorant now.) We used to send him with a "silver penny," as he called a half-crown, to the shack on the way to the shore to buy ices and so learn about change. But he was beginning to spell; knew that the white signpost said "To the Beach." And he was enthusiastic about arithmetic. I remember sitting in a café garden having tea and cakes, and putting Henry some involved question such as "If I had four cakes and I gave mummy one and a man gave me two more . . ." And Henry hopping round the iron table saying, "Now another," while the other tea-drinkers smiled.

I remember the two little girls he played with on the shore, and then how one day he got involved in a pool with four local boys ranging from twelve to five. The four locals paddled round using his bucket and spade, and later the big boys came up very politely and offered to take "the littl' un" to the pictures on Saturday. It would be all right, they said. We should not have to pay anything. Henry was little and would go for nothing. But as chicken-pox was supposed to be among the local children we declined.

Our party included two old aunts whom Henry's mother named "the duchesses." Once Henry caused a sensation in the bus by calling, "Look mummy. The duchesses! The duchesses!" and everyone craned to see the aristocratic visitors.

Henry was polite then. (He is now if you get him alone.) He was polite even to the hens we fed at the end of our path. Once we sent him to give them some dinner-scraps. He returned very pleased with himself.

"What did you say to them, Henry?"

"I said please excuse my fingers."

Soon after this holiday came air-raids and more evacuations, but there were occasional tranquil moments. I remember sitting before the fire and Henry busy making words on the floor with his letter game. D.O.G. he spelt out. We guessed it. "Now," he said, "I'm going to make you a much nicer word, a word that we all love." Neatly he reversed the D. and G.—G.O.D.

A religious-minded aunt was living at the house, and Henry was becoming interested in the Almighty.

Once he was taking me to my bus on a sunny morning. "Auntie," he asked, "what happens to the stars in the daytime?"

"They're still there, Henry, but we can't see them."

"But *Jesus* can see them, can't he?"

His interest in figures remained. Once I took him to visit a poor family a quarter of an hour's walk away. Henry was very generous in looking out toys for the children. We took quite a squadron of clockwork cars with the springs broken. To enliven the long road I showed him the numbers on the gates. It was the first time he had realised that street numbers go in twos. I told him to look out for thirty-three, our goal. He ran on and found it.

We stayed a long time with the family, Henry silent and the children making a fuss of him. When we arrived back his mother asked him what he had been doing. He replied:

"The number's thirty-three."

I still have an Easter letter from Henry. It ends: "Wich day it was dun 2 April."

And in between the alarums we had some gay birthday parties. I remember the one when Henry was four, and had a green-iced cake bought in a shop. You could get such delicacies then. But the chief thing I remember was the boys' appetites. The boys were quite different from the girls, who were self-conscious and said "No thank you" before they were really done and had to be pressed to have more. The boys fished among the biscuits to pick out all the chocolate ones. They declared openly that no, they were not having any pink pudding; it made

them sick. And then had three helpings. They asked for more than one slice of birthday cake. They must have stuffed for a solid half-hour, stretching for things if there were not a helper at their elbow. Boy twins, I think, took the palm for eating. Between them they had about fourteen sandwiches, a dozen slices of various cakes, half a jelly, half a blancmange, four slices of birthday cake, eight or nine chocolate biscuits and six cups of tea. Then they went and turned somersaults in the garden.

TRANSITION

NOTHING ALONE IS responsible for change, and looking back I can find a good many factors in Henry's fall from the age of innocence. But, of course, every child "falls" as he grows older; becomes more powerful, and so makes his individuality felt and is not liked as much. Grown-ups prefer little children and their affection.

Henry's mother was working, and so he had to be evacuated alone. At one time he was staying with a family in a cottage beyond Stratford-on-Avon, and I had a pleasant Sunday excursion to see him. He still was young in his manners; sat on my knee and asked for a story. But he was interested, too, when the boy of eight instructed us on how to recognise aeroplanes. (Henry was himself to be a connoisseur of aeroplanes before the war was over.) We took the three children blackberrying, and the two boys raced about and the little girl stayed with us and, Henry's mother remarked on the difference between

boys and girls. "If Henry were as quiet and obedient as Jennifer I should think he were ill."

But the country cottage was damp and not good for Henry's chest, and he went to various other places. And there were one or two nights when Henry was caught in town by raids, and, though I heard of one boy who hoped to be hit by a bomb because he thought it would take him a flight through the air, I do not think Henry was quite so entranced. It began to be apparent that he was a nervous excitable child. He began a bad stammer.

The general "blood and sweat" atmosphere of the war must have had some effect on Henry—as it had on all children. At the beginning, Henry's mother, a pacifist, had tried to keep all knowledge of war from him. It was like trying to keep out the sea. "Somebody must have been putting things into his head," said Henry's mother severely when Henry in Wales, hearing blasting, asked if it was guns. But after that things continued to be put into Henry's head. This is the kind of game Henry and his friends were playing at the end of the war.

"Woo-ooo-ooo. Bmmmm." They made the noise continuously. It was an imitation of bombs falling.

"Let's play bombers, boys."

"All right. We'll go over Germany."

"Woo-ooo-ooo Bmmmm."

"I'm going to bomb Goring."

"Well, I'm going to take Hitler prisoner." He had a net, he said, and was going to fly low and trail it along the ground and pick Hitler up and bring him back.

"My dad says there's two Hitlers."

"Well, I'm going to take *both* prisoners."

"Wooo-ooo-ooo Bmmm."

But then Henry's mother came out and scolded them for making so much noise. The baby was asleep.

The doctrine of "The only good German . . ." percolated to Henry too. Once I was talking of some German friend and Henry said, "But, auntie, aren't they all wicked? Oughtn't they all to be killed?" I did a little League of Nations missionising, and then he agreed that only bad ones ought to be killed. He'd choose the bad ones when he went bombing over Germany.

A factor in making him the irrepressible grubby little boy he was later may have been the new housing estate. It was on the borders of his own road, and a mixed collection of boys played in the park behind. (They hacked down most of the trees on V.E. Day.) "Mate, chap, marley," the broad accents of the district, came and went in Henry's speech.

His health was doubtful. He cried easily. He had asthma "turns," and had to go for inoculations once a week. He had to go to a speech-training class for his stammer. Then he turned out to be short-sighted, and had to have glasses. When he began to lose hair —an effect of the asthma—his mother was in despair. Yet at the same time there was nobody like him for climbing trees and fighting.

I remember meeting him, when he was five, after some months of absence. It was at a big general stores where he had been brought to have his photograph taken. Suddenly I saw him as a boy, not a

baby. And his hands were into everything. "Don't touch," we said fifty times, and out would go a grubby hand before we had finished speaking.

I remember seeing the first signs of bullying. We asked a rather impoverished friend to tea with a boy nine months younger than Henry. Henry, up to then always the smallest, always controlled, became a different creature. He began to issue orders; to command. "No, dear, you mustn't have that." It was an exact imitation of his mother's tone. Then he took the meek Raymond by the shoulders and pushed him about from one room to another until we interfered.

There were more complaints of bullying from school—a pleasant preparatory school where Henry had gone at three and was otherwise happy, said to be "very intelligent," performing in the band. But after a time mothers began to come to Miss Roscoe and complain that their children were afraid of going to the lavatory—through Henry. "Then I did notice," Miss Roscoe said, "that if any child put up its hand and wanted to leave the room, Henry would put *his* up a few seconds later." When he got his victim in the lavatory he would shut the door on him and refuse to let him out.

Then he was always untidy in his habits. Rusty screw-driver, hatchet, hammer would be found at the bottom of the garden. Henry didn't in the least remember taking them down. Once, just before the birth of his brother, when I was staying at the house, I brought Henry a pencil-sharpener. Immediately shavings were all over the carpet. Later, pencil-shavings were found in his bed.

My umbrella was much in demand. Henry had a theory that he could use it as a parachute, and drift down from a great height. He wanted to start with the garden steps, but—umbrellas were precious in wartime. I removed the umbrella.

So he was already some way along the primrose path before the birth of Cecil.

CECIL

FOR A LONG TIME Henry had been asking his mother for a baby, and he was at first delighted when Cecil came. Previously he had not known much about relationships. Once he was walking down the road with me when he asked :

"Have you a sister?"

"Yes," I said. "Auntie Barbara."

"Oh, is *she* your sister? Well, mummy's *my* sister."

All the same, now that Cecil had come, Henry knew he was his brother. He went to school very full of the news.

Henry has a tender heart. (He is always kind to animals, even at ten exclaiming, like a little child, "Oh dear, dear pussy," and stroking their Persian.)

When Cecil was tiny he used to ask to see him bathed. "He's such a *dear* little baby, mummy."

At the same time he went off pretty frequently with his rough boy friends. When his mother had been at the nursing home it had been Easter holidays, and Henry had roved the park and got his feet wet and torn his clothes. And then, of course, the usual

thing happened. The adults were occupied with the younger child. The elder, with six years of being the star of their firmament, felt left out.

"It was nicer before Cecil came. Mummy was nicer," Henry said to me once.

