RUNNING WILD

By

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AUTHOR OF

"DAYS OF DISCOVERY," "THE WHOLE ART OF CARAVANNING," ETC.

WITH A PREFACE BY

WARD MUIR

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PREFACE

BERTRAM SMITH

Born at New Brighton, Cheshire, 1876.
Died at Beattock, Dumfriesshire, 1918.

BERTRAM SMITH lived aloof from the world of Fleet Street and the clubs. He rarely came to London or met his fellow-craftsmen. Yet here and there, all over the country, there are discriminating readers who heard of his death with very real regret, and who feel that English authorship has lost a most engaging figure. He had a curiously large and diverse following, who watched for his signature at the foot of a *Manchester Guardian* column, who always looked for his work in *Punch*, and

who placed his—alas—not very numerous books in an honoured position on their shelves.

He had published a good many short magazine stories, mostly concerned with sport, and a couple of novels of public school life; but it was less as a fiction writer than as an essayist that his admirers reckoned him. "Days of Discovery" was a series of essays; and his two volumes on caravanning—"The Whole Art of Caravanning" and "Caravan Days"—were in reality essays also rather than merely practical treatises or journals of travel.

What, precisely, is the curious charm of Bertram Smith's essays? His readers would probably find it in their whimsical humour. He had an extraordinary gift for fun—a quiet, unexpected dry-champagne sort of bubbling-up of verbal high-spiritedness. The result was that he was

also delightfully natural. Those of us who had the privilege of his friendship knew that Bertram Smith was no mere artificial humorist: if he was good to read he was still better to listen to. His writing revealed a gay and gallant mind, but the man himself was still more gay and gallant.

That gaiety, that gallantry, were all the finer when one remembered that the latter part of his life had been a continual fight against a dread disease. He died of consumption, at the age of 41. And this illness tinged the whole of his career by compelling him to live in the country. Although born in England he really was Scotch, and thus it came about that he made his home at Beattock, in Dumfriesshire, where he took up farming. His figure, a picturesque one, was familiar throughout a wide district. He was exceptionally tall and broad-shouldered; wind and weather had given

his face a wholesome colour ; his eyes were of a clear, bright blue ; his hair—he generally went hatless, being a Loretto boy—was iron grey, with a splash of white at the front. To see him striding along the roads beside his caravan (he did a great deal of caravanning) you would never have guessed that he was not enjoying the most magnificent health. His death was hastened by the self-sacrificing enthusiasm with which he had engaged in food-production work, the popularisation of ploughing by tractor, the housing of Belgian refugees, and similar war-time measures.

As a boy he had been quite healthy. He was one of a family of six : five boys and one girl. Their interests were mainly in open-air pursuits. At home, in Liverpool, much of their time was spent in the large garden whose delights are drawn for us in " Days of Discovery." The summer

always meant a migration from Liverpool to the North, where, on his father's estate, Bertram Smith spent the happiest days of his boyhood, with his brothers and sister, "running wild." When he reached young manhood he joined the firm of Smith, Edwards & Co., cotton brokers, and had he not developed a consumptive tendency he might have remained in Liverpool, in business, and perhaps the commercial routine would have left him little time for writing. Yet Bertram Smith was no typical business man. Even in that era he would live in a caravan, moving at dusk along the lanes of Cheshire, and in the morning leaving his house-on-wheels to go up to the office by train. Probably never before has anyone contrived to combine caravanning and cotton-broking.

But Bertram Smith had a knack of doing the unusual. On his marriage, when he

built himself a residence, his architect's sole order was that every bedroom must have a bathroom—an unheard-of suggestion in those rural depths. When he abandoned gipsy vans and designed his own, he made not one but a fleet of eight. He caravanned from the Border to John o' Groats. Another curious method of Scottish touring was his invention—namely, punting. Nobody dreamt that the upper reaches of our northern rivers were navigable till Bertram Smith constructed flat-bottomed craft and, accompanied by a crew of old Lorettonians, floated (with many an upset) down the Tweed, Annan, Nith and S. Esk : streams which, for the main portion of their courses, are a mere chain of rapids, rocky pools, and shallows. And the man who rejoiced in these boyish adventures, who loved shooting and swimming and tenting and walking and winter-sport,

was also a passionate devotee of music. Beethoven and Wagner were, for him, the masters.

To his local paper he contributed, week by week, during the war, a careful summary of the military situation: a boiled-down conclusion from his own vast reading of the dailies and reviews. Like Bertram Smith's later *Punch* articles, it was signed by the pseudonym "Bis." He wrote on caravanning for *Country Life*, and also contributed several important articles on curling. During many pre-war winters he acted as special correspondent of *The Scotsman* at the curling Bonspiels at Kandersteg and elsewhere in the Alps. Perhaps no one else has ever been really readable about curling; but the present writer can tell of at least one old lady, who had scarcely seen a curling stone, yet perused Bertram Smith's dispatches with

delight. That was the curious feature about his public—their variety. "Totty" and "A Perfect Genius," his two school novels, were devoured with equal joy by boys and adults. "Days of Discovery" and "Running Wild," except for their extreme skilfulness, might have been written by a child, and can be understood by any child. In spite of the burdens which Bertram Smith bore he remained, in fact, a boy, with a boy's ideals, a boy's high sense of honour, a boy's zest and a boy's capacity for laughter.

WARD MUIR.

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RUNNING WILD

CHAPTER I

A DAY

THE Old Garden has long ago disappeared. It is only possible now to guess at its boundaries, though one may still discern its neighbourhood by the lie of the ground as it falls away to the river. Somewhere in that wide district of streets of small brick houses, running parallel up the hill, there is a tract submerged that once belonged to us,

> "Where water gushed and fruit trees grew,
> And flowers put forth a fairer hue,
> And everything was strange and new."

But it has been wiped out long ago. . . .

And it is well. For it is far better to have a remembered garden, all unspoilt, than to live to see magic places made ordinary or find them tampered with, changed and disfigured.

It was in the Old Garden that most of our outdoor life was spent in the Days of Discovery, and I look back on it now as on an area intensively cultivated, in which every tree had been well climbed, every hedge root well explored, every grid or tap or water-butt investigated and enjoyed. There was no walk there that had not been a river, high-road, corridor, or slide. There was no corner that had not been crawled over by Red Indians or marked with the spoor of lion or of elk. The coal-hole was our safe meeting-place, and there were hiding-places everywhere: the summer-house had played the parts of fort, museum, hospital, hotel. Good use was

found for everything within our marches. With all the ends of life thus concentrated we had little thought or time for the outside world.

But with the journey in July—an occasion that ranked far above birthdays and only a little below Christmas—all that was left behind and cut off short, dismissed without a backward look. For we embraced with keen delight the freedom of our home in Scotland and those long summer days when we ran wild in woods and meadows, down by the river or far out across the moor. It is true that certain "bounds" were set at first—the White Gate in one direction, the Three Oak Trees in another, the Stile on the Dumfries Road—but we soon grew out of them; and after that the whole wide valley was our own and nothing put restraint upon us but the big bell in the roof that called us home to meals.

I wonder if the glad experience of our one Great Day was peculiar to us as a family; if other people, looking back across the years to their childhood, can also vividly recall one separate occasion of sheer rebellion that stands out in bold relief. I hope that it may be so, for our day is still an exquisite memory. Had it never been, my whole recollection of the Golden Age would have suffered for the lack of it. For it remains clear-cut and richly coloured, as a thing of pure delight, a fulfilment of every lawless and spontaneous instinct, a climax and epitome. Surely there are few parents niggard enough, whatever penalties must follow in the interest of discipline, to begrudge a child the memory of one such day.

It is, I suppose, the internal divisions, the absence of concerted action in a large family that makes it capable of control

and government. We were often individually in rebellion, and I can recall a long list of isolated exploits and adventures—such as the happy afternoon I spent sliding down the slates of the stable, clutching the gutter with eager heels at the foot of each descent, on the drawing-room cushions. But the rebel was not always well supported. Great as our sympathy with the idea might be, and much as we might be tempted to take part, there was often another alluring course of action that proved still more attractive—that of standing aloof to gloat in the hour of retribution. The value of a perfect unity of aim and common loyalty to one another did not seem to dawn upon us until Our Day. Then, for the first time, we worked together in eager unison. That was the real secret of our incomparable success.

It was quite unpremeditated. It chanced that Those in Authority were away from

home, and an uncle and aunt had been imported to take charge, who had not enjoyed the years of careful training in our complex methods of misbehaviour necessary for the post. That evening one of us went over the house with laborious care, putting all the clocks an hour back, but beyond that we made no special effort to utilise the rare occasion. I think there was something in the sunshine and the wind of the next morning that stirred in us an unwonted mood of recklessness. Long before breakfast-time we were scampering in Indian file, barefooted and pyjamaed, through the passages and out into the woods. And then we discovered that the manipulation of the clocks had been attended by extraordinary success—that their evidence had in each case been taken, in the face of isolated watches, and the whole machinery of the morning had been thrown out of gear;

Suspicion began to fall on us during breakfast, and it was, I fancy, the immediate fear of reprisals that drove us first into the open. It was then in the little wood behind the wash-house that the full extent of our opportunity dawned upon us. Why go back? Why not make a day of it?

"We must have food," Sidney declared, looking forward with singular prudence, and it was this consideration that first brought home to us the enormous range of the adventure. That we should not be in to dinner was almost unthinkable! This was to be a day with no natural division into morning and afternoon, a day of a new order, all of a piece—surely an interminable day. Silently we raided the larder and bore away the strangest jumble of supplies. And then we waited in close cover till we had seen and enjoyed the spectacle of a forlorn tutor pacing aimlessly in

front of the house, and had heard our names called at every point of the compass. And then to work. . . . I cannot remember any principle on which the campaign developed. We never looked for occupation: we left it to one who is said ever to find work for idle hands to do. All day we held together, and we seemed to move and think in perfect harmony, with the precision of a flight of birds. From one crime to another—some new and bright suggestion would always take the place of each exhausted effort—we rushed rejoicing through the sunny hours and never looked behind us.

And first, not without much hard labour, we dammed the stream beside the bleaching-green, and hurled a muddy cataract into the stable-yard. Nor did we desist till the coach-house was well flooded and we could see the wooden-backed brushes bobbing on the surface. Old

Tom Coachman was never, at his best, fleet of foot, and we had ample time to draw off through the cover of the wood to the garden and the hives. We had often wondered, it now appeared, what would happen if the bees were well stirred up with sticks and stones; and soon we were to know. The bees had by all odds the best of the encounter, though our own losses were not great. For we kept our retreat open to the safety of the green-house. Indeed, all the casualties inflicted were upon my own unhappy person, for being younger and less nimble than the others (with the exception of Archie, who funked) I was stung in two separate places, upon the ear and ankle, and reached the refuge in an evil plight. But I was soon comforted with big words of exploits yet in store; and we moved on to what I must always consider the most original, the most wantonly and brazenly

destructive, and therefore the most memorable of all our inspirations.

Behind the back door there was a steep slope upward to the fence at the edge of the wood, and on the lower part of it there rose a flight of freestone steps to the road which cut across its face. The next few hours we spent in a very labour of Hercules, hauling curling stones one at a time—enveloped in a sack—to the patch of bracken just outside the fence, till we had a score of them collected. A curling stone is circular in shape and weighs some forty pounds. We had worked silently, coming and going by a long detour, and when all was ready for our grand attack it was decreed that we take lunch—a wise precaution, for we must travel light in the stampede that was almost sure to follow. And after that, in the deep noon silence, began a fearful onslaught on the unsuspecting house, a very

riot of assault and battery. For our cannonade succeeded in a measure beyond our wildest dreams. Stone after stone bounded over the short-clipped turf, paused for a moment on the road, crashed magnificently down the steps, scoring its way amid flying chips, to end its rollicking journey in a resounding thwack on the back door. There was one inside who peered out for a moment, wild-eyed, but withdrew her head in bare time to save herself from the next leaping missile in that ponderous attack. In spite of our mis-hits (and there were several stones that took a devious course and came to rest harmlessly upon the roadway), the steps were reduced to a pebbly, irregular slope, and one panel of the door was split from top to bottom before the final curling stone was started on its way.

But now the hue and cry was out. Excited servants poured forth on to the drive;

two garden lads, old Tom, and a nimble kitchen-maid sprang up the hill to the pursuit, and we had a trying course to run before we shook them off and lay panting and exultant on the hay at the back of a distant barn. We spent an hour in whispered consultation before we ventured forth. The afternoon was characterised by a still wilder recklessness and greater disregard for the rights of property. For now we felt ourselves to be outlaws beyond the limit of an amnesty. It only remained to fill the cup. The end of it all was a visit in the twilight to the little railway station to see the mail go by and pick up the letter-bags "by apparatus." That had long been a treasured project, forbidden owing to the lateness of the hour. And then —it was all over. As darkness fell, tired, bruised, and wholly satisfied, we crept down the shattered steps to the back door and

without a word gave ourselves up to justice.

I do not think there was anything defiant in our attitude. I am sure there were no signs of penitence. For we had had our day. We had run wild without stint or let or hindrance. I have no recollection at all of what the sequel was. But at the moment of our surrender we looked forward to it without dismay. For we knew that, short of throwing the whole house into mourning for days to come, there could be no punishment that was adequate. Surely that could hardly be. And whatever the morrow might hold for us, we had had our day.

CHAPTER II

REFORMATION

It was a matter between myself and the new under-nurse. The fact that I was still under her direct control shows that it must have been in the early stages of my career, but although there was a birthday concerned in it I cannot now remember which birthday it was. New under-nurses had rather an uphill fight in our household, where the odds were so heavy against them, and I happened to be particularly bad about the time when Lizzie appeared. It was only in occasional fits of absent-mindedness that I would do as I was told; and if I sometimes obeyed, as a special favour, I

always felt afterwards that I had lost a little ground that would have to be regained. Lizzie kept her end up very well, but though she could easily corner me in the nursery she couldn't catch me in the garden if I had a fair start. And for some time I had her at my mercy in the bathroom. She did not like to close with me when I refused to get out of the bath, so long as I dictated terms with a wet sponge in each hand. So I would make her count twenty—and then another twenty, while I wallowed at my ease, and it often ended in a hand-to-hand scuffle after all.

Lizzie and I sometimes used to discuss the question of how bad I was. We agreed that it was not a matter of temper: it was just unmanageableness. I was more trouble than all the others put together. And one day, when I had thrown a stone at her and hit her on the elbow and was really

rather sorry about it, I had a great idea. I would reform. It seemed to me, as I thought it carefully over, that I had tried most other things in life—but I had never tried this. It would be a new adventure and it would be a tremendously dramatic thing. By Jingo, it would cause a sensation. But I mustn't do anything in a hurry. I must think it out. I contented myself that evening with telling Lizzie that I had some good news for her one of these days.

Well, I saw at once that I should lose the whole savour of the thing if I simply slipped into it by degrees. It was no fun for me to be told at the end of a month that I was improving. I had once been told that before and had immediately taken steps to wipe out the impression. It must happen in a moment, like a thunderclap. It must take people's breath away. They must find themselves forced to use the

strongest expressions of wonder and delight. . . . "I simply wouldn't know that boy." . . . "I can't imagine what has come over him." . . . "I never would have believed it."—That was the sort of thing. Secondly, it would have to take place at a fairly distant date. After all, it was a far-reaching thing. If I was going to be good it meant pretty sweeping changes in my daily habits. I ought to have time to look round me. Then I had another inspiration. I would fix my birthday as the starting-point. It was still six weeks off. And that would give special point to it. It would make a nice tidy division of my life—so many bad years and so many good. And—if you came to think of it—it would be most useful in the future when my dramatic history was subject of conversation. They would be able to say, "Yes, it happened on his birthday when

he was "—I wish I could remember how many—"years old. You never saw such a change!" Finally it must be a profound secret. . . . Altogether I enjoyed that evening's meditation in the hay-shed so greatly that I glowed with anticipation of the better life. It never struck me for a moment that there would be the slightest difficulty in carrying out my intention—for the world was a wonderful place to live in in those days.

But I found that I had to tell Lizzie. And that for two reasons. First of all it did seem rather hard luck on her that she should continue to be pestered day by day by my unmanageableness, without having an inkling that relief was so near at hand. Secondly I had come to see that the dramatic prospects of the fateful day would be greatly improved by preparation of the ground. In other words, the more

abominably I behaved up to the eve of my birthday the more dazzling would be the revolution when it burst upon the world. More than that, I ought to get worse and worse progressively so as to break off at the very moment when I was heading for the abyss. So I told Lizzie, and she was very pleased about it. She put great faith in it. And if she allowed me a little extra latitude, it was only natural in the circumstances. I made her count a hundred one night, but I told her to cheer up. It would be all right on the 18th. Lizzie was very young.

The time grew shorter. I saw the happy days of unfettered licence go by one by one. It was a sobering thought. And it was a busy time. There were so many things that I should never be able to do after the 18th. I must try to get them all in now. I had often wanted to upset the water-

barrel and to cut my name on the oak tree on the lawn and to see what would happen if I stopped the escape pipe of the stable trough and to lock Tom Coachman into the harness-room. It was now or never. And Those in Authority, who did not know of our secret pact, were almost in despair. (They needn't worry: let them wait till the 18th.) And finally came that sad and beautiful day, the 17th, the day of renunciation, when every wicked practice must be carried through for the last time—and I tried to make Lizzie count a thousand.

I had formed no clear idea of what the new life would be like. In a general way I hoped to find consolations, but it was the sort of thing that one couldn't really tell much about till one tried. It would work out all right. And Lizzie had great faith.

And so I made a good finish of it, by

upsetting a ewer of water over Archie when he was in bed, took a sad farewell of my lurid past—and went to sleep. . . .

The whole thing was a ghastly failure. Lizzie affirmed that it was the greatest disappointment of her life. For my reformation, when it came, proved to be a much more gradual and imperfect process. It was not to be done by a *coup de main*.

But I have always held that I hardly got a fair chance. For one of my birthday presents, from an unthinking uncle, was a gigantic squirt.

CHAPTER III

THE TRUTH ABOUT SANTA CLAUS

SANTA CLAUS was a puzzle. It was not a question simply of whether you believed in him or not. You could afford to smile at a younger sister whose faith was still unshaken and who actually pictured to herself a big man with a pink face and a white beard in a beautiful bright red dressing-gown fumbling about the room in the dark with a sack of toys on his shoulder. On the other hand, you resented the cynical smile of an elder brother whose superior air suggested that he had no illusions left. The normal position lay somewhere between the two. Of course no fellow could swallow

all that about a sledge and reindeer. There was no snow anyhow, for a sledge and reindeer existed only in picture-books. And all that stuff about his coming down the chimney was simply absurd. One had measured the chimney. But as to the man himself. Well—he didn't have a cotton-wool beard. Any fool could tell that. And as for his red dressing-gown—well it didn't seem likely. And yet *there was probably something in it.*

These stockings were filled somehow, and even if you kept awake all night with one eye fixed upon them, the thing was done and you never saw him. It was not like other transactions. There was more in it than met the eye. One would not care to commit oneself, but *probably* it was done somehow by Santa Claus, and, as far as one could judge, Santa Claus was old and benevolent and very cunning and had a

deep laugh and a brusque manner. It seemed likely that Those in Authority were really trying to put us off the track. That was the sort of thing they loved to do. The red dressing-gowned, cotton-wool-bearded figure who used to turn up at Christmas trees and distribute gifts was not to be taken seriously for a moment. Any fool could see that he was simply an ordinary person dressed up. And if you came to think of it, it was jolly good cheek his trying to make out that he was Santa Claus. If such an obvious fake as that came in to fill your stocking you would know at once where you were. But that didn't mean that Santa Claus himself was a fake.

