

# The New Boy

By Richard Middleton

## I

When I left home to go to boarding-school for the first time I did not cry like the little boys in the story-books, though I had never been away from home before except to spend holidays with relatives. This was not due to any extraordinary self-control on my part, for I was always ready to shed tears on the most trivial occasion. But as a fact I had other things to think about, and did not in the least realise the significance of my journey. I had lots of new clothes and more money in my pocket than I had ever had before, and in the guard's van at the back of the train there was a large box that I had packed myself with jam and potted meat and cake. In this, as in other matters, I had been aided by the expert advice of a brother who was himself at a school in the North, and it was perhaps natural that in the comfortable security of the holidays he should have given me an almost lyrical account of the joys of life at a boarding-school. Moreover, my existence as a day-boy in London had been so unhappy that I was prepared to welcome any change, so at most I felt only a vague unease as to the future.

After I had glanced at my papers, I sat back and stared at my eldest brother, who had been told off to see me safely to school. At that time I did not like him because he seemed to me unduly insistent on his rights, and I could not help wondering at the tactlessness of the grown-up people in choosing him as my travelling companion. With any one else this journey might have been a joyous affair, but there were incidents between us that neither of us would forget, so that I could find nothing better than an awkward politeness with which to meet his strained amiability. He feigned an intense interest in his magazine, while I looked out of window, with one finger in my waistcoat pocket, scratching the comfortable milled edges of my money.

When I saw little farm-houses, forgotten in the green dimples of the Kentish hills, I thought that it would be nice to live there with a room full of story-books, away from the discomforts and difficulties of life. Like a cat, I wanted to dream somewhere where I would not be trodden on, somewhere where I would be neglected by friends and foes alike. This was my normal desire, but side by side with my craving for peace I was aware of a new and interesting emotion that suggested the possibility of a life even more agreeable. The excitement of packing my box with provender like a sailor who was going on a long voyage, the unwonted thrill of having a large sum of money concealed about my person, and above all the imaginative yarns of my elder brother, had fired me with the thought of adventure. His stories had been filled with an utter contempt for lessons and a superb defiance of the authorities, and had ranged from desperate rabbit-shooting parties on the Yorkshire Wolds to illicit feasts of Eccles cakes and tinned lobster in moonlit dormitories. I thought that it would be pleasant to experience this romantic kind of life before settling down for good with my dreams.

The train wandered on and my eldest brother and I looked at each other constrainedly. He had already asked me twice whether I had my ticket, and I realised that he could not think of any other neutral remark that fitted the occasion. It occurred to me to say that the train was slow, but I remembered with a glow of anger how he had once rubbed a strawberry in my face because I had taken the liberty of offering it to one of his friends, and I held my peace. I had prayed for his death every night for three weeks after that, and though he was still alive the knowledge of my

unconfessed and unrepented wickedness prevented me from being more than conveniently polite. He thought I was a cheeky little toad and I thought he was a bully, so we looked at each other and did not speak. We were both glad, therefore, when the train pulled up at the station that bore the name of my new school.

My first emotion was a keen regret that my parents had not sent me to a place where the sun shone. As we sat in the little omnibus that carried us from the station to the town, with my precious boxes safely stored on the roof, we passed between grey fields whose featureless expanses melted changelessly into the grey sky overhead. The prospect alarmed me, for it seemed to me that this was not a likely world for adventures; nor was I reassured by the sight of the town, whose one long street of low, old-fashioned houses struck me as being mean and sordid. I was conscious that the place had an unpleasant smell, and I was already driven to thinking of my pocketmoney and my play-box—agreeable thoughts which I had made up my mind in the train to reserve carefully for possible hours of unhappiness. But the low roof of the omnibus was like a limit to my imagination, and my body was troubled by the displeasing contact of the velvet cushions. I was still wondering why this made my wrists ache, when the omnibus lurched from the cobbles on to a gravel drive, and I saw the school buildings towering all about me like the walls of a prison. I jumped out and stretched my legs while the driver climbed down to collect the fares. He looked at me without a jot of interest, and I knew that he must have driven a great many boys from the station to the school in the course of his life.

A man appeared in shirt-sleeves of grey flannel and wheeled my boxes away on a little truck, and after a while a master came down and showed us, in a perfunctory manner, over the more presentable quarters of the school. My brother was anxious to get away, because he had not been emancipated long enough to find the atmosphere of dormitories and classrooms agreeable. I was naturally interested in my new environment, but the presence of the master constrained me, and I was afraid to speak in front of this unknown man whom it was my lot to obey, so we were all relieved when our hurried inspection was over. He told me that I was at liberty to do what I pleased till seven o'clock, so I went for a walk through the town with my brother.