Cecil was a handsome dark boy, big for his age and very good until he began to quarrel with Henry. He was more placid than Henry had ever been. You could read him stories of sudden death, and he would not turn a hair, while Henry could not have borne it because it was so sad. Cecil, too, had a curious swaggering wit, which made people laugh.

"I'll have some rice because it's nice," he said once.

"Quite the poet," said his mother.

"I hate poets," said Cecil. He was two.

He was forward because he had Henry's example to follow; was climbing trees and painting in painting books at two. Directly he adopted the same activities rivalry began between the pair. It was not as unequal as might have been imagined, since Henry was so small and Cecil was so big for his age, and then the grown-ups always had to stand up for the younger one.

There was a period before Cecil developed a sense of property when he would raid Henry's toys when he was at school and scribble on them. Then they were given drawers apart, and forbidden to poach. Then Cecil, knowing he would annoy Henry, would seize something, saying, "Mine. Mine," when it was not his, and there would be a tug-of-war and tears. Cecil began to understand that property was a sore spot. He exploited the situation.

Henry would say, "I wonder where I put my stamp-book."

"Frowed it in the fire, Henry," Cecil would say. "I frowed it in the fire."

"You little sneak, you. Mummy, he's thrown it in the fire." Tears.

Five minutes later it would be found behind Henry's bed.

Their mother complained that Henry was always attacking Cecil on the quiet, but as far as I could see if one were not kicking the other or tripping him up, the other was kicking *him*. It developed into one long skirmish, and Cecil was adept at shrieking and running to adults. As usual, they protected the younger. Henry said it wasn't fair. It probably wasn't.

Sometimes it was such a tangled story one couldn't get the rights of it.

"Henry 'it me on the head. Boo-hoo."

"I didn't, you little sneak. You did it yourself with my bat."

"But you were running after me to get the bat. Boo-hoo."

"Well, hadn't you run off with it *just* when I wanted it?" And so on. Their mother said they were about equal in lying.

Recently, when I was staying with them, we drove out to a Warwickshire village, and their parents went to visit a friend while I was left on a patch of grass to play with the two. Each had his own ball; there would have been hell if they had tried to share. There was hell anyhow. Henry wanted to play rounders; Cecil wanted just to throw the ball. After

long argument, Henry induced Cecil to play rounders. Then there was an argument about the trees that should form the course. Then Cecil ran to the wrong trees, and was declared by Henry "out." "You silly little thing." Then Cecil in fury took the stick that was acting as bat and threw it into the middle of a wood marked "private." Then Henry took Cecil's ball and threw it to the other end of the green. Then Cecil got the stick which Henry had brought back and threw it into the private wood again. Then Henry threw his own ball as hard as he could at Cecil's stomach, and hit him, and Cecil doubled up screaming. Then I comforted Cecil and rebuked Henry, and Henry said it wasn't fair.

There are some moments of peace. Henry said to me the other day in the rather soft way he has, "You know, auntie, I love Cecil because I've always been with him." This was surprising news. And then sometimes we have games of croquet on the carpet (played with twisted wire for hoops, marbles for balls and long bricks for mallets) with Henry being almost fatherly.

"No, lovey. Not that ball. That's mine. Let him have another turn, auntie, because he's such a little boy."

This paradise has sometimes lasted for at least five minutes, though it generally ends in a fight when all the hoops are knocked over and the bricks are used on one another's heads.

And individually the two can be charming. When I play a ball game we invented years ago with Henry —standing at stages down the lawn and shying a ball into a bucket—his courtesy is unbounded.

"Hard luck, auntie. I think you ought to have that again." He will take me down the garden to show me the mustard and cress he has planted, and pick me some leaves to taste. He will even show me pits at the bottom of the garden that he has dug to catch burglars.

Cecil is just as obliging. Recently I took him, just four, for a walk, and he was so good you would hardly have known he was there. He did, however, give me the piece of news that Henry's friend's pussy had died, and,

"I hate dead things, don't you?"

And when he was grown up, Cecil said, he was going to live with Mummy at home, and *their* pussy would be with them and would live just as long as they did.

THE IMP

AMONG HENRY'S LONG TRAIN of disasters there are a few sunbeams. He still has a great respect for his mother. Before the 1945 election he told me, "I don't know who's going to get in, but Mummy does." Once or twice when his mother has been ill he has been most sympathetic. I have seen him go up to her and put his arms round her and say, "I'm so sorry you've got such a poorly head," and once when she had lumbago he cooked the whole Sunday dinner.

Sunshine, literally, bathed V.E. Day. The children had a tea party in the road. At long tables on the broad grass verge, on chairs and stools of mixed heights, sat a mixed company from a ten-months-old

baby in his high chair to a lanky girl of ten clad entirely in Union Jacks. There were tinned fruit and iced cakes and tarts, and Henry, sitting near the centre of one side, with friends round him and lady helpers anxious to fill his plate, had a happy smirk. We put Cecil in a chair beside him, and somebody pushed up two plates of tart; but Cecil was at the shy stage, and stood up on his chair, turned his back to the table and hid his face in his mother's chest. So Henry was left, and we took Cecil home for tea. Later, we saw the children running races in the road, the fathers superintending, and about midnight Henry returned very jubilant. He had won sixpence.

Then there was the school concert in the term before Henry left. He had just, at a very early age, won an entrance to a large secondary school. This seemed the more admirable because he was so small in stature—at nine about the size of a seven-year-old—but he would be almost the youngest in the school anyhow. And now he was on the platform, with his fair hair well brushed and his boots bright; and I heard one stout mother whisper to her neighbour, "That little one's Henry."

Henry's preparatory school concentrated on its band. There were bells, triangles, a xylophone, cymbals and a drum—and a big drum which every child wanted. There was a child conductor, and the band accompanied the piano or pipes played by three senior children, Henry among them. Indeed Henry did a good deal—playing the pipes, conducting twice, and three times, with a beaming face, beating the big drum which was about as big as he was. We were proud of him. The only one who was bored

with the performance was Cecil, and he fidgeted and had to go out.

There are other halcyon moments on Saturday evenings in winter when Cecil has gone to bed, and Henry becomes again the only child. We draw a table near the fire; Henry brings out the sweets—with which he is very generous—the cat settles on the arm of the settee, and we play widge. Widge is a mixture of whist and bridge invented for Henry's sake. He is a bit wild in his bidding; otherwise plays well, pausing sometimes to say pensively, "Mummy, I wonder what I'm going to have for my supper."

But the rest of life for Henry is a chaos—of sins, lectures, forgetfulness, more lectures. He began by being very enthusiastic about his new school, as he is about anything new. Football, he told me, was the "lesson" he liked best. Yes, he was in the second preparatory team. And the first term he was just in the upper half of the form, which was not so bad since he was young. But since then he has steadily sunk and sunk, and with his sinking has become correspondingly blasé. He has friends enough, but "It's all work," he says.

We wonder if it is. He leaves school at half-past three, and doesn't arrive home till five. He has been "playing," or he doesn't know what he has been doing. He has an hour's homework, but complains he can't do it properly because he has to go to bed—at something after eight-thirty. He doesn't really know what he does with his evening, but he had only five minutes last night to do the drawing of an ancient Briton; so, of course, he got only three out of ten. All his books are blotted and dirty, yet he has

been making an excellent wooden ship at home.

He loses everything—one glove, a tiepin, money, pencils, a fountain pen four days after he had received it at Christmas. He lost a new pair of white shorts, and did not know if he had left them in the bus or not. Then he lost the key of the garden gate to the park behind the house. Now the padlock remains locked, and we have to make a detour.

Recently he met me very confidentially as I came from the bus. "Auntie, my spade's on the roof."

"Which spade?"

"My seaside one. Can you get it down for me?"

"How on earth did it get there?"

"Well, you see, I was just throwing it up to see how far it would go . . ."

"What did your mother say?"

"Oh, I haven't told her." So that was the reason why he came to me so secretly. I acted as ambassador that evening, and fetching the steps his mother brought the spade from the glass roof outside the kitchen.

One week there was the announcement that Henry had broken the pantry window with his football. It was not only the loss of the window, his mother said; but splinters had got into the butter and sugar and all had to be wasted.

After Henry has had a bath a cyclone might have passed. Shirt, socks, knickers and shoes lie strewn over the floor, and the bath itself has a grey deep rim. Nor is the result always satisfactory.

"Henry, have you had your bath?"

"Yes, of course."

"Then how in heaven's name, child, do you

manage to have a bath and leave mud all over your face? Now remember, when you have a bath you *must* wash your face."

He sighs deeply with a resigned expression. But tomorrow he will have forgotten to wash his face again.

He still stammers. He still has to have injections. He still wears glasses. Nor can he always sleep. Recently, when a visitor was in the house, he had nightmare two nights running, coming down the stairs half distraught and saying that he woke up because his hands felt funny ; felt "so big."

Yet he has already tried to smoke, combining with other boys at school to buy cigarettes. One day his mother came into the house, and, since no one in the family smokes, asks, "Why, who's been here?" For the smell of cigarettes was strong in the hall.

"Nobody," said Henry.

"There's a smell of smoke."

But Henry had gone down the garden.