One would sometimes reason it out in this sort of way, but at the last it was better to leave it vague and not think about it, and above all not talk about it. The

truth was that one wanted to believe in him if possible. It was not a case for admitting the full light of day. He had always been very decent to us, and it was hardly our part to try to find him out and give him away. And yet—to talk like that implied that he was not a myth. And after all he probably was.

You see, if you looked in your stocking before you were dressed you would have nothing in it next year but a rotten potato. Well—no one believed such rot as that. And still, if there *was* any truth in Santa Claus, that would be just the sort of thing that Santa Claus would do. We knew him for a humorist. And it was the sort of thing that no one else could possibly have thought of. Anyhow we weren't going to risk it.

The proper attitude, then, was to behave as if you didn't swallow it, but all the

time to reserve judgment—in case. And to talk about it was simply indecent. If Grown-ups introduced the subject we dried up at once. And among ourselves it was barred. When a brutal elder brother announced one Christmas that he had found it out—it was Those in Authority that filled the stockings—one felt deeply wounded and resentful. It was in any case a disgraceful thing for him to have said. It was as if he had been boasting of opening a private letter. One wasn't going to listen to that sort of thing. One wasn't going to *consider* whether it was true or not.

And there was one Christmas Eve when I did happen to open my eyes and, well, the person who was carrying off my stocking to be filled had on a black tail coat! It was disturbing. But do you think I was going to say a word about it? Not I.

That was a thing to forget. Still, it wasn't likely (if one really came to face the thing) that he wore a black tail coat. Still, he had always been very decent to me and I wasn't going to give him away. I wasn't going to *have* it so. I must have been dreaming. And yet—I could tell the others if I liked, and what a sensation that would cause! But it didn't bear talking about. Depend upon it *there was something in it.*— And now he was coming back! I could solve the whole thing in a moment. Instantly I closed my eyes and drove my face into the pillow, thrilling with excitement. When next I looked I saw in the dim light the bulging form of a well-filled stocking. And I do not know to this day who hung it there or whether he had on a red dressing-gown or not.

A puzzling question, this of Santa Claus.

There must have been some magic in it. For it was one of our first instincts to find out a secret and then swagger about our superior knowledge and jeer at those who were still in the dark. When I found out that Uncle George wasn't really a lion-tamer by profession, as he had always said he was, what magnificent capital I made out of it! How I laughed at the others for being taken in with a yarn like that! A lion-tamer forsooth! That was a good one! And why shouldn't he be a lion-tamer? Why, it was absurd. I had seen through it all along. They must be idiots if they couldn't see that. He was far too fat. He wore spectacles. There were a dozen reasons. No, Uncle George was a very good fellow in his way. He might be a doctor for all I knew, or a cotton-broker, or even a Member of Parliament.

But you had only to look at him to see that he wasn't fit for lion-taming. (And yet, only twenty-four hours before I had asked him if it wasn't rather hot and slobbery when he put his head in their mouths.)

We didn't mean to be trifled with in that sort of way.—And yet, Santa Claus was different.

It became more difficult year by year. There came a time at last when none of us believed it. We were *almost* certain that there was nothing in it. But even then we didn't say so to one another. It was not a thing to talk about. And we actually conspired together to bolster up, as far as might be, the waning faith of my little sister, who was also getting puzzled. There were some compensations even then. For even if there was no such person as Santa Claus, the things he brought were solid

enough : we could always fall back on the stockings themselves.

And after all, would we open them before we were dressed ? Would we risk the rotten potato ?

CHAPTER IV

WAR ON NETTLES

ONE of the special rewards of carrying a stick is to be able to slash the head off a thistle, especially a strong, stringy one that makes a fight for it. I was reminded of that the other day when I read in an agricultural journal a letter in support of the new movement for greater food production. I have to explain that on many of the high-lying farms in Scotland a grave problem at the present time is the spread of bracken, which is occupying more and more space upon the hills and robbing sheep of pasture. It is an entirely useless product; nothing, not even rabbits, will eat it.

There have been many learned discussions as to how to get rid of it. It is too laborious to cut it with a scythe, and burning it does not seem to be effective. A bracken-cutting machine, drawn by a pony, which appeared not long ago, could not be made to work. And now I read, in the letter referred to, of a method that has proved quite successful. It is only necessary to "bash it with shinty-sticks" just before it reaches maturity, so that it is thoroughly smashed and bleeds freely. If this is repeated for two or three years in succession the bracken will disappear. I cannot pronounce on the value of the treatment, but I know that when I read the letter I felt with a pang that it had come to my notice much too late, perhaps thirty years too late. For there was a time when the opportunity of "bashing" anything, especially with a "shinty-stick," would

have been welcomed with profound satisfaction. Even now I could almost lick my lips over the words. Here was a prospect opened up of unlimited bashing, bashing with a definite aim, patriotic bashing; of entering shoulder-high into the jungle and spreading reckless destruction far and wide, of creating a scene of shredded desolation upon a fair hillside. I could almost see myself beating down the enemy beneath my feet, cutting great jagged lanes through the serried ranks, and pausing at last to wipe my dripping weapon and survey the field. So surely as there are small boys left in Scotland, I reflected, there should be no trouble now in exterminating bracken.

And . . . yet . . . I am not so sure. Admittedly bracken is of the very finest material for bashing. Still . . . I have a haunting suspicion that after the first

glad onslaught one might begin to tire of it. The *animus pugnandi*—to use the naval expert's phrase—might flag. One might begin to wonder if it was really good enough, for there would be something lacking. A wicked whisper would be sure to come—If only this bracken was preserved, if only it was a thing of value, how splendid this would be! If only one were forced to fight the battle with an eye on the gate in fear of interruption from the owner! As it is, I am afraid that the occupation, though intrinsically fine, would be robbed of its true zest by its patent usefulness. It would be dragged down from its status of pure adventure. For what would it be after all? A mere agricultural job—like shawing turnips; also a jolly enough thing in itself, but suffering from the same taint.

There was nothing that had a more

chilling effect than this suggestion of usefulness and of ulterior motive. A thing must be worth doing for itself alone. I remember well how keenly we would climb for wood-pigeons' eggs, forcing our way repeatedly to the tops of high spruce trees in spite of many fruitless journeys. There was no other form of birds'-nesting we liked so well, until one day we learned that we were unwittingly performing a most useful service and that every egg we obtained was so much to the good of the community. And after that—well, there were plenty of other nests; wood-pigeons' eggs were not much good, anyway, and it was jolly hard work climbing these old spruce trees and scratchy to the hands and rather dangerous; better look for curlews' on the moor (no one had ever suggested that that was useful). Then Archie went on to point out that if it was so beastly

useful we should be paid for it. We were quite willing to bring them in at so much an egg. There was nothing mercenary about Archie; he only wished to have things clearly defined, so that work should not be confounded with play. And when his offer was scorned we harried the wood-pigeons no more.

Even so with bracken-bashing. It would not only be useful, like the pigeons' eggs; it would have a further flaw in that it was not our own idea. I suspect it would only be undertaken at full union rates.

And as I look further into it I perceive that bracken has another disability from the basher's point of view. It is too strictly a non-combatant; it has no means of hitting back. It needed a better opponent than this to bring out the full lust of conquest. To play real joyous havoc with

a shinty-stick one must ply it upon thistles, nettles, or clinging briars.

For in our historic attack upon the nettles there were losses on both sides. Archie and I had made one of those sudden and solemn vows that used to pop into one's head, apparently from nowhere, that were so rashly and needlessly embraced. We swore that we would in a single day slay every nettle in the woods. We wore no protective armour, though even gloves or a second pair of stockings must have saved us much, and we carried no weapon but a stick. Starting at the foot of the glen, where the enemy was full six feet high and densely packed, we went grimly over the ground for many hours, laying about us with fury and despatch. It really was heroic work, for we were very small boys at the time, and as we warmed to it we were barbarously stung. We even courted

danger, refusing to pull up a stocking that had come down or rolling up a sleeve in sheer bravado. A small, admiring sister followed in our wake, bearing dock-leaves, ready when we took a moment's respite to give some suffering spot a hasty rub. We were hot and weary as the afternoon wore on and stung in fifty places, but we made heroic speeches and egged each other on. What was a nettle sting after all? Painful, of course, but a momentary thing. (We little knew!) We were not to be daunted by that. And so—more dock-leaves and at it again.

By the time we reached the last great clump near the farm gate we were possessed by a blind fury, and more than once belaboured each other in our eagerness to complete the good work. And so we came to the last towering nettle, and, taking it simultaneously from either

side—One—Two—Three !—laid it in the dust.

Dock-leaves and sisterly sympathy; and so swaggering home to tea. What were a few nettle stings, after all ?

I think I may take a different view of nettle stings from other people. I feel that I know more about them, and I am more careful not to sting myself. For rather a strange thing happened that night, and for several nights to follow. We never said a word about it, for we would have no anti-climax after our intrepid attitude; but in the dead of night we both woke up writhing in an unknown agony, hot and tingling from head to foot. This was something far beyond dock-leaves, and for an hour or more we groaned and wriggled and dabbed ourselves with wet towels. The infliction was gone with the morning, but for a week or two thereafter we went to sleep with a

We had no doubt fallen into the national error of underrating the enemy. They had sold their lives dearly, after all.

CHAPTER V

ON BEING IN BED

In the eyes of the nursery each day is a separate possession and a golden opportunity, and they are all too short. It is probable that never in later life, despite the pressure of our modern existence, is one quite so busy, quite so fully occupied with vital interests as one was then. Life was a headlong course of feverish activity. We were often accused of not making full use of toys or games that had been given to us; we were often told that it was discouraging to Those in Authority when they had given us some special permission (at our urgent request) and found we did not avail

ourselves of it ; it was frequently pointed out to us that we were neglecting our pets or our other responsibilities. But the plain truth is that these delinquencies were not the result of indifference. We simply had no time. We never had time. And thus, the day being far too short for practical purposes, one could not bring oneself to regard the close of it with anything but resentment and exasperation. It was almost impossible to maintain a smiling countenance on being sent to bed.

There was no rare treat, in reward for special merit or in celebration of a special event, to be compared with that of "being allowed to stay up." The extra hour thus gained was like no other hour. It was a supplement, a bonus, a free gift. It was also an excursion into an unknown land beyond whose portals one had seldom strayed ; and it was a notable opportunity

for finding out—a point upon which one had often speculated—what the rest of the household did after the hour of one's extinction—8 p. m. On the other hand, to be sent to bed early and alone was to taste all the bitterness of the outcast.

And yet, though it was thus approached with dull reluctance, bed, in itself, was good, rich in possibilities, of which you could never quite get the full benefit, for, with the best will in the world, you fell asleep. You would lay your head upon the pillow, watching the flickering firelight on the walls, and hailing the opportunity—the first that you had enjoyed that day—for thinking, plotting, and making plans. For there was always a vast amount of complicated thinking to do and never time to do it. But all too often you had barely begun to turn over in your mind the special problem of the hour before there came a thumping

at the door, and you were face to face with the activities of another day. Many were the methods adopted of trying to keep awake, to save at least some of these precious hours. One would smuggle in a wet handkerchief to spread upon one's face; one would lie rigidly upon one's back; one would bunch up the pillow and sit half upright. But it was of no avail. There was one thing only that could overcome the forces making for unconsciousness, an attack of toothache—and there was nothing to be gained by that. Even in summer, when the room was light and birds were singing in the branches outside, one's efforts were generally vain.

Yet bed was the centre of many strange experiences and striking scenes. In times of rebellion it was the base from which one made a shivering sortie, with no other end in view but that of reaching a distant part

of the house without being caught—probably because one had been dared to do it. It was the base from which, on occasicn of a dinner-party, a raid upon the pantry might be organised and the chosen spot for the picnic which ensued, and which was always followed by a fearful visitation of crumbs. For crumbs in bed formed one of the chief trials and annoyances of existence. It has always seemed to me, on looking back, that in childhood one suffered from three recurring evils in quite an extraordinary and disproportionate degree. One must have met with them with a frequency for which I can by no means account. Hardly a day can have passed in which one did not encounter soap in the eye, a nail in the shoe, or crumbs in the bed. And of the last I can only say that the ability of a single crumb, insinuated accidentally, to render a whole bed untenable, almost as gravelly

as the bed of a river, hot, gritty, and impossible, remained an unsolved mystery.

Bed also played a part in wild and joyous scenes in the morning hours at Christmas-time, when stockings were in evidence, or on a birthday, when the postman had been waylaid. And it was the home of incredible riots, pillow-fights, and storming parties, in the summer mornings.

But there were also the dim moments of midnight mystery, remembered for many days to come, without fear perhaps, but with a feeling of awe, a far-away sense of an unreal world where one had wandered upon the borderland of sleep. In this mood of weird sensation one has seen—or dreamt that one has seen—a bar of light below the door, and as it was silently opened a narrow shaft of light spring up the wall, yellow, clear-cut. Then one has watched it as it has expanded with a vivid sweep across

the ceiling till the room was lit. On the threshold stood one with a candle who had come to see if all was well. And on the closing of the door one watched the light chase back again, gather together in the aperture, and vanish.

Strangest of all was that bewildering feeling of being cast adrift half-awake, as it were into a world gone wrong, in the midnight hours. The room is not the same; something has happened to it. I try to grasp its usual features, but only to be baffled and distressed. Surely the bed has been turned round? The window should be there, to the left, but it is here. And the walls are all wrong, and I cannot find the fireplace. I wonder painfully what can be amiss, reach out to feel the chest of drawers, try to piece things together. And then in a moment, with a sudden click, everything falls back in its place. I had

been wrong about the window. The room is all right—of course it is—and I may go to sleep again.

There are other, grimmer memories—of weird shapes seen in the firelight, when the corner of a quilt thrown back would take on the semblance of a wolf's head or a picture on the wall would nod at me. And there was the Black Dog. I never saw him, but I knew he was there. He was always under something—a table, a bed, or a bridge—lurking, waiting his time.

It is a fortunate circumstance that Bed, with all its other noble properties, had also this security from all shapes and terrors, power to shut out and defy the pursuer. It was enough to plunge beneath the bedclothes.

CHAPTER VI

DISOBLIGING

THE disobliging years are fairly well defined. There are perhaps some children who are never willing to do anything for any one; they are not good to deal with in after life. And there are some of such a cheerful, sunny temperament that they are always willing to help. But the child that is made up of the normal admixture of darkness and light generally passes through two distinct zones or phases before emerging equipped with the usual Grown-up's willingness to oblige up to a certain point, so long as too much is not asked of him. The pendulum has to swing both ways before it stops at a steady centre.

There was a time when it was my greatest joy to fetch and carry. I would fly down the drive, even before I was asked, to open the white gate when the carriage started. I would jump up to ring the bell. I would proudly take the letters to the post. I would stretch out eager hands to hold the wool that was to be wound. I would help to lay the table or make the toast. I would mend the fire or shut the door or pull down the blinds—I think there was hardly any limit to my cheerful services. I must have been "a comfort," as they say, to those who had charge over me. I am glad to recall that now, as a sort of make-weight to the refusals of the years that followed. For those who believed that I would go on as I had begun were disillusioned. I fell rapidly away.

It was the same with all of us. We dropped off one by one. The brief era

of usefulness moved down from one to another. It was always the youngest able-bodied member of the family who did the work. Those in Authority were disappointed at the spectacle of these lapses into selfishness and there was an aunt who lectured me more than once on my back-sliding. She tried to teach me the hymn that begins "Oh, what can little hands do?" She pointed out what an obliging little fellow I used to be, what a pleasure it was to ask me to do anything; and now—I might very well take a lesson from Archie. Look at him watering the flowers in the window-boxes. . . .

I was not at all convinced. I knew very well that Archie would grow out of it. He would soon get sick of watering flowers. That one could interest one's self in such a thing at all was really a sign of an empty and undeveloped mind. In truth it was

not a case of moral deterioration. The obliging years, which lasted perhaps till one was six or seven years old, were not years of special grace any more than the half-dozen that followed were unregenerate years. It was not the kind of thing that could be expected to last. When I was joyously rendering services in all directions I was not doing it because it was a right or beautiful or proper thing to do. I was doing it for fun. Life lay before me unexplored : everything was so new that everything was worth doing. I had not begun to select or specialise. And I had my reward. When I ran to open the white gate I swung upon it as it closed. When I rang the bell I heard the jangling of wires and distant tinkle that resulted. When I took letters to the post I used to drop them with a thrill into the slot. I had held them warm in my hand one moment and the next they were

gone beyond recall. All the force and pathos of an irrevocable act came home to me. Suppose I had made a mistake and dropped in with them the photograph of the *Alaska* that had been in the same pocket! I would never have seen it again. As well have flung it into the sea. It was a tremendous thought. In the same way blinds and doors and fires were new to me—to poke them or shut them or pull them down was still an adventure.

But after a time one got through with it and it began to pall. There was nothing more to be got out of that sort of thing. I could leave it to Archie. I no longer wanted other people to find me occupation. And I had no time. I was so full of my own affairs.

That was the real reason for the appalling spirit of disobligingness that possessed us. We would do nothing to help unless we were

driven by force of discipline or tempted by reward. It was simply because we hadn't time. We were far too busy. The whole of this teeming world of opportunity was opening up to us and we were desperately intent at every moment of the day upon some special interest, so important that it shut out every other thought I should have been most happy to go messages for people or carry things upstairs if I had been free. If they had only come to me with these requests when I was disengaged there would have been no difficulty, but they never did.

Perhaps one would be comfortably settled at the schoolroom table overhauling an album of postage stamps, while the others were equally engrossed. The door opened —"I want one of you boys to come and help me."—It was a horrid moment. We knew we wer eexpected to volunteer.

And I couldn't go. I had to get to the end of Guatemala before bedtime, otherwise I shouldn't be finished to-morrow. And I simply couldn't delay the job till Saturday. I had all sorts of things to do on Saturday. So it must be one of the others : one could never see that there was any valid reason why they shouldn't go. Probably there was no response, and then one of us would be commandeered and it was a fearful wrench for him to tear himself away. But often the request was not repeated and the interrupter closed the door . . . And then one did feel an awful beast. Still, one got to the end of Guatemala, according to plan.

Sometimes one felt so much of a beast that something had to be done about it, for at the worst one had not really a heart of stone. And so when one had shut one's ears to the appeal for a messenger to go up to the box-room and had afterwards heard

a portmanteau being bumped painfully down the stairs by other hands, one had to think of some way to make it up. And we preferred a way that would not be recognised as an act of penance, that would never be connected with the affair of the box-room. Otherwise it looked rather like a climb-down. Perhaps one would slip in secretly and put a pair of slippers to the fire . . . or fill up the drawers of the desk with envelopes and notepaper out of the packet in the dining-room cupboard . . . or drive in the new nail that was needed at the place where the bellows hung.

One of Those in Authority was very fond of autumn leaves. I do not know what wickedness we had to expiate upon a day when she had been away from home. But when she returned after we had all gone to bed and went into her room she found the dressing-table decorated from the top of

the looking-glass to the floor with an ordered mass of yellow chestnut leaves and scarlet maple and the russet brown of beech. It had cost us many hours of labour, but it was a very fine effect.

We had some decent instincts after all.