The day was drawing to a chill grey close, and the town was filled with a clammy mist tainted with the odour of sewage, due, I afterwards discovered, to the popular abuse of the little stream that gave the place its name. Even my brother could not entirely escape

the melancholy influence of the hour and the place, and he was glad to take me into a baker's shop and have tea. By now the illusion of adventure that had reconciled me to leaving home was in a desperate state, and I drank my tea and consumed my cakes without enjoyment. If life was always going to be the same—if in fleeing one misfortune I had merely brought on myself the pain of becoming accustomed to another—I felt sure that my meagre stoicism would not suffice to carry me through with credit. I had failed once, I would fail again. I looked forward with a sinking heart to a tearful and uncomfortable future.

There was only a very poor train service, so my brother had plenty of time to walk back to the station, and it was settled that I should go part of the way with him. As we walked along the white road, that stretched between uniform hedgerows of a shadowy greyness, I saw that he had something on his mind. In this hour of my trial I was willing to forget the past for the sake of talking for a few minutes with some human being whom I knew, but he returned only vague answers to my eager questions. At last he stopped in the middle of the road, and said I had better turn back. I would liked to have walked farther with him, but I was above all things anxious to keep up appearances, so I said goodbye in as composed a voice as I could find. My brother hesitated for a minute; then with a timid glance at heaven he put his hand in his pocket, pulled

out half a crown which he gave me, and walked rapidly away. I saw in a flash that for him, too, it had been an important moment; he had tipped his first schoolboy, and henceforth he was beyond all question grown up.

I did not like him, but I watched him disappear in the dusk with a desolate heart. At that moment he stood for a great many things that seemed valuable to me, and I would have given much to have been walking by his side with my face towards home and my back turned to the grey and unsavoury town to which I had to bear my despondent loneliness. Nevertheless I stepped out staunchly enough, in order that my mind should take courage from the example of my body. I thought strenuously of my brother's stories, of my play-box packed for a voyage, of the money in my pocket increased now by my eldest brother's unexpected generosity; and by dint of these violent mental exercises I had reduced my mind to a comfortable stupor by the time I reached the school gates. There I was overcome by shyness, and although I saw lights in the form-rooms and heard the voices of boys, I stood awkwardly in the playground, not knowing where I ought to go. The mist in the air surrounded the lights with a halo, and my nostrils were filled with the acrid smell of burning leaves.

I had stood there a quarter of an hour perhaps, when a boy came up and spoke to me, and the sound of his voice gave me a shock. I think it was the first time in my life a boy had spoken kindly to me. He asked me my name, and told me that it would be supper-time in five minutes, so that I could go and sit in the dining-hall and wait. "You'll be all right, you know," he said, as he passed on; "they're not a bad lot of chaps." The revulsion nearly brought on a catastrophe, for the tears rose to my eyes and I gazed after him with a swimming head. I had prepared myself to receive blows and insults with a calm brow, but I had no armour with which to oppose the noble weapons of sympathy and good fellowship. They overcame the stubborn hatred with which I was accustomed to meet life, and left me defenceless. I felt as if I had been face to face with the hero of a dream.

As I sat at supper before a long table decorated with plates of bread-and-butter and cheese I saw my friend sitting at the other end of the room, so I asked the boy next to me to tell me his name. "Oh," he said, looking curiously at my blushes, "you mean old mother F—. He's pious, you know; reads the Bible and funks at games and all that."

There are some things which no self-respecting schoolboy can afford to forgive. I had made up my mind that it was not pleasant to be an Ishmael, that as far as possible I would try to be an ordinary boy at my new school. My experiences in London had taught me caution, and I was anxious not to compromise my position at the outset by making an unpopular friend. So I nodded my head sagely in reply, and looked at my new-discovered hero with an air of profound contempt.

## II

The days that followed were not so uncomfortable as my first grey impression of the place had led me to expect. I proved to my own intense astonishment to be rather good at lessons, so that I got on well with the masters, and the boys were kind enough in their careless way. I had plenty of pocket-money, and though I did not shine at Association football, for in London I had only watched the big boys playing Rugby, I was not afraid of being knocked about, which was all that was expected of a new boy. Most of my embarrassments were due to the sensitiveness that made me dislike asking questions—a weakness that was always placing me in false positions. But my efforts to make myself agreeable to the boys were not unsuccessful, and while I looked in vain

for anything like the romantic adventures of which my brother had spoken, I sometimes found myself almost enjoying my new life.