A few days later she caught him in the act. He was far down in the park with a flaming paper in his hand. She called him up. Then he did confess. It had made him feel sick anyhow.

Cigarettes were not the only things he lighted. One day he appeared at the door escorted by a policeman. He and some other boys had been making a bonfire down in the park. The other boys had run away. Henry had been caught. He was let off on promising never to light fires in the park again.

And on this picnicking excursion, while we have been motoring through Worcestershire—and we should be peaceful since Cecil is away at the sea so

that there is nobody to quarrel with—Henry still plagues us a little. He sprawls at the back, making obscene dance-band noises which he has learned from the wireless. He is told half a dozen times to be quiet. He stops, and then starts again the next minute. Then we stop at the roadside and buy some cherries. Henry seizes a handful out of the bag, and proceeds to eat and shoot the stones anywhere, inside and outside the car. He hits his mother, who is driving, on the back. There is a moment's suspense. She has not felt it. He starts shying the stones about again.

And now in the field, having jumped over the mushrooms as many times as he has been told not to, he is kicking the ball about while we discuss his sins.

"It's all very well for you to make excuses for him," his mother says. "You don't have to live with him."

"No, I know." But, then, what is life like for Henry himself at the moment?

"Oh well, perhaps he'll change," she says, and, affection prevailing, we go and play cricket with him.

TRIUMPH

I DON'T THINK it was anything to do with our conversation. Conversations slide off Henry's back. I think it was just chance. All the same we must rejoice. Henry has been top in his drawing examination, with ninety-five out of a hundred.

The boys, he tells us, were given a choice of subjects. They could draw, "How I help Mother,"

or "Fishing," or "Taking Train Numbers." Now Henry does not help mother, except for an occasional dish-drying when he wants us to come and play. It is generally mother who goes round after Henry. So that subject was no good. "Fishing," too, was discouraging. Henry has a fishing-rod. He has tried to fish in a local pond. But he caught nothing, and his fingers got cold, and a dog came along and tangled himself in Henry's line. And Henry came home blubbering.

But "Taking Train Numbers" was just the thing. That is Henry's great hobby. In fact he hopes to spend his next holiday on the town's two chief stations all day, if he can get past the man who takes the tickets. On his own initiative he has written to the L.M.S. and the G.W.R. and got lists of their engines. And when I return to London he accompanies me down to one of the stations and races round through puddles, touching everything, getting filthy and finally running along by my train till it disappears into the tunnel. He has even begged me to catch another train—late and inconvenient—because it goes from the other station and he would like to visit that one next time.

It is just after Sunday breakfast, and we are contemplating the drawing which won ninety-five per cent. as it stands on the dresser. There have been the usual altercations. Henry is going to a children's service. He likes these services because he gets coloured Bible pictures which he sticks into a book. Last Sunday he took Cecil, and is trying to persuade him to come again.

"It's now or never. You've got to be regular.

If you don't come now you can't ever come again."

"Well, I don't want to ever come again. And I'm not coming, see?" says Cecil.

"Oh, *all* right then. Grumpy!"

And so on.

Henry brushes his hair, gets a clean handkerchief, puts on his new blazer and—goes to the door with boots covered in mud. He is called back, and given a lesson in boot-cleaning on the kitchen floor. Meanwhile I admire the picture.

It is in neat crayon, and shows a little creature with not much in the way of arms and enormous feet standing in a station. It is an excellent station, however—the station for Henry's school, as the nameboard shows. There are signals, lines, platforms, notices. Henry knows more of stations than I shall ever know.

He says modestly, while his mother finishes the polishing of his boots, "I don't think it's *very* good."

"But it is, Henry," we say, for we try to be appreciative.

"And I know why I lost those five marks. You see, I can't draw people. So I made the little man very small so that they couldn't see the mistakes. But the title was 'Taking Train Numbers,' which means the man was the chief thing. So . . ."

"You'll be late, laddie. Run along."

For even when these children begin to talk, to make some hesitating statement to explain their psychology, we are generally too busy to hear them out. They are told to "run along."

"And shut the door, Henry."
He does, banging it.
But he is to have a treat all the same.

John Jervis

GOOD BOY

IN HIS CHILDHOOD he was always "Mother's good boy." And he *was* good. He had a pleasant face, though with that undefinable look about it that comes from a back street in an industrial city. It is something to do with the way the hair is cut and left without a parting and with a fringe on the forehead. But John could make himself look smart, in a new brown blazer with shining boots and his hair brushed to one side. He had a wide mouth, sometimes a little open, which suggested adenoids (but no doubt he had been examined by the school doctor), a long upper lip, brown eyes and a healthy colour. There was something about him in those early days which suggested integrity and reliability.

I knew John from the age of eight. I was doing some visiting for a settlement, and I went down the Jervises' street. It was the sort of street where no child should live—a street of back-to-back houses, one or two general shops, one small factory, a power station behind, and not a sign of green. The Jervises' house opened straight from the street. You went into a kitchen, where cooking, eating, washing and all family activities went on. A winding stair took you up to the bedroom where Mr. and Mrs. Jervis slept, and then went further up to the attic where

John slept with his delicate brother Sam, two years younger.

Mr. Jervis was a labourer, earning before the war something over two pounds a week. He did shift-work, changing weekly, which meant that once every three weeks he had to work at night and sleep in the day. It is not easy to sleep when your window is right over the street, and the women are at their doorsteps all day long. Also Mr. Jervis got very dirty with his labouring, which meant more washing for Mrs. Jervis ; but it was a safe job, and with two children, and with a slump bringing unemployment to half the street, Mr. Jervis could not afford to pick and choose.

It was hard to make do on the money. The children had no pleasures—except the keeping of a dog and an occasional trip to a stream on the outskirts of the town to fish for "tiddlers." When they arrived home from school they did their mother's "errands," fetching coal, buying small groceries. Then they had to sit in the kitchen, which was too small for games and had precious little ventilation except the gap under the door.

I never saw John's school. To make up for home surroundings he should have had something ideal. But where there are old houses there are old schools. John's school had a bad name for roughness. Some prudent mothers in the district sent their children quite long bus-journeys so that they could mix with nicer children, but John stayed in the locality. At John's school there were fifty and more to a class, and the cane was used frequently. John had been

caned only once—for moving his desk, he told me. For he was a good boy.

In such an atmosphere you would not expect ambition ; but it was there. It began with Mrs. Jervis. She herself could not write, but, in spite of poor health—undersized and sallow as she was—she realised the benefits of education ; she worked hard to make her boys "good men," as she said. She had many awful examples of what bad men came to round her—drunkenness, thieving, a constant to-and-fro to the police courts. Her boys were not going the same way. She kept, as the neighbourhood says, "herself to herself." No gossiping on doorsteps for Mrs. Jervis. As she often told me rather self-righteously, she spent her day in cleaning and going round to the cheapest shops so that she could get the most food for her money. "A lot of the poor kids have only a handful of chips o' nights. I goes and gets a bit of bone from the butcher's, and makes a good stew."

The boys were made to realise their difference from the other boys. They were, as she said, "kept close." She wanted their father to talk to them about girls, but Mr. Jervis was too shy. That worried her. She would die of shame, she told me, if "our John was taken up." To forward her doctrine of respectability—and because, poor woman, she had to have something to be proud of—she made a great deal of John's "brains." He was "the brains of the family." He was going to make a fortune for his mother. And John responded, being a little self-righteous in the way he talked about "the bad lads at school."

I never could make up my mind about John's

brains. He was in a "C" class at school, but he was top of it, and his master said he should have been higher. He surprised me several times with his knowledge. He learned the names of birds from cigarette cards, and recognised them far better than I did when, later, I took the family occasional excursions to the country. Once when we were motoring through a small Warwickshire town and I pointed out the black and white work, John said, "Like Shakespeare's house at Stratford," and to anyone who knew the district John comes from the mention of Shakespeare by one of the boys is a miracle. John also had a good deal of general information because, when he was kept in at night by his mother, he read the local evening paper. Sometimes, indeed, he read aloud to Mrs. Jervis—including the murders, which she did not think was nice, as she said, "for a young lad."

I cannot say that John's writing was very impressive. Later he wrote to me once or twice for his mother, since she, and probably his father, could not write. Pale round wandering characters, with many spelling mistakes ; but then what chance had he had?

Altogether I should say that John was the secondary-school type. With a better school, or with better home circumstances, he might have managed it. As it was, there was no question of further education. On forty-something shillings a week you wait with longing for your child to be fourteen and start earning. And then John never had the chance of sharpening his brain against anyone else's. All his family knew less than he did. From the beginning he was doomed.

And yet made to feel this ambition ; made to feel he was different. When Mrs. Jervis complained to me that he was reading murders I arranged with the settlement that John should have two evenings a week at a club there. It did not work. John, naturally, found "rough lads" at the club. One boy punched him and made his nose bleed. Instead of punching back, John went home and told his mother. Mrs. Jervis went hotfoot up to the settlement to complain. She complained to me afterwards at the way she had been treated. They had not seemed to think it mattered whether John's nose bled. They had said he must stand up for himself. Meanwhile the club-leader had mentioned the matter to me. "John," she said, "will never be popular if he goes home crying to his mother every time he's hit."