CHAPTER VII

THE LITTLE HOUSE THAT I FOUND

ONE of the most curious facts about Grown-ups—nothing better exhibited their bewildering limitations—was their enormous ignorance of their own surroundings and their own possessions They didn't even know that there were two mowing machines and the old green one was still used in bad weather ; that the fountain could be turned on and off not only by the key hidden in the rockery (and they used to fumble about for hours when they tried to find that !), but also by a sort of tap in the bank under the big rhododendron ; that the hose was kept in the tomato-house ; that

the bull on the farm was called Frank; that there was an old broken piano at the back of the loft above the saw-mill; that the station-master was the father of the blacksmith's wife. There was no end to the things they didn't know. And further, they never seemed to mind; even when they were told they were sure to forget in a day or two. They didn't know the way about their own garden. They had no idea, for instance, that there was a remnant of an old iron fence in the shrubbery, or how to get along between the bushes and the high wall as a short cut to the kitchen garden, or how to climb down into the little dungeon under the pantry window where the toad lived, or whether it was the same toad that sometimes appeared in the dungeon under the kitchen window, or how he got from one to the other, or anything we knew it wasn't the same toad because

Archie had marked him with a string round his leg).

Why, they didn't even know the inside of their own house. There were certain extraneous rooms in which they lived their ponderous and methodical life, and a stair by which they went up and down, and all that; and one could only suppose that they thought that was all. But we knew—and the plumber knew—that there was a whole network of hidden places under floors, between walls and beneath the roof, which could be reached by the trap-door on the upper landing.

Knowing nothing of their own house and garden, it was natural that they should know still less of their own woods. But that was laziness and lack of ambition. There were sundry paths through these woods, and seats here and there, and they fondly believed that when they walked

along these paths and sat on these seats they were exploring the woods. It was all part of their superficial and detached behaviour. To us the paths were no more than guides to our position—lines of latitude and longitude. And they didn't even know all the paths. We knew of one that they had never heard of, used as a short cut by hill shepherds from the station to cottages on the moor. We decided not to tell them about it. They could jolly well find it for themselves.

I do not believe that any one but myself would ever have discovered the little house. It was far away up the hillside, among the oak and bracken. In summer, when the ferns were high, it disappeared from view. I was resting one day on a little turf-covered mound when I was aware of the sound of running water below me, and looking more closely I noticed that my mound was in the

curved shape of a roof. It ran back into the level of the hill and projected in front about a couple of feet from the slope below. If this was anybody's house it was mostly underground. And it was somebody's house. In the ancient stone front, which faced down the hill, was a small wooden door with a padlock, all beautified and bewitched with moss and lichen. It looked as if no one had opened it for a hundred years, and I could not see inside. But it had water laid on. I could hear a steady fall of water. Must be some sort of damp little web-footed man that lived there surely. It might be magic.

I said nothing about it to any one. It was a glowing secret possession. I meant to get the door open some day and find out who lived there. It might be an otter, though an otter would hardly have had a padlock. And then I lost it.

For days I searched up and down the hill, parcelling off the ground and walking it systematically, and when the others asked me what I was doing I told them at last, in confidence, that I was looking for a little magic house. They laughed at me as one who invented things and pretended things. But I persevered, and on a joyous afternoon I found it again, exactly as it was, with the same quiet fall of water going on inside. This time I took my bearings properly—three hundred and four steps straight uphill from the big beech—and went proudly home to tea. Yes, I had found my house—it was all right, just as I had said. But I wasn't going to show it to any one—at least not yet. They didn't deserve it, and it was no use asking questions.

I always hoped that one day I should find the door open, but I never did. He

probably only went out at night. At last I made up my mind to force the door. It was old and damp-rotted, and, though the padlock held, the hinges soon gave way and I looked in. It was full of water. It was like a little green, mossy vault, dark and dank and tremendously deep. And a jet of water, like a silver rod, came steadily falling in from one side. There was a sort of shelf along the other side that I could sit on, and as I could see no magic about it I took off my shoes and stockings and crawled in and splashed my legs about. But I never managed to plumb the depth of it, and I was no nearer finding out who lived there when I replaced the door as well as I could and went thoughtfully home.

But a very queer thing happened. It proved to me that there must be a little man after all, a man who had dominion over

water in general, and that I had offended him. For the water in the nursery bathroom that evening was so dirty that we could have no baths. It came out of the taps like that—muddy and thick. Nurse said that it was something wrong with the pipes, but I knew better. There had been something magic in it after all.

CHAPTER VIII

STILTS

THE vogue of the stilt may have been a short one, a matter of a few weeks, but it was the one thing in the world while it lasted. There were several pathetic attempts to revive it in later years, but somehow they fell to the ground; we never could recapture the first enthusiasm of those feverish days. Colin split his up for firewood without the least compunction, and mine were left to rot in the space behind the hayshed till a day, long after, when I needed a pole to recover a tennis ball from the roof of the stable, We had done with stilts.

It was Duncan, the gardener, who started it. Archie and he were in close alliance at the time. There had just been a very serious row about some turnips, which Colin and I had used as missiles during a long running fight with a tramp, and as Archie did not happen to have been in it he was for the moment "the only weel-behaved one among us," in Duncan's eyes. That was a distinction that went round pretty freely from one to another, and usually carried with it special privileges. Duncan made a pair of stilts for Archie privily, and Archie enjoyed a rare triumph. Throwing turnips at tramps was really nothing to it. We could see very well that he was bursting with a secret, but he refused to take us into it, and for several days he went about with a profoundly knowing countenance and threw out suggestive hints. It was all right; we would find out soon,

No, not by Friday. But on Saturday, perhaps. We tried very hard to ignore him, but somehow we could not help looking forward to Saturday. In the meantime Archie kept disappearing, and although we did our best to shadow him and track him down he proved to be too cunning for us. Whenever he had safely shaken us off he would beat back to the far end of the kitchen garden between the hedges—where no one would have dreamt of looking—get out his stilts and practise his paces.

There was a garden party on Saturday, and a large crowd of elegant people occupied the lawn, strolling about with parasols, playing tennis and croquet and having tea at little tables dotted all over the place. We were all enjoying it, even although we were expected to field the tennis balls, for the occasion had produced a profusion of certain things that are never, in ordinary

life, to be found in sufficient quantities —such as lemonade and strawberries and ices. But Archie was missing it all. He had put on his new sailor suit, according to programme, and, more than that, he had decorated his buttonhole with a large camelia, brushed his hair most carefully, and stuck a cockade of silver paper in the ribbon of his straw hat. But he had not since been seen.

Suddenly he burst upon us. The bushes of the shrubbery parted and were held back by a large hand (which might have belonged to Duncan), and out he came on stilts, bestriding our little world like a Colossus, and stalking up and down the lanes between the tea-tables in erratic zigzags, head in air. He left a train of destruction in his wake—one upon hands and knees trying to recover a basket of cakes, another mopping a tea-stain off

white tennis trousers; here a small table upset, and there a brief stampede of dainty frocks. But, all the same, the sentiment of the assembly was entirely with him. He moved on amid a crescendo of laughter and applause. Tennis and croquet were suspended, tea-drinking was postponed, and all with one accord followed his uncertain course up the lawn towards the edge of the wood. There he began to show off a little, lengthening his stride and kicking up croquet hoops as he went, till Colin and I fairly gasped with envy and wonder.

Archie always had a genuine feeling for dramatic fitness, and he did not allow his effect to peter out by descending to earth and giving up his stilts to other performers. He went suddenly off at a tangent and headed for our private hole in the hedge. There he dropped down, crawled through in-

to the wood, and dragged his stilts after him. And though search was made for him high and low he was not seen again at that garden party. Thereupon Colin, who had a fine sense of justice, returned to the deserted tea-tables and got safely away with a liberal collection of ices, cakes, and other good things which he conveyed to the hay-shed, for of course Colin and I knew very well where Archie was to be found.

Early the following morning we both sought out Duncan and arrived at a definite settlement of the turnip controversy by disavowing the pelting of the tramp. . . . Yes, we were quite sure. . . . No, we would never, never do it again. And now we must have stilts, higher than Archie's.

Duncan was not going to miss his opportunity for making terms, for the turnip controversy was not the only one outstanding. A lost pair of pincers had to be

recovered and produced, and a solemn undertaking made to give up using the short cut through the potatoes. And even then our stilts were not quite so high as Archie's (who was the only weel-behaved one among us).

For days we never went out of the house without them. They stood at the front door, and we mounted them as a matter of course whenever we crossed the threshold. Colin, having been dared to do it, came inside one day and across the hall, and even through the drawing-room door, stooping unsteadily. But of course he fell and something was broken, and he was asked the stock, indignant question—*When you boys would learn . . . ?*

But outside we had plenty of scope. We stalked round the house, raced up and down the banks, tried in vain to step over the tennis net or to go up and down the

steps, and finally tackled the inviting obstacle of the burn in the meadow, where it was necessary to get up steam by taking longer and longer strides till one was stretched like a distended pair of scissors and usually lost one's balance and fell in.

Those who have never walked on stilts will never know certain precious sensations that belong to them—their swaggering, exalted, heady effect, their added freedom of involuntary movement, the sudden gasp of recovered balance, the creeping shudder that runs up one leg when one takes a step on soft ground and sinks. Perhaps the best use that we put them to was when we held jousts, like the knights of old, and came together with a mighty buffet, shoulder to shoulder.

It is a great idea and a very simple one—to add cubits to one's stature by the use of longer legs.

CHAPTER IX

SHARP PRACTICE

EVEN now the sweet, short note of the bullfinch in the hedge stands out for me from all the babble of bird voices, like the call of a friend, with a challenge. I have to try if my old skill in imitation is lost and gone, or if I can yet make him answer me and enter into conversation for a while; and I have to try to catch a glimpse of him in his seclusion. Often in vain. Sam could have brought him forth, for Sam's bullfinch whistle was so perfect in its inflection and purity of tone that one felt that few bullfinches could compete with him.

There was a time when we ruled the destinies of many birds and beasts. I think we almost exhausted the list of practicable pets. They ranged from mice to Belgian hares, from pigeons to siskins. They occupied a vast encampment of hutches, pens, and cages, and even overflowed into an aviary, where a squirrel, a pair of doves, and a colony of rabbits dwelt together in a state of armed neutrality. All these had their day and played their part. But the group of bullfinches in the huge domed cage upon the nursery landing emerged from the motley crew as a sort of permanent aristocracy. Other casualties were suffered, not perhaps with indifference, but with a certain stoicism; but the funeral of a bullfinch was always an imposing ceremony, nor was one's grief to be entirely mitigated even by the joy of designing and erecting a fitting monument. It was a bullfinch

which escaped on one occasion through the open door, leaving its owner disconsolate, only to return after many days to the waiting cage in the garden, amid a scene of rapturous enthusiasm. And it was a bullfinch at the last which won for us a prize at the local show under circumstances of so thrilling and dramatic a nature as to cast an abiding lustre upon all his breed.

There was a sort of lull that summer in the active enthusiasm with which we pursued our zoological occupations. The rabbits had lost interest and been turned loose to fend for themselves. Doves and guinea-pigs had been found wanting and sold—at an enormous loss. And we had not yet embarked upon the serious culture of pigeons, which had a wide development in the years to follow. Above all, the stock of bullfinches, with the exception of two old

hens, had run out owing to a mysterious and devastating epidemic. And this, as ill-luck would have it, was the moment selected by the local horticultural show to offer a prize—among its classes of cage birds—for "the finest bullfinch." When this tremendous fact came to our knowledge a nursery meeting was instantly held, at which the view was strongly put forward that our position in the parish as bullfinch fanciers demanded that we should take up the challenge, the more so as the prize—or, as its originators preferred to call it, the "premium"—amounted to no less than five shillings, while the entry money was a mere sixpence. Only one thing was lacking to the complete success of the enterprise—a bullfinch. Clearly Sam must be consulted without delay.

Sam was the garden boy of the moment. He is now, I believe, in a position of grave

responsibility as the chief of one of the principal gardens in the land, with a regiment of subordinates at his beck and call. He was then the merriest and most companionable, and from our point of view by far the most satisfactory, of all who had ever held his office. For he was a specialist in bullfinches, their capture, treatment, diet, and all that appertained to them. Gladly Sam took up the present enterprise. He agreed with us that the prize was as good as won, and we pointed out the happy coincidence by which the amount of it was five shillings, while there were four of us. It worked out admirably at one shilling each and one for Sam. As to the problem of the missing bullfinch—well, we must catch one! There were still ten days. One of the aged hens was made over as a "call-bird," and Sam looked out his cage-trap and gathered bait

of rowan berries. He had heard them calling by the sawmill only that morning, it appeared.

Sunset—I have never known why—is the proper hour for catching bullfinches, and the likeliest place, according to Sam, is just on the outside of a large wood. You should put your trap on a little knoll quite in the open, and if you have Sam's genius for imitating the note it is so much the better, as you can keep your call-bird well in evidence, whistling responses to you. And so for several evenings we laboured to the north of the sawmill with all these conditions satisfied, and yet with no result. And on the Tuesday before the show a crisis arose. It appeared that entries had to be handed in that day, and we were in despair. For it did not occur to us to enter a non-existent bullfinch. Indeed, the whole thing had been actually abandoned,

when it transpired on the Wednesday morning that Sam had so far backed his luck as to enter the bird, and boldly advanced a sixpence on his own. His confidence was magnificent, for when one of us pointed out that according to the regulations "all exhibits must have been the property of the exhibitor for at least a fortnight prior to the date of the show," he assured us that we were well within our rights. The bird was clearly our property; it was in our woods. How did it matter to them if we preferred to keep it there till it was wanted? But when Friday evening came and we had still no bullfinch, and our exhibit must be "staged" by eight on Saturday morning, a steady gloom began to settle upon us.

While we were yet in bed there was a sound of pebbles on the window. In truth I do not think that life can hold many moments

such as that. We knew in a flash what it meant, and almost before we were awake we were scrambling wildly across the floor. Yes, Sam had got him ! A great big cock ! We reached the potting-shed in our pyjamas just as his cage was being wrapped in brown paper for the journey, and feasted on him with exultant eyes. That was the first great moment of the day. The second was when we burst into the stuffy little tent in the showyard where the cage birds stood. There he was, as wild as any hawk, and yet by reason of the fresh splendour of his plumage far outshining his two seedy competitors, with a great red First Prize ticket dangling by his side. There were in the course of the afternoon some unfavourable comments, as we learned later, and though we had no reason to believe that the story got about we noticed with dismay that the class for bullfinches was dropped

the following year, but for that day there was nothing to cloud the splendour of our triumph. Perhaps the most dramatic moment of all was in the evening when Sam brought him home. We met the pony cart in the lane beside the sawmill, and Sam got down and handed down the cage. We crowded round to look upon the champion. It was just here that Sam had caught him, some twelve hours before.

We tore off his covering and exposed him to the light. There he sat, hunched up and obdurate, sulking upon the floor of the cage.

"I'm afraid he's moping a bit," said one.

"Of course he's had a pretty exciting day. Is he taking his feed?" Sam shook his head.

There was a long pause. The champion seemed to shiver.

"He does look pretty rotten," was the general verdict.

Then up spake the tender-hearted Sam. The game was played out and the bird had done well, he contended. Why not let him go? The proposal was adopted with enthusiasm. I think we knew that it was by far the most artistic ending. Then and there the door was flung open, and he vanished in the dusk.

CHAPTER X

GLOOM

WHEN people tell me they are "dreadfully depressed" and I try to put myself in their position, I find the shortest cut to that frame of mind is to look back to the days when I did nothing by halves, when unhappiness meant a crushing weight of gloom. Moods followed each other suddenly and decisively, and there was little transition or shading off of one into another. None of them lasted long; very soon, generally without visible reason, one came down off the heights or up from the depths. But one never could remember beforehand that To-morrow would be different from To-day.

The present hour alone existed—it would always be like this. We seldom had cause for unhappiness; there were days and weeks on end without a cloud. But in a world teeming with golden opportunity, rich in delightful discovery, glittering and intense and rosy-tinted, the patches of shadow were also deep and vivid, so that no ultimate expression of distress—"plunged in despair," "lost to all hope"—could be too strong for these dark moments when they came.

Life was not worth going on with; there was nothing to look forward to; the sun had ceased to shine in the sky; all was grey and sinister and unfamiliar. It was a mental state like the heavy, breathless dusk before the thunderstorm; and it could be very terrible. I cannot remember that it was ever brought about by remorse for one's misdeeds, especially if one had

been duly punished for them. But it might be caused by disappointment or injustice; by a sense of being not wanted, an outcast; or, again, by tragedy and a queer, overwhelming sympathy and tenderness—a most uncomfortable, a haunting thing, not at all compatible with one's usual manly disregard for other people's feelings, which worked the more inward havoc because it had to be suppressed.

This has been rather a mystery to me: how in odd places in one's callous hide of indifference that was not far from brutality there should have been these little sensitive spots, where they might have been least suspected. I fear it was not easy to raise in me any responsive or instructive sympathy. The blind man at the corner was pointed out in vain. My only conclusion was that it must be great fun to spell

out words with your fingers like that, and even the Bible might be worth reading on those terms. It was no use for a sentimental nurse to draw my attention to the sad state of that "little ragged girl." I didn't care. The condition of the heathen (on Sunday) left me cold, as did also the condition of certain outsiders called the poor. It was clear that I had no proper feelings. And yet when I had overheard the housemaid reading a letter to the cook in which it was related that her sister had lost half a sovereign through a hole in her purse and could not afford to go to the Isle of Man after all, it is not too much to say I was overwhelmed with grief. I went away alone, reflecting that life was not worth while if such things as this could happen. But neither cook nor housemaid suspected that. Perhaps there was some natural link by which it touched me.

I had no idea what it was like to be blind or ragged or heathen, but I knew very well what it was like to be disappointed.

A more dreadful experience was to feel that one was not wanted, had been overlooked, left out. I went once to a children's party where the organisation had been imperfect and there was not enough room at the supper-table. It would be all right, they said : another little table would be found for me, and my supper would be handed over. But nothing much came my way, and I found myself wandering about in a sort of twilit hinterland (for the table was lighted with candles) behind people's backs. Naturally I wasn't going to stoop so low as to ask for anything. Still, there I was—an outcast. A kind lady came in, swooped down over me, and, presuming that I had finished and was

now taking a constitutional on my own account, asked me if I had had enough supper. But she was in a great hurry, and I didn't feel inclined to confide in her. So I said, " Yes, thank you," and she moved on. And then I went and sat behind the curtains in the window-seat, for I didn't mean to wander about and be a butt for people's sympathy. . . . And in behind the curtains all the concentrated bitterness of life surged over me . . . Life was not worth going on with : there was no place for me.

Again I tasted the depths of despair when I was lost. There are many mitigating circumstances in being lost in later life. It is always open to you to calculate time and place and distance, the prospect of some passer-by, or, if it comes to the worst, the chances of the sending of a search party. But then there was no gleam of hope.

Here I was in the heart of the wood, and it was getting dark, and somewhere in the distance was the nursery and the tea-table and the fire and the others, seen in vivid familiar pictures. They had probably never noticed. . . . It didn't matter much to them what might happen to me. . . . The world about me became a shadowy, endless, uncharted desolation. There was nothing to look forward to.

When I was making toast at the nursery fire an hour later—having fallen in with a gamekeeper—I had put all that sort of thing behind me. But there were hours of terror and gloom which were not so easily forgotten. I must have been a very small boy on the day of the volunteer's funeral. I was all alone in the wood behind the stable, and I suffered something as sudden and poignant as a stab, some shock of panic and misery that left a lasting scar behind.