And then, as the children say in the streets of London, I woke up, and discovered that I was desperately home-sick. Partly no doubt this was due to a natural reaction, but there were other more obvious causes. For one thing my lavish hospitality had exhausted my pocket-money in the first three weeks, and I was ashamed to write home for more so soon. This speedy end to my apparent wealth certainly made it easier for the boys to find out that I was not one of themselves, and they began to look at me askance and leave me out of their conversations. I was made to feel once more that I had been born under a malignant star that did not allow me to speak or act as they did. I had not their common sense, their blunt cheerfulness, their complete lack of sensibility, and while they resented my queerness they could not know how anxious I was to be an ordinary boy. When I saw that they mistrusted me I was too proud to accept the crumbs of their society like poor mother F—, and I withdrew myself into a solitude that gave me far too much time in which to examine my emotions. I found out all the remote corners of the school in which it was possible to be alone, and when the other boys went for walks in the fields, I stayed in the churchyard close to the school, disturbing the sheep in their meditations among the tombstones, and thinking what a long time it would be before I was old enough to die.

Now that the first freshness of my new environment had worn off, I was able to see my life as a series of grey pictures that repeated themselves day by day. In my mind these pictures were marked off from each other by a sound of bells. I woke in the morning in a bed that was like all the other beds, and lay on my back listening to the soft noises of sleep that filled the air with rumours of healthy boys. The bell would ring and the dormitory would break into an uproar, splashing of water, dropping of hair-brushes and shouts of laughter, for these super-boys could laugh before breakfast. Then we all trooped downstairs and I forced myself to drink bad coffee in a room that smelt of herrings. The next bell called us to chapel, and at intervals during the morning other bells called us from one class to another. Dinner was the one square meal we had during the day, and as it was always very good, and there was nothing morbid about my appetite, I looked forward to it with interest. After dinner we played football. I liked the game well enough, but the atmosphere of mud and forlorn grey fields made me shudder, and as I kept goal I spent my leisure moments in hardening my æsthetic impressions. I never see the word football to-day without recalling the curious sensation caused by the mud drying on my bare knees. After football were other classes, classes in which it was sometimes very hard to keep awake, for the school was old, and the badly ventilated class-rooms were stuffy after the fresh air. Then the bell summoned us to evening chapel and tea—a meal which we were allowed to improve with sardines and eggs and jam, if we had money to buy them or a hamper from home. After tea we had about two hours to ourselves and then came preparation, and supper and bed. Everything was heralded by a bell, and now and again even in the midst of lessons I would hear the church-bell tolling for a funeral.

I think my hatred of bells dated back to my early childhood, when the village church, having only three bells, played the first bar of “Three Blind Mice” a million times every Sunday evening, till I could have cried for monotony and the vexation of the thwarted tune. But at school I had to pay the penalty for my prejudice every hour of the day. Especially I suffered at night during preparation, when they rang the curfew on the church bells at intolerable length, for these were tranquil hours to which I looked forward eagerly. We prepared our lessons for the morrow in the Great Hall, and I would spread my books out on the desk and let my legs dangle from the form in a spirit of contentment for the troubled day happily past. Over my head the gas stars

burned quietly, and all about me I heard the restrained breathing of comrades, like a noise of fluttering moths. And then, suddenly, the first stroke of the curfew would snarl through the air, filling the roof with nasal echoes, and troubling the quietude of my mind with insistent vibrations. I derived small satisfaction from cursing William the Conqueror, who, the history book told me, was responsible for this ingenious tyranny. The long pauses between the strokes held me in a state of strained expectancy until I wanted to howl. I would look about me for sympathy and see the boys at their lessons, and the master on duty reading quietly at his table. The curfew rang every night, and they did not notice it at all.

The only bell I liked to hear was the last bell that called us to our brief supper and to bed, for once the light was out and my body was between the sheets I was free to do what I would, free to think or to dream or to cry. There was no real difference between being in bed at school or anywhere else; and sometimes I would fill the shadows of the dormitory with the familiar furniture of my little bedroom at home, and pretend that I was happy. But as a rule I came to bed brimming over with the day's tears, and I would pull the bedclothes over my head so that the other boys should not know that I was homesick, and cry until I was sticky with tears and perspiration.