The final result was that John left the club. But it had had one good effect. There had been a library there which he had enjoyed. Now, used to borrowing books, he joined the municipal library, and went to change his book weekly, sometimes reading it, instead of the paper, aloud to his mother. And, again, it is a most extraordinary thing for a child from Paradise Lane to know there are such things as municipal libraries, let alone join one. John had good stuff in him.

He was a thoughtful son, too. At that time boys of twelve could be medically examined and, if they were fit, receive permission to work out of school hours. It was a concession to very poor families. If the doctor passed them they might get up early in the morning and deliver newspapers, and deliver them again after school in the evening. John was

examined and passed, and began to deliver papers for a newsagent five minutes away. He had to get up before seven on winter mornings, but that neighbourhood is used to hardship. His first week's wages, half-a-crown, he spent on having his brother's boots mended.

But something the same sort of thing happened here as had happened at the club. The newsagent, used to "bad lads," used language of which John did not approve. He came home and told his mother, and she—in the fiery way she had in spite of her miserable little body—forbade him to go any more. "We want money enough, but I'm not a-going to have our John made bad." So the weekly half-crown ceased, and she began to look forward all the more to the time when John would be fourteen and work properly.

My chief link with that family was always Mrs. Jervis. She had a good flow of words, while her husband was almost completely silent and much embarrassed at my presence. The two boys, when their mother was there, chatted to me quite comfortably until the age of ten or eleven. John would tell me about his school; show me carpentering work he had done. He would show me the books he got out of the library—which were mainly, honour to him, natural history. When we went on motor-rides he would sit in front beside me, as his mother always gave him the best place, and drop little bits of information—about Hitler, perhaps, or aeroplanes.

But, as with all boys, and particularly with boys of Paradise Lane, after eleven or so he had nothing

more to say to me. The spontaneity had gone. The only way I could converse with him at all was by asking questions, and then I elicited only a "Yes, miss," or "No, miss." I had got into the habit of taking the family for a Christmas excursion to a big stores, and letting them choose presents; but one year when I asked Mrs. Jervis if they wanted to go, she said: No. The lads thought as they had got too old for it. So then I had an inkling that the Jervis boys had got beyond anything I could do for them.

BAD BOY

A STROKE OF FORTUNE came to the Jervises at about this time. For months I had been trying to get them a house on a new estate. Paradise Lane was not the place for the delicate Sam, who had bronchitis every winter; nor for John who wanted better companionship. But estate houses were hard to get. Not nearly enough were being built, and the centre of the town was still swarming with families living in back-to-back three-roomed houses, often without water laid on. Only those who were overcrowded or whose houses had been condemned were accepted on the new estates, and, bad as the Jervises' house was, it was not condemned. However, I persisted, and Mrs. Jervis persisted too, calling at the Estates Office to enquire, and finally, by working an exchange with a slovenly relative who did not want to leave the public houses of the district, we got the Jervises an entirely new house in a broad road where there had been fields a few months before.

Most of the people who move from the city centre to new estates find it difficult to settle down. Some come back again. The usual complaint is that the new estate is "lonely ; there is no 'life'." Mrs. Jervis took the change differently. She was delighted with the new house, with its three bedrooms, sitting-room and bathroom, and almost at once Mr. Jervis began to garden and potato plants appeared in the small patch behind. But there were complaints. Mrs. Jervis said, first, that the new estate was so much more expensive than Paradise Lane, and, second, that the same kind of people from whom she had tried to protect her sons in Paradise Lane were all round her.

She got over the expense as well as she could. They just had to stand Daddy's extra bus-fares, and, as for shopping, she went into town once a week, paying a fourpenny fare there and fourpence back, and visited her old cheap shops. It paid in the long run, she said.

But her neighbours were another matter. They were certainly tough. When you got on that bus out to Brinksey Farm Estate you were at once surrounded by children with ragged clothes and uncombed hair, by smelly women and, if it was the end of the day, by dirty men. There were grassed-over islands in Mrs. Jervis's road. They were bare in no time with the children running over them. Bands of tousled children roamed about the neighbourhood. There were broken-down prams at gates. Everybody was browner and more healthy. Many of them, like Mrs. Jervis, kept their new houses nice and put flowers in the windows. But

swearing, drunkenness, shiftlessness were still all to be seen.

John liked the change, his mother said. He need no longer be ashamed of his house. But he did not get the benefit of the new school at the end of the road, for the month they moved he was fourteen.

The rest of John's history I only know from his family, and that only spasmodically, for I could not visit the housing estate weekly, as I had done the central street. Sometimes I went the fourpenny bus-ride out to enquire and take a few clothes. Sometimes I met Mrs. Jervis by chance shopping in her old haunts.

What was John going to do now he was fourteen? Ah, that was the problem. Now, looking back, one can see the real struggle beginning. He had that sense of gentility, but now he could no longer sit in his mother's kitchen away from the world. He had little more to offer than the rough lads he had been taught to avoid—a poor elementary education. His parents could not help. And, reserved as he was, he could not talk it over.

He went to the Education Department that deals with children's employment. Hundreds of other children were leaving school, and the interviewers were busy. Possibly a good deal of care was taken in finding John a job. The Education Department will tell you that care is always taken. But they were not to know John's character. His address till recently had been Paradise Lane. It was a city of factories. The obvious thing was to send the boy to a factory.

John went to several. He found the same thing in them all—dirt and rough people. He was unhappy.

Meanwhile, as always happens, while he was doing factory work he was forgetting what education he had. When I saw him now he was a great tall boy, down coming on his cheeks, his overalls filthy. He had nothing to say to me.

But for a time he kept some of his old initiative. Tired of the Education Department's jobs, he went to the factory across his road. This was still being built, and had all the advantages of modernity—low scattered buildings, playing fields, good canteens. And it was near home, and he would not have to spend money on bus-fares. But it was not exactly a thrilling place for a boy of John's mentality. It was making aluminium alloys. The work was rough and heavy, and little skill was needed.

I went to see Mrs. Jervis some weeks after John had started at Lightmetals'. No, she said, John was not too happy. He didn't consider he was getting enough money. He was doing men's work and being paid at boys' rates. And then the foreman had a "down" on him. "You see, our John's always been one to want to *learn*, and he wants to get on, and master it, if you take my meaning. But the foreman just expects him to take orders; don't *teach* him nothing. Give him hard words." But John had got a new plan, she continued. He was going into the Navy. You could go into the Navy when you were sixteen. John had seen some paper about it. He was mad on the sea. He had begun to read books on the sea. There was nothing he didn't know about a boat. "We laugh at him, and Sam calls him Jack Tar."

It was obvious—this weariness with factory life, the inability to settle down, the longing to get away.

Home could not have been very comfortable for John, with its perpetual struggle to make ends meet, the parents he felt he had got beyond. Mrs. Jervis said he was not being very generous over weekly money. I detected some new tone. There was not quite the old enthusiasm for the good boy.

I went once or twice more, and heard how John was pinning all his hopes on the sea. But I did not see him. And then one afternoon I came in on an entirely new situation. I had been so much used to thinking of John as the good boy that I had not taken this wandering from factory to factory, this quarrel with the foreman, very seriously. But people change even before your eyes, and you do not know it, and still see the old character when it has ceased to be there. And I had had no recent contact with John, and so realised the change all the less. Now I was to hear that the old John had gone.

"He's being a bad son to me," Mrs. Jervis said mournfully.

It was a longish story. Lightmetals? Oh, John had worked there only nine months. Then his trouble with the foreman had come to a head, and he had walked out. It was nearly time for him to go into the Navy; so he had not bothered about anything else. Then Mrs. Jervis became vague. She did not "understand it." John had understood. He had made all the arrangements himself. But he had "failed his examination." The Navy would not have him.

From that moment he had "gone to the bad." He had already had a spell of idleness. Now he refused to try for another job. Mrs. Jervis was in despair. He stayed in bed till any time in the morning. Then

he went out all day. She didn't know what he did. Public houses and lounging, she thought. She knew that he had picked up bad companions. She had cried, and begged him to work, as the family needed the money so much. "You might as well talk to a post," she said.

His father had "tanned" him. That made me smile, for Mr. Jervis was a small man and John had grown so tall. So far the habits of youth had prevailed. John had taken his tanning without retaliating. But Mrs. Jervis was terrified lest he should turn on his father. For they had grown to hate one another, she said. John went out of the house when Daddy came in.

"And eat. He eats me out of house and home, and not a penny coming in from him. And this week I had to spend half-a-crown to have his boots mended. His sole was right off. I durstn't tell Daddy, but then I'm short on housekeeping."

Could I talk to John, I suggested without much hope. She thought not. "He wouldn't listen. Why, if he knew you was here, he wouldn't come near the house."

How could we get at him? Clubs? The clergy? Probation officers? But John was out of touch with everybody except his bad companions. He was not yet eighteen; so, though the war was now on, no Government Department had yet put a finger on him. He was just a wastrel, hanging about the streets.

"His coat's in rags, but what can I do? And then he'll ask me short-like for money for cigarettes, and I give him sixpence to keep him quiet. And he not bringing a penny into the house," she repeated bitterly.