For weeks I was haunted by a shuddering memory. I had heard a band, and climbed up eagerly on the wall, from which I could see the bend of the high road. Here they came, soldiers in red coats, marching. But they looked very solemn and moved very slowly, and there was something about the music that I didn't like. It gave me a sinking, oppressed sort of feeling. I didn't want to miss the soldiers, of course, but still I felt uneasy and a little afraid. And then I saw that they were carrying something on their shoulders, with a sword and a hairy hat lying on the top of it. That was very funny. . . .

Then I gathered it all in a flash. It was a coffin; some one was dead. Cowering in a heap among the dead leaves behind the wall, I heard the band stop; then hot and breathless silence; and then in the stable-yard below the sharp clatter of a

bucket-handle falling against the bucket as Tom Coachman set it down. After that, life began to go on again. But even now there is a link in my mind between the clatter of the setting down of a bucket and the Dead March in "Saul."

CHAPTER XI

THE CANDLE SLIDE

I CAME across an old photograph of the Candle Slide the other day, which vividly brought back to me a singular and precious sensation—that of gliding at a high velocity into the heart of a mass of hay. The Slide had a success beyond our wildest expectation, and I think it deserves to rank as the first achievement of an inventive nursery—even before the system of communication by mirror, through which (anticipating the periscope) we were able, by placing all the mirrors in the house in a connected line of vision, to see from the

door of the night-nursery upstairs what was going on in the basement.

Candle-grease was one of the many products that had a special baffling appeal, in that one felt that something *should* be made out of it. It was delightful stuff to knead between the fingers—really as good as putty, except that it lacked the exquisite, sticky smell of putty. It could be, and was, made into excellent little balls for pea-shooters, and of course it could be modelled into various shapes and forms. (I observe that the inherent need to squeeze and roll and punch and pull malleable substances, which we had to satisfy with clay and putty and wax, is now officially recognised, and quite well-behaved children are encouraged to play with plasticine.) But there must be more in it than that. It had the advantage of being slippery, which putty was not. When we

played "Squales" we soon learned to improve the pitch by rubbing the table with a candle-end. . . .

(Perhaps the game of Squales is so far obsolete as to demand an introduction. It was played with precious little wooden discs, ornately figured with a golden star, which slid on the table in the manner of Shove-ha'penny. An elegant, peculiar little game that lived in the nursery cupboard along with the Wheel-of-Life and a well-worn copy of the "Wide, Wide World.")

Well, this faculty of creating a slide was not to be neglected. Would a new pair of slippers, if their soles were waxed, slide on the carpet? No, they would not. But I slipped and fell on a wooden floor when I was carrying a cup of coffee not long after, so there must be something in it.

Would a leaf out of the dining-room table, treated in the same way, do for sliding on?

Yes, almost as well as ice. But there was such serious trouble about it that I had to conclude that I was still on the wrong tack. I suppose I ought not to have used nailed shoes.

But I was not discouraged. After going on to explore the properties of soap in this connection, without any useful result, I returned to the undivided consideration of candle-ends. Inside the house I could find no freedom of action: I was always being accused of spoiling things. And my first attempt outside—when I tried to negotiate the long grass slope in front of the house on a waxed tea-tray—bore no fruit. But that brought me at last to the solution.

There was a bitter controversy between Archie and me as to who thought of it. How in the world Archie ever got it into his head that it was his idea I cannot conceive: it was a pure delusion. But he

stuck to it, flatly falsifying the true history of the event and posing (whenever I was not there to contradict him) as the inventor. We refused to divide the honour, and each of us with the utmost heat contradicted the other's claims. The point was never settled, and I have no reason to believe that Archie has yet changed his opinion. It would grieve me now to enter into a public dispute with him, but I am bound to put the truth finally on record. I was the sole inventor of the Candle Slide.

It happened to be a lucky morning, as Those in Authority were away for the day, otherwise the project might have been nipped in the bud. By working with feverish energy we were able to get the job finished without interruption. Even then only one thing saved it from demolition—namely, its instant success. Even Grown-ups were bound for once to

recognise a good thing when they saw it. The carpenter himself happened to be away from the sawmill when we arrived to pillage, so we got a long start of him, and although he came later to protest that the timber that we had carried off was destined for the flooring of a cottage, we were by that time in the thick of it and had consolidated the position. Altogether it was a lucky morning. We had got the handcart at the garden, and after ransacking the sawmill came on the very thing we wanted—some dozens of rough planks about ten feet long and an equal number of three-inch rails for fencing. We made many journeys with the handcart before we had all our stuff collected on the drive in front of the house. The grass slope was tolerably smooth, very steep, and perhaps fifty or sixty yards long, with an unlimited run-out on the level below. We

simply laid down our boards in pairs pointing in a line straight down the hill, the ends of the upper pair overlapping the lower, till we reached the level. And after that—this was Archie's idea: I don't mind giving him that much—we fixed the fencing rails as borders, by setting them on edge at either side and driving in pegs to hold them. (The sudden shortage of clothes-pegs at the laundry on the following Monday was nothing to us: in the glowing presence of a really good thing such a domestic point was too hopelessly humdrum.) The toboggan was simply a flat plank carrying a cushion with a bar for the heels to rest on. By lavishly waxing the flat sole of the toboggan from time to time we got all the speed we wanted, and far more than we had ever hoped for. By the late afternoon all was ready, and—who was to go down first? The inventor, of course.

The dispute ended by Archie tripping me up and getting off before I could stop him; but on the whole I scored, for the pace was such that he came a terrific cropper at the end and rolled like a shot rabbit far across the grass. We were positively overawed by our instant success. The thing was actually dangerous, and we did not try it again till we had brought, in the handcart, a great heap of loose hay from the meadow and piled it as a buffer at the foot of the track. Thereafter the traveller ran gloriously into this safe refuge and buried himself at a speed—as was afterwards established with a stop-watch—of at least twenty-five miles an hour.

The Candle Slide enjoyed a *succès fou*. It was in daily use throughout the summer, whenever it was dry, and it was not till it had been slowly ruined by October rains that, on a heavy day, the carpenter turned

up with a cart and rescued the remains. For once Grown-ups with one accord followed the lead we gave them, and within a week every member of the household had made the descent. The only cloud upon those joyous days was the fact that delighted guests were almost certain, sooner or later, to inquire who it was that had invented it. . . .

CHAPTER XII

DESTRUCTION

ELLEN, the kindly old Scotch nurse, whose task it was to administer and control a nursery of small boys seething with rebellion, seldom needed to employ the terms of anger or rebuke. Under-nurses, who came and went, might bandy words with us, exchange insults, or try to enforce authority by a combination of violent shaking with angry denunciation. But Ellen could enforce obedience by more gentle methods. Only on rare occasions did she denounce us with words of terrible and lacerating reproof. There must have been times when flesh and blood could stand it no longer; then she would hurl at our

heads, like an avenging thunderbolt, that one dreaded phrase which summed up all the long tale of our iniquity—"You Destructive Child!" This one tremendous epithet, so rarely and effectively employed, had a significance and a force that were all its own. It meant nothing to us to be called "naughty," "disobedient," "provoking" (a very common and ineffective effort), or even "outrageous." But to be called "destructive" made one pause and think. In morbid moments one had visions of what it might mean in years to come if one grew up "destructive." It dimly suggested anarchy, a war against society. It foreshadowed a reckless and devastating career. And it was not without its effect. It was probable that we might stay our hands and try to curb our passion to destroy.

It may, perhaps, have been a certain

vein of Scottish thrift in old Ellen's composition that led her to promote destruction to the status of a cardinal sin, but I do not think that our case was at all remarkable. It is a terrible thing in the eyes of its guardians for a child to destroy anything. Ellen was able to support and expand her admonitions with certain maxims, which surely must be known and hated in many a nursery. "Waste not, want not," she would say, and we were led to believe that if we never wasted anything or destroyed anything we should never be in need. I am not at all sure that it follows. But there was another favourite saying of hers which will not be heard in the nurseries of the future. It was proclaimed with shaking head and upheld finger:

"The children of England take pleasure in breaking
What the German children take pleasure in making."

Never did I hear those fateful words without a sensation of devout thankfulness that I was not born a German child.

I cannot but believe that the thing was a good deal overdone. The tendency to hoard things up and to accumulate unnecessary rubbish, which is inherent in most people, surely does not require such vehement emphasis and encouragement at a most impressionable age. As it is, I suppose no one of us is quite free from the encumbrance of useless belongings; no house but has its hidden stores of old letters that will never be read, old clothes that will never be worn, torn music that will never be played; no house which can face an impartial investigation of the cupboard under the stairs. Perhaps we have lost the faculty of destruction through the influence of those early days when destruction was a crime. Yet it seems

to me that one of the purest and most natural pleasures, satisfying deep inner needs of boyhood, was this pleasure of destruction. I do not mean the pleasure of destroying other people's property for the sake of scoring off the owner—though that was often done—or destroying one's own effects in a fit of rage. I mean destruction for its own sake. There were things which one knew—there was no use arguing about it—had no sound reason for their existence: things which ought to be removed from the face of the earth, which simply cumbered the ground. And there were also things which, if they were to be kept, could be used again with profit, but which nevertheless ought to go, because the present pleasure of destroying them would clearly outweigh any future gain that could be looked for by preserving them. Things that would crash or smash

or collapse—anything, let us say, suggestive of "smithereens"—could only be retained intact with difficulty. The same applies to such things as would tear with a harsh rending, like calico; to such things as would melt, like wax or lead; to such things as would burn with a roar; above all, to such things as would blow up and burst. These delightful processes were an end in themselves. There was a savage joy in playing havoc. What a birthday treat it would have been to have been allowed to run amok among glass bottles with a hockey stick or demolish a conservatory!

Sometimes it was not the object that demanded to be destroyed, but the tool that called for something to destroy. A red-hot poker almost yearned to leave its mark on something, leather for choice, for there one gained the added savour of the

smell. And an axe! It is safe to say that one could get more solid satisfaction in a short time out of an axe than out of any other implement whatever. Our effects were not always crude and barbarous. After the wicked whisper had gone forth from one to another, "Let's break it!" there would often be a pause for reflection and calm discussion as to the most fruitful means of carrying the thing into effect. A fire in a doll's house, combated with penny squirts, yet triumphantly gaining the upper hand and ending in a heap of ruins, made a notable end of a toy that had grown stale. But there was another strange motive at work in our many destructive enterprises, not easy to account for. It was a sort of pagan love of sacrifice. I do not mean that we were actively trying to propitiate unseen powers. But it was something very near akin to that.

There was some curious, mystic relish, which may be innate in every savage and small boy, which led us to rejoice in the renunciation of our goods. The idea above all, of a sacrificial fire obsessed us at one time, as something dark and noble, unholy, and yet tinged with a stoic grandeur. We would even "dare" each other and egg each other on to rise to higher and yet higher sacrifices, casting away freely our best and dearest, till Grown-ups—who have no such impulses—were completely staggered and nonplussed.

On the great and memorable occasion of the burial of the third bullfinch this practice reached the dimensions of an orgy. It is probable that we had been recently learning something of pagan rites, or such a celebration would hardly have occurred to us. But it was understood that each of us must cast into the cruel flames of

that funeral pyre some treasured possession, and the Grown-ups who intervened at the very height of the ceremony were left wondering helplessly if these amazing boys ever would "learn sense."

CHAPTER XIII

RUNNING WATER

Of all the legitimate playthings there was none in more constant favour than running water. One can look back on many hours of dreamy dabbling to the alluring gurgle of the stream. No doubt the same instincts may be satisfied on a grander scale and with an ampler scope on the broad stretch of yellow sand at the seaside. But to us that never was the real thing at all. Our deep-rooted desire to invent our own methods of amusing ourselves, always to discover, to create, and to make the thing our own because we thought of it, revolted against the stereotyped pleasures of the seaside.

Really, if you come to think of it, that is all so cut and dried, so completely obvious and so perfectly adapted, that it might have been specially manufactured by a committee of Grown-ups. The vast stretch of sand to dig in (which was so clean and nice and harmless) which could be found either wet or dry or in a state between the two, as desired; the gently shelving beach to paddle on so that one could advance step by step without risk, without difficulty, without a single thrill of any sort; and—finishing touch!—the tide which decorously rose and fell with measured pace, as if its single purpose were to flood your castle or leave your embankment high and dry. . . . And over the whole expanse were dotted stereotyped little groups of children, all patiently playing up to these well-ordered conditions with spade and bucket and upturned knickerbockers. It was all so pretty and

appropriate, and for that very reason so impossible. The need to dabble must of course be satisfied. But at the very earliest age when direct control of action was relaxed, most joyously did we renounce the bucket and the spade. I can remember well the deep contempt with which one came to contemplate these two symbols of orthodox infancy, how immensely one despised the possessors of them. I think we would almost rather have been seen in public places with a rattle or a doll than with one of these. And we were right. For the great art of Dabbling and all the variety of its bold, ingenious developments there is no medium like running water.

Our favourite haunt was a small rocky stream that tumbled down a narrow gully. It had all that air of mystery, of secrecy, of remoteness from the world of every day, which we look for to give a special flavour

to our doings, for it was closely arched over by great beech trees and sunshine reached it only in small glittering patches here and there. Except in high spate it was not too big to grapple with, yet powerful enough in places to tug fiercely at one's legs as one stood in the full force of the current, and even now and then to fling one sprawling in the flood. And there were endless cascades and pools, twists and turns, in one place a tiny whirlpool, in another a sheer fall of several feet. There was a little tributary tumbling headlong down the bank in the most improbable manner. And overhead lay an old larch tree, blown over years ago, which bridged the gully from side to side, a standing invitation to the perilous, straddling transit.

But our chief concern was the stream itself. There is so much you can do with a stream! There were days of contented

laziness when it was enough to dabble hands and feet and listen to the murmur of the water. There were days when our attention was engaged in racing rival craft of sticks or empty matchboxes down the break-neck course, eagerly watching their behaviour in all the minute dangers and sudden phases of their journey, piloting them over the fall, poking them out of the whirlpool, steering them off the shallows, pelting them with stones when they were out of reach, calculating anxiously their chances when they came to the rapids, trying to anticipate which course they would take round the island. It was breathless work, until it came to the point where—when it reached the level at the head of the garden—the stream plunged suddenly underground to travel out of sight till it finally emerged in the little round pond forty yards below.

Then you may guess we raced round to the winning post, to lie wet and palpitating, one at each side of the opening, straining our eyes into the gloom, waiting impatiently till our craft came forth.

And once, when the stream was low and running smooth, a lighted candle on a wooden lid was launched into that cavern, and how gloriously did it illuminate that long stretch of mystery which we had so often tried to picture to ourselves,—suddenly revealing (what we had never dreamt of) that during its hidden course our old familiar stream positively travelled through a vast pipe, dank, green, moss-covered; and opening up the question as to whether, in a time of drought, it might not be possible to crawl from end to end of that subterranean passage.

But the best days were those of immense toil and labour when we set ourselves

to tamper with, to manipulate and rearrange the bed of the stream, hauling and tugging with all our strength to heave up submerged rocks, dredging channels, forming new islands, opening up new courses. The most important and imposing of our works, at which we would cheerfully toil hour after hour, bruised and drenched and perspiring, was the making of dams and reservoirs. We would fling a great barrier across the stream of heaped rocks and stones, filled in with plastered turf or clay, leaving but a narrow escape for the water. And at the last, when all was ready, we would block up the outlet and eagerly watch the level rise. There would follow some minutes of conflict and intense excitement, as we struggled furiously to hold back the flood, hopping wildly back and forth, supplementing the weak spots in the structure as they discovered them-

selves, dabbing up holes and banking tottering sections, till at last, with a shout of triumph, we hailed the moment when the battle was won, the reservoir was full, and had begun to overflow. As a matter of fact it was much better really when we failed, and the whole dam gave way in sudden, splendid crash, as we leaped back to save our toes, liberating a headlong, muddy torrent.

Perhaps the most ingenious of our exploits in this direction was the occasion of the adventure of the ants. (In truth we were never short of ideas.) I do not know what it was that put so happy an inspiration into our heads as to maroon a company of ants upon a rock in midstream. We had come upon them in the course of excavations, beneath an upturned stone, and we transferred them forthwith to that perilous position. The stream

was very low at the time, and when we dammed it some feet farther down it rose gradually by inches. At first the prisoners paid little attention, though one or two of the more careless were washed away. But as the area narrowed down and the situation became clear to them, there was much running back and forth, consternation and dismay, till at last, when only a point of the rock remained, the whole terrified population was herded together on a space of but a few square inches. Just when a fearful disaster seemed imminent a way of escape was opened up, for we came to the rescue with a bridge, in the form of a twig to a larger rock beyond, from which a second bridge led to the mainland. It was a fine thing to see that distracted throng, hustling and crowding joyously to safety.

Such were the plain facts of this adventure. But it was not thus that we were

wont to relate it in later years. It grew into a legend, elaborated by many picturesque embroideries. There was a point in it, I remember, where the leader of the party stood forth at the bridge end, plainly proclaiming "Women and children first!" And it concluded with a general thanksgiving meeting on the gravel on the bank.

All of which goes to prove that there is much that can be done with a stream.

CHAPTER XIV

CALLERS AND CONSCRIPTION

THE institution of paying calls, which flourished in those days much more vigorously than it does now, presented to us an unfathomable problem. We were agreed that the Grown-up was never seen to more perfect advantage, as a being of a different world from ours, impelled by some cryptic law to expend labour upon wholly futile ends, than when engaged in paying a call. We gave a good deal of study to the matter, but arrived at no conclusion. They cannot have done it in order to wear their best clothes, because every one must resent putting on his best clothes on a week-day.

They cannot have done it in order to see each other's houses, because the same people kept coming back time after time when there was nothing new left to see. Was it possible that they did it in order to talk to one another? *Hardly!* After listening to my brother Sidney's brilliant imitation of the conversation on these occasions it was not easy to believe that. No, the truth was that there was no use trying to guess why they did it: there must be a catch in it somewhere, no doubt connected in some obscure way with the tickets with their names on them which they often left behind. A tennis party one could understand, or any form of entertainment that implied a square meal; but calls were sheer lunacy. Whatever we might grow up to be, we were clear upon one point. We would never grow up to be callers.

It was useless to discuss why they existed,

but they could not be ignored : they were the chief of our natural enemies, and our sentiments towards them were not far different from those of the song-bird toward the hawk. We had just the same fear of being pounced upon and just the same need for taking cover. They destroyed the privacy of the house and garden. They appeared, like a bolt from the blue, at the most awkward moments, and they had an unholy curiosity. Bereft of the rudiments of courtesy, they would never pass by and leave one alone, no matter what predicament one might be in. Archie and I were engaged one day upon our special sport of Water Races—a competition as to which of us could run round the house in the shortest time with his mouth full of water, not to be discharged till he returned to the starting-point. (A main object of each runner was to make his opponent laugh,

by making faces at him when they met on the far side—for we started in opposite directions.) Archie on this occasion blundered round a corner into a bunch of callers and they insisted upon accosting him. Naturally his reply was preceded by a startling explosion that might (with a little tact upon their part) have well been avoided. And when the funeral of the second bullfinch was crossing the drive on its way to the graveside we had the misfortune to encounter a batch of them on the point of arriving. I was thrown to the wolves in order that the rest of the cortège might move on into the shrubbery without unseemly delay. But I felt a fool. I didn't see why I should be called upon to explain, and I was really grieved about the bullfinch. In a word, one could not pursue one's most ordinary daily avocations without

the fear of these deplorable intrusions by idle and interfering people. And there was more than that in it, for there was always a danger of our being captured, "made respectable," and sent into the drawing-room to be sacrificed to these insatiable creatures. No wonder that they exercised a reign of terror and that we had only one method of dealing with them. At the word "Callers!" shouted from the window, we vanished in breathless panic.