The discipline at school did not make us good boys, but it made us civilised; it taught us to conceal our crimes. And as homesickness was justly regarded as a crime of ingratitude to the authorities and to society in general, I had to restrain my physical weakness during the day, and the reaction from this restraint made my tears at night almost a luxury. My longing for home was founded on trifles, but it was not the less passionate. I hated this life spent in walking on bare boards, and the blank walls and polished forms of the school appeared to me to be sordid. When now and again I went into one of the master's studies and felt a carpet under my feet, and saw a pleasant litter of pipes and novels lying on the table, it seemed to me that I was in a holy place, and I looked at the hearthrug, the wallpaper, and the upholstered chairs with a kind of desolate love for things that were nice to see and touch. I suppose that if we had been in a workhouse, a prison, or a lunatic asylum, our æsthetic environment would have been very much the same as it was at school; and afterwards when I went with the cricket and football teams to other granian schools they all gave me the same impression of clean ugliness. It is not surprising that few boys emerge from their school life with that feeling for colour and form which is common to nearly all children.

There was something very unpleasant to me in the fact that we all washed with the same kind of soap, drank out of the same kind of cup, and in general did the same things at the same time. The school time-table robbed life of all those accidental variations that make it interesting. Our meals, our games, even our hours of freedom seemed only like subtle lessons. We had to eat at a certain hour whether we were hungry or not, we had to play at a certain hour when perhaps we wanted to sit still and be quiet. The whole school discipline tended to the formation of habits at the expense of our reasoning faculties. Yet the astonishing thing to me was that the boys themselves set up standards of conduct that still further narrowed the possibilities of our life. It was bad form to read too much, to write home except on Sundays, to work outside the appointed hours, to talk to the day-boys, to cultivate social relationships with the masters, to be

Cambridge in the boat-race, and in fine to hold any opinion or follow any pursuit that was not approved by the majority. It was only by hiding myself away in corners that I could enjoy any liberty of spirit, and though my thoughts were often cheerless when I remembered the relative freedom of home life, I preferred to linger with them rather than to weary myself in breaking the little laws of a society for which I was in no way fitted.

These were black days, rendered blacker by my morbid fear of the physical weakness that made me liable to cry at any moment, sometimes even without in the least knowing why. I was often on the brink of disaster, but my fear of the boys' ridicule prevented me from publicly disgracing myself. Once the headmaster called a boy into his study, and he came out afterwards with red eyelids and a puffed face. When they heard that his mother had died suddenly in India, all the boys thought that these manifestations of sorrow were very creditable, and in the best of taste, especially as he did not let anybody see him crying. For my part I looked at him with a kind of envy, this boy who could flaunt his woe where he would. I, too, had my unassuageable sorrow for the home that was dead to me those forlorn days; but I could only express it among the tombs in the churchyard, or at night, muffled between the blankets, when the silent dormitory seemed to listen with suspicious ears.

### III

A consoling scrap of wisdom which unfortunately children do not find written large in their copybooks is that sorrow is as transitory as happiness. Although my childhood was strewn with the memorial wreaths of dead miseries, I always had a morbid sense that my present discomforts were immortal. So I had quite made up my mind that I would continue to be unhappy at school, when the intervention of two beings whom I had thought utterly remote from me, gave me a new philosophy and reconciled me to life. The first was a master, who found me grieving in one of my oubliettes and took me into his study and tried to draw me out. Kindness always made me ineloquent, and as I sat in his big basket chair and sniffed the delightful odour of his pipe, I expressed myself chiefly in woe-begone monosyllables and hiccoughs. Nevertheless he seemed to understand me very well, and though he did not say much, I felt by the way in which he puffed out great, generous clouds of smoke, that he sympathised with me. He told me to come and see him twice a week, and that I was at liberty to read any of his books, and in general gave me a sense that I was unfortunate rather than criminal. This did me good, because a large part of my unhappiness was due to the fact that constant suppression by majorities had robbed me of my self-respect. It is better for a boy to be conceited than to be ashamed of his own nature, and to shudder when he sees his face reflected in a glass.