Her only comfort was that Sam, the delicate boy, had begun to work. It was only a labouring job at a factory, and he earned only a few shillings a week, but he brought it all to her. "Our Sam's a sticker," and one could hear in the warm way she said it that she was trying to transfer her pride. "Sticking" was about the only thing the poor little chesty boy had to boast of.

The end of the story, and the end of John's boyhood, is, like most things in life, a mixture of good and bad. I heard it only the other day. For a time his father went on tanning him, and his mother giving him sixpence on the quiet and complaining of his badness. Then, luckily for him, conscription intervened. He was called up.

Even then he did not enter the Navy. But it did not matter. He had lost interest. He went into the Army. Luckily he had not gone too far along the wastrel's path. He was smartened up. The family now has an enlarged portrait of John in uniform and beret among all the other enlarged portraits of grannie and Mrs. Jervis when she was young and Mr. Jervis when he was young in the sitting-room. Meeting Mrs. Jervis one afternoon when she was doing her shopping I heard that "our John" was a "fine figure, nearly six foot."

But later, again when I met her, she was not so pleased with him. A great number of lads in the Army, she said, had signed a paper to give their mums some allowance. John knew how hard up they were, "But never a penny I've had off him." And he wrote home only when he wanted something. But she did send him parcels of cake and soap. It was the

old story with the Jervises—complaining and doing things for him.

Later she told me that John had been home on leave. It was not a very successful leave, she said. "It's like as if he don't care for us at all. You'd a thought he might have taken a bit o' notice of his brother. He might a taken our Sam out a bit. But no. He gets up of a morning, and we don't see him for the rest of the day. He's down town with them friends of his, drinking. And as for money—not a penny do I see."

One could guess what John still felt about his family. He moved about. He went to Holland. He was at Arnhem. Those times of danger probably made many men think tenderly of their homes. But not John apparently. He still wrote only when he wanted something.

The last time I visited the Jervises, Mrs. Jervis was out shopping; so I missed the usual flow of news. Mr. Jervis and Sam were there—Mr. Jervis still at his labouring job, but Sam thinking of changing his because they were "putting on him"—but neither is communicative. I enquired after John.

"John's doing fine," his father said. That sounded better. Yes, he was still in the Army, but he would be out soon. No. He didn't know what he was going to do when he was demobilised. And then:

"He's married, you know."

I asked whom.

"Oh, a girl from the estate."

John must be about twenty-three by now. He has no job to return to. He has no house, though "they've put their name down." The estate, with the

rough people that the Jervises once did not like, seems to have caught him.

Perhaps it is best. He will not have to return to his family. He will be able to start a new life. Much will depend on the girl.

Only—I think of the boy who mentioned Shakespeare, who recognised the birds in the country, who borrowed books regularly from the library. It is a pity that more could not have been done for him. The gap between children and the adult world exists anyhow. With John (because he came from the submerged quarter of the population) the gap was a chasm, and there was nobody to stretch a hand across it.

Conor

THE COMPANIONS WHO WENT

I SAW CONOR FIRST at something after eight on a Sunday morning. I had crossed from England to Northern Ireland, and came in with my bag to find him sitting on his high chair in the kitchen, with a collection of spoons and tin-lids on his tray. His face—a pale little elvish face with blue eyes, dark brows and brown curls—was plastered with breakfast-food which cook who was looking after him called "porridge." He greeted me by waving both bacon-fatty hands and saying "Bay. Bay." This was not a dismissal, I learnt, but his only form of address. He was sixteen months.

Around us, Green Lawns, the old house, was silent. I had known it fifteen years before, full of the footsteps of boys and girls, five sons and daughters. But now there was only the heavy tick of the grandfather clock in the hall, and cook saying, "Ate up yr porridge like a good wee boy." For Conor's parents had expected me earlier and had arranged a political week-end for me by the sea, and now they were there without me and cook and Conor were alone.

Green Lawns had been a prosperous house in the old days. It was prosperous still with its vases of red geraniums by the steps, its limetree avenue outside

and late-Victorian solidity. Only the gaiety had gone.

Indeed, only just gone. The family had settled there just after the Great War; had been to school and college, entertained, motored through Antrim and County Down, rowed on Lough Neagh, gone to Dublin for the Horse Show, married. Then a fresh generation of children had appeared. For by this time another war had begun. The husbands were in the Forces and the wives had no settled homes and wanted a refuge. So sisters and sisters-in-law had congregated at Green Lawns, and cousins of any age up to six had trotted up and down the steps, and there had been several prams in the garden and mass cleansings in the bathroom.

But now the war had ended and husbands had been demobilised. The sisters and sisters-in-law began to look for homes in England. Then, just as partings were beginning, the grandfather, the old colonel, who was something over eighty and proudly counted his grandchildren (saying that he had beaten his brother who had started twenty years before him) died. Now Green Lawns was to be sold and its staff dispersed. Already it was half empty, for the sisters and sisters-in-law had taken carpets and furniture for their homes in England. Only Conor's parents remained. They were teaching in the town and would stay on at Green Lawns until they found another house.

During my visit I was constantly to hear of the other children. Conor was missing them, it was said. Only a few months before, Conor was having a grand birthday party with a cake with one candle

and his cousins as guests. Now the rooms were empty. Stories of children of different generations hung around Green Lawns like perfumes (though rather odd perfumes sometimes). Different adults would take up the tale. The same character would appear at different ages.

Sometimes we talked of the earlier generation—the boys and girls I had known on my previous visit. There was John, for example, now himself the father of two little girls. One evening we were discussing children's ideas of death. "When we were children," said Conor's mother, "I remember instructing John about death. I said when you died you went to heaven."

John's one question had been: "If you tied a hammer to yourself would that go to heaven too?"

But most of the stories were of the second generation, Conor's cousins. Two little boys of five had a similar materialist conception of death and the deity. When their grandfather died they felt that some mystery had occurred in the bedroom and hung about the door. They were told to go away. God had taken grandpa to heaven.

A short time later, Julian and the other cousin were seen in the avenue with their bows and arrows. Carefully and several times they shot towards the sky. When they were asked what they were doing they explained that they were annoyed with God for taking grandpa. So they were shooting Him.

Conor, himself, of course, was too young to know anything of death. But some faint remembrance of grandpa remained, his mother said, even after two

months. When anyone lighted a pipe Conor watched ready to blow out the match. That was all.

"Ah, but it's Julian he's missing," somebody was always saying. "Julian was the one that was good to him," and off they would go again into anecdotes.

Julian, a handsome little boy with some likeness to Conor, was at Green Lawns from the age of two to five; so he was a comparatively senior relative. He used, however, to go out walking by the pram, slipping inside the handles and pushing the front. That was—until he went to the nursery school. Then the story-tellers would begin to hold up their hands. That nursery school! It was supposed to be a school for the nice children of the district, but Julian quite changed after he had been there. The language he learnt! "Aw, holy Mother o' Jaysus!" he would say, or once it was:

"Oh God, I've dirtied my bib!"

But nurse kept a soft place in her heart for Julian—partly, of course, because he had been good to Conor. "He'd a tender heart," she told me on one of our afternoon walks, and continued with a story illustrating the child's general desire for honours, even if the honours are as empty as they usually are. "I'd always called Julian my honeybunch. But he was so rough after he went to that nursery school; and one day he hit me. 'All right,' I said—though I suppose I shouldn't have done. 'I won't have you for my honeybunch any more. I shall have Bruce' "—the new baby. "A long time after that I found Julian crying. I'd quite forgotten what I said, but he sobbed out, 'You're—going—to—have—Bruce—for—your—honeybunch.' I had to comfort him.

'All right,' I said, 'if you're good I'll keep you for my honeybunch, and Bruce shall be my honey-bubble.' That made him quite happy."

Julian was a child of adventures. Conor's mother took up the tale. Once Julian, she told me, had locked himself in the bathroom and couldn't unlock the door. Agitated adults clustered outside shouting instructions to "darling," but Julian was not particularly interested, and would ignore the instructions and wander off to the window to gaze down on coalman or dustman. It was a long time before he fiddled his way to freedom, and his relations were more upset than he was. After that they had the bolt put higher.

"Though that wasn't as bad as a friend of mine who was bathing with her child in the bathroom—both naked. She went to the hot cupboard to get something, and the child locked the door on her! And then the child hadn't the slightest idea how to unlock the door, and they both had to wait naked, the mother in the hot cupboard and the child outside, for some hours until the milkman arrived, and then the mother had to send the child down . . ."

Julian, with all his adventures, had pious parents. His little room at Green Lawns was full of religious pictures. A ribald member of the family once tried to make him believe that Conor was "the little Lord Jesus." Julian replied scornfully :

"He can't be. The little Lord Jesus didn't have nappies."

"And in that," said Conor's mother, "he was not such a modernist as one of the boys we've been teaching. The class was asked to draw the Flight

into Egypt. One boy drew Mary riding on the ass and a small Jesus marching by her side carrying an attache case marked J.C."