But after a while we were no longer content with total disappearance. We began to take an interest in the habits and customs of these strange people, and even to turn what had been an unmitigated annoyance into a source of entertainment. Thus we began to deal in safe retreats from which to keep the foe under observation. We would perhaps leave a younger brother

under the sofa to report the proceedings or—when the function took place outside—fill every clump of bushes or neighbouring hedge with hidden spies. The one in the box-hedge would always give a careful descriptive account of the shoes and boots of the party, as from the nature of the ambush he could see nothing else. But when we had discovered the magnificent potentialities of the lime tree on the lawn we confined ourselves entirely to the Crow's Nest.

In a great gale some years before the tree had been blown down along with many others, and lest the place be wholly swept of its former beauties it had been sawn off some twelve or fourteen feet from the ground, set up again, and stayed on every side. Thus there was at the top of it a flat circular little platform, and in the course of time new branches sprang all round its

head and grew strong and thick, forming a fresh crown of foliage about it. There the whole four of us could find footing at once. It was fairly easy to climb, and could be reached from the shrubbery beyond without observation. It commanded both the lawn and the front door. In a word, nothing could have been better. Unsuspecting callers came and went, asked kindly after the children, were sorry not to see them, were told that they were not to be found at the moment, and drank their tea in the shade of the great lime tree all unconscious of the group of peering eyes and straining ears among its branches. Had we been content with mere observation and refrained from the use of the pea-shooter it is probable that our retreat would have remained a secret and many more years elapsed before we learned of a new crime that must be added to the

things we were not to do. It was called Eavesdropping, and, although perhaps we could not quite see why, it was, it seemed, a very grave offence—which was exceedingly annoying, as life would be the poorer if this useful practice was really to be given up. And there was a certain injustice in this arbitrary pronouncement. The argument that "*we* would not like it" if other people overheard what we were saying (which was often effectual) failed in this instance. For we justly felt that if other people overheard us, that was purely our own fault for being overheard.

But we were clear about one thing. Whatever sort of game this calling business was, it was a game for Grown-ups. And that was a thing that they could never see. They brought children with them sometimes —often unwilling captives no doubt, though we had no mercy on them. We

regarded them with the sentiments with which a free and enlightened citizen might regard a convict in a chain-gang. Indeed, we did not look upon them as children and compeers at all, but as juvenile callers, dressed for the part and in league with the enemy. And their presence always embittered the situation, for we were certain to be called upon (if found) to entertain them, which was done in a chilly and perfunctory manner that could not possibly lead to a better acquaintance. I remember once being confronted, under these painful conditions, with the doctor's son in a velveteen suit. Only that very morning I had been bird-nesting with him in the Bank-end Wood. But now we had nothing to say to each other. I was sorry for him, for I could see that he felt his position keenly, and by tacit consent we never afterwards referred to the episode.

And sometimes the position was reversed, for Those in Authority were also addicted to paying calls, and would also on occasion take a victim with them. Particularly there was an aunt, with whom we sometimes went to stay, who had fallen into this unfortunate habit. It was her only drawback. I think she had a firm conviction that it was good for us, a necessary part of our training, and that she would not be performing her whole duty towards us if she did not insist upon it.

"I am going to pay a few calls this afternoon," she would announce at lunch, "and I think I shall take one of you boys with me."

Dead silence. She would then inquire with unfailing hopefulness which of us would like to go. Then she would explain how nice it would be. Then she would point out that it was only right. Then she

would appeal to each of us in turn. She was not willing to give up the voluntary principle till it had been worked out to the very end. But she got no response. Other methods were clearly necessary. Sometimes she would decide forthwith and select one of us to go. Sometimes she would leave it to us, merely stipulating that one of us was to appear, washed and dressed, at the front door at 3 p.m. Then we retired to the orchard to have it out. There was no question of rebellion. Our aunt was an indulgent hostess and she must be humoured in this matter, for, after all, it was her only fault. Often the point was settled by a system of bounties. Each of us would consider the offers made by the other two to gain immunity, and the result was arrived at by a sort of triangular auction. Sometimes we drew lots, and it cannot be said that the winners made

it easy for the victim. The moment that the issue was decided they began to gloat. And as he went sadly off, feeling that all the brightness had gone out of the summer day, to put on his new sailor suit, he was sure to see them starting out ostentatiously upon some alluring exploit. It was made clear beyond any doubt who had scored.

But the aunt was not without sympathy and understanding. She suddenly introduced rewards. The lot had fallen upon me that day, and the attitude of the other two had brought me to the verge of despair, despite the fact that I might be allowed to drive the pony up Dumgree Hill and that there was only one call in question—though it was known to be a deadly one.

But the people were out, and when the other two came in to tea they found me sitting on the gate hugging a gigantic box of chocolates. And who scored that time?

CHAPTER XV

JOKES

It was not very much use making jokes for the benefit of Grown-up People. They didn't understand them. There was a great gulf fixed between us. They seldom gathered what we were laughing at and it was no good trying to explain. We were so far apart on this matter that when Sidney made a joke one day that they did understand the rest of us could see no merit in it, though that may have been because we were jealous of Sidney, who made some reputation by that stroke of wit, which was remembered and quoted for years to come. And looking back

dispassionately I may now admit that it was rather smart of Sidney, considering of course how small he was at the time. The capital of Ceylon was under discussion, and the point was whether Kandy was on the coast or in the interior. Sidney cut in with a chuckle, "I wish Kandy was in my interior." And Those in Authority understood for once.

It was almost equally difficult to reach across from the other side. Grown-up People had jokes of their own which sometimes filled us with wistful wonder, though they evidently enjoyed them in their own restrained and twilit manner. And we were often expected to laugh at them—which we did. (After all, we had to live with these people, and concessions must be made.) But it was all rather unreal—or nearly all. For there were rare moments of understanding, priceless occasions when

we could meet on common ground and laugh in harmony, and I am convinced that nothing had the same power to draw us into sympathy with Those in Authority as that. For a child will find himself on new and genial terms at once with a Parent or Guardian when both are stirred to genuine laughter at the same moment by the same clown.

This is a tremendous matter: it is just here that the main clash between the generations comes about. There are many Grown-up People—not so many perhaps as there used to be—who fail utterly through the misuse of laughter in reaching good relations with children. I do not know why it is. They set out with the idea that there is something comic about being a child, and the one thing necessary is to say something flippant. More than that, they have the idea that he is easily amused and

no great effort is called for. And so they fire off patronising jokes down to his level and at his expense. How often have I been subjected to this heartless bombardment! . . . "Holidays will be over next week, eh? I suppose you will be glad to get back to your books? Ha! Ha!" . . . "I thought that must be your seat—next the sugar." I am ashamed to put down these feeble efforts, but that was the sort of thing that was considered good enough. But these jesters were profoundly wrong. There is nothing comic about being a child. The very first necessity is that he should be taken seriously. If you are going to treat him like a monkey or a kitten, you are lost, even while you are proclaiming how fond you are of children. And, far from being easy to amuse him, it is an event so rare and precious that if you have once

succeeded in it you have taken a long stride toward winning the great possession of his confidence. And thus, when humour was in question, we lived on different continents, connected only by a slender isthmus.

But among ourselves one of the main ends in life was to be funny, and one of the bitterest of failures was the attempt to be funny that did not come off. It is bad enough in later years to tell a story that misses the point, but there are kindly social instincts abroad by then ready to help one gently and swiftly out of the hole, to pass off the awkward moment and leave it behind. But in the Days of Discovery we had no mercy. It was a perilous thing to make a joke : it was a thrust through hostile fortifications, for no one would admit that you were funny if he could help it. And if, as was

only too likely, it fell to the ground, you were left naked to your enemies—the object of withering scorn or stony blank indifference. In all the daily warfare of our life there was no better occasion for trampling upon the tender pride of an opponent than this, and for bringing home to him what a futile idiot he was. This was the shaft that stabbed us to the limit of mortification . . . "I *suppose* you *think* you are *trying* to be funny."

And yet—to bring it off, to make a joke that got home : above all, to wring a burst of laughter from an elder brother—there was no triumph like it. We must have had an inordinate thirst for applause, but at least the admiration that we won was fairly won, as it so seldom is among Grown-ups—in whose smooth dialogue laughter is obedient to every claim upon it.

What were the jokes we made ? What

was the secret of those dazzling flashes that broke down all defences and had the nursery table in a roar? They were a priceless joy—more to be desired than food or drink, or climbing ladders, or riding on the hay, or freedom after lessons, or travelling by train, or pocket-money, or snow: more to be desired than winning a game, or hitting a mark, or getting a present, or finding a knife. For a joke that had the power to touch the secret spring that freed our laughter, snapping all control, was a thing long treasured and remembered and repeated, a new possession picked up by the way.

What were they and where are they now?

I have looked back and thought of one or two—but I may not set them down. You would not understand; indeed I do not understand myself. You and I are con-

demned to make what we can of the Kandy and Sidney's interior. It is all that is left to us. Even if I were to present to you my brother Archie's imitation of a tadpole or Colin's pun about the garden-roller, I should only add to our bewilderment. They are no more than the wilted leaves left on the ground when the fairy castle has melted into mist. We lost these things so long ago that it is too late now to turn back for them.

CHAPTER XVI

TREES

THERE were many well-remembered trees. I think there must be some remaining influence from a small boy's prehistoric ancestry that keeps tugging at him from the branches overhead; at any rate, to be brought up in a treeless land would be almost as great a tragedy of wasted opportunity as to be brought up in tropic climes where snow was never known to fall.

There was the lime tree with the Crow's Nest in it . . . the ancient elm beyond the drive, whose widespread arms supported swings and hammocks . . . the Three Sisters, famous oak trees in a bunch, said to have sprung from a single acorn ; ; ;

the two wild cherries . . . the fallen larch that spanned the glen . . . the straight ash with the high fork where missel-thrushes built, on the knoll beside the lake. There was the old Scotch fir that stood out at the edge of the wood, bathing its crimson head in evening sunshine . . . there was a senile hollow oak, beloved of starlings, which one could squeeze inside by desperate compression. . . .

There are a hundred occasions for climbing a tree—to hide or to escape or to find a look-out post, to get nuts or cut pea-shooters, or reach birds' nests, or hang a rope or carve one's name on the bark near the top where no human eye will ever see it, or just for the sake of the climbing; or again, to sit and swing and feast among the branches as in the case of the giant cherries.

We had sticks from the hazels, bows

from the yew, and from the willow material for (unfinished) baskets, but our richest harvest was from the giant cherries.

These two noble trees, unmatched as specimens throughout the land, gorgeous in their white blossom, vivid in their autumn tints, loaded in their due season with great black cherries, and well known to half the blackbirds in the county, stood on the slope before the house. They were cut down. That was to us so genuine a calamity that we felt as much resentment against Those in Authority, who had done this thing, as hopeless inability to understand their point of view. We felt that we were living among aliens with whom we had no common ground. We were told that the trees were too near the house—that they obscured the view. That was all: no other reason was suggested. Grown-ups would stand on the porch after the sacrifice

and look about and tell each other that it had been a great wrench, but after all it was worth it—it was better without them. But we could see nothing but a desolating emptiness and a horrid gap. And we didn't believe it had been a wrench. The very heart of our domain had been laid waste for the sake of seeing some stupid hills miles away that could be seen anyhow from the upstairs windows. If Grown-ups were determined to use their vast and arbitrary powers in this way, in order to secure a view, why did they not move the house and leave our trees alone? The thing rankled the more because, at any word of complaint, we were laughed at as missing the trees—because of the cherries! And that cut us deeply. It would have been like loving a friend for his money to have loved our trees on that account alone. So we said nothing about it, except sometimes when a

sympathetic visitor came who agreed with us, and then we backed him up and rubbed it in.

It was for years a main ambition of our life to go up one tree and down another, as the squirrels do. That is not at all an easy thing to do, and it gets more difficult as you get older and heavier. Archie did it at last with two of the Three Sisters, but when he tried to repeat the exploit he fell on his back and I found him gasping in a terrible condition. I thought he was going to die, but he very soon recovered; and Colin, who had seen this thing before, explained that he had only been "winded."

Most of our tree adventures were of course in quest of birds' nests. There was a wood on the hill full of gigantic jackdaws' nests, which must have been heaped up from year to year. So big were they that as we came up from underneath they blotted out the sky above us, and our problem was to find a

means of climbing round them to the little pocket in the centre where the eggs lay on the top. But chiefly I remember the glorious sensations and rewards that we first found in climbing for pigeons' eggs. The old spruce trees grew in dense formation, darkening the ground beneath, high up on the hillside. It was almost like starting from the gloom of a dungeon when we set out to climb them. And it was a stern course. You have to force your head through dead spiky little branches, though there is plenty of foothold all the way. And your hands get scratched and bark-dust and needles rain down on your upturned eyes. But it gets easier as you go on, and the thrilling moment of arrival is always coming nearer. If you have chosen an outstanding tree that towers above the others, it is beautiful to emerge into the sunlight among the lofty tossing foliage. Suddenly

you find yourself in a fresh, breezy world on the roof of the wood. Yours is the true bird's-eye view. You begin to understand the royal life of birds in this their habitation, far from the ken of those who peer about in the dark abyss below. You have no need to hold on anxiously, for you are borne up on dense and buoyant branches. You could hardly fall through if you tried.

And now we come to the cream of it: so precious and moving an experience—unknown to Grown-ups, who are too heavy, anyway—that you will only barely imagine it when I tell you. If your spruce tree is a good one, well clothed from top to bottom, you may lie on your back, with your head toward the trunk and outstretched arms, and slide down by your own weight among the bending branches, sleek and pliant, as they give below you, sinking through swishing greenery down, down into the vault.

CHAPTER XVII

FIRES

THE elemental playthings were far the best of all. All the goods and chattels that ever we possessed, from stilts and bows and arrows to mechanical trains and the "wheel of life," did not amount in solid value to half the profit that we got from snow and water, frost and fire. The world was full of incomparable raw material: there was sand in the sandhole, clay in the pit, straight sticks among the hazels, and "soldiers" in the grass. The products of the earth were rich for us in useful properties. But best of all were the special, passing dispensations, when a new element

appeared and a new situation was created; when heavy rains had flooded the burn and a pond was formed in the meadow, when a snow-fall came in the night or when the lake was frozen. These were transient things, and therefore deeply precious. But fire, which was fit to rank among them, was ours at command, and it had a special quality in that it was capable of damage. We loved it for that very reason, as we loved everything with latent powers of destruction—a knife or an axe or a garden syringe. It was not that one often really wanted to hack the drawing-room table or chop the oak tree on the lawn—though one had a passing hankering in that direction after hearing the moral story of George Washington—nor yet to deluge the nursery through the open window. But one did like to feel that one could do these things if one chose to exercise the power. And

there could be no doubt of the destructive capacity of fire and its ability to get us into trouble.

We were ready to light a fire at any moment for employment and companionship—for something to do. In the winter woods we would light them for warmth, or in the summer woods to keep the flies away. We lit them to roast potatoes in the embers or to boil birds' eggs in a tin canister, to toast chestnuts on a pointed stick. We lit them to dry unlucky stockings—to smoke out wasps' nests—to signal after dark—to celebrate a triumph. We used them for occasions of high sacrifice or as a funeral pyre in the obsequies of a departed bullfinch or white mouse. We used them to destroy discarded belongings or to melt down lead for catty bullets. And often enough we lit them in the shrubbery for no reason at all—except

perhaps to jump over the flames in headlong competition.

There was that about the glow of a fire, especially after dark, which induced a strange mood of repose, of contemplation and whispered confidence. Above all I remember the most alluring of our secret habitations, where we spent many golden hours after Duncan had gone home, in absolute security from capture. It was the stoke-hole of the tomato-house, where on winter evenings there was a little underground furnace, discovered by opening a small door which ran far back out of sight along a glowing corridor. You had only to lift up the wooden trap-door in the garden walk and creep down into this retreat, shutting it behind you, and you could lie upon a bank of cinders and gently toast yourself. Here was indeed a perfect thing that all our labour and imagi-

nation could not have compassed, made ready to our hand through the whim of some Grown-up who desired to grow tomatoes.

But I have said that fires could also get us into trouble.

It was a Sunday afternoon, generally a time of active wickedness, and we were out in the Garden Park, seeking what might turn up, when a purely academic discussion began upon the question of whether gorse would burn. There was only one way to decide, and we sent Archie in for matches. He never came back, as it happened, and was consequently provided with a perfect *alibi*. But in spite of his righteous airs during the period of retribution that followed he knew very well that he had missed a good thing. He had been captured to write a letter to his Aunt Mary, who had sent him a birthday present,

and that kept him going till tea. (There were always special dangers of this sort on Sunday afternoons.) So I went, more cautiously by way of the back door, got a box of matches in the store-room, thus keeping out of the danger zone, and returned to Colin in the Garden Park.

There was any amount of gorse there: many small isolated bushes and one great mass just below the garden, visible from the windows of the house. The question in dispute was solved without delay, for it was a dry afternoon with a strong wind. Colin and I had a glorious time. We had had no idea before that day of the peculiar properties of the gorse bush, particularly when it is well choked up with withered grass, as a ready-made bonfire. We were deeply thrilled by the instant rush and fury with which the crackling flame drives through it before the wind. Each one leapt

to sudden climax and subsided, leaving a shivering, blackened skeleton. It was more like a firework than a fire. The difference is that between an avalanche, sudden, startling, and brief, and a steady-going waterfall.

Colin and I worked up the field, entirely engrossed, recklessly firing one bush after another, glowing with excitement. We never had the slightest misgivings till every single bush had been exhausted and we were confronted by the big clump beside the steps. Then we paused for a moment to contemplate the climax that awaited us, for we knew that the others would be as nothing to this.

Did we ever give a thought in that ecstatic hour to Archie in the drawing-room, slowly inscribing "My dear Aunt Mary, I hope you are well" ?

We sat down on the steps and looked

round, and for the first time we were visited by doubt, for there was no little change in the aspect of the field. Half an hour ago it had been dotted over with fresh little green bushes, rather picturesque in their way. And now in their place were these stricken black skeletons. They certainly looked very odd. We counted twenty-six of them and one beside a drain that had only half burned and had a specially degraded aspect. It was a great transformation of a familiar scene—and it had been so easily done!

"People are pretty sure to notice," remarked Colin uncomfortably.

"Gorse doesn't take long to grow again," said I.

"Anyway, it isn't worth anything."

"No. But——"

We sat in silence. Questions of amenity were rather beyond our scope; still, we

felt we had gone pretty far, and it was hard to say just what would come of it. But one point was clear. We had better get the job finished before we were caught. If there was going to be a row, at least let us get full value. We sprang up and fired the big clump.

I can hardly believe that if Those in Authority had arrived in time to see the climax they could possibly have resented it. They did not arrive in time. They came at the very instant of anti-climax, when the scorched remains were still quivering from the shock. And all that they could do or say was powerless in that moment of our intoxication to give us cause to repent. For we had had full value.

CHAPTER XVIII

POCKETS

I COULD not now say at what age one began to adopt the custom of turning out the contents of one's pockets before going to bed, but it seems to me (now that I have gone over to the enemy) to be a good custom. It offers occasion for review and tends to curb accumulation. Grown-up People nearly always behave in that sort of thoughtful, calculating way, looking ahead and taking an unfair advantage. They nearly always take the cork off the corkscrew, for instance, and they never seem to be caught out by an empty match-box or an old time-table or yesterday's newspaper. And if the handle comes off when

they slam a door, they never seem to go away and forget about it till the next time they want to go into the room and find they can't. And so I suppose they want to know exactly what is in their pockets (which is a mistake), and to make a fresh start with them every morning. Further, they are always trying to rub it in, and make other people as cautious as themselves.