My second benefactor was nominally a boy, though in reality he was nearly as old as the master, and was leaving at the end of the term to go up to Oxford. He took me by the shoulder one evening in the dusk, and walked me round and round the big clump of rhododendrons that stood in the drive in front of the school. I did not understand half he said, but to my great astonishment I heard him confessing that he had always been unhappy at school, although at the end he was captain in lessons, in games, in everything. I was, of course, highly flattered that this giant should speak to me as an equal, and admit me to his confidences. But I was even more delighted with the encouraging light he threw on school life. "You're only here for a little spell, you know; you'll be surprised how short it is. And don't be miserable just because you're different. I'm different; it's a jolly good thing to be different." I was not used to people who took this wide view of circumstance, and his voice in the shadows sounded like some one speaking in a story-book. Yet although his monologue gave me an entirely new conception of life, no more of it lingers in my mind, save his last reflective criticism. "All the same, I don't see why you should always have dirty nails." He never confided in me again, and I would have died rather than have reminded him of his kindly indiscretion; but when he passed me in the playground he

seemed to look at me with a kind of reticent interest, and it occurred to me that after all my queerness might not be such a bad thing, might even be something to be proud of.

The value of this discovery to me can hardly be exaggerated. Hitherto in my relationships with the boys I had fought nothing but losing battles, for I had taken it for granted that they were right and I was wrong. But now that I had hit on the astonishing theory that the individual has the right to think for himself, I saw quite clearly that most of their standards of conduct sprang from their sheep-like stupidity. They moved in flocks because they had not the courage to choose a line for themselves. The material result of this new theory of life was to make me enormously conceited, and I moved among my comrades with a mysterious confidence, and gave myself the airs of a Byron in knickerbockers. My unpopularity increased by leaps and bounds, but so did my moral courage, and I accepted the belated efforts of my school-fellows to knock the intelligence out of me as so many tributes to the force of my individuality. I no longer cried in my bed at night, but lay awake enraptured at the profundity of my thoughts. After years of unquestioning humility I enjoyed a prolonged debauch of intellectual pride, and I marvelled at the little boy of yesterday who had wept because he could not be an imbecile. It was the apotheosis of the ugly duckling, and I saw my swan's plumage reflected in the placid faces of the boys around me, as in the vacant waters of a pool. As yet I did not dream of a moulting season, still less that a day would come when I should envy the ducks their domestic ease and the unthinking tranquillity of their lives. A little boy may be excused for not realising that Hans Andersen's story is only the prelude to a sadder story that he had not the heart to write.

My new freedom of spirit gave me courage to re-examine the emotional and æsthetic values of my environment. I could not persuade myself that I liked the sound of bells, and the greyness of the country in winter-time still revolted me, as though I had not yet forgotten the cheerful reds and greens and blues of the picture-books that filled my mind as a child with dreams of a delightful world. But now that I was wise enough to make the best of my unboyish emotionalism, I began to take pleasure in certain phases of school-life. Though I was devoid of any recognisable religious sense I liked the wide words in the Psalms that we read at night in the school chapel. This was not due to any precocious recognition of their poetry, but to the fact that their intense imagery conjured up all sorts of precious visions in my mind, I could see the hart panting after the water-brooks, in the valleys of Exmoor, where I had once spent an enchanted holiday. I could see the men going down to the sea in ships, and the stormy waves, and the staggering, fearful mariners, for I had witnessed a great tempest off Flamborough Head. Even such vague phrases as "the hills" gave me an intense joy. I could see them so clearly, those hills, chalky hills covered with wild pansies, and with an all-blue sky overhead, like the lid of a chocolate-box. I liked, too, the services in the old church on Sunday nights, when the lights were lowered for the sermon, and I would put my hands over my ears and hear the voice of the preacher like the drone of a distant bee. After church the choral society used to practise in the Great Hall, and as I walked round the school buildings, snatches of their singing would beat against my face like sudden gusts of wind. When I listened at the doors of my form-room I heard the boys talking about football matches, or indulging their tireless passion for unimaginative personalities; I would stand on the mat outside wondering whether I would be allowed to read if I went in.

I looked forward to Tuesday night, which was my bath-night, almost as much as to Sunday. The school sanitary arrangements were primitive, and all the water had to be fetched in pails, and I used to like to see the man tipping the hot water into the bath and flinging his great body back to avoid the steam that made his grey flannel shirt-sleeves cling to his hairy arms. Most of the

boys added a lot of cold water, but I liked to boil myself because the subsequent languor was so pleasant. The matron would bring our own bath towels warm from the fire, and I would press mine against my face because it smelt of childhood and of home. I always thought my body looked pretty after a really hot bath; its rosiness enabled me to forgive myself for being fat.