Another story told of Julian showed, I thought, a child's adaptability to new circumstances. Julian's mother had taught him long prayers. When she went to a nursing-home for her second baby to be born, Julian's aunt, Conor's mother, put the child to bed. "I expected I should have to hear all those prayers. Julian asked me, 'Shall I say my prayers now?' and I agreed. He closed his eyes for a minute and then opened them and announced, 'They're said.' The next night he didn't mention prayers at all."

Julian was not the only hero of the stories. There was Shortie, too, though she did not mean as much to Conor. Shortie, fair and two years old, lived a separate life, playing on her own. One of her chief pleasures was poking in a drain with a stick. Another pleasure was telephoning. Her father was in the R.A.F., and he would often 'phone to her mother. Presently Shortie got the impression that her father was actually in the instrument. "Daddy in there," she would say.

She would wander up to the bedroom and fiddle with the dial. Once by some chance she actually obtained a number. Her mother heard a woman's voice saying "Hallo" at the other end.

"Hallo," repeated Shortie.

"Hallo. Hallo."

"Hallo. My daddy's in there." And that was the end of the conversation.

But in spite of Shortie's fondness for the instrument her relatives said it was not easy to hold a real

conversation with her on the 'phone. One needs physical contact with a child of two. Without it one can't find anything to say.

Once her mother was away and spoke to her. "Hallo Shortie," she began. "How are you?"

"Quite well thank," Shortie said briefly.

"What have you been doing?"

"Breaking jam-jars," said Shortie, and that conversation ended too.

Boy and girl cousins up to the age of six—you could see snapshots of them clustered in little groups with Conor. The last had left only a week or two before. No wonder, solitary in his pram in the front garden, he missed them. "And you notice when he's out," nurse said. "Any time he sees children he gets that excited. It's as if he's still looking for Julian."

Certainly he grew excited, though most babies have a liking for children's company. But I think Conor's excitement, his leaning forward and bouncing up and down in the pram, did have memory mixed with it. He specially brightened when he saw a boy of Julian's age.

One afternoon—but that was some time after I had arrived—Conor had a really happy outing. He met a friend. It was not a boy of Julian's age but the next best thing—a girl of Shortie's age. This, however, was a dark little girl—Paula, Pahla to the Irish—stout, brown-eyed, with a fringe. Nurse and I and the pram were walking up the road when Paula, in a blue coat and bonnet, and *her* nurse, emerged from the house, starting off for *their* walk, the nurse wheeling Paula's "jeep," a tiny go-chair that you could push or pull.

"That's Cahnor," shouted Paula, running to the pram. She was an only child, too, and was as pleased to see him as he to see her. "That's wee Cahnor." And Conor sat forward and gave his parrot shrieks, and waved his hands and said "Bay. Bay," and then held out his hand, which Paula took. You felt that the two formed some special trade union on their own.

We joined forces and took a pleasant walk on the borders of the town, with a blue-grey mountain in the distance, and a green valley before us with white Irish cottages. Our conversation, punctuated by Paula's, "That's wee Cahnor" and Paula's nurse's, "There's a motor coming now. Here Pahla you naughty girl," was nanny talk—about our charges, about our charges' parents, about the things we passed. Paula kept on running to the pram to have a look at Conor and Conor kept on uttering his parrot scream. Only once we reached wider themes. It was when a bearded man in a cassock entered a gate ahead of us. He was presumably a Catholic priest but this was Protestant Ireland.

"Who's him?" said Paula's nurse.

I suggested a priest.

"No," said Paula's nurse somewhat surprisingly. "I think he's a Quaker. I've never seen one, but I think that's what he is."

"No," said Conor's nurse. "That's not a Quaker. I think he's a Mormon."

Twilight was coming, and we parted at the fork of the road. Conor waved both his hands to Paula. For the rest of the way down the avenue he had only two adults to amuse him—telling him to do things he had done many times before, such as "hiding the

music," which meant putting his round painted musical-box, that would only tinkle, underneath his pram-cover. He did it obligingly, but the excitement and the parrot screams were over.

OUR MEETING

IF CONOR HAD LOST in children he had gained in grown-ups. For most of the staff of Green Lawns remained. There were visitors. There were his parents. And now they had only him to concentrate on. There were six of us discussing his upbringing—apart from the washerwoman who came to wash his napkins and the people we met in the street.

To have a choice of six adults to change you, bath you and feed you has both good and bad points. One very good point I noticed first. With six adults you cannot be "a mother's boy"; you cannot be shy. I know a baby I visit almost monthly, whom I have bathed and dandled from the age of seven weeks. He has only his parents to serve him. He screams when he sees me again. Conor did not scream. He smiled.

I return to the day of my arrival, for that was an example of Conor's good behaviour. Except for the middle part, that day was indeed a model for all babies. It was a longish day, too, for Conor's mother did not arrive back until tea-time.

There was my first view of him as I came from the boat—his pale face, fine curls and a bit of fried bacon in his hand. Possibly Cook was not too pleased for me to see him in négligé, for she hurried to get me

breakfast and to give Conor his bath. I ate downstairs, and then wandered up to the library. From the bathroom came movements and singing. I found a de Maupassant, and settled down in the tranquil house. But not for long. I was to be Conor's nurse that day.

"Maybe ye'll just keep an eye on him," Cook said, opening the door. A clean Conor was in her arms with a white jersey and long green corduroy trousers, American style. "He'll not be any trouble. You'll see. I've got the house to do." She put him on the carpet and went out.

I expected tears, but none came. Conor went rapidly humping over the floor on his behind, travelling almost as quickly as if he were walking. He edged along the book-shelves, but did not touch the books.

I was feeling luxurious after the long journey—by a gas-fire on a quiet Sunday morning. The book was amusing. All the same, though Conor was perfectly good, when you have a strange baby in the room you feel some onus on you to entertain—as indeed you do with a strange cat or dog. So presently I let de Maupassant go and began to study the child.

He moved about so expertly that it seemed a pity that he should have to walk at all. But he was sixteen months. He should be standing. I tried him by a chair. He did not protest, but leant with his stomach on the chair-edge, his buttocks protruding and one leg limp and half bent. He was obviously glad to drop to the floor again. He had taken the wrong turning in his evolution of movement. He was in a cul-de-sac, and would have to come out of it. Nurse said later

he would have been walking if Julian had been there to encourage him. Possibly. Anyhow there was all his life ahead, I thought on that Sunday morning. It was no good forcing him.

He was intelligent enough anyway. He had no plaything ; so I fished some papers and a bottle of aspirins (top screwed on tightly) from my bag. To entertain him I began hiding them under the rugs. He was quick. He soon began to hide them himself, and then lift the corner of the rug to find them. But he did not yet connect cause and result. Sometimes he peered hopefully under faraway rugs we had not been near.

He was lifting the corners of rugs for the rest of my visit. "He has a good memory," his mother said. "He was at Dublin for five weeks in the summer. When they brought him back we met them on the station. I thought he'd have forgotten me, but he held out his arms straight away."

He had a sense of adventure too. He constantly humped towards the door, waiting for it to open. I opened it and let him go out on to the landing to see what he would do. He went some way towards the stairs ; then paused and considered ; then humped back. The urge of adventure was not very strong yet.

He already had his jokes. One was to approach you and hold out his arms. When you stooped to pick him up he laughed, dropped his arms and humped away. It was a kind of teasing. When there were several people in the room he would tease them all, going from one to the other with his arms held out and then slipping away when they stooped.

Gradually, too, I began to distinguish his sounds. Later I was to see him put through his tricks, pointing to his curls and his shoes when it was required, saying "bow-wow" when asked what "the wee pups" said, and "moo" when asked about the cows. But that first morning he used his own vocabulary—the parrot shriek of excitement or annoyance, an "a-ha" with a rising note when he was doubtful and another "a-ha" when he accepted something in exactly the tone of an "O.K."

I had learned so much of him when Cook poked her head in again. "It's time for his sleep now. And I must be going to church. Ye'll hear him from the window if he cries. Ye don't mind being left alone? Nurse, ye see, has her week-ends off."

I did not mind at all. It is rather pleasant to be left alone in somebody else's house. I opened de Maupassant again. But not for long. There were piercing screams. I went to the window. Cook was going down the path in her Sunday best. Conor, in a pram under a tree, breaking his record for good behaviour, was yelling as if he was being murdered. Cook said later that she could hear him as far as the tram. It was because she was going out and had not taken him.

What followed was my fault. If I had been strong-minded the screams would at last have ceased. But there is one thing of all others a visitor does not know about a strange child. For how long is he allowed to cry? One dares not leave him too long.

I went down. Somehow one is always glad to be rid of a baby and then always glad to get back to him. Conor, great tears rolling down his cheeks, stopped as if by magic; was quite self-contained and began

"bay-baying." A cat wandered by from the next-door garden. I turned his pram so that he could see it, and together we watched it lose itself stealthily among the plants. He liked that. But then I slipped away. And there was a moment's silence, and then the piercing screams began again.

Conor no doubt sensed that he had a weakling in charge of him. I spent the next three-quarters of an hour running up and down from library to garden. When Cook returned I had just decided to take my book down and sit where Conor could see me. But what always surprises me about young children is the way they can turn tears on and off like a tap. Conor, at the sight of both of us, even with tears in the corners of his eyes, smiled gently as if he had not a care in the world.