But it is a poor thing to know exactly what is in your pockets, and to be able to reply to any demand that is made upon them, without a search. That is an excellent example of the way in which Grown-up People contrive to destroy romance and dispel mystery. They can even whip out a railway ticket on demand without pursuing it all over their person, as one might search for a ferret in a rabbit burrow. But without mystery pockets must lose something of their special

character. There is a story of a keen angler who possessed a lake well stocked with trout. And after many years it occurred to him that he would like to know exactly what the stock was, and he had the lake drained and the fish counted. And after that he could take no more pleasure in fishing there—for the mystery was gone and he knew what to expect. Even so, a pocket is hardly a pocket if you know exactly what is in it. And as it was always our keen desire to have as many pockets as possible, and all of them full—each representing a miniature chaos—there was no small field for discovery and much ground for hope if you had sudden need of a pencil or (more likely) a bit of string or (most likely) a knife. Indeed, nearly all the beloved objects that were lost were lost in pockets. After a diligent and dreary search down the back of the sofa, and in all the many places where

you might have "had it last," it would be given up as gone, while you privately suspected that it had been stolen. And you would claim much sympathy—and get it, and even compensation sometimes. So that it made you look rather foolish when, weeks or even months later, you recovered it and had to admit that you had found it in the pocket of a jacket you had not been wearing. But there were tragic discoveries, too, among the most shocking and dreadful experiences of those eventful days—of letters that had been given you to post or a telegram that you had taken off the hall table for prompter delivery and carried about with you for days.

The first pocket was a decisive step—almost as important, one might say, as the first tooth. There is a certain type of benevolent old person who loves to ask you, before giving you anything, "Have

you got a pocket ? " It is terribly humiliating when the answer is in the negative. And as one grew older one had an insatiable appetite for pockets. In a new suit of clothes it was the one thing that counted. The colour or the shape of it, or the stuff of which it was made, were naught to you ; but it was everything to you if it had seven pockets all told, where the last had only six. And a new acquisition, such as an inside jacket pocket or a " ticket pocket," added a dignity and nobility to the suit that did not wear off for many weeks. There was also a legend in our family about a tailor who always put a penny in one of the pockets of a new suit—though one never knew which one—and that led to a feverish search at the first trying-on. But I never found the penny.

Girls were, of course, completely out of it, as in the case of most of the best things

in life. They generally had one wretched little pocket somewhere about them, but it was hard to find, and there was seldom anything in it when found. There was no real injustice there. Girls have no need of pockets. They are wholly devoid of the pocket sense.

Your pocket was your most intimate and secret possession. It was the one thing you could really call your own. It represented the one sanctuary that no one ever dared to penetrate, and, like travellers in doubtful company, we preferred to keep our valuables upon our person. Not that they were really safe there, for pockets (owing to the inadequacy of their material or to abnormal wear and tear) soon developed holes; and there was always an undue strain on those that were sound and in working order. Besides, a pocket, even without a hole in it, may be out of action :

that happens when it is sealed and cemented by the presence of some adhesive substance that it really would have been wiser not to have put there—putty or toffee, let us say.

Pockets used to have a powerful and unaccountable effect upon their contents: say what you will, there was some mystery about them. Things very seldom came out of them quite the same as they went in. Those strange, long-lost handkerchiefs, grey, weak, and flabby, and moulded into a set shape, that would come to light after many weeks, must have passed through some queer, hidden process, far from the light of day. And, greatest mystery of all, how was one to account for that woolly accumulation of dark grey matter—known to us as "pocket fug"—which was never absent from them, and which was obviously generated out of nothing at all, purely through lapse of time?

We were very sensitive indeed upon the point of our absolute control of our pockets; for any one else to have put a hand in them would have been to rend the last curtain of our privacy. We were determined that they were our own to do what we liked with. And the most dreadful encroachment that I can remember upon my sovereign rights was the action of a wicked old lady at a picnic (whom I have never forgiven: I burn with indignation even now when I think of her). She had been tidily gathering up scraps of paper and odds and ends, to leave no trace behind, and was looking about for a safe refuge for them. Finding none, she picked me out as her victim, and, with a colossal measure of misunderstanding such as is given to very few, she handed them to me.

"Here," she said, "Put these in your pocket."

I need hardly say that I flung them to the winds. But I was deeply hurt. For it seemed to me—and I think I was quite right—that if the world had no more respect for the dignity of my person than to treat me as a waste-paper basket, life was hardly worth going on with.

CHAPTER XIX

COLLECTIONS

WHEN I look back upon the many bright beginnings that withered away, on the many feeble foundations that never rose above the ground, I am impressed by the memory of that superb faith and blind optimism which were always ready to invite us to new enterprise. The dreary, grown-up habit of counting the cost was never present to cloud our prospect. We had a perfect, and wholly groundless, confidence in our powers of sustained effort. We saw so clearly the beginning and the end, and had no thought for the stages in between.

We set ourselves prodigious tasks, quite undismayed. My litle sister, as soon as she

had learned to write, bought a small note-book and began to copy out in pencil the whole of "The Mill on the Floss." She wished to have a private copy of her own, and this seemed the most direct and simple way of procuring one. Archie once elected to dot the eyes of all the little swallows on the nursery wall-paper, and spent an industrious week in covering the ground between the sofa and the window. Colin made up his mind to dig a tunnel from the quarry in the Garden Park to the Three Sisters, and set to work at both ends alternately; and I laid out a flower garden, which was the most impossible undertaking of all. It was carefully planned and nothing was left to chance, the scheme of it being worked out in great detail on paper, not omitting the fountain and sundial. A tract of the potato patch was claimed from Duncan and staked off. . . .

In truth we were not easily daunted. It is the first step that costs, according to the French proverb, and perhaps that may be the way with French children. With us it was the only step that cost us nothing. There was a day when, working all together in unison, we entered upon the long-considered improvement of deflecting the course of the stream that ran through the Bank-end Wood. I dare say that even now the careful explorer might discover a small bay or semicircular bight on one side of it at the point, above the bend, where we began and ended.

And in nothing was our perfect faith more potent than in the making of collections. We did not collect stamps from any love of stamps, or birds' eggs from any interest in them. It was the sheer need of collecting that was always with us, the idea of a great growth from small begin-

nings, of accumulation and crescendo and the filling in of gaps, the vision—which seemed so near—of the completed whole. We had in view the great day (which never dawned) when we should be able to say "I have finished my collection," and enter it up in a catalogue, set it aside, and go on to something else. We often told each other that we were going to begin collecting something else as soon as we had finished this collection. But we began much sooner; and thus the house was full of pathetic first stages. We collected practically everything—stamps and flowers and moths and pencils and birds' eggs and crests and signatures and pen-nibs and photographs and flags and coins, and many less obvious things—such as tin canisters and mediaeval weapons, and above all empty cartridge-cases.

Some were more successful than others.

Flowers, pressed between sheets of blotting-paper, were attractive, but that had to be given up. It was a little too pretty and delicate for one who took a robust view of life; and, besides, it was approved by Those in Authority, who called it Botany. The collection of autographs tailed off into a competition in forgery. It was much easier and more amusing to copy people's signatures than to wait for an opportunity to get authentic specimens. The collection of birds' eggs had too many defective specimens, which had been "blown" in an advanced state of incubation and had their gaps made good with stamp-paper. The collection of mediaeval weapons, which should have had a fine future before it, was based upon the handle of an old sword which I had found in the shrubbery. But it never got any farther, and there was even considerable doubt as to whether it really

was the handle of a sword. Coins were much in favour, and that collection, alone among its competitors, actually left some trace behind in later years. Only the other day I came upon a purse containing a big old penny and a fourpenny-bit. But it had to contend with special difficulties. At the best of times it could not be expected to get on very fast, and it was therefore most natural to make a start with a complete set, as far as possible, of the currency of one's own country. Consequently it proceeded by steep undulations. At one time it would present a brave show of graduated items, mounted on a square of black velvet; at another there would be many blanks.

Certain considerations of playing the game governed all our collections, with a queer rigid code of sportsmanship. The feeling was that things must be actually

collected, not acquired by short cuts. There was a shop which sold postage stamps, where we spent much time looking in at the window or even consulting the proprietor. But we never dreamt of buying any, for we were not quite certain about any stamp unless we had actually taken it off a foreign envelope or acquired it by exchange.

But I had one collection that really was in a sense completed. It was my proudest possession—a thousand empty cartridge-cases. For years no one had been allowed to go out shooting without being eagerly canvassed to preserve his empty cartridges. I had friendly keepers working for me; I searched the butts on the morrow of grouse drives. And by degrees I filled my boxes and piled them one above another in the cupboard. I can still recognise that an empty cartridge is a very desirable thing. When it is fresh it has a fine crisp feel about

it and a rich alluring smell of powder. Cut short and fitted with a cap it can be made into a striking, but rather ineffective, match-box. It flies well, foot foremost, as a missile, and drops into water with a jolly "plip." It slides beautifully on polished surfaces.

So much for the individual. In bulk they make fine soldiers, most apt to drill and march about, and suitable officers of all grades are found among the handsome green and yellows, working up to the magnificent brass specimens (brought sometimes by shooting guests), while the occasional slim 16- or 20-bores were all marked out for posts of distinction.

I ploughed a lonely furrow in this affair. Such imitators as I had soon gave up, while I acquired their holdings. One ingenious attempt was made to discredit my whole collection by setting up a false

standard, but my position was too strong. Colin announced that he also was going to collect empty cartridges, but he would have no specimen in his collection which had not killed a bird. Later he went into partnership with me. But we could not work together, for he developed a horrid tendency toward "faking." We were short of non-commissioned officers—who were blue—and I caught him, to my deep disgust, painting privates to fill the vacancy. I need hardly say that I turned him out of the concern as one who had no proper sense of decency or delicacy of understanding. There never was a clearer case of not playing the game.

CHAPTER XX

COMPETITION

It is only by a process of selection that we find out the points in which we may hope to excel, or at least the directions in which it is worth while trying. Most of us have to be content at last with the possession of some little talent, some special turn of skill or store of knowledge by which we may stand out among our fellows—be it only as a collector of postage stamps or a performer of card tricks. It is certain that we like to know that there is something that we are good at: it is a sign of lethargy and indolence when we no longer care. But we started out upon life with no such restricted programme. We had sweeping

ambitions then. As far as I can remember I fully intended to beat every one at everything in those days—that is to say, at everything that was worth doing : such as climbing trees, jumping ditches, turning cartwheels, finding nests, making kites, killing wasps, catching sparrows, lighting fires, throwing stones at a mark, and especially guessing anything that had to be guessed. I was always willing to back myself to go through a smaller hole in the hedge than any one else could manage, to open the lid of a tin canister which no one else could move, or to untie a knot that had baffled all attempts. It was literally impossible for me to see any one struggling with anything that required manipulation without instantly offering my services—"Let *me* try!"—not from any pure spirit of helpfulness, but in order to score a success where others had failed. I never could

sit still and watch any one try more than once to draw a cork. It was so obvious to me, until I put it to the test, that I could do it. And the rest of our company in the nursery were in no way different from me in this respect. Had it been possible by some fortunate means to turn all that keen and furious driving power into other channels, into the paths of learning and true achievement, how magnificently must our education have progressed! But all the main aims and ambitions of Grown-up People and the studies and exercises that led up to them belonged to a world that we would fend off as long as possible and had no power to strike that spark of desire within us. Our own daily life was quite as much as we could manage: it was always held at the highest pressure by this blatant, swaggering, intense passion to prove oneself the best or the tallest,

the quickest, the strongest, the cleverest, the heaviest, or the lightest, as the case might be.

This form of warfare, this instinct for the offensive, shows itself at the earliest age. It is a sad thing to see a child that must play alone, without a competitor. For children do not so much play together as play against one another. If I may go back for a moment into those four lost years that none of us can recover, beyond the point where memory may reach, I have no doubt at all that when first I built brick castles on the nursery table I felt the need to build a brick higher than Archie or to have a wider door than Colin's or a longer flight of steps. I have no doubt that the Grown-up in charge was called upon at every turn to "look at *mine* "—as who should say, this is the only castle worth attention; don't be put off with those

other fellows' efforts. I have no doubt that I bagged Colin's bricks when he wasn't looking, feeling that they were wasted on his incoherent pile. And further, I can well believe that when any new game was put before us, when we were shown for the first time how to blow bubbles or make paper darts, my first words were "Let *me*! Let *me*!" Why waste time with other bunglers when I can do it so well? In a word, I do not doubt that I was always out to win.

Even so in later years we struggled for the mastery. We could never allow ungrudgingly to each other any special bent or knack or faculty. The rule was that if he could do it better than the rest of us, and we had tried our best and failed to beat him, it was not a thing worth doing. Archie, as it happened, was very good at drawing houses. The windows

never looked too big and the path to the front door never looked like a serpent. And they had eaves and well-proportioned chimneys. (Archie is still very good at drawing houses.) We tried repeatedly to get level with him. We even copied him, flatly denying it when accused. But it was no use. Archie had the better of us. His houses were even shown to callers. One of them stood on the drawing-room mantelpiece for quite a long time. But we would not let him enjoy this happy gift. We made him understand that drawing houses was a poor game—a girls' game really. We denied ourselves the whole pleasure of house-drawing, simply because there was one among us who did it too well. Still, I am glad to remember that it was a true consolation to Archie. As the youngest he had a good many bad moments, when he was left out of things, neglected

and despised. Then he would go quietly up on the top of the nursery cupboard and sit in the corner with his knees bunched up—drawing houses. And at last he got a box of coloured chalks, and the houses got better and better; but he wouldn't show them to us. He would look at them with a smile of sad content and then drop them in the fire.

Archie scored off us in another way. He was left-handed. And he could always start a competition in doing things with the left hand that left us speechless with exasperation. He could use a pair of scissors with his left hand in a way that we were almost forced to admire. And all this was most annoying in a younger brother.

For this ceaseless desire for mastery that drove us on was quite arbitrary in its selection of tests. One did not score

any more heavily by being the best of the group at skinning moles, let us say, which does require some skill, than by standing upon one leg longer than the others. And I would feel all the satisfaction of victory one day because my arm was thin enough to reach up a pipe to a sparrow's nest where Colin's arm had stuck, while Colin would triumph over me another day by stopping the flow into the stable trough because his arm was thick enough to act as a plug.

But there was one tempering influence that did something to compose this ceaseless warfare, otherwise life would have been a record of anarchy and confusion with every man's hand against his neighbour. We had great respect for the claims of age and order. A certain thread of discipline ran through all our relations, and an elder brother had always some control. I would compete with Colin, and Archie

would compete with me, but Sidney was too far ahead of us, too great a master of all our arts and practices, to be easily drawn in.

And so, as years went on, we emerged from the age of savage individualism toward co-operation. We are all willing now to admit that Archie can draw houses; and the field of our endeavour is confined to those few things that we can do.

CHAPTER XXI

GENERALLY USEFUL

ONE of the most dreary things about being grown up is the way in which all manner of delightful implements and utensils which used to be made to serve all manner of delightful ends lose this happy adaptability and settle down into the miserable little rut of their own specific purpose. They lose their powers. A walking-stick, which ought to spend its life in a round of varied adventure—prodding holes in mud, rippling along corrugated iron with resounding effect, prising open lids, being thrown at rabbits, being retrieved by dogs, beating down nettles, decapitating thistles, playing the part of a horse, or a sword, or a

battering ram, or extended to reach nuts that grow too high or balls that have fallen down a grid—becomes a mere prop to walk with, something little better than a crutch. A penknife, with all its immense latent powers of destruction and creation, which ought to keep it in a feverish state of hourly activity, is reduced to a pitiable routine of sharpening pencils. There was a time when one used to catch a glimpse of it, lying inert in the stamp drawer of some Grown-up Person, among nibs and sealing-wax, and go away marvelling that so great a talent should be allowed to rust so long as there were trees that might have initials carved on them, or sticks that might be whittled, or all sorts of substances that might be cut or nicked or slashed. It seemed a cruel shame, like keeping a wild beast in a cage. Putty, again—but there is no end to it. If everything was to be used

only for its own strict purpose, and its special outside faculties were not to be explored, there would be no real object in being a small boy.

But of all the glaring examples of the senile helplessness that may overcome a useful and lively object there is none so glaring as that of the pocket-handkerchief. In the morning I take one from a drawer and put it in my pocket. If I have a bad cold or shed tears I may employ it to some extent in the course of the day in its proper function, and then it goes to the wash—practically unstained. But there was a time when no handkerchief of mine was without a vivid history which could be partly deciphered by the marks it bore. And yet one has cause for gratitude in the fact that civilisation has made the discovery that it is desirable to carry a small napkin in one's pocket, for in the Golden Age its

services were so varied and so valuable that had it not been already invented some small boy must almost have thought of it for himself. And it is really astounding that its functions should have shrunk to this. Let us look at its more obvious uses. They fall naturally into four classes —(1) as a receptacle, (2) as a thong or binder, (3) as a weapon, and (4) as a plug.

How often when some happy windfall has come one's way has one made an involuntary grab for one's handkerchief! One may have found a sleeping bat in the dark corner of the boathouse or a glow-worm on the bank. One is out gathering raspberries without a basket. Or one has been fishing, without a creel. Or one has come across mushrooms, or a young bird that has fallen out of a nest, or a field-mouse, or a "red admiral." How on earth could one deal with any of these without a

handkerchief instantly at hand? And more especially this applies to such trophies as one would hardly like to put direct into the pocket—such as frogs; though if you wish to transport a live eel—and that, of course, is a piece of rare good fortune—it is best simply to take off a stocking. I think there must have been very few handkerchiefs of mine that ever ran their course from one wash to the next without having been used to enwrap and protect some wayside acquisition.

For all such uses there is adequate excuse, for surely no sane person could expect one to carry about a basket or a bag on the off-chance of loot. But when we come to regard a handkerchief as a thong, the same, perhaps, cannot be said. In the majority of cases it was simply called in as a substitute for string. It was one of the things that one never could remember

—to carry string. At every turn one was met with the same query, followed by a hopeless search through crowded pockets —"Got any string?" Thus one fell back upon one's handkerchief to tie and mend and splice and join, to lash and truss and bind. It was used as emergency braces or belt or garter, to bandage wounds, to join two ankles together for a three-legged race, to affix a splint to a broken fishing-rod or a better grip to a hockey stick, to sling a hammock or peg a tent or hold an oar when the rowlocks were lost or silence a mudguard of a rattling bicycle. It is true that these things were not at all good for it, and even the wash would sometimes fail to restore its shape after so severe a diagonal strain. But one couldn't help that.

It cannot be maintained that a handkerchief was a good weapon, but it was better

than no weapon at all if one had to defend oneself in a tight corner. It should be wet when the knot is tied, in order to get it firm and hard. I have on occasion had to run the gauntlet between two lines of knotted scourges slung gleefully from the shoulder. And the thing was used for duels, having the advantage that it left no mark behind.

And finally, as a plug or stopgap the handkerchief was very hard to beat. There are many holes and cracks that have to be dealt with in the course of a single day's transactions. Whether it was a question of keeping water out of a boat, or keeping it in a pipe, or stopping one hole of a wasps' nest while one fumigated the other, or preventing the escape of a family of mice, or closing a keyhole for greater privacy —in any such emergency it was whipped out in a moment.