One very strong impression was connected with the only master in the school whom I did not like. He was a German, and as is the case with others of his nationality, a spray of saliva flew from his lips when he was angry, and seeing this, I would edge away from him in alarm. Perhaps it was on this account that he treated me with systematic unfairness and set himself the unnecessary task of making me ridiculous in the eyes of the other boys. One night I was wandering in the playground and heard him playing the violin in his study. My taste in music was barbarian; I liked comic songs, which I used to sing to myself in a lugubrious voice, and in London the plaintive clamour of the street-organs had helped to make my sorrows rhythmical. But now, perhaps for the first time, I became aware of the illimitable melancholy that lies at the heart of all great music. It seemed to me that the German master, the man whom I hated, had shut himself up alone in his study, and was crying aloud. I knew that if he was unhappy, it must be because he too was an Ishmael, a personality, one of the different ones. A great sympathy woke within me, and I peeped through the window and saw him playing with his face all shiny with perspiration and a silk handkerchief tucked under his chin. I would have liked to have knocked at his door and told him that I knew all about these things, but I was afraid that he would think me cheeky and splutter in my face.

The next day in his class, I looked at him hopefully, in the light of my new understanding, but it did not seem to make any difference. He only told me to get on with my work.

#### IV

The term drew to a close, and most of the boys in my form-room ticked off the days on lists, in which the Sundays were written in red ink to show that they did not really count. As time went on they grew more and more boisterous, and wherever I went I heard them telling one another how they were going to spend their holidays. It was surprising to me that these boys who were so ordinary during term-time should lead such adventurous lives in the holidays, and I felt a little envious of their good fortune. They talked of visiting the theatre and foreign-travel in a matter-of-fact way that made me think that perhaps after all my home-life was incomplete. I had never been out of England, and my dramatic knowledge was limited to pantomimes, for which these enthusiastic students of musical comedy expressed a large contempt. Some of them were allowed to shoot with real guns in the holidays, which reminded me of the worst excesses of my brother in Yorkshire. Examining my own life, I had often come to the conclusion that adventures did not exist outside books. But the boys shook this comforting theory with their boastful prophecies, and I thought once more that perhaps it was my misfortune that they did not happen to me. I began to fear that I would find the holidays tame.

There were other considerations that made me look forward to the end of the term with misgiving. Since it had been made plain to me that I was a remarkable boy, I had rather enjoyed my life at school. I had conceived myself as strutting with a measured dignity before a background of the other boys—a background that moved and did not change, like a wind-swept tapestry; but I was quite sure that I would not be allowed to give myself airs at home. It seemed to me that a youngest brother's portion of freedom would compare but poorly with the measure of intellectual liberty that I had secured for myself at school. My brothers were all very well in

their way, but I would be expected to take my place in the background and do what I was told. I should miss my sense of being superior to my environment, and my intensely emotional Sundays would no longer divide time into weeks. The more I thought of it, the more I realised that I did not want to go home.

On the last night of the term, when the dormitory had at length become quiet, I considered the whole case dispassionately in my bed. The labour of packing my play-box and writing labels for my luggage had given me a momentary thrill, but for the rest I had moved among my insurgent comrades with a chilled heart. I knew now that I was too greedy of life, that I always thought of the pleasant side of things when they were no longer within my grasp; but at the same time my discontent was not wholly unreasonable. I had learnt more of myself in three months than I had in all my life before, and from being a nervous, hysterical boy I had arrived at a complete understanding of my emotions, which I studied with an almost adult calmness of mind. I knew that in returning to the society of my healthy, boyish brothers, I was going back to a kind of life for which I was no longer fitted. I had changed, but I had the sense to see that it was a change that would not appeal to them, and that in consequence I would have another and harder battle to fight before I was allowed to go my own way.

I saw further still. I saw that after a month at home I would not want to come back to school, and that I should have to endure another period of despondency. I saw that my whole school life would be punctuated by these violent uprootings, that the alternation of term-time and holidays would make it impossible for me to change life into a comfortable habit, and that even to the end of my school-days it would be necessary for me to preserve my new-found courage.

As I lay thinking in the dark I was proud of the clarity of my mind, and glad that I had at last outwitted the tears that had made my childhood so unhappy. I heard the boys breathing softly around me—those wonderful boys who could sleep even when they were excited—and I felt that I was getting the better of them in thinking while they slept. I remembered the prefect who had told me that we were there only for a little spell, but I did not speculate as to what would follow afterwards. All that I had to do was to watch myself ceaselessly, and be able to explain to myself everything that I felt and did. In that way I should always be strong enough to guard my weaknesses from the eyes of the jealous world in which I moved.

The church bells chimed the hour, and I turned over and went to sleep.