"Ah, bad wee lad. Maybe he'll sleep this afternoon," cook said easily. She knew him. She did not take him as seriously as I did.

We had our lunches, I in the dining-room and Cook and Conor in the kitchen together. So began a quiet and Sunday-like afternoon. But that was not the last of Conor. An hour later cook looked in again. "Maybe you'd like to walk him round the park a bit in his pram. That'll send him to sleep."

It was a lovely golden afternoon. Slightly heavy-eyed after my night on the water, I went and put on my coat. There was something rather nice about this too—to go out exploring a strange town with a strange baby. Conor was waiting for me in his pram. He was excessively pale, but his blue eyes were still alert under his dark brows. He made you feel sorry for him. He seemed a frail little thing.

"He is, indeed. It's because he didn't have his slape this morning" Cook said, still comfortably.

Conor leant forward ready for his journey. I negotiated kerbs and presently found the park—not much of a park, for the Army had been there and the flower-beds had been allowed to disappear. Now, again, I thought, how much at sea one is with a child one doesn't know I still felt bound to entertain Conor. In spite of his pallor he sat erect and stared out. But what did his usual attendants bring to his notice? Trains, dogs, children? Possibly all three, but then what did they call them? I tried several things. Conor remained grave. Sometimes I just could not get him to look the way I wanted him to.

I tried him with a flower—a bit of ragwort. That was a mistake. He had not been taught, as some babies are, to "smell pretty flowers." He dropped it at once out of his pram.

At last we turned back to the main road. Still he had not slept. I suppose I had still been entertaining him too much. But now, though he continued to sit upright, his eyes were growing vague.

It was only half-past three. I turned into the avenue, not talking any more. The avenue beckoned with its yellowing lime-trees and late afternoon sun. So I did not go in at Green Lawns, but went past quietly and on past other gardens of hydrangeas with the mountain brooding at my back. Conor's head had begun to nod and his eyelids to sink.

The trees and gardens were charming. I went slowly. Suddenly I was aware that Conor was drooping forward. I laid him back on his pillow, but still he fought sleep ; immediately bobbed up again.

I went on. Then he was leaning right forward a second time, doubled up, sleeping at last with his nose on the black pram-cover. Now when I laid him back he did not resist.

Then I realised that the day with a stranger had taken more out of him than it had out of me.

TOO MANY NURSEMAIDS

YES, THERE ARE SOME BENEFITS for a baby in having six grown-ups handling him. Any newcomer is only one more. He accepts anybody. So I thought that first day as, after that late sleep in his pram, Conor bumped round the library where his mother, myself and a friend of the family who had dropped in were having tea. The talk was animated, and the baby was so good we forgot he was there.

But later in my visit I began to grow aware that a crowd of nursemaids has its drawbacks too. I have never seen the question discussed in books of child psychology. I do not know if it ever has been discussed. Certainly a worker in an orphanage—where the proportion of children is always too large to the adults—told me she noticed how the children missed individual attention. They each wanted one adult each, and they did not get it. On the other hand, isn't six to one child rather over-much?

For our attentions to Conor were conflicting. And not only *our* attentions; there were other relatives in the picture. In the summer he had spent five weeks in Dublin, and had come back with a new trick, this waving of the hands and repetition of "Day. Day"—

the colloquial form in Dublin for "Good Day." But his people in Northern Ireland thought this a little over-plebeian, and so they tried to make him turn it into "By. By." The result was a compromise—the "Bay. Bay" which sounded as if Conor had a super Oxford accent. But it meant fresh learning for him.

During my visit there was a variety of accents in the house. Conor's mother had a trace of American in her speech. His father had a Dublin voice. Nurse and Cook and certainly the washerwoman had the accents of Northern Ireland. "Not rhododendron. Rhodo*dan*dron," Nurse had been heard to say once to Julian. The other visitor and I had Southern English voices. Which was he to adopt among us all? When Nurse said, "Where're Cahnor's currls?" he put his hand obediently to his head. When we said, "Where are your curls, Conor?" he did the same but with a trace of hesitation. It seems to me masterly perception for sixteen months to realise that the very different sounds meant the same thing.

Even our baby-words varied. What does one call a dog—bo-wo or bough-wough? I said bo-wo. Nurse said bough-wough. We blurred it over when we said it to Conor in one another's company so that we should not seem to be contradicting one another. Then what was Conor to say for thank-you? His mother thought "Ta" a little démodé. I tried him with "Thank-you," but it was too difficult. Conor solved the problem with a "ta-ta" learned from who knows whom.

We knew different forms of children's rhymes. My little pigs—an emergency performance to stop his screams when he was lifted from the bath—went

to market, stayed at home, had roast beef, had none and went wee-wee-wee-wee all the way home. Nurses' little pigs went shopping in quite a different way. When I rode Conor on my knee I recited a (very class-conscious) rhyme with a charming first line taught me by my grandfather.

The lady goes a nim, nim, nim.
The gentleman goes a trot, trot, trot.
The lord goes a gallop, a gallop, a gallop.

Conor's mother had quite a different version beginning, "This is the way the lady rides," and ending, "This is the way the children ride—a-bobble, bobble, bobble." Did he recognise the rhymes as the same thing?

Nor did we agree about the general care of him. Nurse and I thought his curls too long, especially one that lolloped on his forehead. I said so to his mother, who gave Nurse permission to cut a little off. He looked better to our eyes, but we hankered for a further trimming. The other visitor, on the other hand, thought it wicked to cut such lovely hair at all. His mother compromised by saying that she would take him to a proper hairdresser.

Then there was the matter of his walking. Most of us were a little concerned about it—sixteen months and not standing properly yet. "Poor little sissie boy," his mother would say, lifting him until his legs in their long trousers dangled as if he were a pretty little doll. She compared him with the children of friends. So-and-so was younger and yet walking; looked a boy instead of a baby; but she thought she was not being biased when she said he was not nearly as pretty! In a rough café in a remote little town we

were greeted by a stout walking baby something like Henry VIII with a squint. "How old is she?" we asked the proud cousin in charge.

"Thirteen months, she is, and she weighs two stone."

Thirteen months! Three months younger than Conor! The incident was repeated with sighs when we got home.

Nurse and I were filled with the same dissatisfaction. On our afternoon excursions with the pram we would study other children. Once we came up behind a stout walking boy and speculated on his age. "Quite old," said Nurse. "Eighteen months," I said, so that honour should be satisfied. "Excuse me," we said as we passed. "I was just wondering how old your little boy . . ."

"Sixteen months. Walks anywhere."

"Oh . . . That's just the age of this little boy in the pram. But *he* doesn't walk yet."

"He's a bonny-looking child, though," the happy mother said generously.

Of course, baby-books tell you not to worry, but Nurse and I decided to give Conor tuition. He was bathed in the big bath twice a day, and liked it so much that he always screamed when he came out. So we let him have plenty of play, and among the play we put standing exercises. We collected all his treasures—sometimes with a struggle to get them out of his clenched fist—and put them on the shelf at the end away from the taps. There were two blue teething rings, a tin lid, two face-cloths and the end of a wooden-lamp-stand. Conor learned the game quickly. Encouraged by our cries he would pull

himself up by the side of the bath, one leg crooked, straighten precariously and lean to reach one of the treasures. When he had it we lowered him down so that he did not collapse with too frightening a splash.

He seemed to enjoy it. We enjoyed it. We spent a long time over it. We showed him off. And then, after all, the visitor remarked, "I shouldn't be in such a hurry. He'll walk in his own natural time. And the longer he goes about on his behind the better it'll be for you. He won't get into such mischief." We felt a little crestfallen.

Then there was the matter of eating. We each thought we managed him best. "You've got to have patience," said Cook, giving him his breakfast. "The other people in this house hasn't enough patience." She let him have spoons and tin-lids. She let him take bits of bacon in his hand, and if he didn't want all his breakfast-food at once she left it and let him return to it. In this way he did quite well. But nurse's method was completely different. "Cook," said Nurse to me, "has no idea of feeding children. What do you think she did today when I was trying to get him to take his dinner quietly? Puts a matchbox on her head and starts larking round. Of course, the child's attention was taken right from his food. I had to carry him up to the bathroom and give him his food there. You heard him crying? Screamed the place down. Only temper. I let him have his cry out, and then he took his dinner as good as gold. You have to be firm."

His mother and I leaned to Cook's indulgence when we fed him on Sundays. We thought we would encourage him to feed himself. We set a plate of

pudding in front of him and gave him a tea-spoon. He knew what to do, but he was clumsy. He put the spoon in wide ways round and left half the pudding on his cheeks. Then he lost patience and began batting the pudding with the back of the spoon so that splashes flew in all directions. The only thing to do was to keep a wet face-cloth at hand and give a hasty wipe at everything in turn.

That was our method, but the next day he would have Cook and her playthings at breakfast and Nurse and her discipline at lunch. If Conor could have spoken he might have echoed his mother's complaint I remembered from some years before. She had been brought up in India, stayed in California, settled in Northern Ireland, been to school and college in England and then returned to America for two years.

"I've seen people eat in so many ways," she said, "that I really don't know now what *are* good manners."