But after all, my four classes do not by any means exhaust the functions of this valuable instrument. If the sun is hot and sunstroke imminent it is immediately plastered on to the head with a knot in each corner. It makes an excellent parachute. By those who have learnt the art of deftly rolling and twisting it centrifugally it can be made into a first-class ball. (And that, you know, was what the sailor did with the sheets when his landlady had overcharged him, and never till this day has she been able to disentangle them.) And if you are reckless enough to tear it into strips—for which you will have to suffer later on—new possibilities open up.

The truth is, that one handkerchief at a time is not nearly enough. Let us suppose that on the same day (which might well happen) when only two of you are hunting together you found mushrooms,

caught a field-mouse, broke your fishing rod, and cut your finger, while at the same time you were troubled by the heat of the sun—— No, I think if I were to live the first dozen years of my life again that one of the few reforms I should like to introduce would be this—I should never carry less than three.

CHAPTER XXII

CONFESSION

I THINK we must have been "very well brought up." I know that we had the greatest horror of the Cardinal Sins. We thought of them only as the practices of the abandoned and depraved. To steal, to swear, to tell a lie—well, of course there was something splendid about these things: they were full of wild adventure. But they were not for us. Public opinion was so firmly rooted in this matter that the barest suggestion of falsehood was instantly repudiated. You must clear your character there and then or know yourself to be an outcast. And we had a high standard. I well remember being horribly worried for

a whole afternoon because I had replied to a kindly caller, who had asked me if I was quite well, with a careless "Yes, thank you." And when I came to reflect I knew that I wasn't well. I had a bilious headache and things jumped about when I looked at them. I sat alone pondering on the seat among the laurels, and it seemed to me that it was a difficult world. I had, I supposed, told a lie. It made me shudder when I put it like that. And yet, what was I to do? I wasn't going to tell Mrs. Bulley that I had a bilious headache. I should rather think not. Perhaps the headache itself was partly to blame for the gloomy cast of my reflections. At last I consulted Colin. His considered opinion was that although a lie it was hardly one that counted. The best way out of it would have been to make no reply at all or change the subject by remarking suddenly

that it was a fine day. But I was able to score off him there, which I was not slow to do. For I pointed out that he had fallen into the same trap. It wasn't really a fine day : there had been a heavy shower in the morning and there was thunder about. . . . All the same it was probably not the sort of lie that counted.

The proper lie, the real whacker (as we might have said) was completely barred. That was why the story of George Washington, which was rubbed into us at an early date, never impressed us. It must have been obvious that some one had hacked the cherry tree, and when George was accused of it he was clearly cornered. There was no need whatever for him to remark "I cannot tell a lie." Of course he couldn't; neither could you nor I. And if that was all that was called for in order

to become the first President of the United States . . . it was a rotten story.

Still, the whole system of necessary confessions was somehow based upon George Washington. Those in Authority did not see the distinction: they never grasped what a gulf there was between admitting the cherry tree after it had been found out, and confessing the cherry tree before it was found out. And thus it was that this duty of confession was made almost as urgent a duty as speaking the truth.

It was all a matter of breakages. There were a good many breakages. The house was full of fragile furniture: there was glass in all the windows, and crockery in daily use; drawing-room chairs really stand very little wear and tear; swinging gates do not carry nearly so much weight as one might think; green-houses come

so often into the line of fire ; even walking-sticks are not to be depended on for vigorous use. And so many accidents occurred that it was right to have a fixed policy regarding them. I am bound to say that the way was made easy for us by Those in Authority. The rule was that you could break pretty well anything you liked and you would not be blamed for it—so long as you confessed of your own free will. But if you did not confess, you were deceitful : a lurid light was cast upon your unreliability in future life, and you were made to feel as bad as if you had told a lie.

We never quite saw it in that light, and it went hard with us to have to confess. For with all our happy relations with Those in Authority we were always their opponents in a sense. Life was a sort of tug-of-war between them and us. It was their business to look after us and our

chief end to escape control. If we were caught in the act it was a fair score for them. If we were directly questioned we were bound to confess. But to confess a thing that might never be found out was to give away points. It was surely their business to look after their belongings and see that no harm came to them without this sort of help from the enemy. And where was the thing to end? Why insist on this one group of confessions? If I must confess when I broke the hinge of the garden door (no one would ever know: hinges often give way), why should I not also have to confess that I had been out on the roof in my night-shirt or had played dominoes in the stable-loft on Sunday with Archie?

But the system was strictly confined to breakages and other damage to property; and the real truth is that it worked very

well. It fostered in us a tendency to admit mistakes which we may hope bore fruit as time went on. But at a fearful cost. It was only with the greatest effort that we brought ourselves to own up, and it was one of those things that got rapidly worse with waiting. I must add that we did not make it easier for each other. As you stood in the first shock of dismay and looked down upon the fragments of a flower-pot and the broken remains of a maidenhair fern, gleeful voices would bear in upon your sad reflections—"You'll have to confess! You'll have to confess!" "No, I won't. They can jolly well find out for themselves," you would reply carelessly. But that of course was a mere formula. You knew very well that it was true—and the sooner you got it over the better.

There was a wide range in the severity

of this ordeal. Some of our breakages were so self-evident that there was no special virtue in admitting them. Others were so easily concealed that we rose to moral heights when we disclosed them. When I pulled the big marble clock off the dining-room mantelpiece and it came down in the fender—and I think that was the greatest and most startling smash I ever brought about—the whole house resounded. There was one of Those in Authority who was due home in about half an hour, and I went straight to the front hall and sat there waiting in the dark on the chair beside the hat-rack. Before the door was fully open I had it out and safely over—"I've-smashed-the-clock-in-the-dining-room-and-broken-the-fender."

But it was a different matter with the ornamented ostrich egg in the drawing-room, because, when I put it up again in

its stand and turned it with its best side foremost, no one need have known that there was a hole at the back where the head of the golden serpent should have been. And yet I knew it had to be done. . . . And I put it off. . . .

I tried to dismiss it from my mind, but all that afternoon and evening I was arguing the case within myself. There was very little wrong with the egg. . . . It was only a small hole. . . . My foot had slipped in the mat. . . . No one would ever know. . . . It wasn't nearly so strong as it looked, that egg. . . . I would forget all about it. . . . But . . . I wonder how often it's *dusted*? . . . But why should an egg be dusted? . . . It was all right. . . . No one would ever know. . . . If they did find out perhaps they wouldn't mind. . . . It was a small hole. I would think of something else. . . . *Blow* the egg! . . . Even at nursery tea it wouldn't leave me alone.

I gave it up and confessed. It was not perhaps entirely a triumph of conscience. The truth is that I was completely worn out by the evening, through the strain of thinking about the same thing for several hours on end. I had to get rid of the egg, the world was so full of other things.

CHAPTER XXIII

SUNDAY AFTERNOON

If it were possible to trace the separate history of each day in the week, through the Golden Age, and mark all the events that fell upon Monday on one list and Tuesday's events on another, and so on, I am convinced that Sunday would claim the longest list by far. In the later period, when "lessons" had spread from morning to afternoon and their heavy hand was laid upon all the best hours of the day, the Saturday half-holiday attracted to it all the chief events of an official and premeditated nature. The entertainings and going out to tea, the circuses, the picnics,

and also the dentists, fell on Saturday afternoon. The programme on Sunday afternoon, on the other hand, was blank. Nothing was expected to happen; many things were forbidden. It was in theory a sort of gap when the wheels of activity had run down and life was at a standstill. And yet it came about that there was more real history made, in the long run, during those empty hours than at any other time in the week.

We were not under any very strict Sabbatarian code, but there was just enough of confinement and repression in the air to whet our faculties. There were so many things that we were not allowed to do that one had to keep thinking of something new; for things cannot be forbidden before they have been invented. It was rather as if the daily stream of our life had been dammed and held back and, as

the water rose, it broke through unexpected outlets.

The code was a little arbitrary. We were not allowed to play the piano, but there was no objection to musical-boxes. We were sometimes allowed to bathe in summer, but we were not allowed to skate in winter—though we might slide. We were not allowed to bicycle (Colin at one time possessed a second-hand high bicycle, with a little wheel running behind, which was apt to throw you over its head like a horse), but we were occasionally allowed to go out in the boat. But the great dividing-line that surrounded Sunday was the fact that we were not allowed to play games. We found, however, curiously enough, that that only held good when games were correctly played. There was no protest against playing cricket with a walking-stick and a tennis-ball on the drive, or

billiards with oranges, or marbles with peas. If the object of these complicated regulations was to create a Sunday atmosphere that set the day apart (as, no doubt, it was), it could hardly have been more successful.

We were expected to read, though no special Sunday reading was prescribed. And we were often, when caught, made to write letters. That was the peculiar terror of Sunday afternoon. To be set down at the dining-room table with a sheet of notepaper, ruled in double lines (to counteract the inborn tendency to write uphill), and a pencil, which one was told not to bite, and to find oneself utterly bereft of any idea whatsoever which should contribute to the filling in of the aching space between "I hope you are well," and "your loving nephew," and yet to know that there was no hope of release

till that space was filled—it was an insoluble situation of blank despair. But we generally got away. . . .

A heavy calm brooded over existence; there was a Sunday stillness in the sunlight. . . . No sound came from stable or house or garden. . . . All activity was clogged and stifled. . . . Nothing was happening; it seemed that nothing would ever happen again. . . . We felt that we were waiting—without anything to wait for. We had reached our hiding-place in safety. There was no fear of letters to-day. And we were utterly bored and idle, sulky and oppressed, and there were still two hours till tea-time. The ground was very ripe for the seed.

Then it was that daring ideas were conceived, enterprises undertaken, plots hatched. And there was everything in their favour, for the coast was clear and we

had the world pretty much to ourselves; and again, any vivid hour of life snatched from this somnolent atmosphere stood out in high relief. The most ordinary misdeeds were enhanced and intensified; if we could think of nothing better we might even get out of the tower window on to the roof, or straddle in Indian file along the rafters in the hay-shed. These things had become commonplace, but they were still worth doing on Sunday.

More often we had some special inspiration. It was on a Sunday that we fired all the gorse bushes in the Garden Park; it was on a Sunday, during the great gale, that we mounted the high wall that shut off the Old Garden at home from the Old Gentleman's house next door, carrying great stores of newspapers, and lavishly sprinkled his lawn and fruit trees with ragged fragments, flying far and wide;

it was on a Sunday that we fed the calf with a cabbage stalk at the end of a piece of string and led him into the kitchen. The great smash on the stairs, when Colin had to have three stitches in his forehead, occurred on a Sunday. (We had tried sliding down the banisters three at a time, and the weight was too much for them.)

But our greatest Sunday project was never carried out. I do not believe that we would ever have taken seriously on a week-day the idea of running away, but in that queer, stagnant, unreal world of Sunday afternoon it would appear before us as a glowing opening for adventure well within our reach. It was eagerly discussed, and if it was ever forgotten for a time the proper mood was sure to be revived by a special grievance or passing sense of injustice. But we were never quite able to agree as to the actual end we had in view.

It was a question whether we were going to run away and stay away long enough to create alarm, distress, and finally remorse in Those in Authority, and then to come swaggering back—or whether we were going to run away for ever and just trust to luck as to the course our future life might take. There were times on summer Sundays when this latter scheme took definite shape and we hotly discussed arrangements—as to what we would take with us, and the hour and direction of our flight, and, above all, the farewell note to be left inside the hall clock (which was wound up on Monday morning) to make it quite clear that it was no use taking any steps to trace us, and that at the last we bore no ill-feeling. Just as one of us started making a list the tea bell would ring. . . .

And it would happen that on Monday

morning, when all the well-ordered machinery of life would begin to move again, we were rather shy of encountering each other, not quite at our ease, seeking new subjects of conversation, anxious to forget. For the magic of Sunday afternoon had passed away.

CHAPTER XXIV

WASPS

ONE memorable afternoon I was thrown for an hour or two into the company of a tremendous fellow who had come to lunch with his parents. He tossed me for sixpences behind the stable (although, knowing well how wicked it was, I had never done such a thing before); he told me much of his striking history; and he gave me his matured views upon a hundred things—the fun of swimming in a river where there was a strong whirlpool, the way to startle people by looking calmly over the edge of precipices, how to travel undiscovered in a cattle truck, what was the best sort of

revolver. . . . He was some two years older than I. I never saw him again, which was perhaps just as well, but I remembered him as a glorious exemplar, entirely of my own way of thinking, but better, bolder, and bigger than I.

Among other things we considered wasps' nests. I wanted to show him that I too was capable of reckless daring, but my recital fell flat. I was relating how we had gone at dead of night with sulphur and matches to smoke them out when he cut me short. I learned that even on this question he was an authority. It was true that he had used sulphur—when he was a kid. But he had arrived at the opinion that though there were all manner of ways of taking wasps' nests, there was only one sporting way.

"And what is that?" I asked eagerly.

"You put in a lighted squib," he replied,

" and then stand five yards off and defend yourself with a tennis racquet."

" Have you really ever done that ? "

" Dozens of times."

I could almost have worshipped him. I had not been so profoundly moved by anything since my cousin Peter had been offered half a crown to climb the monkey-puzzle tree and had gone with bleeding hands to the top. But this was even finer. After he went I betook myself to a safe retreat of mine among the laurel bushes, deeply pondering. It was tremendous : one of the noblest, loftiest things, I thought, that I had ever known. It was comparable only to what I had seen when the menagerie came and the tamer had put his head in the lion's mouth. But, after all, he was a Grown-up and a professional ; he was paid to do it. This other—with his tennis racquet and his squib—had freely

chosen to play the part, facing tremendous odds. Even now I admit that there is something in it that appeals to me as being in line with the tradition of giving the quarry a good run for his money. Indeed, I wish I could say here and now that this was our method of taking wasps' nests. But we were never so heroic. When I went to tell Colin about it I found him unsympathetic. (If the hero had been his own discovery Colin might have taken a different view, but he had been kept talking in the drawing-room and was in rotten form.) He merely retorted that he didn't believe it, and, further, if it was true the fellow must be an awful ass.

None the less, we had many passages with "our sweet enemy" the wasp. He was fair game, delivered into our hands for the unfettered satisfaction of those instincts of the hunter which so often led us into

throwing stones at other people's poultry, cattying the most domesticated animals, chasing and rounding up other people's cats. Already the first pure zest of life is lost when one comes to look upon the wasp as a mere pest. He was an adversary, and on the whole we found him a clean fighter, a little too simple-minded, but not to be despised, for when he did get his sting in he scored.

There was a deadly respectability about the bee, a fellow armed (like a lumbering merchantman) solely for defence, with a view to protecting his wealth; a deplorably industrious fellow, never backward in lending himself as a model for tracts and homilies. We did not dream of making war on that patient wage-earner, nor on his country cousin, who tumbled about among the mowing grass with a bleary lack of purpose. But the wasp was a gay

marauder whose point of view we could well understand—fond of fruit, jam, sugar, sunshine; generally nimble and well able to look after himself, except when he was reduced to impotence by his hereditary delusion that if you keep on long enough crawling up a window-pane you will find a way out at the top. And—well, when a fellow comes in to steal the marmalade one naturally feels on terms with him.

But the main point about wasps and what gave them their chief value as an asset in one's daily life was the fact that there are so many people who are afraid of them. Therein they offered opportunity for showing off. It was a fine thing when they created a stampede at a picnic to treat them with cool swagger and indifference, retaining a perfectly collected air even when they were palpably "infuriated." This

epithet was the sole property of the wasp, as the epithet "becalmed" may be said to belong to a ship. It was one of his individual features, this state of infuriation, and it was taken for granted that it increased with every unsuccessful shot at him. It could also be whetted with a view to creating a panic.

In very waspy summers we used to count our daily bag and hold competitions. There was a day when I established an outside record by the happy discovery of ripe plums upon the garden wall where gorged wasps were hanging in festoons. Archie used to shoot them, when he found them crawling, in some mysterious way with a cap-pistol which blew them in two. But the real eclectic method, which always made a sensation upon the onlooker, especially at picnics, was to nip them between clapped hands in full flight.

The wasp had also won our regard in his home life ever since we had found in a gooseberry bush one of his beautiful grey paper nests, built in with an exact art that seemed foreign to a blustering buccaneer ; and there was an impressive episode during the year of the great drought which revealed him to us in quite a new light as capable of the finer feelings of decency and reverence. There was in the porch in front of the house a long rubber mat, containing I know not how many thousands of square holes. It was a great wasp year and bags were heavy, and we conceived the idea of trying to fill every hole in the mat with a dead wasp. We started at one corner and went on for several days covering the ground, when we discovered that some one had begun to undo our work and many of the holes that we had filled were empty. The strange truth was that numbers of living wasps were steadily

flying to and fro carrying away the bodies of the dead.

I suppose I have lost most of my interest in the wasp, but at least I still prefer to kill him fairly in full flight. And I still hold that to crush a wasp on the window is to shoot a rabbit sitting or a pheasant in a tree.

CHAPTER XXV

RELATIONS

In our attitude to relations, as in so many other things, we showed our kinship for the primeval savage, who is at war with all the world but keeps his heaviest club and his longest spear for disputes within the family circle. Our relations were the special object of our scorn and enmity. There was no reason in it : it just seemed to be part of the order of things. They were to be looked down upon, resented, avoided, as a class—just like girls' schools and boys with long hair and people who wore goloshes. They were the special subject for ponderous sarcasm. Yet we studied their habits with a certain curiosity. It was all very bad and sad. I should like to say

here (lest this should meet the eye of any one of them) that I take it all back. But that is how it was. We had not selected these people as worthy of our regard, yet it was laid down that we should love and respect them—and we reacted forcibly.

I do not mean to say that we condemned them all without exception. There were one or two uncles who did not neglect the practice of tipping; there was a grandmother who was so good a friend that she had completely overcome the disabilities of kinship; and there were others. All the same they had to prove themselves; they were never given the benefit of the doubt; the presumption was, until they established the contrary, that they were undesirable and even ridiculous people.

The main thing was (it is all very curious and I have no key by which I may inter-

pret it) not that they were objectionable or unpleasant, but that they were absurd. We had the most enormous fund of scorn within us in those days, and when we congregated on the hay at the back of the shed or in some other secluded spot to discuss our relations we brought it freely into play. The things they said and did; the sort of collars or caps that they wore, if they were boys; their pigtails or their boots, if they were girls; the voice of this uncle and the patronising pats of that aunt—it really was very funny. But there was another side to it. These strange people had a certain pull over us. We were not at liberty to look on and criticise. We were expected to play up. We were always in danger of being pounced upon for some special ordeal—to show Cousin Henry the way to the station, or take Aunt Sarah out in the boat—and we were apt on these

dreary occasions to be subjected to cross-examination upon many subjects. For relations always thought they had a right to ask questions. And sometimes you had to go out to tea with them. And often you had to write them letters. They had an undoubted pull over you, and the real bitterness of the thing was that you were condemned to gratitude. You were always being told that it was so good of them to do these things to you. You were expected to thank them cordially for all their trouble, and particularly for their condescension. . . . And yet we didn't feel that we had got anything out of it.

On the other hand, relations were of course good for a certain number of presents on birthdays. There were times when we were bound to admit that some of them were not so bad.

It is possible that our rooted idea that

relations were ridiculous owed something to the big album of family portraits that lay on the drawing-room table. I am inclined to think that on that evidence alone our judgment was not much amiss, for photography was capable of strange effects in those days. There were early pictures of ourselves in the album, and we loved to pore over these strange, gaping, little ineffective creatures, with curls and velvet dresses and square-toed slippers, and try to bridge the gulf between then and now. It was all in keeping with the comic properties of the collection. The album was indeed a priceless treasure, but we were not at all sure that it ought to be exhibited —as it so often was—to strangers. They were not likely to think any the better of us, as a family. Surely with such relations as ours it was only common prudence to keep it out of sight ?