We disagreed about Conor's other habits, too. While I was there he learnt a cross between a hiss and a spit, parting his lips to show his new white teeth. I approved as one approves any of a baby's new tricks—those tricks that seem to come from nowhere and are each a new guarantee of intelligence. "Clever boy," I said.

Later Conor hissed at Nurse. She, the disciplinarian, was disgusted. "Naughty boy. Rude," and she gave his hand a tap.

He was at the stage when he dropped things and wanted you to pick them up. Knowing that all babies do this and get pleasure from it, I was obediently

picking up all he dropped. He let a rabbit go from his pram just as the three of us were starting out for a walk. I picked it up as usual.

"Naughty boy. He's not allowed to do that," said Nurse, and gave his hand another tap.

Naturally we all grumbled a bit about the others' treatment of him. Cook thought she was the only one with patience. Nurse said *she* was the only one who didn't spoil him and trained him in cleanliness, and it was strange how she could never find any of his clothes after she had been away for the week-end, and it was strange, too, that he should cry all the afternoon after he had been with his mother and me. And his mother said Nurse put too many clothes on him, and it was confusing for him to be told not to pull the plug out at the beginning of the bath and then to be told to pull it out at the end, and I told his mother that I didn't like to see his hand smacked by Nurse.

He did not, of course, know of our mutual complaints. He did not know how important he was, and how we all—the women at least—were competing for his affection. If others' memory of childhood is to be trusted he thought us all great and perfect beings and any variations in the day's routine just part of the inexplicable difficulties that surrounded life.

It was not really bad for him. For with any child of sixteen months the contact is through all sorts of things besides words and routine. There are nursings, wheelings, flyings, kissings, ticklings and other amusements which most adults perform in much the same way. We all played with him, and he accepted

us all, going to any of us without a murmur.

And anyhow he was only sixteen months. He would not remember any of the conflicts. Later it might be interesting if he could tell us his impressions of those early days ; if we could say, "Tell us what you remember of Green Lawns, Conor—of your grandfather who used to let you blow out his match, of all your cousins and of how they went away and left you solitary, and then of all the grown-ups concentrating on you and confusing you." But it would be of no avail. He would not know. Perhaps, mercifully, his first struggles would have faded into darkness and all he could say would be, "I forget."

Conclusion

SINCE CHILDREN say nothing, and are all different anyhow, there can be only the most tentative of conclusions.

With variations of age, sex, characters, adults are bound to make mistakes sometimes. I was reminded of this the other day when somebody of over sixty was telling me of the horrors of her childhood, which she remembered, she said, as if they had occurred yesterday. Her worst horror was an entertainment which gave exquisite pleasure to her elder brothers.

The worst horror was a tale of a wooden leg. It was told by the family maid, after the children had had their bath by the kitchen fire. There they would be warming themselves, the little girl of five, and the maid with the baby on her lap, and the two bigger boys; and the boys would cry, "Tell us the story of the young lady with a wooden leg."

Then the maid would begin. There was once, she would say, a young lady. She had long golden curls, blue eyes, a rosebud mouth and—the first twinge of horror—a wooden leg. Well, one day that young lady died, and her father—he was a mean man and he wanted to make money. He thought he would sell the wooden leg. So he unscrewed it while the young lady lay in her coffin, and he put it in his bedroom. But the night after the funeral what happened?

Why, he woke up and saw a white figure in his room. And the white figure had only one leg.

Then the maid would begin a chant of the ghost's question and answer:

"Where's my beautiful golden curls?—
A-mouldering in the grave.
"Where's my beautiful blue eyes?—
A-mouldering in the grave.
Where's my beautiful rosebud mouth?—
A-mouldering in the grave.
And where's my wooden leg?"

Then the maid would make a lunge forward so that the baby bounced on her knee, and would shout:

"You've got it."

Now the point about this story is that, although the little girl dreaded it from week to week, and though it sent her upstairs—four flights up—to bed weak with terror, she never mentioned that she was frightened, and also her two brothers loved the tale and demanded it. The maid probably thought she was giving them all an exquisite treat. It is not at all easy for adults.

There does, however, seem a certain consensus of agreement in memories of childhood. In the same way as every adult you meet will confide in you (sometimes with self-importance) that he is really very shy, he will also confide, speaking with deep emotion—and why are people so emotional about themselves as children? Is it self-pity?—that he was very sensitive in those early days. He was terrified of many things, he will add; had many misapprehensions about the world, and suffered extremes of

unhappiness which he often remembers more clearly now than the happy things. This applies particularly to snubs from adults, whom he regarded as invariably perfect.

If that is really the general experience, then adults can help a little. Not completely, of course. Children are bound to endure some shocks. Most little girls, for instance, hate big bangs, and possibly suffer unnecessarily from crackers and fireworks (though, since we are a strange mixture, with the bolder ones the hate of the bang may make part of its attraction). We can exclude crackers and fireworks if necessary from our own homes, but not from our neighbour's; nor can we prevent bangs in the street from faulty car-exhausts. And that is typical of a thousand other things in children's lives. One of their most harrowing thoughts is that their parents will one day die. Nobody can do anything about that.

Nor, since you do not know what they are thinking, can you be sure that children are not suffering under frightening misapprehensions. The little girl who dreaded the wooden-leg story had been told by another maid that men who spoke to children intended to murder them. So she watched all men with fear. One spring she and her brothers were picking violets in a country churchyard, and a pleasant man came up and talked to them and read the inscriptions on the graves with them. The boys chattered easily; she was dumb with fright. He possibly thought her shy, for he put his arm round her shoulders.

That was the climax of agony. "The murder," she thought, "is beginning."

All that terror could have been avoided.

It is so easy to tease children with false statements. You hear it round you every day. "The policeman'll get you." "I'll give you to the lady in the shop." They shrink and seek for a hand, and everybody laughs. Even the impossible they believe.

"Shall I throw you over the moon, Christopher?"

"*No*," shouts Christopher, aged three, seizing me round the neck. But here, again, I think he half enjoys the fright. Again it is complicated.

Still, let us on the whole have strict truth and, of course, as little anger, and as much kindness as possible. It is so obvious to the casual observer that children are exactly what their parents are. They do not do what their parents tell them to ; they do what their parents do. It is almost ludicrous at times how children pick up and parade attitudes and words of their adults. Time and again, as psychologists point out, anger and disturbance in the adult cause anger and disturbance in the child. I once said to a mother that it seemed to me that if parents were perfect all children would be perfect too. I was probably exaggerating, but she at least agreed.

But parents are not perfect. It is astonishing again to the casual observer—but then he, of course, has not the wear and tear of living with the child—how imperfect they are. One is perpetually amazed at the child's resilience, his unquenchable affection. He comes back for another kick instead of losing heart and shrinking away somewhere by himself. But it was no doubt worse in the past. Recently I was talking to somebody about William the Conqueror and his miserable youth ; and suddenly I had a gleam

of understanding of what childhood must have been like in those dark, cold, dirty, unsafe, pain-haunted, death-haunted Middle Ages. If the wicked King John had been brought up with Montessori toys in a twentieth-century house in Surrey—who knows?

We are constantly hearing how the majority of children appearing in the Juvenile Courts come from "broken homes." It seems, on the other hand, that the majority of people who have excelled in the arts or sciences, or enriched civilisation generally, have come from the wealthier, more comfortable homes. Let us, I should say, make our children as comfortable as possible physically and mentally. The idea that hardship improves them is a myth. They themselves will contribute all the hardship and discomfort necessary!

There are, of course, many books and articles on child psychology, and the more leisured parents are reading them. They seem to me sometimes to give the impression that all is known about the child; ignore the secretiveness, the "not telling," of which I am so conscious. But at least they advocate kindliness and remove, or explain, the pernicious doctrine of "sin."

I stood once with a mother by her baby of three months in his Moses basket. "Isn't it awful," she said "what he has in front of him? Not only teething and all the other ailments. The amount he's got to learn. Talking. The alphabet. Figures. Writing. Reading. All the information he's got to pick up."

"I think it's worse," I said, "to be so entirely at other people's mercy. Not to be able to do a thing for yourself."

Meanwhile he sucked two fingers and glanced at us sleepily, taking his hard lot calmly.

All the same it is a hard lot, and for grown-ups to pretend they would like to be children again seems to me rank dishonesty. The only reason I have ever longed to return to childhood is for its simple world; for a mental rest. You knew exactly what was good and bad then. Everything was neatly labelled. Red Indians wore feathers and lived in wigwams and smoked pipes of peace with strangers. The French wore pointed beards, were witty and drank wine. The Africans were simple naked black men waiting for the light of the Gospel. Everything in that world was in perfect order. Well, it would give you a breather to enter that world for a short time, but perhaps, too, it would be boring. Complexity at any rate is interesting. And I cannot see any other reason at all for wanting to be a child again.

So, pitying the baby of three months and everybody up to, say, eighteen, for the asperities of their lives, I am inclined to say, "Make it as easy as possible for them, even if other people say you are spoiling them." I may be wrong. I may not. For then perhaps later these children will make it easy for *their* little boys and girls, and so on until . . .

But in this modern world it is not fashionable to have hopes.

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