Pondering upon these things one day Sidney suddenly asserted that if Those in Authority insisted on trotting out this exhibition—*he would make it worth while.* "It only wants a little touching up," he said, "to make it really funny."

When Sidney was inspired, as he clearly was that afternoon, we never interfered with him: we simply became his willing slaves. He carried off the album to the spare bedroom, cleared the washstand and laid it out; one of us went for a pencil and notepaper, which we tore according to instructions into strips; and we locked the door. Sidney wrote in his annotations at the foot of every page. Unfortunately they have not survived. I only know that it was a painstaking piece of work.

Of one, a guileless young man in a frock-coat, he wrote:

THIS HANDSOME YOUTH,
HE SPEAKS THE TRUTH:
WHENEVER HE FINDS IT PAYS.

To a smirking family group, who looked too good to be true, he gave the legend:

WE ARE BUT LITTLE CHILDREN MEEK.

Two small Australian cousins, one much more portly than the other, were labelled thus:

ILLUSTRATING JOSEPH'S
DREAM OF THE LEAN AND FAT KINE.

And keeping his grossest insult to the last he inscribed at the foot of the picture of Grand-Uncle Albert (who had dragged him off to Sunday School the afternoon before) the scathing and appalling words

RUN TO SEED.

I wish I could remember more. The album was conveyed back to its accustomed table and the thing was not found out at once, as Colin had had the happy idea of pasting in an injunction on the first page—"Keep it dark." More than one sporting visitor, in turning over the pages, found unexpected entertainment, while we keenly watched their faces from a distance. And when it was found out there wasn't such a row as we had looked for; for you never knew how Those in Authority would take things.

And I do not think the album ever quite recovered its prestige.

CHAPTER XXVI

ON GETTING TIRED OF IT

ONE of the chief misfortunes of being sent too soon to school is the new ideal of uniformity which it sets up. The adventurer, overawed by the immense significance of football or cricket or hockey or high-jumping or whatever it may be, is soon content to stop inventing ways and means of entertainment. There is a new continuity in the succession of the days, and quite a new outlook in his waking thoughts. Something is gone, though it may never be missed, from the rosy mystery and invitation of life. Before, every new morning brought its own gift of chances unexplored; he had to guess what fresh possession the day

might bring forth or how far he might have travelled by the evening. Now he awakes to a programme. Even in the holidays it is never quite the same: school is far too great an influence to be set aside. The old careless rapture of inconsequence can hardly be recovered. Between those who have gone and those who have been left behind there is a great gulf fixed, and the attempt to bridge the gulf comes generally from the wrong side. A few months ago stilts or bull's-eye lanterns, squirts or fireworks held the field. Now an elder brother is teaching the whole nursery to play cricket. And it must be cricket. Rounders, which is far better suited to available resources, is rejected with contempt—outside the pale, unauthorised, unknown, at school.

School also introduced entirely new and hampering conditions in making us aware

of the operations of Times and Seasons. They had not existed for us. Our sole idea was to set about doing a thing forthwith, at the moment when the first thought of it occurred. It was always better to do it badly and inefficiently at once rather than to delay till it grew stale. It was useless to tell us that if we would wait till to-morrow or next Tuesday ways and means could be found. To-morrow! To-morrow, as likely as not, would bring a fresh adventure of its own; anyway, next Tuesday was far too precious to be surrendered in advance. The weather certainly was able to dictate—though it did seem intolerable that when one had conceived the idea of digging a pitfall for Tom Coachman the plan should fall through for no better reason than that the ground was frozen hard.

I know very well that among other

children strange universal times and seasons do exist—that tops and hoops and "cat-and-dog" each come in and go out in their correct rotation; but we never came under the sway of these things, though we had one brief spasm of marbles, when there was a lively outbreak of technical hieroglyphics on the flat parts of the drive and garden walks, and chalk circles appeared on the wooden floor of the harness-room. But that was extinguished by the unlucky arrival of an expert and the terrible discovery that he made. We had been showing off, no doubt—that being the usual method of playing the part of host—when he observed that our way of shooting was to "pinch" from the first finger instead of the second—the way girls always do. He was boisterously amused; he thought it would make a capital story to tell his friends. And that took all the heart out

of us. Marbles was a rotten game anyway. Much better use them up as bolts for the crossbow.

The truth is that life was too vivid and too many-sided for us. We could seldom, if ever, repeat a success. We spent our time—like the Athenians—in the pursuit of some new thing. We lived in a succession of booms and reactions. We loved to carry out a thing to the bitter end—and then stop short. There were a few fixed points that survived—Christmas, the Fifth of November, the First of April—but for the rest, the very objects and directions of life, from day to day, could never be foreseen.

It was this spirit which led to certain painful tragedies in the matter of neglecting pets. Guinea-pigs, unfortunately, and canaries (owing to the fact that they must be fed at intervals) cannot be taken up and

dropped intermittently. They demand a condition of moderate and continuous interest in their keepers. It is not good for them to be elaborately pampered for a time and then forgotten. That, I know, is a universal difficulty. It has always seemed to me that there is a fine opening for some kind-hearted person here—an uncle perhaps, with nothing else to do and a large number of nephews and nieces—who might start a central establishment for the distribution of pets, after the fashion of a lending library. For if they could be exchanged at will they would never grow stale. And when one had completely explored and exhausted ring-doves (which is not difficult), or felt that one had really got to the end of white mice, one could apply for a bullfinch or a box of silkworms.

But even so liberal an arrangement as that might very well have failed; for when

the ebb had once set in we made no fight against it. It was as if we were so possessed by a single idea that we extracted from it, with a reckless appetite, all that it held of amusement, humour, novelty, and delight; but when we were done with it we never wanted to hear of it again. There were blank and dreary hours, when Grown-ups were peculiarly unsympathetic, failing to understand why that which had filled every waking thought a week ago should now be treated with detached contempt. And there were occasions when a younger brother made the mistake of clinging on to an outworn pursuit, and thus laid himself open to disdainful snubs. He soon learned his error, though at first it was rather a shock to him. For his elders were quite without shame, and he was made to feel that he had been guilty of a grave *faux pas*. If Sidney or Colin got sick of a thing the

other was sure to know by instinct, but it was not so with Archie and me. At a time when we had all been eagerly at work night after night with bull's-eye lanterns, signalling red and green from the stable loft, one of these sudden slumps occurred; and when I had the audacity to light mine as usual the following evening and sally forth I was asked, with the coolest effrontery, what I thought I was doing with that silly thing.

But the worst case was on a day when we were putting the finishing touches to a theatrical show. We had been at work on it for a week, and it was going extremely well. But on that fatal afternoon, when we were to fix the occasion of the first night, some queer cloud of dissatisfaction and inertia spread over us. It was a mysterious thing. Colin would persist in looking out of the window—where there was nothing

to see; Archie was half asleep; Sidney kept sharpening a pencil instead of attending to his part; and I looked from one to another with a sinking heart. I knew the symptoms. Weariness came over them, and by degrees we subsided into silence. No one dreamt of suggesting that we should chuck the thing, but Colin at last wandered thoughtfully off to the stable, followed by Archie with his hands in his pockets. Sidney picked up a book, absent-mindedly rubbing the burnt cork off his upper lip, and I found myself the sole survivor. I was greatly disappointed, but I might have known it was all up.

"But aren't we going on with the show?" I demanded of Sidney.

"What show?" said he, sulkily.

And I went sadly away. It was a bitter moment, for I had made myself a beard out of a tawny-coloured doormat.

CHAPTER XXVII

PIGEONS, LTD.

THE new company was not floated without friction. At the outset there was much disagreement between myself and Colin. Pets were to me (for the moment) a sufficient end in themselves. I was at the time deeply interested in a scheme of my own invention for bottling the berries of the rowan tree and preserving them for a winter diet for the bullfinches, and the rabbits had recently shown symptoms of a new and engrossing disease, which was like to occupy the whole of my energies if it assumed the dimensions of an epidemic. So I had quite enough on hand. I didn't want to be bothered. Besides, I put it bluntly to

Colin, when he explained and enlarged upon the excellence of his plan, that I simply didn't see what was to be made out of it. I have sometimes in later life been inclined to propound the same question. "If we can make money, why shouldn't we stick to it ourselves? and if we are going to lose money why should we run other people in?" But that was the worst of Colin—or perhaps to be quite honest I should say that that was the best of him. He could never let anything go on for long upon familiar lines. He must be always reconstructing and elaborating; and he dearly loved to turn something into something else. And now he had made up his mind that the pigeon business had reached a point when it should be floated as a company. I had to give way, of course, as I always did in the long run. It is no use trying to go on living with an elder brother unless you

adopt his ideas. But I was never really much interested and I did not profess to follow him through all his financial calculations and arrangements, many of which appeared to me a little arbitrary and abrupt.

Our capital was divided into ten shares of a shilling each. Of these Colin and I took two each, Archie one; one was allotted gratis to my small sister ("so that we can rope in her rabbits"). A friendly uncle subscribed for one, but that arrangement, as I shall show, proved to be a blunder on our part. Duncan took one, and one was taken and paid for (reluctantly) by Tom Coachman. We failed altogether to dispose of the last one, and Colin finally insisted upon our holding it as Trustees. But I never knew what that meant. The question then was, when we had gathered up the proceeds in an empty cough-lozenge box—

what are we going to do with this money? Of course we mustn't spend it, said Colin, or we may not be able to pay it back. For my own part it was a good deal on my mind. The sum was a large one, and as it clearly did not belong to us no risks must be run. At last we agreed by a solemn bond and covenant that whatever might be the fortunes of the company in the years to come, to whatever straits it might be reduced, one thing would be sacred: we would never touch the shareholders' money. Then we buried it after dark under the cherry tree.

We had thus disposed of the first business of a limited liability company, as expounded by Colin—the selling of the shares. We must now turn to the other branch of its operations—namely the paying of dividends. It cast a considerable gloom upon the proceedings when we discovered that this

sort of thing was usually done on a yearly basis. Much as we trusted in the stability of the concern, a year was a jolly long time, and anything might happen. We agreed at last to hold our annual meeting and pay our dividend once a month. Most of them seemed to pay about 5 per cent. every year, according to Colin, who had been getting the thing up, so if we paid 5 per cent. a month it would probably come to about the same thing. In act, it seemed paltry enough, but there was no use beginning on too grand a scale.

We had a splendid stock at the time. A brother of cook's, who held a distinguished position in a shipping office, had only a few weeks before decided to give up keeping pigeons and bequeathed the whole of his fantails and tumblers to us, so that with what we had already the total was not less than three dozen. Then there were the

bullfinches (which were by no means a profitable branch, but had to be taken in for the sake of unity), a vigorous colony of rabbits—and the fowls. The fowls had been bought with the proceeds of a recent birthday. So far they had not appealed to us much, but now that each egg represented the dividend due upon a share they became the back-bone of the concern.

But we had other sources of profit. The Show season was just coming on and our neighbourhood had always been remarkable for the number of local shows, which included exhibitions of pigeons and cage birds among their attractions. In the previous summer we had netted no less than eleven shillings in prizes with the old black carrier, and he was surely good for another year. So that our only difficulty in the matter of dividends was that we had too little opportunity of rewarding our share-

holders for their co-operation. Colin soon started a thing that he called a bonus. Holding as we did half the shares ourselves we could well afford to be generous.

Some difficulty was experienced with regard to the annual meetings. We felt that if we held them in the harness-room, for the benefit of Tom Coachman, the uncle could hardly be expected to attend; while if we held them in the schoolroom some awkwardness might arise with regard to the status of our allies outside. We solved the problem by holding two meetings on each occasion in identical terms. Then rather an awkward thing happened. My sister sold her share to the uncle, who said he "wished to acquire a larger interest." Colin was convinced that the transaction was quite regular, but we hoped that sort of thing would not go on. We wanted to know clearly whose money it was

that we had got buried under the cherry tree.

The outside meetings (in the harness-room) had always been most orderly. Every one had appeared to be satisfied with the conduct of the concern, dividends were paid, votes of thanks passed, and no hitch of any sort ever occurred. But we began to fear that if ever the uncle attended any of the schoolroom meetings trouble might ensue. The first time he put in an appearance we had fortunately a brilliant balance sheet. Colin ran through the principal items. The old black carrier had indeed been defeated on the previous Saturday, but not disgraced—taking the second prize in a class of three entries. One of the new fantails had also won a prize. Seventeen eggs had been sold to the household at remunerative rates. The butcher's boy had bought a rabbit. The directors

were at that moment considering the advisability of killing the best of the three chickens, which could not be valued at less than half a crown. It only remained to declare the usual dividend, plus a special bonus of 20 per cent. The statement was greeted with loud applause, and just as we were on the point of adjourning the uncle rose to put a question.

"We have all listened," he said, "to the remarkable statement of our chairman, showing the flourishing and healthy condition of the business. There is only one little point that I cannot quite understand. Perhaps the chairman will explain. There is no entry in these accounts for food supplied to our stock. What do these creatures eat?"

A look of harrowing anxiety suddenly appeared upon Colin's countenance—almost a look of horror. There was a

whispered consultation among the directors at the table, as the questioner resumed his seat. Then a statement was made. Colin rose, and speaking firmly but with some emotion, "That has been overlooked," he said; "but every penny will be paid."

We went out and sat on the roof of the dog-kennel to face the situation. "I wonder who does pay for it?" said Colin. "I wonder how we came to forget it?" In the crash that followed (for the value of Indian corn had been a terrible revelation to us) we had at least reason to congratulate ourselves upon the fact that the shareholders' money was safe in the cough-lozenge box beneath the cherry tree.

CHAPTER XXVIII

THROUGH THE LOOKING-GLASS

In the days when the world was "so full of a number of things," before any film of indifference had come to cloud one's eyes, every new departure had about it an element of unreality. Nothing ever looked the same a second time; every new door that one encountered was the threshold of an enchanted castle. Soon enough, it is true, we were caught up by the lagging atmosphere of everyday (which we had left behind), dispelling rosy mists, lopping off battlements, filling up moats, making of our castle a very ordinary affair. But we had had our glimpse. The first time that I came in to late dinner—having been

detained over schoolroom tea at the dentist's; the first time that I went to church; the first time that I went to stay with Uncle Henry . . . there was a tremendous quality about these things. The ferry-boat at home when first we boarded her, running up and down stairs from one deck to another, watching wide-eyed the pouncing engines, spelling out names on life-buoys, scrambling over heaped ropes, deceived us altogether as to her dazzling qualities. She bore no true relation to the same boat as we came to know her after many voyages, when we were on speaking terms with the engineer and had insolently concluded that she was a "rotten old tub." The first time that we stayed in an hotel the whole splendid enterprise was full of that dream quality. We never went back, and it is hard to believe even now that the Royal Oak has anything

in common with other hotels. If I am to trust my memory I should say that the hall porter is a foot taller than other porters; the lift is more swift and silent; the passages are more deeply carpeted; there are far more mysterious back stairs and servants' passages; there are endless rows of fire-buckets on the top landing, and you have a fair chance of meeting a fireman up there who looks just like Achilles; there are muffled, far-away bells ringing all the time, thousands of them, and sometimes they grow louder and angrier and more persistent; there are a million chimneys to be seen from the window as you lie in bed in the morning; the landscape is full of palms and curtains; and deft little boys in buttons (each a perfect globe of gold) swing up and down, fearlessly carrying telegrams. Altogether it was not a real hotel: it was an hotel out of a book. (Or may it be that

that is what hotels are really like, and I have lost my power of recognising them ?)

New places, new pursuits, new people always appeared to us thus disguised, always had some strange quality about them that we never saw again—let us say, a through-the-looking-glass quality. It was something like the bewitching beauty of a landscape seen through the wrong end of a telescope. It was like peering out on the garden through the coloured glass of the summer-house window. And as soon as the new thing was familiar to us, thrown into the common stock of our experience, the enchantment passed away. Yet we were always taken in. We never made allowances for first impressions; we never dreamt that the real truth would come home to us to-morrow. It was not till we looked back from a later period of comfortable familiarity that we saw

how queer it all had been—the first time.

But of all these through-the-looking-glass experiences there was nothing, for sheer magic, comparable to the first days at school. To go back for the second term, as a Fourth Form boy, was not essentially different from going back for the fifteenth term as a prefect—one was already an old hand in either case. But to arrive as a new boy was different. It was the greatest plunge of all into the unknown. And to me one of the strangest things in the new life was the new Colin.

I came to know later on just how he felt about it, but at first his behaviour was a profound surprise to me. When we left home the bond that united us was that we were brothers; before we reached school the gulf that separated us was that I was a new boy and he wasn't. The closest

family ties gave way before that iron fact. Even in the train things began to change between us. We were very friendly at first. I lent him a book; he pointed out a heron in a pond; we tossed for the odd sandwich. But after a time Colin began slowly to freeze up and enwrap himself in a new reserve. He paid less and less attention to my remarks, but sat in thoughtful silence, making it clear to me that his mind was fixed on graver matters. I gathered fragments of dropped soliloquy. . . . "I hope the Fifteen will make a better show this term. . . . I wonder if Tubby will be moved up after all. . . . I believe Old Sneezer will take us in maths."

When I asked eagerly for more light on these topics, wanted to know who Tubby was and what was meant by maths, I was greeted by a wintry smile. A barrier was growing up between us. I saw that Colin

would soon be on his own ground and that I was an outsider. And I learned that Colin held me in the hollow of his hand. When in the late afternoon two other fellows got in, having been hailed with a yell by Colin from the far end of the platform, I was brought face to face with my own insignificance. For the three of them sat in the far corner of the compartment and talked of many things—and I was not introduced.

(And only yesterday afternoon, I reflected, I had been teaching Colin how to set a brick trap.)

"By the way, that in the corner is a young brother of mine," said Colin at last, in the most off-hand manner, when the train began to slow up.

How little I had known him! There was a cynical, smiling, standoffishness about this new Colin—and I admired it

greatly. And his very name had undergone a change. His friends had called him Bunny. I wondered how soon I should begin to call him Bunny. . . .

There are really two schools in the matter —one where I spent some prosperous years and one where I spent the first few days, which occupied the same space and had the same inhabitants, living the same life to the same ends. But it had a different air about it altogether. I cannot now speak with certainty concerning it, for it was disappearing all the time, dissolving into the enduring structure that came afterwards. But I know that it was a puzzling place, the unreal school of the first few days : a place where there was no refuge except in bed ; a place of unexpected bells, followed by scampering feet in stone passages, where the only safe plan was to go with the crowd and trust to luck ; a place where a

fellow was desperately apt to give himself away if he didn't keep his eyes open. It was a place of sudden dilemmas : a fantastic place altogether.

But although it was to fade away so soon, the mysteries to be solved and the outlines to harden and routine and daily habit were to drive away the magic, the school of those first few days was never lost. In a sense, it has more permanence than the other. For when I have returned as a very Old Boy and gone over the ground again in memory I have been always confronted by the first time that I entered that door, slept in that bed, sat at that table—the first time that I played on a football side or sang in the choir. The other hundred times that I did these things left little trace behind. . . .

Thus one by one we passed over the brow of the hill, away from the enchanted valley

that we should never see again except as strangers, and now only Archie was left behind. When his turn came it fell to me to travel with him, and he was treated with a cold neglect.

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